

universes God fails to create gets wronged by God's failure to create them, so again, it seems to me, God might well decide not to create such a plenitude, restricting Himself – idiosyncratically or arbitrarily – to a finite number of universes, possibly even one. Sure, there'll then end up being fewer types of good than there could have been, but if no-one's harmed by their absence, so what? After Santa's delivered presents to every inhabited house on Christmas Eve, does he then feel morally compelled to deliver them to every uninhabited house too? So it is that, before O'Connor's train of reasoning pulled into its final destination, this reviewer had alighted from it. Others would, of course, have waved it goodbye at yet earlier stages. But even if one decides that one will not oneself make O'Connor's journey in full, one can certainly enjoy watching him make it and learn much about the metaphysics and epistemology of modality and the contingency version of the cosmological argument by doing so.

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Douglas Hedley *Living Forms of the Imagination*. (London: T. & T. Clark, 2008). Pp. x + 308. £65.00 (Hbk); £24.99 (Pbk). ISBN 0567032949 (Hbk); 0567032957 (Pbk).

'What the imagination seizes as beauty' – Keats famously wrote to Benjamin Bailey on 22 November 1817 – 'must be truth'. Obviously, Keats was not talking here about bare factual truth, or the truth of scientific data. He was not suggesting that the true bus timetable is in all circumstances the most aesthetically appealing one, or that if we want to know whether there is a continent across the Atlantic, we should ask whether the existence of such a landmass would be pleasingly beautiful or rebarbatively ugly. Keats's point was rather about existential truth: religious or poetic truth. For an ideal or a worldview to be true is, at least in part, for it to be liveable. But we cannot live by any ideal or worldview that does not feed the spirit and the imagination. And what feeds the spirit and the imagination is always and only beauty of one sort or another. So no ideal of life that does not enliven our imaginations by becoming for us a medium of the experience of beauty can enter any serious claim to be a *true* ideal of life. Douglas Hedley's project, in his rich and eloquent study, is to fill out this thesis of Keats's in its application to philosophy of religion: 'I shall argue that a major obstacle to reflective faith is a failure of imagination' (1).

The point is not, of course, that imagination is *all* we need. As Hedley is at pains to show, Keats's thesis need not imply that bare factual truth is unimportant. Or if it does imply that – if Keats himself thought, as he perhaps did, that it simply did not matter if poetry's truths were factual falsehoods – we can and should move beyond him, to two further claims. The first is the claim that Coleridge drew from Kant (Hedley has much of value to say about Coleridge): the claim that, without imagination's work, there *are* no bare facts for us to engage with – 'we use our imagination not to escape the world but to join it' (Iris Murdoch *The Sovereignty of Good* (London: Routledge, 1970), quoted by Hedley at 166).

The second further claim is a thesis that C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien famously argued for (Hedley has much of value to say about them, too). This is the claim that there can be a myth, a story-pattern of imaginary potency, which becomes a historical and factual truth as well, and that the uniqueness of the Christian story lies precisely in its being both.

We must not be ashamed of the mythical radiance resting on our theology. We must not be nervous about 'parallels' and 'Pagan-Christ'; they ought to be there – it would be a stumbling block if they weren't ... If God chooses to be mythopoeic – and is the sky not itself a myth? – shall we refuse to be mythopathic? For this is the marriage of heaven and earth. (C. S. Lewis 'Myth became fact', in *idem God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1970), quoted by Hedley at 127)

Lewis and Tolkien shared the view (more exactly, Tolkien persuaded Lewis of the view: Humphrey Carpenter *J. R. R. Tolkien* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1977), p. 147) that story-telling or myth-making was not a matter of telling engaging lies, but of 'sub-creation': of taking the materials of character, motif, and theme that 'the real world' gives to us, and stocking our own and others' imaginations with the fantastical new things that can be made of them. And, of course, Lewis's and Tolkien's attempts to enrich our common imaginary by their fantasy writings are their best-known legacy today. (They display contrasting degrees of success: Lewis's seven *Chronicles of Narnia* have stood the test of time much less well than Tolkien's three *Lord of the Rings* books. This is mainly, I think, because they are not old-fashioned enough.)

This 'failure of imagination' that Hedley calls 'a major obstacle to reflective faith' is perhaps exemplified by the commoner attitude to 'pagan-Christ' that Lewis was in fact criticizing in the last quotation. This is the view classically argued in Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, that the presence in many cultures of a myth of a god who dies and is resurrected is not a *praeparatio evangelica* for the Christian resurrection myth, as Lewis claimed, but a reductive explanation of it. For a more recent and more definite example of the kind of failure of imagination that Hedley has in mind, we need look no further than Dawkins on the Christian doctrine of the atonement:

Jesus was tortured and executed to atone for sins. Not his own sins (which would be bad enough by the standards of enlightened penal thinking) but other people's sins.

By some accounts he was atoning for the sin of Adam – a man who never existed and [so (?)] couldn't sin. By other accounts he was atoning for the sins of all humanity, even though most of us didn't yet exist and might decide not to sin when our time came. Isn't the New Testament doctrine of atonement a truly *nasty* idea, perhaps even nastier in its weird pretensions than the robust, Ayatollah-like cruelties of the Old Testament? (Richard Dawkins *Science and Faith* (London: Atheneum, 2004), 9; quoted by Hedley at 222)

What is at stake here between Dawkins and the Christian is not simply a question of historical fact (Was Jesus really executed? And in the way the gospels describe?), nor simply a question of dogmatic fact (Is it really Christian doctrine that Jesus was somehow *punished* for others' sins, as opposed, e.g., to somehow absorbing the evil of those sins, or destroying the division or healing the disease that they create?). What is at stake is, rather, the place of the atonement within our worldview and our imaginative life. Dawkins's rejection of the atonement in the last quotation is not just a disagreement about historical facts or doctrines. It is an *aesthetic* rejection of the atonement. Dawkins finds it a 'nasty' doctrine: it is not the kind of beauty that he can live by. His rejection of it is a refusal, or a failure, to share the imaginative life of which that doctrine is a part, the deep and rich background of faith, reflection, historical narrative, and symbolism against which alone that doctrine can make sense.

Such swift dislocations and dismissals of venerable traditions and doctrines are a familiar part of contemporary intellectual life; Dawkins is not the only pundit on the scene who writes like a tone-deaf man with a militant anti-music agenda. But it can be argued – and is argued, at length and in depth, by Hedley – that you are not much more of a friend to the doctrines of religion than Dawkins is, if you try to reverse the dismissals while (overtly or covertly) accepting the dislocations. And this, in his view, is what far too much contemporary philosophy of religion does. As John Cottingham has put it in a fine book that (in many ways) parallels the concerns of Hedley's:

Religion has been isolated as an object for dissection, scrutinised as a set of abstract doctrines, abstracted from the ethical commitment that makes it truly meaningful. It has been cut off from ... the psychological and developmental story that links it to our human quest for self-understanding, from the linguistic domain of symbolic understanding ... that [is] its natural means of expression, and from the liturgical and sacramental tradition that sustains it. So lopped and trimmed, it is hardly surprising that a formerly flourishing plant appears to many as a sickly specimen (John Cottingham *The Spiritual Dimension: Religion, Philosophy, and Human Value* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 171)

Cottingham and Hedley share not only this diagnosis of what has gone wrong in philosophy of religion, but also their prescription for a cure:

... once these branches are grafted back on, it becomes possible to have a different image of religion ... not as a set of quasi-scientific hypotheses ... but as an embodiment of the human quest for meaning ... human beings were never meant to live fragmented lives, splitting off the intellect from the emotions, or keeping our theoretical beliefs

neatly separated from our deepest commitments ... Rather, our inner and outer lives, our personal confrontation with the mystery of existence and our need to join with others in exploring the meaning of that mystery, call out to be integrated into a living structure that can sustain our energies and keep alive our hopes. (*Ibid.*, page?)

These remarks of Cottingham's spell out the main agenda of Hedley's book: as we might call it, the recovery of the Christian imaginary, and the rejection of any attempt to make sense of Christian doctrines or positions that does not take that imaginary as its context. So for instance Hedley considers religious experience (chapter 3), psychology (chapter 4), ethics (chapter 5), metaphysics (chapter 6), and politics (chapter 8) – all of them as areas in which a Christian philosophical agenda cannot make real or worthwhile progress so long as we engage only with specific objections to that agenda, and do not also consider the underlying source that feeds these objections: the mindset of narrow and reductive empiricism – 'the passion for conceiving the universe in the most labour-saving way' (William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (London: Penguin, 1985), quoted by Hedley at 39).

An important question here, of course, is 'How?'. How do we engage philosophically with a mind-set rather than an argument? Given that philosophy is basically all about arguments, how do we present a philosophical case for a worldview or an ideal? Hedley's answer to this challenge is partly to use his own book to demonstrate the method that he would advocate. He loads his rifts with ore: his study is itself a rich source-book of quotations, themes, ideas, and arguments from the Christian-Platonist tradition in which he stands. His exposition of this tradition reminds us of the apposite truth that even if arguments are the heart of philosophy, they never stand on their own.

For one thing, there is the very important question of whom we listen to – which philosophers or other authorities are in our hagiology or canon, and how central they are to that canon. It is not hard to identify David Hume as the chiefest saint of contemporary analytic philosophy (with E. C. Mossner as his high priest, perhaps). Other cults exist, of course (Ludwig Wittgenstein, Bertrand Russell, David Lewis ... Dawkins too, come to think of it, is a bit of a cult). Still it might reasonably be said of contemporary analytic philosophy that so much attention is paid to David Hume and his heritage – real or supposed – that we have almost lost sight of other possibilities. We are in danger of forgetting what it might be like, for instance, to inhabit Reid's or Newman's or Coleridge's perspectives instead of Hume's, to see Hume as a stage in a history of thought centred on Locke or Berkeley rather than the other way around, to find Humean theses implausible because insufficiently Butlerian instead of vice versa – and so on. Even from a Humean viewpoint, this tunnel vision of ours can hardly be a good thing. From the viewpoint of a philosopher like Hedley who wants to restore or renew or at least revisit the Christian imaginary from which Hume was at such lifelong pains to dissociate himself, it is obviously disastrous.

For another thing, there is the question of whether our arguments carve reality at the joints – whether, indeed, reality outside formal logic *has* any incontestable joints to carve it at. The space traversed by most arguments about most things that matter is (as good as) infinitely divisible: in practice, there is always room between premisses for an intermediate step that will radically alter the argument's overall direction. The question which of these intermediate steps we actually choose to insert, and which not, is not itself answered by any conception of logic.

Take, for example, the differing attitudes of Christians and non-Christians to the problem of evil. A non-believer like (the deeply Humean) J. L. Mackie is content to note, in Epicurean style, the incompatibility of the premisses 'God is omnipotent', 'God is good', and 'Evil exists', and draw at once the conclusion 'No good and omnipotent God exists' (see J. L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), ch. 9). Whereas a believer like Archbishop William Temple, whom Hedley quotes with clear approval, can accept all three of these premisses, agree that they are indeed incompatible, and yet very quickly find a gap between them and Mackie's conclusion, simply by pointing out that Christianity is a *Heilsgeschichte* – an historical narrative of salvation – which, at our point in history, remains incomplete. Hence the problem of evil, at least as it arises for the orthodox Christian, is a problem in time. The reconciliation of the three incompatible premisses is something for which we are waiting:

What we must completely get away from is the idea that the world as it now exists is a rational whole; we must think of its unity not by the analogy of a picture, of which all the parts exist at once, but by the analogy of a drama where, if it is good enough, the full meaning of the first scene only becomes apparent with the final curtain; and we are in the middle of this. Consequently the world as we see it is strictly unintelligible. We can only have faith that it will become intelligible when the divine purpose, which is the explanation of it, is accomplished. (See F. A. Iremonger *William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury: His Life and Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948), 537–538, quoted by Hedley at 201)

A believer may accept the archbishop's proposal with gratitude, or may already have developed the same gambit on his own account before reading Temple. An atheist, by contrast, may well dismiss it out of hand, as Mackie does, quoting Hume: 'As Cleanthes says, these are arbitrary suppositions' (Mackie *Miracle of Theism*, 158). What can it be that makes the archbishop's gambit look like a promising argumentative move to the theist, but like embarrassingly ad hoc flailing to the atheist? The answer cannot be a matter of straight logic; there is nothing *invalid* about the archbishop's gambit. The difference arises, surely, from views about things like inherent likelihood, what kinds of argumentative moves are appropriate or 'arbitrary' in a given context, which premisses bring with them an impossibly heavy explanatory burden, and so on. And these views in turn depend on just such features of our wider outlook as Hedley is concerned to illuminate.

Similar considerations attend a third question that is always there to be asked about any argument: whether a given conclusion should be accepted as it stands, or should be found so intolerable that it must spur us to review our premisses. As one cliché has it, one man's *ponens* is another man's *tollens*. As another cliché has it, a conclusion is the point in the argument where you got tired of thinking. If we imagine that logic compels us irresistibly to accept just one set of philosophical conclusions, our acceptance of which entitles us to view ourselves as uniquely rational, then we are deluding ourselves. Perhaps particularly in the area of philosophy of religion, the internet displays increasing evidence that this delusion is spreading – both among atheists and among believers.

For all these reasons, a real engagement with the Christian worldview can never be merely a matter of drily dissecting its arguments, as they are familiarly and wearisomely dissected in a thousand university courses. That worldview is not merely a philosophical theory, but a tradition: which means a record of what experience of the divine can be like, and a living practice of the ways and means of engaging with that experience that have been found valid. As Hedley himself argues, quoting particularly felicitously – among a mighty cloud of witnesses – from William James and from the Cambridge Platonist John Smith:

... personal religion will prove itself more fundamental than either theology or ecclesiasticism. Churches, when once established, live at second hand upon tradition; but the *founders* of every church owed their power originally to the fact of their direct personal communion with the divine. Not only the superhuman founders, the Christ, the Buddha, Mahomet, but all the originators of Christian sects have been in this case; so personal religion should still seem to be the primordial thing, even to those who continue to esteem it incomplete. (James *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 30; quoted by Hedley at 103)

To seek our Divinity meerly in Books and Writings, is to *seek the living among the dead*; we do but in vain seek God many times in these, where his Truth too is not so much enshrined, as entomb'd: no; *intra te quaere Deum*, seek for God within thine own soul; he is best discerned ... as Plotinus phraseth it [*Enneads* 5.3.17], by an *Intellectual touch of him* ... the soul itself hath its sense as well as the Body. (John Smith *Discourses* (Cambridge, 1660) quoted by Hedley at 93; cf. Charles Taliaferro and Alison J. Tepley (eds) *Cambridge Platonist Spirituality* (New York NY: Paulist Press, 2004), 158)

Hedley's learned and profound study leaves me with two intriguing questions, with which I will close, and about which I hope to hear more in his further works (his webpage tells us that he plans this book as the first part of a trilogy). The first question is whether Hedley, who does so much to display the riches and the resources of the tradition of the Christian imaginary, has sufficiently registered the point that contemporary scientific naturalism is surely also a tradition – a relatively new one – with a developing imaginary of its own. As Mary Midgley, Stephen Clark, and others have pointed out, we should not miss the appeal of the work of popular science writers like Richard Dawkins, Susan

Greenfield, or Stephen Hawking, or even more of TV presenters like David Attenborough, Robert Winston, and David Bellamy, as purveyors to our society of an imaginative picture of how we should think of ourselves and our place in the world. Just because they are not producing fiction does not mean they are not stocking the imaginary. On the contrary, part of the imaginative appeal of the picture that these advocates are building lies precisely in the fact that the scientific world-picture is supposed to be, not only a world-picture, but also *true*. Compare Lewis as quoted above, on Christianity as both myth and fact. (Compare also – turning to fiction – the naturalistic fantasy writing of Philip Pullman: his visceral hostility to Lewis’s Narnia books is no accident.)

If contemporary scientific naturalism is indeed a tradition, that brings me to my second and final question about Hedley’s project. How, in his view, do we choose between traditions? For choose we must, at least sometimes: those of us who are Christians may be able to incorporate into our own worldview some parts of the picture that the popular scientists are now building up, but we clearly cannot coherently take it all on board. There is, in the end, no room for compromise between the ideas that we are just here through blind chance, and that a loving God means us to be here. Overall our worldview must be either Christian or scientific, and cannot be both – any more than it can be both Christian, proclaiming that Christ is the Son and the clearest revelation of God, and also Muslim, proclaiming that Mohammed is ‘the seal of the prophets’ and that ‘God has no sons’. We need reasons to choose between worldviews like scientism, Christianity, Islam, and others. It is clear from what Hedley says that he thinks that our reasons cannot come from philosophical argument alone, because such argument always presupposes the imaginary of some particular worldview as its background. But if not from philosophical argument alone, then from what else?

That, for us in our present historical plight, is surely not merely a rhetorical question in philosophical theology; it is an urgent question in practical politics. We should look forward to hearing what more Douglas Hedley has to say about it.

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