Abstract  As an illustration of what Phillips called the “heterogeneity of sense,” this essay concentrates on differences in what is meant by a “reason for belief.” Sometimes saying that a belief is reasonable simply commends the belief’s unquestioned acceptance as a part of what we understand as a sensible outlook. Here the standard picture of justifying truth claims on evidential grounds breaks down; and it also breaks down in cases of fundamental moral and religious disagreement, where the basic beliefs that we hold affect our conception of what counts as a reliable ground of judgment. Phillips accepts the resultant variations in our conceptions of rational judgment as a part of logic, just as Wittgenstein did. All objective means of determining the truth or falsity of an assertion presume some underlying conceptual agreement about what counts as good judgment. This means that the possibility of objective justification is limited. But no pernicious relativism results from this view, for as Wittgenstein said, “After reason comes persuasion.” There is, moreover, a non-objective criterion of sorts in the moral and religious requirement that one be able to live with one’s commitments. In such cases, good judgment is still possible, but it differs markedly from the standard model of making rational inferences.

Keywords  D.Z. Phillips · Reasonable belief · Wittgenstein · Persuasion · Grammatical diversity · Rush Rhees · Moral and religious disagreements · Subjective judgment

Introduction

Like any thinker influenced by Wittgenstein, D. Z. Phillips tried to resist the assumption that an essential form lay behind important philosophical concepts, and this is especially true of epistemological concepts such as reasonable belief. What counts as a reason depends on the issues at stake, and the evidence that is needed in one case is not sufficient or relevant...
in dealing with another. Indeed the reasonableness belief—the nature of good judgment—is nearly as heterogeneous as language itself.

This at least was Wittgenstein’s view, and Wittgenstein’s way of doing philosophy was Phillips’ way. Most of Phillips’ philosophical work is directed against over-generalizations, such as the claim that every reasonable belief can be evidentially supported, or that all knowledge is justified true belief, or that all truth claims are descriptive representations of external realities. Thus, it can be difficult to read him, especially if one assumes that there must be some theoretical generalizations about language and belief that guide his thinking. Instead, he offers exceptions to our common picture of reasonable belief, often appealing to literature to show the sense in odd examples and extreme cases. The point is not to offer better generalizations about what it means to be reasonable, so as to include these exceptional cases; it is to free us from the narrow picture of good judgment that we hold up to ourselves as we struggle to believe. Bringing out the heterogeneity of the logic imbedded in our language was perhaps his most significant contribution, just as it was of his teacher, Rush Rhees, and of Rhees’ teacher, Ludwig Wittgenstein.

All three thinkers thought that we were misled in this regard by two things: by our preoccupation with the “narrow range of examples” that we take to be normative in constructing a general theory, and by the fact that our language hides conceptual distinctions beneath a superficial commonality in our forms of expression. We need to aware, that is, that we call all sorts of things “beliefs,” “knowledge,” “facts,” “truths,” “well-grounded judgments,” etc. We need to be aware of the fact that there are conceptually different ways in which these concepts are to be understood, depending on the context at hand. What counts, as Wittgenstein said, is not these superficial similarities in our forms of expression, but their underlying grammar—the norms and limits that govern epistemological notions like these in their particular settings of our discourse.

I cannot cover all that Phillips and other Wittgensteinians have said on the topic of reasonable belief, of course; but I can offer a sampling of the heterogeneity that drew Phillips’ attention and a few remarks on the value that these samples have in helping us to become more mindful of the complex logic of language. I readily confess that my way of presenting these examples is my own. Yet even where this is manifestly the case—as it is later on when I come to persuasion—I trust that Phillips would agree with what I have to say.

We might start with those beliefs that are obvious truisms, where accepting such beliefs is a mark of rationality. The reasonable man accepts such truths without doubt, and this acceptance itself is a requirement of what we consider good judgment to be. But then we must turn to those cases in which a belief seems indubitable for the members of one culture but not for the members of another. Wittgenstein is interesting to read on this score because he, and Phillips after him, both refuse to say that one side or the other in such disagreements is objectively mistaken. We regard so-called primitive peoples, for example, as wrong in their conceptions of the world; and neither Wittgenstein nor Phillips would say that there is anything logically out of order in this attitude. The philosophical issue concerns whether or not their mistakes can be shown by appealing to independently guaranteed standards of rational judgment. Our standards of judgment are not their standards, and there are no further standards by which our standards can be authenticated. This does not mean that we cannot disagree with primitive peoples; we simply cannot show objectively that primitives are making a demonstrable mistake. For there is a logical background required for such demonstrations, and this background does not exist for primitive peoples. We face similar difficulties within our own culture, where cases of fundamental moral and religious disagreements involve analogous differences in the background of assumptions with which good judgment begins. This is where Phillips felt that epistemological clarity is most needed, and where it is hardest to come by.
Certainties

Every philosopher who has been impressed by the later Wittgenstein recognizes his notes *On Certainty* as an extraordinarily rich source of epistemological insight. They represent his efforts to clarify the logical ground of those beliefs we regard as certain, and he ultimately finds this ground to lie in an ungrounded agreement in our manner of thinking and living (i.e., in the form of our lives). Thus, the effect of these notes is not to undermine the certainties that lie behind the logic of our reasoning, but to lay to rest the never-ending search for further grounds on which to justify our certainties. That search comes to an end by acknowledging, practically speaking, what we take reasonableness to be: “This is how we think. This is how the life of reasoning unfolds. This is what it amounts to in real life.”

In other words, these notes *On Certainty*—both Wittgenstein’s notes and the extended notes of Rush Rhees, Phillips’ teacher—dwell on the surprising fact that some of our beliefs, including our empirical beliefs, are accepted without any reasons serving us as grounds for thinking that they are true. They come to be accepted simply by learning how to reason historically or scientifically or psychologically, etc. And thus these beliefs—certainties—provide a striking example of the logical heterogeneity of the concept of a reasonable belief. For by the usual standards of rationality, these beliefs appear to be affirmed irrationally, without the firm grounding that we expect for reasonable claims. Yet they are the most certain beliefs that we have. They cannot, at least in all ordinary circumstances, be sensibly doubted. Their truth seems ingredient in our very understanding of reasonableness itself. So if their truth is not acceptable, then all grounds of belief are vulnerable; and the discipline of basing our judgments on reliable grounds is left without any ground to stand on.

We rely so thoroughly on such assumptions that they are almost never examined or even formulated. For the process of learning to think critically incorporates them as its rudimentary background, and so for those of us who have learned to think critically, it is otiose to demand they be justified on still-more-certain grounds. They belong to a web of assurance that is the logical substratum for everything that we know as good judgment.

Here are some examples from Wittgenstein.

“The sun is not a whole in the vault of heaven.” (OC 104)

“The earth has existed during the last hundred years.” (OC 138)

“I am writing this sentence in English.” (OC 158)

“Every [living] human being has a brain.” (OC 159)

“My friend’s [living] body is not full of sawdust.” (OC 281)

“Cats do not grow on trees.” (OC 282).

Some certainties like these have been explicitly taught to us, and we have accepted them on the authority of texts and teachers. But others have never been expressly formulated. Rather, we simply “swallow them down” with the rest of what we learn (OC 144). For example, I am looking at the spine of a book on my shelf right now. I have never thought about the matter before, but I see that it is red. I am certain that it is red. In fact, I would have to dream up a very unusual scenario, one that does not obtain, in order to imagine myself having any reasons to doubt that this fact. Apart from such scenarios, I don’t even know what it would

---

1 Phillips has edited several volumes of Rhees’ own previously unpublished notes, not only *Wittgenstein’s On Certainty* but also his notes on *Moral Questions* (1999), and his notes on religious belief (*Rush Rhees on Religion and Philosophy*, 1997). He said to me several times, in fact, that he regarded Rhees as a great thinker who stood head and shoulders above him as a philosopher, largely because of his honesty and intensity.

2 *OC* refers to Wittgenstein’s *On Certainty*, followed by the entry number of the notes.
mean to doubt that the book’s spine is red, nor do I know what would follow from such groundless doubts. I simply cannot imagine being mistaken.

The unusual status of such certainties is but one example of the epistemological heterogeneity of the statements we make, and of the differences in what counts as a reason to believe in these statements. Certainties belong to the “substratum of all inquiry and asserting” (OC 162), to our “frame of reference” (OC 83), to our “world picture” (OC 93-5), to the “inherited background against which I distinguish between true and false” (OC 94), or to the “element in which arguments have their life” (OC 105). They are the “foundation walls [of thinking] that are carried by the whole house” (OC 248, 253), and so they “lie apart from the route traveled by inquiry” (OC 88). They are the fixed axis of belief that remains still in our thinking, as hinges that do not move with the door (OC 141). By whatever analogy we describe this relationship between having the certainties that we do and having a framework of judgment, we require this background in order to think as we do. “Any reasonable person,” Wittgenstein says, “learns to behave like this” (OC 254), for to doubt such certainties is to forfeit everything we know as critical thinking, accepting some things in order to doubt others. Once that capacity has developed and once we recognize other speakers as sharing this same capacity, there is no going back and confirming the myriad of truths one has learned to trust in learning how to make responsible judgments in the first place. At times, of course, we do just that, but only when we have specific, contextually supplied, reasons for doubt. The mere appearance of a belief as a synthetic judgment provides no reason to doubt it; and without specific reasons to doubt the “inherited background against we distinguish between the true and the false,” skeptical doubts have no logical force.

Yet these statements are not analytic truths. Their “predicates are not contained in their subjects.” Their truth is not recognizable apart from the place they have in our thinking, nor are the necessary of self-evident truths. For there are special circumstances in which these truths would not be self-evident, and in those circumstances, it would make perfectly good sense to doubt them. Were those circumstances to obtain, we would need reasons (evidence) to counter our doubts. Thus, if I awaken in the hospital after an automobile accident and find my legs entirely bandaged, I might wonder if I still have two feet. So I will need a doctor to answer my doubts; but while the doctor tells me whether I still possess two feet, I do not doubt that we are conversing in English, that I am lying on a bed, that I once had two feet, etc. These latter certainties belong to the background of beliefs that enable me to deal with claims in the foreground, claims that for one reason or another need scrutiny.

Part of what it means to understand the heterogeneity of good judgment, then, is to understand the epistemological place various beliefs have in the logic of sensible thinking. This role is not the same for everything that we call a “belief.” If we lack an appreciation for the resulting differences of sense, we will fail to see the point at issue when a statement is put before us—and this in spite of that fact that we might know the general meaning of all the words that make up the judgment in question. We will be like young children and not know what kind of judgment an assertion calls for—immediate acceptance, the suspension of commitment, conditional disbelief, etc.—because we will lack the ability to connect the belief to the overall shape of reasonable thinking, which is the context that gives the belief its sense and its epistemological status. Because of the role that they play in getting higher orders of critical consideration off the ground, certainties are judgments that we expect to be accepted without being justified; and this is but one example of beliefs that might be

---

3 I.e., the logic that governs the judgment of such beliefs is a function of the role that they play in the activity of our thought, not simply a function of what they supposedly represent or describe as a fact.
differentiated in logical kind from other beliefs because of the peculiar role that they play in the actual working of reasoning.

Yet I never heard Phillips put this general point about different kinds of belief in quite this way—that is, by correlating kinds of beliefs with epistemological differences in the kind of judgment that they require. I think that he associated the word “epistemological” with the notion of rational justification in the narrow sense. Yet the word “epistemological” plainly has a larger sense that includes every kind of judgment appropriate to all kinds of knowledge (which is also a heterogeneous concept!). However the point is made, though, in fact there is an array of diversity in the sense and in the judgment of what we believe. That is a lesson that Phillips learned well from Wittgenstein and Rhees: there is no such thing as a monolithic concept of a belief, nor is there a standardized picture of what makes a belief rational.

Cultural divides

So far I have mentioned certainties in order to substantiate my claim that the epistemological “place” that different beliefs have in our thinking is complex. This complexity determines the normative considerations involved in calling some of these beliefs rational and others irrational. But when people do not share common training in the actual business of making reasonable judgments, in which they are subject to such conventional norms, we can no longer assume that our partners in dialog will recognize the same norms that we have learned to accept. And that means that they will take for granted some claims that we would regard as extremely dubious, and that they will find some of our certainties virtually senseless. Thus, we doubt that a person can leave her body, commune with a world of spirits, and return with an authentic knowledge—e.g., of medicine—beyond our scientific ken. We have a hard time, in fact, understanding just what out-of-body travel is supposed to be. Yet others seem to have no difficulty at all with this, and some of them (primitive peoples) find it incredible that we can turn falling water into invisible energy, and can use that energy to make lights shine in the dark.

Or consider some historical examples. Having no training in what we consider history to be, those who have not learned to think as we have will miss the point of laying out historical evidence. Their thinking about the past will rely on stories that seem wholly mythological, since the reliability of these stories will not be related to evidence but to tradition, or to the stature of those who tell these stories, or to the stature of those who supposedly passed them down. Many of these latter accounts will have a significance that reaches well beyond the factual record, making up for their lack of historical credibility by adding other dimensions of significance that cannot be found in what we call “strict history.” Such conceptual divides, in which human beings have quite different conceptions of what the past is and about what is worth preserving in public memory are quite common, as the contact between educated people and indigenous or native peoples amply illustrates.

When people know nothing of our ways of thinking, we have to be careful about what it means to say their views are wrong. They know little about how reasonable judgments are formed in our alien ways of thinking, and so we cannot say that they have misused the rational calculus that we have been taught to accept; they have not used it at all. They simply think differently; and though this recognition offers no reason whatever for leading us to accept their way of thinking, it does mean that we articulate the nature of our disagreement with their way of thinking by saying that they have made a “mistake.” For both Wittgenstein and Phillips, mistakes, generally speaking, could be found out by using a commonly accepted method of reasoning. Mistakes, in other words, can in principle be told. One can see where a
person went wrong in his thinking, and his error can be discovered internally in his manner of reasoning. For here the one who identifies the mistake and the one who makes the mistake share the same underlying conception of what reasoning is and what it requires. Yet when we realize that another’s thinking develops under differing norms, saying that they are making an error in their judgment can be misleading. For we disagree with them because their whole manner of approaching a subject is logically different than our own, not because they do not think well according to our logical standards.

Phillips was well aware of the epistemological issues that surround the idea of justification in cases where common argumentative grounds are lacking. Wittgenstein, in his “Remarks on Frazer’s The Golden Bough,” had argued against the assumption of educated westerners that native people simply make crude scientific descriptions.\(^4\) Such people are doing something quite different from describing the world in a scientific spirit, and it is sometimes difficult for us to realize this. We have trouble grasping what is going on when native peoples think as they do. Sometimes the accounts they offer of the shape of the world seem more like normative judgments expressing the order and value that they find in their surroundings. Other times we are not sure just how to interpret the sense of their beliefs, yet clearly, assuming that they are doing primitive science in a very crude way is off the mark. They simply think differently about their lives than we do. A conceptual divide separates their conception of good judgment from the norms that we rely on in defining our conceptions of rational thinking.

Outside of these remarks on Frazer, Wittgenstein said relatively little on the subject of primitive peoples. Yet in On Certainty, he offered some advice of vital importance in understanding what it means to proceed appropriately in cases of such basic disagreement. Reason, as I said earlier, is a concept with different senses; and the sense in which reason comes into play in cases of conceptual or cultural differences in understanding is not the same as the sense in which reason is brought into play in grounding an argument or drawing inferences. In the latter case, being reasonable means making one’s judgments in the light of what rational norms require. It means having sufficient evidence to back up one’s beliefs, or it means excusing one’s beliefs from this requirement by explaining the benefits follow acting on the assumption of their truth. In the case of cultural divides, being reasonable is a matter of acting appropriately given the inability to justify these rational norms themselves on effective argumentative grounds. This difference is important for understanding both Phillips’ rejection of the ideal of unconditional objective argumentation and for his rejection of cultural relativism.

First, he points out that the arguments we are tempted to give have no logical power to convince those who do not think as we do. In such situations we may call those who do not reason as we do unreasonable, but this is simply a negative pronouncement, not a justifiable finding. It is an epithet that expresses the fact of our disagreement—almost, as Wittgenstein says, as if we were “combating” those who disagree with us in a war of accusations and slander.

Supposing we met people who did not regard [the evidence used in physics] as a telling reason [for how things work]. Now, how do we imagine this? Instead of the physicist, they consult an oracle. (And for that we consider them primitive.) Is it wrong for them to consult an oracle and be guided by it? –If we call this ‘wrong,’ aren’t we using our language–game as a base from which to combat theirs? (OC 609)

\(^4\) Rhees edited this text (Wittgenstein 1979) and Phillips’ colleague at Swandea, Peter Winch, expanded on the logical problems involved in cultural divides in Understanding a Primitive Society (1964).
When two principles really do meet which cannot be reconciled, then each man declares the other a fool and a heretic (OC 611).

The attitude implied in these remarks is that people who clash over irreconcilable principles are not engaged in an argument that admits the logical possibility of being independently settled. Instead, they are simply combating each other with verbal accusations, including the indemonstrable accusation, “you are being unreasonable.” Wittgenstein’s point is that such accusations have no logical force, since the force of an argument depends on shared background about what counts as reasonable thinking, and that kind of background is missing in cases of irreconcilable conflict over the way in which good judgment is to proceed.

Yet if there are no objective, rational, means of determining who is correct in such fundamental disputes over the nature of good judgment, are we not forced to accept a relativistic view? For on this view, does not the truth as well as the reasonableness of our most fundamental certainties depend on conceptions that one happens accidentally to share? And if there is no independent way of determining the adequacy of these accidental conceptions, does not the idea that truth is at stake in our different ways of thinking simply evaporate?

Phillips, emphatically, did not think so, nor did he think that Wittgenstein accepted this kind of arbitrary relativism. For one thing, both are trying to clarify what it means to affirm the truth of various beliefs; and it makes no sense to nullify the very notions—truth and reasonableness—that one wishes to clarify. For another thing, Wittgenstein does not say that it is wrong or senseless for us to be “guided. . .by the propositions of physics.” Being so guided is entirely proper for those who know something about physics. The point at issue is not to lodge a complaint here; it is to point out the limitations in the kind of defense available to anyone facing such a cultural or conceptual divide. Here no objective compulsion is possible. The shared understanding that enables an appeal to objective standards of judgment does not obtain. The slogans we brandish in calling our opponents irrational do not mean that there must be such standards, nor do these accusations of irrationality compel others to change their minds. They simply make us feel better about the way we think. We might assume that there must be objective standards that will be compelling, but no standards of judgment are independent of a conventional pattern of application and the usage that manifests their sense. This usage shows what following these standards comes to, or what grounds their sense in our lives and makes them teachable. This is what enables us illustrate their sense, in other words. We say: “this is what a reasonable person does in this case,” “this is how we proceed,” “this is what evidence is,” etc. Yet the same conventional usage that manifests a proper understanding of good reasoning does nothing to guarantee that everyone will master this usage. For people are not exposed to the same training, and so the problem of trying to show people that they should “follow the propositions of physics”—that is, that they should think as we do—is bound arise whenever we encounter people who lack the training needed to appreciate this way of thinking.

Still, it can be difficult to admit that our norms of good judgment are not objectively verifiable. Most of us, as I said earlier, assume that the only alternative to determining the truth or falsity of all our beliefs objectively, including our principles and standards of rational judgment, is not determining the truth of what we say at all. It is, in short, an arbitrary relativism in which all claims are ultimately unjustifiable. Yet at this point, almost parenthetically, Wittgenstein offers a helpful bit of common sense,

I said I would ‘combat’ the other man,—but wouldn’t I give him reasons?

Certainly, but how far do they go? At the end of reasons comes persuasion.
(Think of what happens when missionaries convert natives (OC 612).}
The reference to persuasion here is often passed over by Wittgenstein’s readers, including Phillips. But the reference is significant, for it shows that our spades are not altogether turned when we run up against those who share a different understanding of good judgment. We cannot convince them to change their beliefs by an argument they will appreciate; but we can use other means—some of which are appropriate—to bring about the needed change in form and content of their reasoning.

The fact that we generally try to persuade people to come around to our way of thinking shows that we do not regard our ways of thinking as arbitrary. We think of these ways as being in some sense true, as reliable, and as capacitating. And when objectively telling grounds of argument are not available or have been exhausted, we often do resort to persuasion. This tactic, in other words, is symptomatic both of our inability to construct objective arguments for those who cannot appreciate them, and of our confidence in our ways of argument. We think of our particular forms of rationality as productive or reliable, as capacitating, and as full of insight, and that is why we teach them to our children, for example. We give them instruction in ways of thinking that we think are vitally important for them to master, and the methods we use are essentially persuasive; for not yet having mastered the reasoning process, they are obviously in no position to appreciate arguments.

The means of persuasion by which we try to convert others to our ways of thinking are nearly impossible to summarize. They include everything from brow-beating to patient instruction, from offering rewards to teaching by means of impressive stories, and from punishment to practical demonstration. Many of these persuasive techniques simply manipulate and demean the intelligence of those we try to persuade. But somewhere in this collage of persuasive methods are due forms of persuasion, forms that are vital to the process of instruction, genuine understanding, and conceptual enlightenment. Yet the reason we distinguish all sorts of persuasion from giving logical reasons for belief is that persuasive considerations do not have the same relation to a conclusion that evidence does. Evidential grounds justify the conclusions that we draw from them inferentially; but persuasive considerations generally provide reasons only in the sense that they supply motives for the act of believing, not inferential grounds for the beliefs in question as propositions.

Pragmatic justification, for example, is a good example of persuasion. It holds forth the usefulness of a belief as a reason for holding the belief. But here there is no logical relation between the utility of a belief and the truth of that belief. False beliefs, for example, can often be very useful to people who do understand or should not hear the actual truth. Thus, in some sense, they can occasionally profit from accepting false teachings. False beliefs can also be useful models in science, just as the Catholic Church said about the heliocentric hypothesis during the Galileo affair. The heliocentric hypothesis provided a useful model for purposes of celestial calculation and prediction, but it was literally false. So while habits of beliefs might be pragmatically “justified” in terms of the benefits that accrue from them, the beliefs themselves are not thereby justified as truth claims. Neither Wittgenstein nor Phillips ever denied the possibility of giving such pragmatic explanations for various acts of belief; but for the reason I just gave, both insisted that such forms of justification do not belong to logic. Going along with a belief in a purely practical sense might explain causally what people do in believing, but it does not provide a ground from which a belief logically follows as a truth claim. Neither pragmatic justification nor persuasion, therefore, properly belongs to logic.

Phillips remained relatively silent about persuasion, then, not because he denied that there are such things as persuasive reasons to believe but because he was more intent on making the point that such reasons do not constitute an objective form of justification. And his neglect of the subject of persuasion might make it appear that he has nothing to say against the relativistic implications that are often read into his viewpoint. But we need to be reminded
that evidential reasons belong to a much larger and heterogeneous class of reasons that include persuasive considerations. And we need to remember, moreover, that we do not surrender our ideals of good judgment simply because they are inseparable from a conventionally acquired background in which we learn to accept all sorts of claims in learning what good judgment is. In fact, the connection between principles of judgment and the corresponding behavior actually suggests a non-objective means of trying to change the behavior—the form of life—that underlies what we take to be an inferior manner of thinking. We might endeavor to change this manner of thinking just as we teach our children how to expand the life-world of their own limited cognitive abilities. If this is a relativistic view, it is not a pernicious one, since it preserves the ideal that reliable forms of understanding are available to us, even though we might not be able to objectively demonstrate their existence.

**Fundamental moral judgments**

The sharp recognition of the limits of objective argument that comes out in cultural divides also comes out in Phillips’ treatment of moral questions. But the study of such certainties presses in upon us in a particularly personal way, and this only increases philosophers’ attempts to help us determine the correct moral responses. Again, however, this is not what Phillips is up to in his work on ethics. In fact, he intervenes in philosophical attempts to render ethical questions decidable in a purely intellectual and impersonal way. Philosophy can only show us more clearly what ethical struggles involve; it cannot lead us to some sublime point of view from which these differences can be objectively overcome.

Here it is Rhees, even more than Wittgenstein, who influences Phillips’ attempts to show the profound differences between objectively resolvable disputes and fundamental moral disagreements. He quotes Rhees to this effect in the introduction to Rhees’ *Moral Questions*, a volume which he himself edited (Rhees 1999). He points out that moral disputes have differing logical starting points, or value commitments, that determine large parts of a person’s moral outlook. On this point, again, he quotes Rhees, who in turn quotes A. E. Murphy.

Modern man would claim some advance over ancient Assyria in respect to the treatment of prisoners of war [whom they tortured for their own pleasure]. . .Could he offer any relevant arguments to show that the Assyrian practice was Wrong? He would have no doubt that he could. He could say that to act in this way was to produce gratuitous pain. . .and that this was wrong; he could show that it was to indulge one’s impulse to hatred. . .and that this too was wrong. If then he was asked why these should be called wrong, could he continue the argument? He could say that to produce intense pain was wrong because such pain was evil. If he were asked to give reasons for these judgments again, he would probably be nonplussed. He had arrived at judgments that he would be content to regard as self-evident. But at any rate, he had offered an ethical argument.

The difficulty that Murphy wrestles with here is a good example of a conceptual divide where different concepts of what is valuable or obligatory come into conflict. Murphy sees

---

5 Phillips explains what he means by subliming the logic of our language in *Wittgenstein and Religion* (1993, chapt. 2). It is to suppose that normative and conceptual conflicts about what is reasonable, real, and proper to believe can be settled by being sublimely removed from all of our normal but conflicting methods of judgment. As Alvin Plantinga put this sublime ideal, “sober questions of truth” await an objective resolution independently of any of the conceptual strictures that define what it means to speak of truth. See p. 15. See also Wittgenstein (1953, paras 38, 89, 94).
this clearly, but he is not sanguine about the possibility of finding a satisfactory argument to convince the Assyrian that his actions are immoral.

Suppose [he and his friends] had really been concerned to reach an understanding with the Assyrian on the wrong of torturing prisoners, and not simply to argue with complete rational cogency from premises which were to them self-evident: is it thus that they would proceed? Of course not. A ‘common’ argument requires common grounds or reasons, and so far none have been supplied. . . the Assyrian’s notion of what is proper to do with prisoners is bound up, as it is bound to be, with the form of life of which the glorification of war and warriors and ‘the fundamental right way’ of treating enemies are part.6

Part of the problem with seeking out common grounds here is that truly functional moral grounds are embedded in a person’s way of life, just as the conception of good reasons in embedded is a person’s thought-life. Murphy refers to “forms of life” in this connection, now a familiar Wittgensteinian notion. But he might just as well have said that what seems fitting for the Assyrian to say about his treatment of prisoners is bound up with a different practice, or traditions, or pattern of living. Admittedly, all of these notions—“practices,” “traditions,” “ways of living,” “forms of life”—are somewhat nebulous; but the point of invoking them in the case of moral judgment is not. For moral decision making, just like any other kind of decision making, does not take place in an abstract world of thought, disconnected with the actual business of living. And the Assyrian’s confidence in the way he treats prisoners is of a piece with his confidence in his way of life. Ultimately, this means that to change the Assyrian’s mind one will need to re-establish him in another way of life. And that will take something more than an abstract argument.

Thus, if one accepts this indissoluble connection between moral ways of thinking and moral ways of living, one ultimately needs to rethink what moral philosophy is. For if moral values are ultimately tied to differing forms of practice in which one realizes their power and appeal, then there can be no higher values that are divorced from any essential tie to practice and thus capable of adjudicating the differences between morally embedded lives. There are no transcendent standards of moral judgment, in other words, standing above moral living, as if these values might be recognized beyond the fray of all practical dispute. The values that philosophers and theologians often envision as having this higher status, turn out to be reflections of a particular evaluative tradition (practice, form of life, etc.). To see this point is to realize that these supposedly higher values are not above the fray of moral lives, but reflect moral practices that are urged upon us under the deceptive guise of giving us an objectively certain moral outlook.

Here as before, relinquishing the myth of an objective resolution to all evaluative disputes does not mean ceasing to oppose those whose values are morally unacceptable. Certainly there is nothing new about such conflicts. One person thinks that the other is wrong. But this does not mean, and need not mean, that one person can show objectively that the other is wrong. Objective issues, after all, can be settled by external criteria, which determine what it is reasonable to believe and what reasonable people should believe. But there is something irreducibly personal about moral commitment, something that comes to us from within rather than from without, from conscience rather than from externally imposed values, even from those that seem intellectually commendable. Thus, even though we can show to our own satisfaction that the moral position we hold is reasonable and that other moral positions are mistaken, we cannot show this to the satisfaction of those who weigh their values differently.

Trying to show them that they are making moral mistakes short-cuts the process of inner consideration essential to forming a personal moral outlook. Indeed, if we are to respect those with whom we disagree as persons, we must leave them room to decide fundamental value questions for themselves by weighing the best arguments that we can make. This essentially personal dimension of judgment is one of the things that distinguishes moral questions from purely factual questions, in which inward consideration plays little or no role in determining descriptive truths about the world.

What shall we say, though, about those who come to feel that they have made a mistake in their moral outlook? If mistakes are objectively identifiable, then those who recognize mistakes in their fundamental moral outlook must have an objective means of assessing their moral views. But on closer examination, this turns out not to be the case. Those who confess mistakes in their moral outlook generally arrive at this view by coming to weigh some values more heavily than others. The judgment that they have made mistakes in what they value, that is, is inwardly determined in the same way that their original commitments were determined. So in this case, talking about mistakes does not mean what it usually does. Mistakes are still found, yes, but the process by which they are identified is not an impersonal one in which arguments alone settles the issue. The significance of our value commitments is inwardly determined both in coming to a moral judgment and in withdrawing from one.

Phillips stresses the difference between the way we recognize moral mistakes and the way we recognize objective mistakes in our cognitive views because the epistemological differences show the limitations of strictly objective arguments in ethics. But he still believes that it makes perfect sense to object to moral views that one does not share, and at times to take steps to influence another person’s thinking. Were he were a blatant relativist, he would not have such attitudes. But he is not. His point is simply to call attention to limitations of mounting objective arguments, particularly “sublime metaphysical arguments,” in ethics.

Still, what is wrong with making a rational argument that satisfies us, even it does not carry any weight with our moral opponents? Ironically, the idea that we need to satisfy only ourselves argumentatively presumes the very kind of relativism that objective arguments are supposed to eliminate. For if only some people recognize the force of such arguments, then the conclusion of those arguments will hold only for those people. And a good argument will then be relative only to those who find it to be a good argument. This way of relativizing the power of arguments is no better than relativizing values. A good moral argument is relative to those who are in a position to appreciate it. A good value is relative only to those who inhabit a tradition in which it is part of the fabric of their lives. One way out of these relativist binds is to remind ourselves, first of all, that we take our moral view seriously even in the face of those whom we cannot convince by argument and, secondly, that our efforts to convince others do not end with formal argumentation. Persuasion, once again, is the oft-forgotten recourse that shows us that conviction is compatible with the logical impossibility of proof.

**Criticism of particular moral theories**

Philosophers, however, prefer to talk about epistemological justification, even in moral matters. Thus, for example, utilitarians try to make ethical judgments objectively determinable by tying the rightness of a moral action to its effect on people’s general welfare. That is how the utilitarians achieve a standard of judgment independent of ordinary moral disputes. They simply portray moral issues as questions about what is conducive to the general welfare, which they take to be a more or less objective question about what constitutes human well-being. That makes issues of right and wrong resolvable according to non-moral judgments about what people want or about what is good for their interests. But Phillips will have none
of this, as this sort of utilitarianism simply reduces the distinctively moral character of our disputes to prudential issues by gathering moral questions up under non-moral standards. Yet moral individuals sometimes sacrifice their own welfare and the welfare of their society for the sake of ideals that override prudential considerations. Certain pacifists, for example, are willing to let their countrymen be over-run by despots rather than take up arms to protect the people’s welfare. Here they need not think that they are somehow protecting the general welfare in the long run; they need give only an absolute moral weight to the moral significance of non-violence.

Similarly, Phillips criticizes Kantian ethics for proposing a formal standard (the categorical imperative) for resolving the question of what is and is not ethical. Supposedly, people need only be capable of universalizing the “maxims” of the acts they are considering to recognize their obligatory nature. If they cannot universalize these maxims without envisaging possible conflicts with what they feel entitled to themselves, the moral person will sense a conflict between what she desires to do and what she desires others to do. This conflict characterizes all immoral actions and serves as a purely rational means of determining what we should and should not do. Yet we typically act in concrete situations, under complex circumstances, and with some sense of our own moral limitations. And we bring these various qualifications with us when we consider what we ought to do. Thus, we can often say “anyone in my particular situation should do as I do” because we can wave the thought that we might be affected if everyone were to follow our example. If everyone were to do as we do—telling lies, for example—that would amount to the contradictory policy of willing that others lie to us. But then everyone is not involved; only those with my complex circumstances and difficulties need act as I do, and so I need have little fear that I would be lied to. My circumstances make me exceptional and allow me to do things that would otherwise be difficult to take as a universal model for moral behavior. The point is that actual moral decisions are usually made in circumstances to which the categorical imperative can be made to conform, so that it offers little guidance in determining what we ought to do.

The formal inadequacy of Kantian ethics becomes even more apparent when people face moral dilemmas. In moral dilemmas, both horns of the dilemma are ruled out by the Kantian principle, and yet one of them must be chosen. So in such cases one can either say that in choosing for oneself one cannot universalize and choose for others, or one can say, “if you were I, then yes, you and anyone else who lived my very life should do as I do.” In the latter case, of course, universalizing the maxim of the act would not extend to anyone else and thus would provide no real guidance. Any choice is moral dilemmas is a moral choice and could be “universalized” in this way. Yet the categorical imperative, because it provides no criterion of when an agent’s circumstances are relevant and when they are not, does not resolve actual moral issues, much less moral dilemmas, under a morally telling directive.

Similar criticisms apply to prescriptivist theories. It sounds plausible to say that a moral judgment is rational if a moral agent can cite reasons for making that judgment, where reasons consist of descriptive properties that a certain class of valuable things possesses. Thus, a moral judgment made about the permissibility of eating animals but not human beings is a rational judgment if we can identify a relevant property of set of properties that human beings have and animals lack. Supposedly, such properties would then justify not using people as food and using animals instead. The rationality here, however, does consist of choosing these properties because of their moral worth; it consists of the rule-like procedure of evaluating categories of things in the same way by connecting one’s evaluative judgments with certain common properties of these objects. But there are no moral reasons for selecting such properties. The choice of properties becomes a “moral” choice only when people choose to regard that set of properties as the basis for a consistent attitude toward the objects in question.
Here Phillips was undoubtedly influenced by not only Rhees but also by his colleague R. W. Beardsmore. All three were philosophers at Swansea, and all three called attention to the unsystematic diversity that characterizes our treatment of various kinds of things, sometimes valuing them and sometimes not. Let’s stick with the example of animals. We generally don’t hold wild animals in the same moral regard as we do our pets, for example. Thus we would not think of eating our pets, but we might very well try a Chinese dish containing dog meat. The only relevant differentiating feature here is the fact that a particular dog is or is not my pet. No generalizations about what is moral or immoral follow from that since our moral regard for animals does not depend on any of their intrinsic features but only on their relationship to us, and this relationship is private. Hence, we cannot expect others to have the same relationship to our pets that we have, and so we cannot expect others to hold them in the same moral regard that we do.

We might wonder, moreover, what it is about human beings in distinction to animals that renders human beings worthy of greater moral respect. Supposedly we must be able to isolate a feature or set of features that human beings have but animals don’t have so that we might explain why we evaluate humans as highly than animals. Perhaps they can return love in a fuller sense than animals can, perhaps they can deliberately plan their behavior in a way that animals cannot, perhaps they can consciously reflect about themselves, etc. Yet we regard some human beings with moral respect (the comatose, the mentally deranged, infants, etc.), even though they lack these characteristics. We respect people as people, that is, despite the fact that we cannot point to some additional feature—other than their humanity. Here we need to give up the effort to rationalize our moral judgments by looking for such features. We should say what we should have said to begin with—that we respect people as human beings and not because they have some special characteristic that can be singled out as the basis for moral regard.

If, after all, the moral treatment of people is based on their having certain properties (other than the fact that they are human beings), then we might ask why we should treat that property as the reason for the discriminations that we make in our behavior toward them. Must there be some other property that the first property must have for us to identify the first property as value-conferring property. Just where in fact does evaluation enter into the picture here? Beardsmore put the issue in this way:

...it is quite obvious that if sometimes we respond to x but not to y because of some property z which x though not y possesses, then it must respond [evaluatively] to z, but not the absence of z, without necessarily being able to identify any further characteristic to justify our responses. Otherwise we are led into an infinite regress of justifications for justifications, with the result that nothing is ever justified.7

Beardsmore’s argument here captures Phillips’ thinking as well, as both reject the prescriptivist claims that reasonable moral judgment is made in virtue of a specific property or set of properties possessed by the things we value. For both the whole effort to provide reasons to explain our moral evaluations is misguided.

Take another example. Consider those racists who think that what makes people worthy of moral respect is the color of their skin, and further imagine that they consistently hold to this view. Here one cannot resort simply to the principle as a means of explaining what is wrong with this notion, as this principle simply says that a rational person must have some answer

7 This quote is from a private copy of Beardsmore’s paper, “People.” I suspect this paper was presented at the Swansea Philosophical Society.
or another to the question, “why do you value one race above another?” Having an answer to this question, for the prescriptivist, means having a reason for one’s evaluative attitude. But this formal, non-moral requirement to have a reason is satisfied by the response, “because they (the favored races) have white skin.” Yet most of us, as Phillips would point out, cannot find any moral relevance in this property. One could just as well say that they have heavy beards. Morally speaking, the selection of such properties is arbitrary, and yet as long as there is some property to which to link one’s moral attitudes, one is said to be thinking rationally. The net effect of this view, therefore, simply reduces the evaluative quality of moral regard to a matter of formal consistency. If the racists are consistent, then they are moral.

But do we really want to say that racists are being morally rational if they consistently use skin color as the basis for their moral attitudes? Far better to expose the rawness of moral disagreement between racists and non-racists by saying that most people who are not racists would dismiss a “rational” racists’ consistency as something that is morally reprehensible. At least this would imply that there are specifically moral reasons involved in disputes over racism, and it would not promote the false ideal of manufacturing objective—i.e., non-moral—reasons to explain our moral attitudes.

This last case illustrates one of the confusions that attend the use of the word “reason” in the context of moral disagreements. In the case of prescriptivism, having a reason for one’s moral attitudes is a matter of having some way—any way—to explain these attitudes by giving a reason for them. Here having a reason for belief is not a matter of having evidence for a proposition but of being able to justify one’s behavior. Phillips thought the character of moral behavior was distorted if it explained on the basis of non-moral considerations. Moral positions, to the extent that they can be explained at all, rest on more deeply held moral views. This is not the use of the word “reasonable” that I mentioned earlier when I suggested that the morally enlightened might simply accuse racists of being morally unreasonable. In this latter context, the accusation that someone is being unreasonable means that someone (e.g., racists) cannot be reasoned with because of what they value and wish to defend, Their thinking is morally incommensurate with humanitarian views, and thus we lack a common basis for moral discussion. The problem in other words, is not that they do not know how to explain themselves by giving a reason for what they believe, but that their way of following this formal rule of reason begins with what we regard as the wrong values. When that happens, the disputing parties cannot find their way to a resolution of moral issues on the basis of shared values.

In sum, Phillips objects to various moral theories because they propose grounds on which to resolve moral disputes; and yet the grounds they offer either do not offer the guidance that they advertise—as in the case of Kant—or the grounds that they offer obscure the inherently moral nature of moral disputes. Thus, if one expects Phillips to offer a better theory, a theory anchored in some more telling conception of objective reason, one will find his work disappointing. For in his ethical work he is not trying to discover the objective ground of ethics. Instead, he wants us to see ethical and evaluative deliberations for what they are, even if this means seeing ethical reasoning as something that is too messy to be covered by theoretical generalizations.

Other observations on moral reasoning

If many moral disputes are objectively irresolvable, as Phillips says, it seems odd to many philosophers that we should speak of moral struggles as the search for moral truth. And yet people commonly do speak in this way, finding nothing amiss about the Declaration of Inde-
pendence, for example, and laying out human equality and human rights as obvious truths. So perhaps I should say more about this idea of moral truth.

Phillips has no objection to using this term, but he would insist that the word truth, like the word “reason,” requires grammatical clarification. The sense of the word that applies to moral discernment is different than the sense of truth that we invoke in describing the world of fact. When we distinguish between such differing kinds of truth, that is, we do so out of the recognition of the different forms of judgment involved in discerning these different kinds of truths. Such in-kind distinctions in what truth amounts to in various contexts reflects our epistemological sensitivity to the differences in the way that such truths are judged. Thus, not only are there differences in what it means to speak of truth in connection with our various judgments, there are also differences of kind to be realized in what it means to speak of “knowledge.” Moral knowledge is not the same thing as the knowledge of descriptive facts, and neither is the discernment moral truths the same as the ascertainment of information. Phillips never explained the heterogeneity in the concepts of reason, truth, knowledge, discernment, and the like in quite this way, but I think that he would have little objection to it.

I’ve already mentioned the fact that the moral judgment of truth has an essentially personal aspect to it, whereas purely factual or descriptive judgments do not. But this is not the only logical difference between moral judgments and objective descriptions. For one thing, when an objective hypothesis is disconfirmed, it is simply discarded from the collection of our beliefs. But when one moral stance is chosen over another, the unchosen belief often retains a liveliness that is missing in a disconfirmed hypothesis. In moral dilemmas, for example, one chooses to do one thing but remains absolutely opposed to the alternative that one allows. Out of concern for the national welfare, for example, a leader might refuse the demands of a ransom note from those who have kidnapped his child. Thus, he might choose to do one thing—save the nation from harm—and allow the kidnappers to do what they will with his child. But choosing to act in a national rather than a personal interest does not mean that he dismisses the importance of caring for his child, far from it. He has chooses to sacrifice his child rather than to sacrifice the nation, but his action does not mean that he feels any less of an obligation to his child. This is the nature of moral judgment: sometimes one must act against what one believes is a morally binding obligation (caring for one’s children) in order to act in accord with another morally binding obligation. The extent of one’s obligation is felt in the bottomless depth of one’s regret.

Such regret does not attend the rejection of an objectively disconfirmed hypothesis. The grounds we need to confirm a purely descriptive or empirical hypothesis might be unclear; and as long as they are, we might entertain sympathy for several alternative hypotheses. But this is unlike the moral uncertainty that we feel in recognizing several moral values that in various circumstances come into conflict. In the case of the hypotheses, we simply need more evidence to determine whether the hypothesis is correct of incorrect. Once this evidence is in, however, we can affirm one hypothesis and reject the others—without regret. Yet with moral issues, we must weigh the values that we choose; and even those that we choose not to act on in particular circumstances continue to have some weight in our thinking.

The fact that weighing values is part of moral judgment reiterates an earlier point—that there is an irreducibly personal element in the determination of moral truths. For moral truths are not determined in an entirely objective manner, as cognitive propositions are. Moral arguments are possible, of course; but after the arguments have been made, it remains for people to consider their force, and to judge this force in relation to their other values. That is why we call moral decisions “judgments” in the first place. In making these judgments, we weigh commitments according to our interior sense of what is appropriate. After all, a change in a
person’s moral outlook changes one’s personal life; and thus in deciding moral questions we are deciding questions about how we understand our selves and our lives.

To put this point differently, to affirm basic value commitments is to stand personally behind them, endorsing them, as it were, with one’s life. It is to vouch for these beliefs by investing oneself in them. Trying to eliminate this feature of moral judgment by trying to justify moral ideas in an impersonal, objective, and detached manner is, in the end, senseless. For even if it should be possible to show moral truths objectively, it would still remain for people to weigh these truths against others in the depths of conscience.

Phillips implies as much about our moral affirmations when he says our moral beliefs must be commitments that we can live with, and that the commitments we cannot live cannot be maintained for long. Thus, we invest our sense of who we are in our moral lives, and this is what accounts for the personal dimension of seeking moral truths by which to live. Initially in our moral development, of course, we do not have our identities wrapped up in learning moral rules. Instead, our moral beliefs are maintained under parental and social pressures that have little to do with the internalizing of moral principles. But such internalization belongs to the nature of genuine moral commitment, and those who have yet to invest themselves in any moral values have yet to know the full force of moral belief. Morally speaking, they have yet to mature.

In view of the importance of this self-involving element in basic moral judgment, surprisingly, Phillips does not provide more details about what it means to find oneself in one’s moral outlook. The point often comes up in writings of Rhees, who stresses the fact that deciding what one can and cannot live with is a matter of self-honesty. If Phillips had spent more time on this point, I think that he might have shed some light on the appropriateness of asking those we are trying to persuade, “Are you being honest with yourself in this decision?”—e.g., to have an abortion. “Are you really satisfied with your way of life?” Whatever the answer to such rhetorical questions might be, they point to the opening up of inward considerations of self-examination that are essential to the moral life. These questions carry weight because they connect the determination of values not only with the determination of what one wants, but also with the more important matter of how one understands one’s own worth. These inward considerations are subjective, and they cannot be turned into objective reasons for belief. But then again, they do not have to turned into evidence to play a proper role to play in moral judgment. For they reveal the crucial importance of avoiding self-deception in the evaluative judgments by which we live, which, once again, must bring with them a way of thinking and being that one can live with in inwardly transparency.

I will say a little more about the role self-honesty plays in our moral and religious judgments in the next section, but or now I want to stress that moral judgments derive their seriousness and to some extent their logic from their essential relation to selfhood. On the deepest level, those who are serious about clarifying their most basic values and moral principles are looking for a moral outlook that they can claims as their own, an outlook in which they can reside in inward satisfaction and integrity. That is what the subjectivity of moral judgments is all about, and one cannot eliminate the aspect of moral reasoning without reducing the moral life to a caricature of what it really is.

From the point of view of objective judgment, such subjective considerations as the weighing of values or their role in helping people find themselves surround the ideal of achieving objective judgment in moral matters with impossible complications. But that is what the moral life is for Phillips, not only an inwardly serious life but a messy one as well. His thinking is not designed to simplify it, nor to provide transcendent criteria by means of which we might
impersonally discover moral truths in higher form of objectivity. As a philosopher, he does not object to the kind of arguments that people with strong values make in order to change minds. At most, he simply shows how far short of the logic of purely objective judgment moral commitment falls. This modesty in his intent is perhaps is the most Wittgensteinian aspect of his work as a philosopher. He brings nothing new to the ins and outs of our moral deliberations. He simply tries to remove some of the layers of confusion that portray moral believing as an objectively adjudicable intellectual matter so that we might recognize the ways in which we are personally touched by moral questions. Such clarification reminds us about the complexity and heterogeneity of our judgments; and this is needed, as Rhees said, “not in order to fix your gaze on [a supposed] unadulterated form [of moral reasoning], but to keep you from looking for it...For reason doesn’t always mean the same thing: and in ethics we have to keep from assuming that reasons must really be of a different sort from what they seem to be.”

Religious beliefs

Religious beliefs, as Phillips shows, share their objectively indemonstrable feature with fundamental evaluative commitments and with moral principles. In fact, they share so many logical features with moral claims; that Soren Kierkegaard—a writer whom both Phillips and Wittgenstein respected—put both sorts of claim explicitly into the logical category of “subjective truths.” Yet none of these writers thought that religious claims are subjective in the sense of being arbitrary matters in which personal desires somehow determine truths. These are beliefs which, because they play a formative role in opening up new ways of looking at the world, simply develop under different strictures than do cognitive claims and speculative hypotheses.

Another way of coming at Phillips’ view is to say that the world of a religious person is not the world simply as it is given to us and available for description. It is a world in which the ordinary world that we describe cognitively is regarded with altered conceptions of its worth, which necessarily extend to altered conceptions of our own worth. Seeing the world religiously is therefore an existential question, and good judgment in affirming a religious outlook can be said to be sober judgment if it is made in connection with a full and honest awareness of the inward struggles of selfhood and meaning. For to believe is to change the way in which we take life in under the guidance of religious ideas. We adjust our thinking to a new form of conceptual understanding that believers say brings them a peace that is unknown apart from a religious outlook. We do something more than saying “yes” to a thought, therefore. We transform ourselves. This self-transformation belongs to the very nature of what religious believing—faith—is, which involve changes not only in the way one thinks—the species of one’s judgments—but also in the manner of life that is involved in living out a new vision of the world. So it should not be surprising that faith claims, being essentially self-transforming, involve a different kind of judgment than that which is required by other, more objective, claims.

Phillips talked mainly about the belief in God because it is the pivotal religious belief for most westerners, who, like him, were best acquainted with Christianity. But his point was not to defend Christian belief. It was only to understand the difference in judgment involved in becoming a believer. He thought that the issue of faith had been obscured by a simple but

---

10 This is why Kierkegaard said that subjective claims, such as religious beliefs, involve us in a metabasis in allo genos—the transition into another way of thinking. See Concluding Unscientific Postscript (1941, p. 90).
firmly entrenched set of assumptions. We think that the belief in God must be reasonable in order to be credible, that being reasonable is a matter of having independent evidence for what one believes, and therefore that belief in God must have independent and objective grounds that determine its truth. Yet because this belief entails a change in the way one thinks and lives, these assumptions obscure rather than illuminate what faith is and what good judgment in matters of faith actually requires.

In trying to get other philosophers to see this point, Phillips became discouraged. Convincing most philosophers of the inappropriateness of objective forms of deliberation in relation to faith claims turns out to be a very hard sell. For them, the philosophical debates over the existence of God do not obscure the sense of theistic claims at all. Quite the opposite; these philosophers think of themselves as taking faith claims seriously precisely by looking for objective grounds on which to believe or to disbelieve. Many of them think that they are enhancing the credibility of certain faith claims by suggesting such grounds. Why would anyone want to deny the relevance of this? Are not believers committed to the existence of an objectively real God? How could giving objective, person-independent reasons for believing or disbelieving not be crucial to credibility of faith?

One way to explain Phillips’ perspective here is to compare his treatment of God’s existence to the stance one takes on fundamental issues of value. When it comes to our most basic value commitments, objectively telling grounds are not available; and trying to certify them on objective grounds simply robs moral conclusions of their moral point. Utilitarian reasons for being moral, for example, wind up portraying moral concern as the same thing as prudential concern. But a more careful consideration of moral disputes indicates that moral truths are justifiable on distinctively moral grounds. And thus the arguments over what is right begin and end with fundamental notions of what is obligatory or valuable, not with prudential concerns. But what then do we say of the evaluative grounds that we use in these arguments? Are they justifiable? That is the problem that we are up against both in morality and in religion.

If we like, we can say that the belief in God and the belief in certain values are self-evidently true, or that these fundamental convictions have been implanted in us by a benevolent god, or that the belief in God is a revealed truth. But if one attends carefully to what is going on when such things are said, it amounts to telling others that they should not expect justifiable grounds for these convictions—that they should believe without proof. That is the point behind such expressions, as those who insist on these views of faith know very well. They know that objectively compelling demonstrations for the existence of God are for one reason or another not as convincing as their proponents often imagine, and they believe that faith has its source in some other source of conviction. That is the thematic idea of Phillips’ work on religion: the belief in God is not logically subject to being defended as a rational hypothesis. To believe is eo ipso to effect a transformation in the way that one lives. And if one tries to justify this belief as an objective hypothesis, the result will be a conclusion that has lost its power to change us. For a rational hypothesis belongs to one order of judgment, and its affirmation expresses confidence in that order of judgment. It does not signal a shift out of that entire way of thinking into another order of judgment. Yet the belief in God signals just this kind of shift, and not just in our thinking but in the personal changes that accompany it. If such personal changes are not essentially involved in the manner in which this belief is commended, then whatever affirmations come out of such impersonal reasoning will degenerate into a religiously empty form of mere assent.11

11 Perhaps additional premises can be added to the beliefs that a “believer” assents to, thus producing some practical implications for him to follow. But forcing yourself to live up to these practical implications is ego-managed “works righteousness,” not the humble acceptance of grace that comes with genuine faith.
I once compared the belief in God to the belief in a rational principle itself, whose credibility depends on the power of that way of thinking that depends on it. Phillips, however, prefers to speak in another way about the distinctive character of religious claims. Taking a suggestion from Wittgenstein, he treats most religious claims about God as grammatical claims. Grammar, as Wittgenstein used the term, is a normative concept that refers to the common usage that governs the sense of our words. Just as grammar in the usual sense gives parts of speech their correct role in speech, grammar in this normative sense gives words their meaning as concepts. Everyone who tells us how certain concepts are to be understood, as long as they are not stipulating personal definitions, appeals to what amounts to the same thing as grammar. Perhaps they do not use this term. Perhaps they appeal to traditional understanding, or to received interpretation, or perhaps they simply pronounce something a senseless way of understanding a concept. But they do so in accordance with what they take to be the proper, meaningful, usage of a term; and this amounts to grammar. The striking thing about Wittgenstein is not this notion of grammar and its usefulness in clarifying some religious concepts, but the suggestion that philosophical theology consists (or should consist) entirely of grammatical or conceptual elucidations.

If one objects to this view and denies that a certain statement about God has the logical status of a grammatical or conceptual truth, he need only deny the statement in question and see what happens. If, for example, one denies that God cares about us, suggesting that God is sometimes not even aware of what happens to us, the response that you will get is, “Nonsense. It makes no sense to think of God as an absent minded and uncaring being. Such a God is not the God that I believe in.” This denial comes straight out of a grammatical understanding of the concept, as does everything that we say about God. So if one denies the normal understanding of God as an absolute source of loving care, it becomes apparent to believers that the person who thinks that God can be ignorant and uncaring stands outside the circle of understanding that fixes the normal meaning of the word. Perhaps such a person belongs to some other circle of understanding in which the god-idea is not at all what we take it to be. In any case, the important point here is that grammatical knowledge, and not the knowledge that comes from factual investigations of an external object, explains how the concept of God is to be understood.

To take another example, the claim that God is not an object is also a grammatical claim. For God is obviously not a normal object. He cannot be touched, for example. But what kind of object is he, then? We don’t have any understanding of this outside our familiarity with the way people commonly speak of God. We might think that God must be a name for something that we can point to simply because it is a noun, and many nouns can be ostensively defined. But this assumption is over-generalized and completely gratuitous. What it means to speak of God as an object is given by a religious grammar that one has to learn in order to command any clear view of the concept. Before we can acquire this sort of understanding, we have to displace our assumptions about other kinds of objects. Confusions enter from every side because differing grammars govern the way objects are to be understood, just as confusions creep into our superficial understanding of what mathematical objects, such as numbers, are. Only grammar, the norms of common usage, gives us the means of understanding the nature of various kinds of object.

In any case, Phillips accepts Wittgenstein’s suggestion that theology might be understood as grammar, and he looks for the differences that attend the sense of what we say and think about God, as opposed to what we say and think about other things. If this is so, then the

12 See Whittaker (1981).
13 Wittgenstein (1953, para 373).
knowledge of God’s existence is not the result of an objective, speculative inquiry, or of anything like that. It is something that believers affirm by coming to share a new order of conceptual understanding, in which God’s existence is distinguished from the existence of other objects, and the question of God’s existence is distinguished from questions of investigation. One could make this same point by saying that the conception of knowledge is not the same in religion as it is in cognitive fields of study. It is a different concept altogether because the means of acquiring religious knowledge (wisdom) are utterly unlike the means of building up objective information. That is why believers give a different name to their understanding, calling it the “knowledge of faith” and distinguishing that sort of knowledge from the sort that depends on evidential confirmation.

The notion that we might affirm God’s existence simply by conforming our own outlook to the transforming grammar of faith proves immensely illuminating in unraveling the paradoxical fact that believers say so much about the mysteriousness of God. It is hard to know what to make of this peculiarity in their “knowledge” of God. They say that God cannot be described—and then they turn around and say all sort of descriptive things about the deity. They tell us that a true knowledge of God is impossible because God transcends all reliable knowing. Yet these are not the self-contradictions that they appear to be. They say that God is mysterious largely to block the idea that one might find out things about God by way of investigation. God cannot be known in the way properties can be read off the given objects of natural experience, nor can his existence be inferred from properties that can be read off the face of experience, as if God were simply a more remote and less available object of experience. That is not a possible way of understanding God. That is what it means to say that God is a mystery. Purely cognitive means of approaching God are not possible because God is not an object of cognition to begin with. He is a mystery. Familiar descriptions of God, therefore, are not pieces of information about a cognitively remote God; they are conceptual remarks about the way the concept is to be understood. Believers do not derive their knowledge of God from anything like a direct encounter or a perceptual intuition or a cognitive inference; they get their understanding from their familiarity with the use of these terms. That and that alone is why they can identify some of the things said about God as nonsense. Their knowledge of God is purely conceptual.14

Right away, then, we can see why Phillips stressed the fact that beliefs about God are not hypotheses. For we do not know things about God from having conducted an investigation in his nature, as if we had made empirical or philosophical discoveries of what God is like. We only know God in the same way that we understand familiar concepts. And if we do not know God in this latter way, then we are simply in no position to speak with any confidence about the God-idea. We know mathematical “objects” in exactly the same conceptual way. We do not conduct empirical investigations into the nature of numbers, for example. We learn what numbers are in learning the proper use of mathematical symbols and concepts. And this is the only way we learn about numbers, since an independent investigation into the reality of numerical objects makes no sense. They have no reality outside that disclosed in mathematics, and neither does God have a reality outside that felt in belief. This certainly does not mean that numbers are unreal, or that God is, but their reality is understood only from within the relevant grammars that illuminate what the reality of numbers or the reality of God amounts to. Indeed, knowing nothing of mathematics, one might very well say that numbers are mysterious and indescribable. For they are unlike anything that one knows how to investigate cognitively.

Religion, then, no more needs an external justification of God’s reality than mathematics needs an external justification of the reality of numbers or of probabilities or any other kind of mathematical conception. In both cases, what the real existence of the relevant objects means is internal to logical limitations of sense that govern the discourse. Philosophy simply goes on holiday, as Wittgenstein once said, when it goes looking for sublime guarantees of God’s existence, as if such a thing could be sought independently of knowing what exactly it is that one is looking for.

Believing in and believing that

Earlier I suggested that the logic of justifying religious beliefs might be compared to the logic of justifying moral beliefs. In cases of two parties with a fundamental difference of values, the reasons that one offers for her side generally reflects the very values in dispute, and so these reasons are question-begging rather than convincing. Insofar as giving religious reasons for one’s religious belief reflects the very orientation in dispute, giving religious reasons for one’s religious beliefs suffers from the same circularity. But there are additional problems here as well. An effective argument for one’s religious beliefs—for example, for the belief in God—must be transforming. This is particularly important to note in the case of religion because the point is so often overlooked. Belief alone, belief that has no personally transforming entailments, is not enough to effect a faith change. Faith logically entails internal changes in what one trusts and what one hopes for; and so if coming to believe does not \textit{eo ipso} involve such changes, then the claims at issue are not fully understood. For they remain religiously pointless.

Antony Flew overlooked this aspect of religious belief when he demanded that those who believe in God explain what evidence might falsify the belief that God loves us.\textsuperscript{15} Plainly, then, he was treating the belief in an all-loving God as a purportedly credible hypothesis, not a grammatical belief that belonged to a new way of envisioning oneself and the world. But hypotheses are \textit{objective} beliefs because precisely because their credibility does not depend on the personal changes involved in adopting a new outlook on life, Because the affirmation of a descriptive hypothesis depends on evidence, it is not, to that extent, self-involving in the way that religious belief is. The point of believing in God—and here we could just as well say that the meaning of believing in God—is to displace impersonal judgments that depend objectively on evidence with self-involving judgments that incorporate personal repercussions. Thus, judgment that there is a God entails the surrender of the ordinary prudential conception of happiness and the substitution of another conception, in which our true well-being depends not on ourselves but on a trustworthy but indescribable source of unfailing love. Hence, it is a cornerstone of this changed conception of happiness that this divine source is eternally, changelessly, and perfectly loving, despite all that we do or fail to do. God, so to speak, never gives up on us; and this eternal reliability is grammatically inscribed in the way in which is to be understood. Flew, however, asked believers to treat this grammatical truth, anchored in a new outlook on life, as if it were a hypothesis. And far from being a sensible demand, this request was in fact an unfitting expectation based on a complete misunderstanding of what is at stake in the issue of God’s existence. The issue is not one of believing that there is an external object, God; the issue of faith is the issue of transforming one’s life by trusting in a new conception of happiness that cannot be attained by willful self-exertion. God is the source of this trust.

\textsuperscript{15} Flew and MacIntyre (1964, pp. 96–98).
To believe in God, in other words, is not to satisfy oneself that there is a God in the ordinary sense of justifying an existential claim about the presence of an external object. To believe in God entails reordering one’s basic longing for inward peace, and the concept of God is understood in the light of this changed perspective. God cannot be descriptively known, then, yet he can be understood as the descriptively unknowable source of an all-sustaining love. He is not an object in any ordinary sense, despite the fact that we refer to him with nominative expressions and personal pronouns. He is the source of a peace that passes all understanding and that can only be “known” through trust. We picture this source of love in a variety of ways, primarily as an infinitely loving being; but the descriptive adequacy of all such depictions is said to be inadequate. God can no more be described as an external object having a hypothetical existence than numbers can be understood as quasi-physical objects needing empirical confirmation.

There is nothing strange or necessarily irrational about people becoming captivated by God and conception of happiness without being able to supply a convincing justification to skeptics. One might attempt to give a pragmatic justification to skeptics by saying that believing in God is conducive to happiness in the ordinary, prudential sense—i.e., that it reduces stress, that it helps people to get along interpersonally, etc. But as I said earlier, such an argument does not touch the truth or falsity of God’s existence. And neither do objective attempts to prove the existence of God. The starting point of both sorts of argument is logically inappropriate when the belief at issue is one where the affirmation of its truth brings with the entry into it altogether new way of thinking, much as affirming the reality of numbers entails a newfound ability to count. Thus, a child who knows something about how to describe things but nothing about how to count them need not be supplied with an empirical description of numbers in order to learn about their reality. He learns of their reality in learning how to count, and there is noting illogical about the necessity or teaching him how to count rather than objectively trying to argue him into seeing the reality of numbers independently of learning to count. Here the child’s acquisition of a new ways of thinking about things (counting them) is fitting without being rationally justifiable in the strict sense, and the same is true in trying to teach people to accept God’s reality in teaching them a new way of seeing themselves and their happiness. There is another kind of reasonableness involved in the expansion of a child’s thinking into new dimensions, and there is another kind of reasonableness involved in the effort to induct people into religious ways of construing their happiness. From a Christian point of view, God is necessarily involved in this effort to change people’s ways of thinking about their happiness, just as numbers are necessarily involved in learning how to count. But this hardly means that either is irrational.

Recognizing these last points goes a long way toward disarming complaints about Phillips as an irrationalist. The fact that religious beliefs are not subject to hypothetical justification on independent, non-religious, grounds does not mean that believing in religious claims is unreasonable. It is unreasonable, in fact, to demand, as Flew did, independent evidence for the God-hypothesis because it mistakes the issue of faith as a hypothetical issue instead of an issue of conceptual transformation. Every such transformation involves developing appreciation for new grammatical claims, which can never be antecedently justified according to the canons of a prevenient way of thinking and living.

The logical oddity of trying to prove the existence of God sublimely—that is, without paying any attention to the grammatical role of the God-concept—can be illustrated by considering Norman Malcolm’s well known discussion of Anselm’s ontological argument. Malcolm points out that Anselm’s argument, if we read it as involving necessary existence as a divine perfection, escapes the Kantian criticism of treating existence as a predicate. For even if existence is not a predicate, and therefore not a property possessed by a perfect object,
necessary existence is such a property. Anselm’s argument, therefore, escapes the Kantian objection and shows non-believers that they cannot speak of God as being by definition a being greater than which none can be conceived without also speaking of God as a necessarily existent being. Since we know that something that exists necessarily must also exist actually, we are logically forced by Anselm’s argument to say that a supremely perfect being actually exists. Malcolm makes this point, but then he wonders what the argument actually accomplishes.16

I don’t think that the argument is as good as Malcolm seems to have thought it was, but let us suppose that it is.17 The significant point is that he does not deny that the argument will be powerless to convince people to change their lives. At most it will convince them that they cannot speak of a being greater than which none can be conceived as lacking the property of necessary existence. But what does that mean? It will leave most non-believers feeling non-plussed when it comes to adopting a religious life. It will not lead them to believing in God in the sense of changing their strategy of managing their happiness, for example. Affirming the unintelligibility of speaking of God as a merely possible and not as a necessary being will remain religiously pointless because this affirmation has been removed from the implications that it has according to its grammatical role. For all that remains of the issue of belief in the abstracted context of the argument is the question of whether or not one will allow oneself to speak of a necessary being as non-existent. Given only the argument, in other words, the consequences of accepting or denying the conclusion remain little more vital than this. The issue has been abstracted from the life of faith—i.e., the grammatical context—that supplies its meaning; and so to return this meaning to it, the issue of faith would have to be raised in connection, not with the concerns of modal logic, but with the existential of life. Once the idea of God’s existence has been removed from its life-transforming role as a religious belief, we should not be surprised, then, that it affirmation does not awaken faith.

For Anselm, on the other hand, the proof was never a vital test of his faith. He already accepted the grammatical truth that God exists, and he already conformed his life to the religious entailments of this belief. He saw himself as divinely loved, and his notion of who he was, what was required of him, and where his happiness lay was changed as a result. Thus, he never thought of himself as questioning the existence of God, as if that were a prior question that had to be decided for the conceptual outlook of his faith to make any sense. The question of God’s existence was not an issue that was separable from all of these changes and did not need an independent confirmation. His faith in God other words was already secure, and his argument provided only a conceptual embellishment to a religious form of understanding that he had already internalized.

In his discussion of Anselm, Phillips takes issue with the assumption that the question of God’s existence is a meaningful question prior to the concept’s acquisition of its religious role. Contrary to many philosophers, he does not think that the actual existence of God is an antecedent condition for the possibility of religious grammar. Instead, grammar explains what it means to believe in God. As I said, the grammatical role of the God-concept connects faith with the way in which one understand happiness, the way one deals with oneself, the way one recognizes the value of others, and so on. And if one abides by all of these entailments of belief, using them as templates for one’s thinking about oneself, then one accepts the existence of God. The question of God’s existence, in other words, is internal to the grammar

17 All that it shows, I think, is this: that if the concept of a being greater than which none can be conceived refers to anything, and it is not clear that it does, then it refers to an actual reality and not simply to a possible one. Here in effect, I have simply translated the argument into the de dicto mode and then restated Kant’s objection in the de re mode.
of faith; and it is settled by choosing to abide personally in the guidance that conceptual truths about God bring into one’s life. In this respect, the life of faith no more depends on logically prior proofs of the existence of God than arithmetic depends on independent proof of the actual existence of numbers. The actual existence of God, like the actual existence of numbers, is found in the actual practice of the activity that goes with believing in God or in believing in numbers.

Are all beliefs about God grammatical remarks, then, as Wittgenstein suggested? Yes, I think that Phillips would say they are, at least when we are talking about God’s nature. But when believers are applying this understanding of God to themselves, what the say about God’s activity in their own lives is not conceptually guaranteed. These opinions are surmised, and they can be mistaken. For example, believers often change their minds about what they consider to be God’s will for their lives. I once knew someone who became a Wycliffe bible translator; and before he was to go into the mission field, he told me that God had appointed a wife for him (none of these translators could work in the mission field unless they were married). It was wonderful, he said, to be directed in this way to the woman he was to marry. Yet the next week I got another letter telling me that it was not God’s will that he marry this young woman after all. He had met someone else that God had appointed for him, and he would marry her instead.

How did he come to such judgments? His view was that he had made a mistake in understanding God’s will in relation to his own life. But this mistake was not like other, objectively demonstrable, mistakes. This one obviously had to be identified only through a kind of inner discernment. To really know what God wanted him to do, he had to be sure within himself that this or that woman was right for him. And what he said about God’s will presumed this background of self-searching. Was this or that woman someone he could marry in utter sincerity and inward peace? He had to put these questions to himself and answer them before he could say what God’s will for him was. He did not doubt that God willed something for his life—i.e., that someone was right for him. But he regarded his thinking about what that was to be correctible.18 Again, however, the fact that his thoughts on this matter proved to be correctible does not mean that he must have discovered his mistakes through objective evidence. His mistakes were inwardly discerned and self-determined. No one could tell him what results would turn up from his self-examination. Not even God, as it were, could do that.

The importance of self-understanding in relation to religious belief cannot be overemphasized. It is perhaps the crucial factor in leading people toward faith or away from it. This is no small point. It means that knowing how to abide in faith requires knowing how to put religious ideas to work in one’s life, and this bringing these ideas into touch with one’s search for oneself.

A scene from a movie that I recently saw illustrates the point, and I sure Phillips would have appreciated it. The scene comes for an otherwise forgettable movie entitled From Dawn til Dusk, in which an aging preacher tries to explain to his daughter why he has left the church. He feels that he has come to a point where he just can’t go on.

18 I think that God wills only that we find ourselves, not that we live in a particular way. It is a grammatical truth, that is, that God calls us, but not that he calls us to specific roles. Thus, believers heed God’s call when they find themselves in particular roles that seem inwardly right to them; yet they express this sense of rightness as if God called them to this particular way of finding themselves instead of calling them to the general task of finding themselves.
My congregation needs spiritual leadership. Well, they can’t get that from me anymore. My faith is gone. To answer your question, yes, I do believe in Jesus. But do I love them? No. After Jenny died, I just thought, what’s the point?

When his daughter asks him how he can just pick up and leave, he looks her in the eye and says:

Every person who chooses the service of God as their [his] life’s work has something in common. I don’t care if you’re a preacher, a priest, a nun, a rabbi or a Buddhist monk. Many, many times during your life you’ll look at your reflection in the mirror and ask yourself, am I a fool? We’ve all done it. I’m not going through a lapse. What I’ve experienced is closer to awakening. I’m not trying to shake your faith. I’ve just decided not to devote my life to God anymore.19

Looking at himself in the mirror, of course, is an idiom for inwardly taking stock of himself. Intuitively, the preacher knows that feeling assured in the life of faith depends on feeling at one with oneself, and he asks himself if he is satisfied with the identity that he has tried to live up to. For his life in Christ was intimately connected with the need for inner wholeness and a settled sense of selfhood.

When the former preacher in this passage tells his daughter says he no longer wants to devote his life to God, he means that the life of faith has left him inwardly unsatisfied in trying to live according to what he once regarded as his calling. He has not lived his life for himself but for God—which would be fine if he could say that such a life had stilled his inner restlessness. But it has not. He tried to bring his life under a higher calling, and he found Jesus in this sense; but he did not find himself in the process. By finally freeing himself from his one-time religious identity, then, he feels released from the effort of pretending that he had found something that he had not.

Phillips often said that the acid test of faith is not so much intellectual as it is an inward trial. People lose their faith by confessing that they remain as inwardly lost as believers as they were before they believed; and it is difficult to see how an intellectual solution might solve this personal problem. Surely those arguments mounted in a cognitive attempt at having objective reasons for belief would not matter much to a believer whose religious doubts stem from such inner doubts about himself. At most, he might try to believe by forcing himself to do what he thinks that faith requires. But trying to believe is one thing, and genuine belief is another. And it is difficult to see how such efforts at self-manipulation could give one the freedom that comes from genuine faith.

Admittedly, it is somewhat surprising that Phillips, though he often refers to one’s failure to find oneself as a reason for losing one’s faith, does not treat the opposite as a reason for being confident in one’s faith. Christianity, after all, promises a life of true abundance (John 10:10; I Tim 6: 19), and it is perfectly reasonable to treat that promise like any other. Whether this promise is borne out or not must be determined by those who are interested in it, but this determination is a not an objective matter but a subjective one.

That was perhaps Phillips’ main point, and I think that Phillips did not say more about the subjective side of believing because he feared that it might obscure his primary objective. Like Wittgenstein, he objected to the overestimation of scientific reasoning; and he was intent on distinguishing the logic of religious and moral commitments from the logic that governs abstract hypotheses and requires some kind of inferential justification. The standards

19 The text of the screenplay can be found at http://www.godamongdirectors.com/scripts/dusk.shtml
of objective rationality have little to do with individuals struggling to find themselves in faith, nor should they. Indeed it is a logical mistake to put speculative considerations before the inward trials of our lives, as if the business of how we live might be settled by purely abstract arguments, sublime arguments, grammar-less arguments, and so on.

Had Phillips gone on and one about the inward satisfaction that might attend belief, moreover, he would have invited a misunderstanding of his philosophical purpose. He would have made it sound as if he, having exposed the limitations of objective arguments about god’s existence, now occupied the position of trying to persuade other philosophers that faith is a good thing. But he was not trying to do that, any more than his teachers, Wittgenstein and Rhees, were engaged in that kind of effort. For them the importance of understanding, not believing, was the only call that philosophers should respond to. For once people clearly understand the nature of their moral and religious problems, the work of the philosopher is done and the real work of finding ourselves in the moral and religious sense we make of our lives has just begun.

Still, it is not easy to gain that sort of clarity, especially when we feel bound to be reasonable in the sense we make of our lives. But here is where Wittgensteinian philosophers can help. Not every judgment, again, is reasonable because it is rationally justifiable. Our thinking is reasonable when it is appropriate to the issues that confront us; and in addition to descriptive hypotheses that require evident grounds to be accepted as truths, there is an enormous variety of other beliefs that require other kinds of reasonable consideration. The affirmation of some beliefs requires a change in what we take good judgment to be, and those beliefs generally require due forms of persuasion designed to help others understand and appreciate the change in thinking that accompanies belief. Such is the case, for example, where our reasons are the values, rules, or principles to which we subscribe. But in addition to evidential grounds for beliefs as propositions, there are reasons that function as motivations for acts of belief, and there are causes for belief in this sense as well. Then there are the factors responsible for the expectation that reasonable people will accept some truths directly, without the need for further explanation. And there is also the use of the opposite term, “unreasonable,” to indicate that a rational discussion is not possible with some people, including those who do not share the training we have in learning to think critically.

In bringing such heterogeneity to light, Phillips enlivened his discussion with illuminating anecdotes and illustrative examples from life and literature; and that gave his work a genius that I cannot duplicate here. Instead, I have tried to find simplified ways of getting into some of his thoughts on the subject of reasonable belief; and I have risked my own way of making his points in the process. But Phillips was also a kind if insistent philosopher, and I trust that he would not have objected too much to this handling of his ideas.

References

