

The Use of Philosophical Categories in New Testament Hermeneutics

ANTHONY C. THISELTON

TO USE philosophical categories as a tool of New Testament interpretation is not necessarily to be committed to a particular set of philosophical doctrines. This point has been made with reference to the philosophy of phenomenology;¹ and Rudolf Bultmann insists that it is the case in his own use of the categories of existentialism. He writes, 'We do not necessarily subscribe to Heidegger's philosophical theories when we learn something from his existentialist analysis.'² 'My theology does not become dependent on a philosophical system by my seeking to make fruitful use of the concepts of the so-called philosophy of existence, particularly of Heidegger's analysis of existence in *Being and Time*. I learned from him not *what* theology has to say, but *how* it has to say it, in order to speak to the thinking man of today.'³ Admittedly some of his critics accuse him of reducing the Gospel to a philosophy.⁴ But the validity of this criticism turns on Bultmann's devaluation of historical fact (*Historie*) in the context of his total programme of demythologising, and not on his use of existentialist categories as a hermeneutical tool in the narrower sense in which he does this in his *Theology of the New Testament*.⁵ Indeed sometimes the criticism of such writers as Bultmann and Ernst Fuchs is not that they have drawn on philosophical categories, but that they have drawn on too narrow a tradition of philosophy.⁶

Part of the relevance of philosophical considerations to New Testament interpretation emerges when we begin to ask what questions, and what conceptual frame, the interpreter brings with him to the text. Bultmann rightly points out that we all come to the New Testament with certain questions. In this sense, 'there cannot be any such thing as presuppositionless exegesis'.⁷ Every interpreter approaches the New Testament from the standpoint of a particular perspective. This is not necessarily to accuse him of undue prejudice. It is to stress that he approaches it with 'a way of raising questions'.⁸ But are our questions the right questions? Should our own questions be en-

couraged, modified, or suppressed? Friedrich Waismann reminds us, 'The question is the first groping step of the mind in its journeyings that lead towards new horizons . . . Questions lead us on and over the barriers of traditional opinions. Questions seduce us, too, and lead us astray.'⁹

As we shall see when we examine the philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer, we cannot merely suppress these questions if we wish to understand the texts of the New Testament, although we may have to let the New Testament itself remould and re-shape them.¹⁰ We must reject what Bernard Lonergan has called 'the principle of the empty head'. He explains, 'The principle of the empty head rests on a naive intuitionism . . . The principle . . . bids the interpreter forget his own views, look at what is out there, let the author interpret himself. In fact, what is out there? There is just a series of signs. Anything over and above a re-issue of the same signs in the same order will be mediated by the experience, intelligence, and judgment of the interpreter. The less that experience, the less cultivated that intelligence, the less formed that judgment, the greater will be the likelihood that the interpreter will impute to the author an opinion that the author never entertained.'¹¹ To quote Bultmann again,

Interpretation presupposes a living relationship to the subjects which are directly or indirectly expressed in the text. I only understand a text dealing with music if and in so far as I have a relationship to music . . . I only understand a mathematical text if I have a relationship to mathematics . . . or a novel, because I know from my own life what, for example, love and friendship, family and vocation are . . . The demand that the interpreter must silence his subjectivity . . . in order to attain an objective knowledge is therefore the most absurd one that can be imagined.¹²

To accept this is the starting-point of genuine hermeneutics. But once it is accepted, it is a relatively short step to argue that philosophical reflection can help the interpreter towards a more sensitive and critical awareness of the relation between his own questions and conceptual frame, and those of the text.

Three distinct traditions of philosophical enquiry bear closely on these issues. Firstly, a number of writers have made claims about the relevance of existentialism to New Testament studies. The categories and perspectives developed by existentialist thinkers seem to suggest different questions, for example, about Paul's uses of such terms as 'flesh' and 'spirit' than were often uppermost in the minds of those who unconsciously viewed Paul's terminology through a conceptual frame moulded by Platonism, Aristotelianism, and Kantianism.¹³ Thus body, soul, and spirit were thought of as 'parts' of which man was composed, rather than as capacities or aspects of the whole man. We shall explore this point further, below. But existentialism is not the only philosophical perspective to offer light on the procedures of hermeneutics. The main work of the Heidelberg philosopher Hans-

Georg Gadamer, which has had an increasing influence on the new hermeneutic, has been described even by one of his fiercest critics as 'the most substantial treatise on hermeneutic theory that has come from Germany in this century'.¹⁴ Gadamer poses important questions about the interpreter's basic attitude to the text, and about his methods of questioning it. He views understanding, in contrast to knowledge, as a progressive experience, to which our presuppositions or pre-judgments (*Vorurteile*) decisively contribute; whilst they in turn are re-shaped by the text itself, so that the text 'speaks'. This has a practical relevance to procedures of Bible study. Thirdly, linguistic philosophy also relates, in Wittgenstein's words, to 'the way we look at things'.¹⁵ Philosophy, Wittgenstein suggests, can enable us to *notice* things which previously went unnoticed because they were always before our eyes.¹⁶ 'Philosophy is a little against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language'; but it may 'in no way interfere with the actual use of language . . . It leaves everything as it is.'¹⁷ At very least, in J. L. Austin's more modest language, it gives us 'a sharpened awareness of words'.¹⁸ On the face of it, then, all three traditions of philosophical enquiry may offer hermeneutical tools to the New Testament interpreter. It is not surprising to find that all three receive at least brief mention in a recent article entitled 'Hermeneutics Today'.¹⁹

Existentialism

THREE or four authors have attempted to explore the categories of existentialism to shed fresh light on the parables of Jesus. G. V. Jones, for example, has no difficulty in showing the relationship between a number of basic existentialist themes and major themes in the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15: 11-32).²⁰ First, there is the theme of freedom and estrangement. The parable is the story of a flight into estrangement, and a return through longing. The reason for the return is the estrangement, 'for without it there would have been no longing, no nostalgia, no feeling of not-belonging'.²¹ We see how the experience of estrangement, like the son's initial decision to leave the father, leaves indelible marks on his character. 'The new self living in destitution and abandonment is in a sense different from the confident defiant self at the moment of departure . . . He is a stranger, unwanted and anonymous, experiencing the utter nausea of dereliction.'²² He finds himself in a disenchanted world in which he is not at home. He had thought himself to be master of his own destiny, but he finds himself to be subject to the anxiety and despair which is related to human finitude.

Together with this theme which is so prominent in Sartre and Marcel, we also encounter questions about the personalness of life.

When the crash comes, the prodigal son is deserted by those who were bound to him only by money, and he finds life meaningless without personal relationships. Even in the second part of the parable, in the view of the elder brother 'the boy was less a person to be nursed back into spiritual health than a type; one who is to be dealt with by a standardised approach'.²⁸ By contrast, when the father calls for the best robe and puts a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet, the son 'is regaining his character through once more being treated as a person'.²⁴ Once again this is a typically existentialist theme, especially in the writings of Marcel. Jones also explores the themes of longing and return, and of anguish and reconciliation, which we cannot examine here.

D. O. Via shares Jones' belief that to feel the impact of a parable involves living through certain experiences with the characters, rather than merely examining its message at a reflective level. Like a novel, it turns on 'the pre-philosophical living-through of an experience within a horizon, or the giving of a new configuration to pre-conceptual existential forces'.²⁵ When the door is shut in the parable of the Ten Virgins (Matt. 25: 1-13), this is not simply an abstract statement about exclusion from the presence of God; it is filled with existential reality by being interpreted in the light of the life-experience that 'when a crisis is not responsibly met, the opportunity for further action may be cut off'.²⁶ Similarly, when the foolish virgins request oil from the wise, this relates to the real-life experience of supposing 'that the world would take care of them, that someone else would pay the bill'.²⁷

In connecting the *understanding* of a parable with experience rather than rational reflection alone, we have come near to the philosophical interests of Hans-Georg Gadamer. Thus, although there might be a case for examining the work of Ernst Fuchs and Robert Funk on the parables in connexion with existentialism, we shall postpone this until we look at Gadamer's philosophy.²⁸ We cannot, however, leave the subject of existentialism without glancing at one more set of questions, namely about the conceptual frame which the interpreter brings with him to the text.

Commenting on the all-over significance of Heidegger's *Being and Time* for his own thinking, Bultmann writes, 'I attained a deeper understanding of the historical character of human existence, and thereby at the same time the *conceptual framework* in which theology too can operate in order to bring faith to appropriate expression as an existential attitude'.²⁹ By 'historical character' he means that man is to be viewed in terms of capacities and possibilities, rather than in terms of fixed properties; and that these possibilities are radically limited and conditioned by the historical context into which a man is 'thrown'.³⁰ This, together with Heidegger's notion of 'falling' (*Verfallen*), contributes greatly to Bultmann's understanding of 'flesh' in Paul.³¹ The phrase 'in the flesh', as it occurs most often, suggests

that 'according to Paul a man's nature is not determined . . . by what qualities he may have (as Greek thinking would put it) but that his nature is determined by the sphere within which he moves, the sphere which marks out the horizon or the possibilities of what he does and experiences . . . It corresponds antithetically to the formula "in the Spirit" in which Spirit means the miraculous life-giving power of God'.³³ Further, in its most theological usage, to live according to the flesh comes to mean 'to trust in oneself as being able to procure life by the use of the earthly and through one's own strength'.³³ It denotes 'the self-reliant attitude of the man who puts his trust in his own strength and in that which is controllable by him'.³⁴ All this is very different from the quasi-Platonic idea of 'flesh' as 'territory' from which sin wages war against the higher life'; and of 'spirit' as 'a point of contact in human nature for the regenerative action of the Spirit of God'.³⁵

We cannot pursue questions about existentialism further here, except to admit the point that existentialism can become dangerous and misleading when it carries the interpreter beyond certain limits. In their attitude to history, for example, Bultmann and even Fuchs clearly go well beyond those limits. Nevertheless existentialist perspectives can help the interpreter to see the inadequacy of the more static, less personal, and less historical conceptual frame which all too often he has unconsciously inherited from Plato, Aristotle, and Kant.³⁶ This is not to deny that existentialist insights require correction and supplementation.³⁷

Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics

IN the first part of his book *Wahrheit und Methode* Gadamer distinguishes sharply between knowledge (*Erkenntnis*) which is a matter of cognitive concepts, and understanding (*Verstehen*) which is a matter of experience. His concern is to investigate 'modes of experience in which truth comes to light'.³⁸ He follows Dilthey in his belief that in certain areas of life, such as in the lawcourts or in the humanities in general, we cannot get at the whole truth simply by the 'scientific method' of classification and generalisation, on the level of concepts and propositions. We have to enter into the situation, and allow our own experiences of life to play a part in arriving at our judgments.

Gadamer rejects the idea that the Cartesian model of knowing subject and known object represented the universal method in philosophy before Dilthey and Heidegger. Greek notions of wisdom and Roman philosophy of law turned on a wider relationship to real-life experience than the narrower 'cogito' of Descartes.³⁹ It was, rather, Descartes who wrongly insisted on one single method of enquiry; and Vico with his feeling for history challenged Descartes the mathema-

historical times. He belongs to a historical tradition which transmits to him certain presuppositions or pre-judgments; and 'an individual's pre-judgments (*Vorurteile*) much more than his judgments, are the reality of his being'.⁵⁰

History itself, however, provides a means of bringing these pre-judgments into conscious awareness. The very fact of the temporal distance between the interpreter and the text can jog him into an awareness of his own presuppositions, in such a way that he can allow the text itself to re-shape his own questions and conceptual frame.⁵¹ This brings us to three ideas which are basic to Gadamer's philosophy, and fruitful for questions about New Testament hermeneutics. These are the hermeneutical circle, the notion of merging horizons, and the logic of question and answer.

There are two closely-related senses in which we can speak of the hermeneutical circle. The meaning of a text must be seen in terms of books, chapters, and paragraphs, as well as sentences and words. Heidegger, among others, stresses this point.⁵² But this has an important consequence. Bernard Lonergan comments, 'We can grasp the unity, the whole, only through the parts. At the same time the parts are determined in their meaning by the whole which each part partially reveals. Such is the hermeneutical circle . . . It is a self-correcting process of learning that speaks into the meaning of the whole by using each new part to fill out and qualify and correct the understanding reached in reading earlier parts.'⁵³ In addition to this, understanding follows a spiral (more accurately than a circle) in a further sense. To begin with, the interpreter brings his own questions to the text. But because his questions may not be the right ones, his initial understanding of the subject-matter is limited, provisional, and liable to distortion. But this provisional understanding, in turn, helps him to revise his questions and to ask more adequate and appropriate ones. These now secure a better understanding of the text. The process continues until he is in a position to ask questions which have clearly been shaped by the text itself; so that he achieves a progressively more adequate understanding of its subject-matter.

This principle is very important to Gadamer. It underlines the nature of understanding as a progressive experience rather than as a once-for-all act of knowledge. Further, the subject-matter to be understood is not just an 'object' of knowledge, but confronts the interpreter, as subject, in shaping his own questions. Finally, it introduces us to the notion of merging horizons, and to the logic of question and answer. The orientations and prejudices of the interpreter and of the text represent, to begin with, two quite different sets of horizons. But a horizon is capable of enlargement as we move towards it. It moves as we move. Hence the goal of hermeneutics is to reach the place at which the two sets of horizons merge into each other (*Horizontverschmelzung*). Each set of horizons now embraces

what was initially beyond it.⁵⁴ This brings us to Gadamer's section on the logic of question and answer. An answer, he insists, 'only has meaning in the meaning of the question'.⁵⁵ In the words of R. G. Collingwood, truth belongs 'to a complex of questions and answers'.⁵⁶ It is only sustained dialogue with the text which yields the right questions, and only the right questions which yield the truth of the text. Only in the process of this to-and-fro will the text 'speak' (*zur-Sprache-kommen*).⁵⁷

All this has practical implications even at the level of everyday Bible study. The interpreter must question what questions he brings to the text; but he must do so in the light of the text itself, and allow time for the hermeneutical process to take place. He must allow both the whole and parts, equally, to speak to him, and he must not view the text only as an object of knowledge. This is not to deny that he will also wish to assess and examine his own conclusions as 'objects' in his own thinking at various points in the hermeneutical process. Indeed we admit that it is a major weakness of Gadamer's philosophy that in his third main section on language and ontology he appears to end up in an undue relativism.⁵⁸ Under the influence of Heidegger and Hegel he leaves no room at all for the subject-object model of knowledge, and Wolfhart Pannenberg rightly criticises him for devaluing the role of cognitive propositions.⁵⁹ As R. E. Palmer puts it, 'Gadamer is concerned not so much with understanding more correctly . . . as with understanding more deeply. . . .'⁶⁰ Nevertheless his insights provide an important corrective to an over facile or naively objectivist account of the task of hermeneutics.

We cannot agree, therefore, with the conclusions of the conservative American writer John Warwick Montgomery on the subject of the hermeneutical circle. He calls for 'the rejection of contemporary theology's so-called hermeneutical circle', and continues: 'In his exegesis the preacher must not make the appalling mistake of thinking, as do followers of Bultmann and the post-Bultmann new hermeneutic, that the text and one's own experience enter into a relationship of mutuality . . . To bind text and exegete into a circle is not only to put all theology and preaching into the orbit of anthropocentric sinfulness, but also to remove the very possibility of a "more sure word of prophecy" than the vagaries of men.'⁶¹ Montgomery's language, however, suggests not so much an attack on the hermeneutical circle as such, as the use made of the principle by Bultmann and his school. In practice the hermeneutical circle reflects the experiences of the student when confronted by a book on *any* subject that is new to him. There are terms or phrases which he cannot understand until he has seen the argument of the whole book; and the book as a whole remains obscure until he sees the meaning of its sentences. Moreover his understanding is conditioned by his own existing cultural and intellectual background. But as he goes through the book a second or

tician on precisely this ground. Later, Shaftesbury pointed out the role of wit or ridicule in arriving at truth; Thomas Reid stressed the role of common sense; and Henri Bergson underlined the importance of intuition and creative insight.⁴⁰ Thus the Cartesian 'method' of knowing subject and known object represents only *one* particular tradition within philosophy as a whole.

Following the later Heidegger, Gadamer himself investigates the special significance of understanding a work of art.⁴¹ Two points emerge. Firstly, understanding a genuine work of art is a *progressive experience*, 'an incomplete happening', for its total content usually transcends what we actually see in it at any given moment, and perhaps even the conscious intentions of the artist.⁴² Later in his argument Gadamer cites the verdict of Friedrich Schlegel that in literary art 'a classic is a writing that is never fully understood. But those that are educated and educate themselves must always want to learn more from it'.⁴³ The truth of a work of art is disclosed through a succession of real-life experiences. Thus 'interpretation' progresses from century to century. Secondly, to understand a work of art, the interpreter must be gripped by it. The work of art becomes *subject*, disclosing itself to the interpreter as object. Like a game, it creates its own 'world', in which the interpreter stands.⁴⁴ In a game 'the player . . . stands in a world which is determined by the seriousness and purpose of the game'.⁴⁵ The player accepts the presuppositions of the game, and it is these, rather than the conscious thoughts of players or spectators, which create the reality of the game. This reality is *experienced* by the participant, but it 'escapes those who view it only as a presentation for the benefit of the spectator'.⁴⁶ In the same way, understanding and experiencing a work of art is different from merely thinking about it from the position of a neutral spectator.

In the second main part of his work, Gadamer applies these hermeneutical principles to the problem of history and historical understanding. Schleiermacher, he argues, saw that understanding depends on psychological factors as well as linguistic ones.⁴⁷ Linguistic questions and the traditional hermeneutical 'rules' perform only the *negative* function of preventing false interpretation. But it was left to Dilthey, Gadamer maintains, to expose the historical dimension of the problem: how can the interpreter overcome the problem of historical distance from the text? Dilthey's solution lay in the historical continuity of human nature: 'He who investigates history is the same as he who makes history.'⁴⁸ But Gadamer cannot accept this solution. Following Heidegger, he stresses that man is radically conditioned by his own particular place within history. This 'historicity' (*Geschichtlichkeit*) moulds his attitudes and presuppositions, and hence his understanding.⁴⁹ He asks questions of the text which are shaped not simply, as Dilthey might seem to suggest, by a humanity common to all generations, but by the concerns and orientations of his own

third time, light will dawn in a way which would have been impossible at the first reading. An appeal to the activity of the Holy Spirit does not short-circuit these problems. As Heidegger comments, 'If we see this circle as a vicious one and look for ways of avoiding it . . . then the act of understanding has been misunderstood from the ground up'.⁶⁴ In Biblical interpretation, as Herman Diem and Heinrich Ott have stressed, this means only that exegesis is inseparable from systematic theology.⁶⁵ In any case, a thoroughgoing relativism is not the only alternative to a thorough-going Cartesianism.⁶⁴

Applying these principles to the interpretation of the New Testament Ernst Fuchs insists, 'The texts must translate us before we can translate them . . . How does one make them talk, indeed bring out *their* word? If we remain sovereign over them, the texts remain merely sources for things like the historical-critical method of interpretation. But if they become sovereign over us, they have again become texts of proclamation.'⁶⁶ The text, he writes elsewhere, is not just a servant, 'but rather a master that directs us into the language-context of our own existence . . . *It is really the present that is interpreted with the help of the text*'.⁶⁶ Similarly Gerhard Ebeling urges, 'The text by means of the sermon becomes a hermeneutic aid in the understanding of present experience.'⁶⁷

Elsewhere I have tried to show how Fuchs, together with Funk, applies this kind of perspective to his interpretation of the parable of Jesus.⁶⁸ The parable, he argues, creates a 'world' into which the hearer is drawn. Within its horizons he encounters presuppositions and verdicts different from his own. The logic of this world of the parable draws him on until he finds himself judged by these new evaluations. Thus in the parable of the prodigal son, for example, the pharisaic critic becomes involved in outlook with the role of the elder son, whilst 'sinners' find themselves cast in the role of the prodigal. The pharisees are thus judged, whilst the sinners find themselves accepted and welcomed. Robert Funk comments, 'It is man and not God who is on trial . . . The Pharisees are those who insist on interpreting the word of grace, rather than letting themselves be interpreted by it.'⁶⁹ The word 'speaks' in grace to those who allow it to be active subject, and not only passive object.

Linguistic philosophy

IT might almost be said that the starting-point of linguistic philosophy lies in the recognition that traditional questions about vocabulary and grammar deal with only one part of the problem of meaning. The vocabulary of the question 'What about the points?' may be perfectly familiar, but its intelligibility may depend, according to its meaning, on a knowledge of the war-time system of rationing, of the placing of

fieldsmen in cricket, of entering decimal calculations in appropriate columns, of scoring marks in games, of railways and signal boxes, of electric wiring, and so on. In the Fourth Gospel, Nicodemus stumbles over the meaning of 'birth' (John 3: 3, 4); the woman of Samaria finds problems about 'living (i.e. running) water' (4: 10-12); the disciples misunderstood the meaning of 'meat' (4: 32-34); and the Jews stumble over 'bread', 'eat and drink', and 'come down' (6: 27-35 and 41-58). But none of these difficulties turns on the problem of vocabulary as such. Rather, it is the logically odd setting, or language-situation, which causes the problem.

The same principle applies to questions about grammar. In certain circumstances it only scratches the surface of the problem to say that 'is' is a third person singular present indicative active in the sentence, 'This is poison.' For the utterance may function as an imperative, rather than as an assertion. It may mean: 'Quick! Fetch a doctor!'; or, 'Avenge me of my enemy'; or 'Look out! Don't drink this.' Or it may function logically as a reproach: 'You forgot to put sugar in my tea.' To see the primary logical *function* of the utterance, we need to know something about its language-situation. In Wittgenstein's terminology, we need to investigate the whole language-game in which the utterance occurs. The language-game is 'the whole, consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven'.⁷⁰ 'Only in the stream of thought and life do words have meaning.'⁷¹

The example about the sentence 'this is poison' may give us an initial sympathy with Bultmann's proposals about demythologising. Even if the statement 'God is judge' looks like a solidly descriptive assertion about God, it really speaks, Bultmann suggests, about my own responsibility and finitude.⁷² 'To speak of the act of God means to speak at the same time of my existence.'⁷³ If I say 'Christ is Lord', this is not so much a Christological assertion, as a pledge to behave as Christ's servant. Fuchs seems to suggest that the hermeneutical significance of Philippians 2: 5-11 is that 'We can exalt Jesus in us only by being ready to expose ourselves to the distress of our existence.'⁷⁴ But can these statements be translated in this way *without factual remainder*? In our example, the words 'this is poison' can function as a warning or plea only because (either in fact or in belief) the poison was poison. In J. L. Austin's words 'For a certain performative utterance to be happy, certain statements have *to be true*.'⁷⁵ I have developed this point in my discussion of Fuchs's work on the parables, as well as more briefly in my essay on demythologising.

I have space now only to outline briefly two examples of the kind of hermeneutical clarification which may be possible in the light of linguistic philosophy. Firstly, on a very broad level it provides us with tools for re-assessing certain *conceptual* problems. It has been claimed that Pauline theology, for example, presents 'the problem of anti-theoretical conceptuality . . . Alongside a group of juridical concepts . . .

stand terms of a quite different kind . . . Scholarship comes up against a brick wall'.⁷⁷ 'While we hear the sound of his (Paul's) words, the tune of his logic escapes us.'⁷⁸ Conceptual problems however, constitute the subject-matter of Wittgenstein's philosophy, and he investigates them in terms of comparisons between language-games. He observes 'When language-games change, then there is a change in concepts, and with the concepts the meanings of words change.'⁷⁹ Conceptual confusions occur when concepts are viewed '*outside* a particular language-game'.⁸⁰ This may suggest a possible way forward in Pauline theology. To declare that the believer is both righteous and a sinner is not to utter a 'paradox' within the single language-game of flat assertion. We are concerned with two evaluations, each of which is valid within a certain frame. One is valid within the framework of eschatology; the all-embracing language-game of apocalyptic concepts. The other relates to man's existence within the every-day empirical world.

The principle may perhaps be illustrated with reference to Wittgenstein's observations about 'seeing as', or to what D. D. Evans has termed 'onlooks'.⁸¹ Wittgenstein considers Jastrow's deliberately ambiguous drawing which can be seen either as a duck or as a rabbit. We see it now as the head of a duck pointing to the left; now as the head of a rabbit looking upwards. In each case we may have the same mental image; this is not the point. Everything depends on 'the *system* to which the sign belongs'.⁸² The same strokes may mean ears in the rabbit-system; or a beak in the duck-system. Evans writes, "Looking on *x* as *y*" involves placing *x* within a structure, organisation, or scheme.⁸³ Thus, if God looks on the believer as righteous, this concept becomes fully intelligible only within the appropriate conceptual frame, which is probably the language-game of apocalyptic.

Secondly, Wittgenstein elucidates the logical peculiarities of certain *first-person utterances*. I can say, for example, 'he believes it, but it is false'; but hardly, 'I believe it, but it is false.' Wittgenstein writes, 'If there were a verb meaning "to believe falsely", it would not have any significant first person present indicative . . . My own relation to my words is wholly different from other people's.'⁸⁴ Such utterances as 'I am in pain', or 'I am afraid', or 'I believe', are not reports of inner states of mind. They express a complaint (in place of pain-behaviour), or a cry of fear, or a pledge of faith.⁸⁵ J. L. Austin makes a similar, if slightly different, point about performative utterances. If I say, 'I name this ship . . .', or 'I open this bridge . . .', or 'I give and bequeath my watch . . .', given the appropriate circumstances and conventions, I am not *informing* someone about something, but *doing* it. 'The utterance is the performing of an action.'⁸⁶ The speaker 'is doing something rather than merely saying something'.⁸⁷

Clearly this has relevance both to the New Testament and, more broadly, to Christian liturgy. When we say 'We praise thee', or 'I

repent', we are not attempting to inform God about our inner states of mind. We are performing an *act* of praise, or an act of repentance. Yet, as Austin also points out, for the performative utterances to function effectively, certain things must also be true. Both of these aspects apply, in turn, to primitive Christian confessions in the New Testament. Thus whilst it is true, as Conzelmann stresses, that these confessions represent acclamation rather than merely flat assertion, it is also true, as V. H. Neufeld argues, that they reflect *both* the believer's pledge or act of commitment *and* a cognitive credal content.⁸⁸

We have certainly not exhausted the significance of Wittgenstein's philosophy for New Testament hermeneutics. His work on public criteria of meaning, for example, sheds light not only on language about supposedly inner states, but also on the relevance of the Old Testament as representing a tradition of public experience, and a series of paradigm cases, through which otherwise abstract concepts become intelligible. Further, Wittgenstein demonstrates the function of analytical or 'grammatical' statements in extending the conceptual frame within which understanding certain concepts becomes possible. We cannot, however, explore these points here.

I conclude by underlining the suggestion made in connexion with existentialism and Gadamer's philosophy that the present subject, as well as representing a rigorous academic field of study, also has great relevance to pastoral issues in the Church. Whether in terms of the current "contextual" emphasis in the World Council of Churches, or in terms of the charismatic movement, a polarisation has emerged between a pre-occupation with present experience and the study of the New Testament. But this polarisation is needlessly encouraged all the while New Testament study is seen as an exclusively objectivistic concern with past facts (*Historie*), or with information for its own sake. By contrast, the hermeneutical task is to establish a relationship between two sets of horizons: those of the New Testament itself, and those of the interpreter's present experience and conceptual frame. I have tried to show that the use of certain philosophical categories may contribute towards the successful performance of that task.

¹ Georges Van Riet, 'Exégèse et réflexion philosophique' in G. Thils and R. E. Brown (eds.) *Exégèse et Théologie. Donum Natalicum Iosepho Coppens*, III (Paris, 1968) pp. 1-16.

² R. Bultmann, 'The Case for Demythologising' in H.-W. Bartsch (ed.) *Kerygma and Myth II* (E.T. London, 1962) p. 182.

³ R. Bultmann, 'Reply', in C. W. Kegley (ed.) *The Theology of Rudolph Bultmann* (London, 1966) p. 276.

⁴ Cf. E. Voegelin, 'History and Gnosis' in B. W. Anderson (ed.) *The Old Testament and Christian Faith* (London, 1964) pp. 64-89; and H. Thielicke, 'The Re-statement of New Testament Mythology' in H.-W. Bartsch, *op. cit.* I (London², 1964) pp. 141 and 149-55.

⁵ Cf. A. C. Thiselton, 'Myth, Demythologising' in *Zondervan's Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (forthcoming).

⁶ Cf. J. A. Kirk, 'La Nueva Hermeneutica en Perspectiva' in *Cuadernos de Teología I*, nos. 2-3 (1971) p. 13; J. Macquarrie, 'Philosophy and Theology in

- Bultmann's Thought' in C. W. Kegley (ed.) *op. cit.*, p. 142; and C. E. Braaten, 'How New is the New Hermeneutic?' in *Theology Today* 22 (1965-6) pp. 229-30.
- ⁷ R. Bultmann, 'Is Exegesis without Presuppositions Possible?' in *Existence and Faith* (E.T. London², 1964) pp. 343-4.
- ⁸ *Ibid.* p. 346.
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- ²² *Ibid.* pp. 175-6.
- ²³ *Ibid.* pp. 185-6.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.* p. 191.
- ²⁵ D. O. Via, *The Parables. Their Literary and Existential Dimension* (Philadelphia, 1967) p. 93.
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- ²⁷ *Ibid.* p. 126.
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- ³⁰ On 'thrownness' (*Geworfenheit*) cf. M. Heidegger, *Being and Time* (E.T. London, 1962) pp. 174-9 and 219-24.
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- ³² R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament I* (E.T. London, 1952) p. 235.
- ³³ *Ibid.* p. 239.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.* p. 240.
- ³⁵ H. Wheeler Robinson, *The Christian Doctrine of Man* (Edinburgh, 1911) pp. 117 and 111.
- ³⁶ On the more dynamic, historical, and personal perspective of the Old Testament, cf., for example, K. Miskotte, *When the Gods are Silent* (E.T. London, 1967) pp. 35-6, 51, 81, 149-50, 224-46 *et passim*.
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- ³⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 17-18.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.* pp. 21-24.
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- ⁴² *Ibid.* p. 94.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.* p. 274, n. 2 (also cited by B. J. F. Lonergan, *op. cit.*, p. 161).
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 97-105.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p. 97.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.* p. 104.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 176-85.
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- 146-65. Cf. J. Macquarrie, *God Talk* (London, 1967) pp. 147-67.
- ⁶³ B. J. F. Lonergan, *op. cit.* p. 159.
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- ⁶⁶ R. G. Collingwood, *An Autobiography* (Oxford, 1939) p. 37.
- ⁶⁷ H. -G. Gadamer, *op. cit.*, p. 360.
- ⁶⁸ Cf. the criticisms of Emilio Betti, *Die Hermeneutik als allgemeine Methodik der Geisteswissenschaften* (Tübingen, 1962).
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- ⁷¹ J. W. Montgomery, 'An Exhortation to Exhorters' in *Christianity Today* 17 (1973) p. 606; cf. also his essay in C. F. H. Henry (ed.) *Jesus of Nazareth Saviour and Lord* (London, 1966) pp. 231-6.
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- ⁷³ H. Diem, *Dogmatics* (Eng. Edinburgh 1959), and H. Ott, *Theology and Preaching* (E.T. London, 1965).
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- ⁸² R. Bultmann, *Essays Philosophical and Theological*, pp. 280-87.
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- ⁹⁴ L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* II, x, pp. 190 and 192.
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- ⁹⁶ J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, p. 6.
- ⁹⁷ J. L. Austin, *Philosophical Papers*, p. 222.
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