

**SOF**

# SEA OF FAITH

Quarterly Magazine of the Sea of Faith Network

NO. 25 APRIL 1996



*'exploring and promoting religious faith  
as a human creation'*

# SoF magazine No. 25 April 1996

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## About the Network . . .

*The Sea of Faith Network's statement of intent is 'to explore and promote religious faith as a human creation.' We **explore** the implications of accepting religion as a human creation; **promote** this view of religion, and **affirm** the continuing validity of religious thought and practice as celebrations of spiritual and social values.*

*The Network has no creed. It welcomes people from all faith and non-faith traditions. It has a Steering Committee elected by the membership, an annual conference and local groups. If you would like to join, or for more information, contact the Network Secretary: **Ronald Pearse, 15 Burton Street, Loughborough LE11 2DT***

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## About the magazine . . .

*Sea of Faith is published quarterly. It is free to Network members, £2 per copy or £8 per year to non-members. Contributions express the views of the writer, which are not necessarily those of the editor or the Network. Contributions for the next issue should reach the editor by 31 May. Send (with SAE for acknowledgement) to Anthony Freeman, 4 Godolphin Close, Newton St Cyres, Exeter, Devon EX5 5BZ. Please note change of address.*

## EDITORIAL

An important task of SoF magazine is to provide members of the network with material to help in your own 'exploring and promoting of religious faith as a human creation'. One type of contribution for which we have been particularly asked is the personal testimony of other members, both how they have come to their present state of un/belief and how they would choose to express it. The article from Mike Smith fills precisely this slot. [The promised piece from Nicholas Smith has been held over to the next issue.]

Another constant request is for material suitable for use in worship by those who embrace a 'Sea of Faith' position. Elizabeth Reid's response to Don's 'Dual Agenda' challenge takes us into this sensitive area and she offers possible rewordings of two familiar texts. Anne Ashworth comes at the issue from a different perspective — pointing out the harm which hymns in particular have done in the past — but she also ends on a more positive note.

The thoughtful essay by Chris Gaal also takes up an issue raised at the 1995 Conference — and suggests that a dogmatic non-realism is as harmful to reasonable faith as more traditional forms of dogmatism. This is a longer than usual article for this magazine, but the centrality of the subject, and the clarity of the argument, should make it both useful and accessible to readers.

I have been asking for some time for contributions of a visual rather than verbal kind. The delightful cartoon on the front cover comes courtesy of the Sheffield Telegraph, and the editor has kindly given permission for us to use further material from the same source. This particular quartet of pictures seems to me to sum up very neatly the interplay between language and ethics/theology to which Don constantly draws our attention.

Pictures and words come together in the work of Ifeatu Okoye, a Nigerian postgraduate engineer, artist and poet who is currently studying at Loughborough University. His work is largely a commentary upon what he himself calls 'a terrorised and tormented era', and he provides what David Hart has termed 'a realistic and sensitive thermometer on our fevered times'. Please encourage other artists and illustrators to offer their work to the magazine.

*Anthony Freeman*

## 'LET'S HAVE A GOD WHO LAUGHS!'

*urges David Bryant*

**I**t has taken me thirty five years to realise that there was a fundamental flaw in my training for the priesthood.

Implicit in the theological college system was the assumption that sensuality was, if not actually 'wrong', to be severely haltered. Austerity was the prime virtue to be inculcated into ordinands and the rules worked to that end. Communication with the resident Irish maids was considered unseemly. The local inn was proscribed territory, both because of the evils of drink and also to ensure that no unsavoury relationships were forged there, and the college food was (I suspect intentionally) made unpalatable. Lady friends were closely monitored at the termly dances so that their suitability as future clergy wives could be assessed. On visiting days they had to sign out early in the evening lest sexual improprieties should take place. (Temptation in the afternoons was assumed to be less severe.)

Twice-daily chapel attendance was compulsory and rumour had it that the sub-warden ensconced in the rear pew noted the order in which we departed from our devotions. Wednesday evenings had a monastic bent and culminated in a 'spiritual' talk on a weighty matter, after which silence was maintained. I still recall a senior staff member deliver a homily on the delicate subject of lust, in muted tones.

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We ached for a passionate,  
laughter-filled, humorous,  
sensitive, weeping, sensual God

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The entire regime was anti-life, anti-world, anti-sensual and depicted religion as wearisome and lacking in joy. It produced a deadly dichotomy between body and soul. The one was evil the other good. This immediately induced a guilt complex in us. We wanted to enjoy the sensuality and sheer exuberance of life, natural to our youthful secular contemporaries, and yet we were left in no doubt

that such weaknesses were to be sublimated and subdued before we were worthy of ordination.

This pressure led us to an unhealthy introspection and an undue concern with 'saving our souls'. Spirituality became an exercise in ego-building, a kind of heroic attempt to surmount the evils of the body and become saintly. Such dualism turned us into prime material for the psychiatrist's couch and it certainly made for a distorted sexuality. A reading of the beautifully sensual *Song of Songs* in chapel produced no more than an embarrassed giggling. A roving copy of John Cleland's *Fanny Hill* was avidly seized upon by one set of damp hands after another. It would be instructive to know how many of the sexual misdemeanours concerning clergy, reported in the press, spring from this early rejection of the sensual.

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All this left us quite inadequate to deal with the pastoral problems which might be expected to come our way in future parish life. If the body was evil, what advice were we to give to the worried homosexual who indulged his body in an 'unnatural' way? How were we to guide married men or women embroiled in a passionate affair who desperately needed to talk? What on earth did we say to the masturbating teenager or the young couple 'living in sin'? Condemnation was our only possible response. We had been programmed that way.

Nor was this an ideal basis on which to found our relationships with women in the parishes where we were to work or indeed with our own future wives. If Irish maids were a potential source of our downfall, so presumably were all women. At the very least they were to be treated with the utmost caution. (Does this in part explain male antipathy to women priests?)

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If the body was evil,  
what advice were we to give . . . ?

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What we needed above all was to be told that the sensual (when exercised in a controlled and compassionate manner) is entirely good and one of God's greatest blessings. Why were we never given any help in learning the art of loving our-selves, soul AND body, so that we could then go on to love others? Surely one of our pundits should have pointed out that the imagined dichotomy between body and soul was a treacherous invention and led to a disparagement of life and humanity and to a destructive inner conflict? If only we had been taught the skills of loving rather than hating!

Because the sensual and the sexual were gross and secular, God was kept firmly away from them. He was 'out there', not 'in here'; deistic, not pantheistic. He was the remote being to whom we prayed solemnly and fearfully. In his absence he had called us to do his work in the world vicariously. (After all, weren't we all going to end up as 'vicars'?) He watched over us moodily, spasmodically tugging the reins of our guilt and self-recrimination to keep us on the straight path. He could be grim and frightening if we missed saying the daily offices or passed the bounds of decency with a woman friend. He smiled when we endured a particularly lengthy prayer session or banished lustful thoughts for the night.

The real problem was that this distant God was excluded from the very experiences which meant the most to us — and which offered the best hope of our finding Him — namely, girl friends, sex, laughter,

companionable drinking, humour and sheer pleasure. He was absent from our deepest concerns and thereby effectively dead. What we would have welcomed with open arms was an injection of God's immanence; for somebody in authority to stand up in the pulpit on those doom-laden Wednesday evenings and to say, 'Yes. God is in sexuality, in joy, in femininity, in dancing, in kissing, in enjoyment and pleasure, in falling into or out of love. Yes, he is in the Irish maids with their wiles and charms, he is in the light-heartedness and youthful excesses.' We longed for a thorough-going pantheism, for a God who was 'in all'. We ached for a passionate, laughter-filled, humorous, sensitive, weeping, sensual God.

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None of this would matter if it were not for the fact that little has changed. We are still I guess preaching a distant God 'out there', who pulls the puppet strings and makes us dance to his tune and we are still moralising about the wickedness of human sensuality. Perhaps this is why (according to the latest survey) more than half the people in Britain believe that the Church is out of touch with real life.

If we started proclaiming a smiling, sensual God who is right here in our deepest concerns, maybe all this would change.

**TALKING BOOKS AT ST. JAMES' with SCM Press**

**6.30 p.m. on Monday 22nd April at St James' Piccadilly**

A discussion to mark the publication of

***Authority and Anglicanism***

by Stephen Ross White

(author of *Don Cupitt and the Future of Christian Doctrine*)

**SPEAKERS**

**Stephen Ross White ♦ Anthony Freeman ♦ John Halliburton**

**Entrance £5 (concessions £3)**

# AN ACTOR'S DREAM . . .

. . . RELATED TO RUSSELL HUNT BY JAYSON ROBBINS

## WHAT IF . . .

. . . THE WORLD'S MOST POWERFUL PRODUCER SAID TO YOU, 'I AM MOUNTING MY BIGGEST PRODUCTION AND YOU ARE IN IT.

'THERE WILL BE NO AUDITIONS. I ALREADY KNOW WHAT YOU CAN DO AND I LIKE YOUR WORK. THERE ARE NO BIT PARTS OR CAMEOS IN THIS PLAY FOR EVERY ROLE IS A LEADING ROLE, EVERY PART IS A SUPPORTING PART, AND EVERY APPEARANCE IS A SPECIAL APPEARANCE.

'THIS IS A HUGELY SUCCESSFUL PRODUCTION WITH ROAD COMPANIES ALL OVER THE UNIVERSE. EVERYONE WILL STAR IN THE PLAY WHETHER THEY WANT TO OR NOT. SO WHY NOT MAKE THE MOST OF IT? YES, YOU ARE A STAR AND I AM BEHIND YOU ONE HUNDRED PER CENT.

'NOW THERE ARE A FEW THINGS YOU SHOULD REMEMBER AND THESE ARE NOT NEGOTIABLE — SO DON'T SEND YOUR AGENT AROUND TO ME, I ONLY DEAL WITH PRINCIPALS. THERE IS NO PLOT, AS THE PLAY IS NOT YET WRITTEN. THERE WILL BE NO REHEARSAL — WE ONLY DO THIS ONE TIME. THERE WILL BE NO DIRECTOR — YOU WILL DIRECT YOURSELF AND YOU KNOW EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW IN ORDER TO DO THIS. DON'T WORRY ABOUT A SCRIPT, FOR YOU'LL KNOW WHAT TO SAY AND IF YOU NEED TO SAY SOMETHING JUST BE QUIET AND LISTEN — I'M THERE.

'MY CASTING, AS ALWAYS, IS PURE GENIUS. YOU MAY CHOOSE THE CHARACTER YOU WISH TO BE AND CREATE THE ROLE AS YOU GO ALONG. AND REMEMBER, IF YOUR CHARACTER IS NOT PERFORMING AS YOU WISH, YOU MAY RE-WRITE THE ROLE IN ANY WAY SO LONG AS YOUR CHARACTER DOES NOT WEAKEN THE OTHER CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY.

'I URGE YOU TO CONCENTRATE NOT ON ACTING LIKE BUT ON BEING THE CHARACTER YOU CHOOSE TO CREATE. AND, WHATEVER YOU DO, MAINTAIN THE INTEGRITY OF

YOUR CHARACTER. SPEAK CLEARLY, DON'T KEEP BUMPING INTO THE FURNITURE AND TRYING TO REDO THE SETS, YOU'LL ONLY HURT YOURSELF. BESIDES, IT TOOK MILLIONS OF YEARS TO DESIGN THAT SET AND IT WORKS PERFECTLY.

'DON'T WORRY ABOUT THE OTHER CAST MEMBERS, FOR YOU WILL FIND THEM AS GOOD AS YOU FIND YOURSELF TO BE. THERE WILL BE NO REVIEWS AND NO CRITIQUES FROM ME. IF YOU WANT A REVIEW YOU WILL HAVE TO WRITE IT FOR YOURSELF. BUT FOR MY SAKE DON'T LET SOMEONE ELSE DO IT!

'DURING OUR RUN, YOU MAY PRESENT YOURSELF WITH EVERY REWARD YOU THINK YOU DESERVE — EVERY RECOGNITION YOU WANT. THERE ARE PLENTY, SO HELP YOURSELF. I DON'T DO TROPHIES. YOU WILL ALSO DECIDE WHAT YOUR COMPENSATION IS TO BE FOR THIS ROLE; JUST LET ME KNOW.

'OH YES, THERE ARE NO UNDERSTUDIES AND NO TIME OFF. NO ONE ELSE CAN EVER PLAY THIS PART YOU CREATE BUT YOU, SO BE SURE YOU ARE COMFORTABLE WITH THE CHARACTER, AND KEEP IT FOCUSED. IT MAY OR MAY NOT BE A LONG RUN, BUT IT WILL BE THE LONGEST RUN YOU'LL EVER HAVE. AND — YOU WON'T LIKE THIS BUT I HAVE TO TELL YOU — THERE IS NO STAGE MANAGER. SO IF YOU MAKE A BIG MESS YOU'LL HAVE TO CLEAN IT UP YOURSELF. BE SURE AND LET ME KNOW WHEN YOU'RE FINISHED WITH IT.

BY THE WAY, THE TITLE OF THE PLAY? I CALL IT *YOUR LIFE*. AND THE CURTAIN, IN CASE YOU HAVEN'T NOTICED, HAS ALREADY GONE UP. YOU'RE ON! IN FACT I'VE BEEN GIVING YOU YOUR CUES FOR YEARS NOW.

'THE ONLY PROP YOU GET TO USE IS YOUR OPENING NIGHT GIFT. DON'T YOU REMEMBER? THE ONE I GAVE YOU WHEN WE FIRST OPENED ON THE DAY YOU WERE BORN? YOUR ABILITY TO THINK! USE IT — IT WORKS IF YOU DO.

'SO GET OUT THERE AND "BREAK A LEG", KIDDO. REMEMBER, I LOVE YA.'

# Is There Room For A Sliver Of Reality?

*'The Sliver Strikes Back . . .'* with help from Chris Gaal

*In this article I wish to revisit one of the most important controversies at last year's Conference: whether there can be a 'sliver of reality' beyond our God language. Bishop Spong argued that there could, and that this 'sliver of reality' lay behind our belief in God, our experience of God and our talk of God. Don Cupitt argued that the notion of a 'sliver of reality' beyond our God language is meaningless. I think most peoples' hearts were with Jack, but their minds probably sided with Don.*

Don argued with his usual flair, but I do have a difficulty with his position which I would like to explore. He put the following post-modernist arguments. Language structures our experience of the world, and we can never as it were peer behind the world-as-we-experience-it-through-language, to see if it really is like that. Since we can never get at reality except through language, an independent reality would be forever an unknown 'X' about which we could say nothing. This idea has no content to give it meaning. As Don puts it in one of his books, 'outside language there is chaos'. I accept there is a complex interplay between our language and conceptual schemes, and how we experience the world. I have trouble accepting the further claim that it is senseless to speak of a world independent of language.

I would like to use a thought experiment to explain my difficulty. Einstein used these, so I am in good company. *Let's survey in our mind's eye the history of the universe. We start with the Big Bang, then the evolution of galaxies, the formation of the earth. At some point life emerges. Species after species, of increasing complexity, develop until we get to the precursor of womankind. Let's stop at this point, before the emergence of people and their language.*

Up to this point in history there has been no language. Yet despite this there must have been developing physical structures in the universe. Without definite structures, there could have been no evolution of world or life. It makes no sense to suggest that somehow these structures were applied retrospectively to chaos, after people had evolved and developed views on the origins of the universe. There must have been more than chaos out there, for the world and people to have evolved in the first place! Up to this point the world must have existed and had definite characteristics, independently of language.

By contrast, if post-modernism is right, we would have to say that before people developed language, no structure in the universe was possible. If not even a sliver of reality can exist independently of language, post-modernists can hardly accept a whole cosmos independent of language!

Post-modernism seems refuted by our thought experiment. Indeed it conflicts with our whole scientific outlook. Human beings did not create themselves and the universe *ex nihilo* when they uttered the first sentence!

Admittedly this account of the world's history is expressed in words and uses current scientific concepts. But my point does not depend on the infallibility of our latest scientific views. **WHATEVER HAPPENED**, definite processes must have occurred for aeons BEFORE humans developed language, if we are to account for our very existence on this planet. Even Genesis allows the world to exist for several days before human language! As the world has existed in the past independently of language, why not now? If the physical world can exist independently of language, why not God? (Though we may doubt Her existence on other grounds.)

At this point I can imagine the following counter-argument from an indignant post-modernist.

*'When we say there is no such thing as a reality independent of language, we are not saying that reality is HISTORICALLY or PHYSICALLY dependent on language. We are not saying that language had to come first before anything else could happen. We are not saying that our words create the physical world.*

*'What we mean is that the world is LOGICALLY dependent on language. As Wittgenstein said "the world is the totality of facts, not things". Facts are true statements. The world is everything we can truly say about it. We can only state facts and make judgements about the way things are from within a language. Try and describe the world outside ANY language, and you will end up just making an inarticulate noise!'*

Is this appeal to 'logical dependence' enough to save post-modernism? What does it involve in practice?

## *The Sliver Strikes Back . . .*

### *The Puzzling Case of the Logically Dependent Elephants*

Imagine a post-modernist zoologist claiming that *'there can be no such thing as an elephant independent of language.'* Elephants are after all a part of reality, so the arguments should work just the same, and be easier to follow in a more concrete case.

This claim seems initially surprising, but she goes on to explain: *'I don't mean that elephants couldn't have existed before humans. They did. Nor do I mean that elephants are in any way CAUSALLY influenced in their biology or life-style by human language. If the human race died out tomorrow this would if anything improve the life chances of elephants.'*

'So what DO you mean?' we cry, 'and whatever you mean, why do you express it so misleadingly? Everything you have said so far clearly proves that elephants ARE independent of language!'

*'But they are LOGICALLY dependent on language. We cannot describe elephants or state facts about them, without using words. We can't even call them "animals" without appeal to our zoological classifications. Outside language we can say or think nothing about them. Outside language they are forever an unknown "X" about which we can say nothing. But this idea is meaningless. So it is their LOGICAL dependence which makes a language-independent elephant a meaningless impossibility.'*

'But hold on,' we reply. 'You have already admitted that elephants have in the past and do now PHYSICALLY exist independently of language. So whatever your logical dependence involves, it can't sensibly deny THAT. If your logic STILL leads you to conclude that a language-independent elephant is impossible you have contradicted yourself. They can't be a meaningless impossibility AND be placidly roaming the African plains, as their ancestors did before them, long before humans developed language. There must be a flaw in your reasoning somewhere.'

The appeal to logical dependence shows that OUR ability to say things in words is logically dependent on language, not that ELEPHANTS can't exist independently of language.

Similarly for 'reality'. We cannot make statements or judgements about the world except through language. In this sense, our detailed understanding of what the world is like at any given time is logically dependent on our language at that time. Pre- Einstein and Niels Bohr, it was not possible to describe the quantum nature of the world. The relevant concepts, vocabulary and mathematics were simply lacking.

However, it does not follow that reality itself cannot stand independent of our understanding of it, that there is some dependency between THE WORLD and our language. Modern science is built around asking: 'Are our current concepts RIGHT?' This would be an unintelligible question if the nature of the world was itself somehow DETERMINED by our language. Science constantly reformulates and expands our language to respond to new discovery. Reality is bigger than our language.

'Facts' do not just exist as statements in language. 'Facts' are also STATES OF AFFAIRS in the world — as Wittgenstein acknowledged. There can be more states of affairs in the world than are yet dreamed of in our language.

### ***The World Is The Totality Of Facts, Not Things***

Our post-modernist still has some important things to say.

*'You admit we cannot state facts or judgements about the world independently of language. This concedes more than you think. The early Wittgenstein thought that when we state facts, we draw little pictures in words, of what the real world looks like. But he grew out of it. He realised that when human beings describe the world, they don't first look, in a language neutral way; then decide which of our words best fits what we see.'*

*'Your examples of the elephants and world history, sound more plausible than they are, because we all SHARE the same contemporary language. Language is like the air we breath — because its there all the time, we forget it is! Because we look at the world THROUGH our concepts all the time, we forget we are doing this.'*

*'But go back five hundred years, and your description of Big Bangs and galaxies would have seemed not an obvious neutral description, but a fantastical invention in LANGUAGE! Just as Genesis does to most of us today. Go to Africa with a different set of zoological classifications, and you won't find elephants.'*

*'The "things" of the world do not tell us what they are and what to say about them. What it is right to say, what "the facts are" is given by the concepts, definitions and rules of evidence embedded in our language.'*

*'I concede that "reality" in some sense must exist outside language. But whatever the hidden substratum of reality is, we can have no access to it. For all practical purposes, our life is lived within the world created by our language. For all practical purposes, we still create truth.'*

### *The Sliver Strikes back . . .*

Let us look at these two claims that:

1. an independent reality would be 'practically irrelevant' to us;
2. our language determines what is to count as fact.

#### ***1. The Strange Case of the Darkened Room and the Multiplying Elephant***

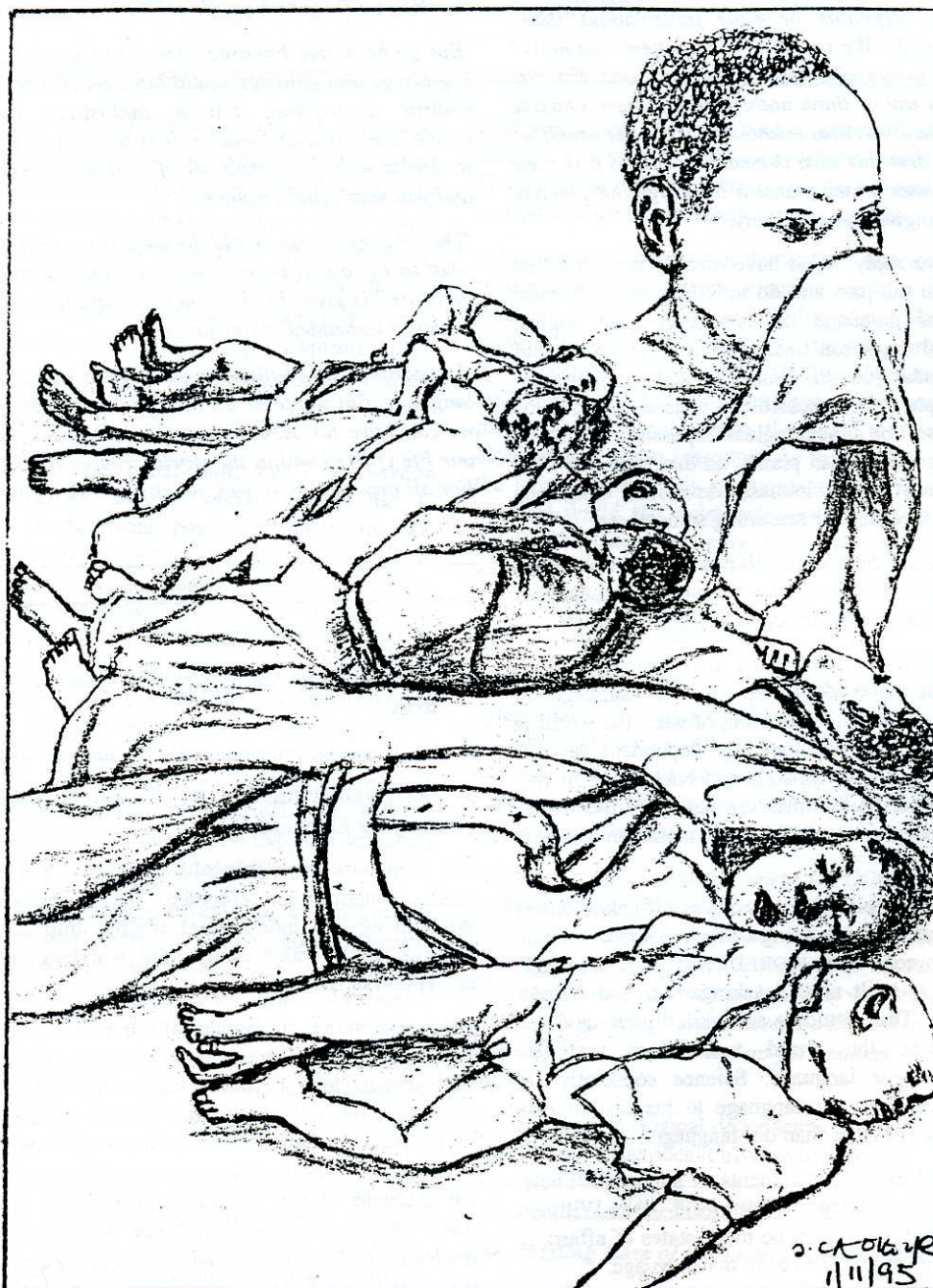
Our elephants proved helpful last time. Let's use them again. Imagine an elephant in a darkened room, symbolising our independent reality. Into the room we shine a torch which stands for our language-mediated perception of the world.

When we shine our torch into the room, we see (not surprisingly) an elephant. But WHICH elephant?! When our post-modernist above said that BECAUSE our experience of the world was always through language, 'objective' reality was forever inaccessible and irrelevant to us, he was arguing like someone who would say about our example: *'When we shine a torch into the room, we don't see the real elephant. That is forever hidden and irrelevant to human knowledge, because we can never see it as it is in itself. As we surely do see an elephant, it must be ANOTHER, immanent elephant that we see.'*

Now clearly, we don't create a second elephant when we switch our torch on. We see the REAL one, although it will look different in red torchlight to white. It is mistaken to treat the real elephant as a questionable 'forever unknown' which can make no contribution to what we see (and can therefore be denied altogether) — to treat OUR TORCH as the instrument that creates the immanent elephant that we see.

Similarly with the world. Our language and concepts MAKE A DIFFERENCE to how we see the world, but do not create the world we see. Our galaxies and elephants are derived

### THE KIBEHO CARNAGE



These kids ain't sleeping.  
They're dead and reeking  
Of raw butchery and pestilence.  
They knew not why the death sentence  
that was laid upon their innocent souls  
Even before conception.

Yet from the holocaust in Auschwitz  
To the carnage at Rwandan Kibeho  
And even the restive cities of Bosnia;  
Such gory sights of shock would linger  
Until we begin to number with our fingers:  
Those grievous losses of strife  
And the great value of life.

*Ifeatu C. A. Okoye*  
8/11/95 (1:34am)



from our observation of the 'real' world. They are not an immanent phantasm created by our language. The world outside language is relevant to the truth and falsity of our concepts and the statements we make. Because it is, we can investigate things further and revise our views. Galaxies may seem strange at first, but we can build telescopes which prove (or disprove) them. One cannot investigate further an immanent phantasm — its appearance is all there is. But if 'the surface is all there is' we don't get nearer truth — we destroy the distinction between truth and illusion. Things must be as they seem.

What of the claim that our language determines what is to count as fact? This brings in Wittgenstein's later view of language.

## 2. Wittgenstein and The Holiness of Ordinary Language

Wittgenstein argued that words have meaning by playing a part in patterns of human life or 'language games'. In these games, words are given meaning by a series of rules governing their use, just as in games like cricket there are rules which determine both what the players will do, and what such key words as 'leg-before-wicket (lbw)' mean. In such games, the linguistic and procedural rules of the game determine 'the facts.' By definition 'lbw' exists in cricket. The rules define what is to count as 'lbw' and when it occurs. It would be a misunderstanding to deny that 'lbw' exists because one had searched the cricket pitch for it in vain. Similarly in the religious game, 'God exists', and it would be a misunderstanding of the game to search for some 'Super Object' in the Heavens.

Words only have meaning WITHIN a language game (if they are in more than one, they have more than one meaning.) If we try and use words OUTSIDE the game, we start talking nonsense — outside the game there are no rules for the correct use of the word.

We cannot question the VALIDITY of a language game or the key concepts within it. It is meaningless to ask, about the religious game: 'Yes, I know this GAME exists, but does GOD exist?' (Yes I know the game of cricket exists, but does 'lbw' exist?). We may get TIRED of a game (I don't want to play the religious game anymore) but we cannot PROVE OR DISPROVE a game. 'Proof' can only occur within the game, according to the relevant rules. By applying the rules of cricket, one can prove that a player has been 'caught lbw', but it makes no sense to speak of either proving or disproving the game of cricket.

This analysis of language as games has captivated many thinkers. The history of philosophy is seen as littered with the bones of thinkers who have fatally fallen into potholes of meaninglessness by using their words outside the right games. (The game 'philosophy' is not allowed.) The true philosopher becomes a kind of intellectual sheep dog, rounding up straying thinkers and pushing them back into the safe confining pens of ordinary speech, by reminding them of how they should use their words. Language CANNOT BE WRONG, and the only 'solution' to the great philosophical problems about God, mind and matter, free will etc. is to convince philosophers and theologians of the holiness of ordinary language, and cure them of the impossible urge to transcend its limitations. Fortunately the ancient Greeks never read Wittgenstein, otherwise we

might still be trapped in the thought world of the ancients, 'refuting' every attempt at innovative thought by pointing out how it conflicts with established Babylonian linguistic usage.

Was Wittgenstein right? His views contain many paradoxes and difficulties. As a sample of the paradoxes: It is ABOUT language games, but does not itself seem to BELONG to a language game. If Wittgenstein is right that words only function meaningfully within a game, his own writings about them must be nonsense. Conversely, if we understand him, he must be wrong!

Wittgenstein chose the metaphor of a 'game' to stress the sheer variety in human language, and the importance of seeing language as not just something 'in the head' but an integral part of human social and active life. He says much that is important, but this metaphor of 'games' is dangerously misleading. We see this once we attempt to define the boundaries between language games. Since 'the rules' only apply within the game, we need to know where 'the boundaries are. Here the comparison with games starts to break down. Cricket has clearly defined boundaries. But what are the boundaries in more general cultural categories like science and religion?

When Ptolemy said the planets revolve around the earth, and Copernicus said they didn't, were they disagreeing within the SAME game? Or was Ptolemy playing his own game of 'Hunt the Epicycles'? Is religion as such a language game. Or is each major religion a different one? And if so, does every sect inhabit its own language game as well? This is a Tower of Babel scenario in which everyone inhabits their own self-justifying world. Transubstantiation is a fact within Catholicism; instant creation within Fundamentalism; etc.

We can try to ease the difficulties by allowing our 'games' to be more fluid and interconnected than our initial comparison with cricket suggested. Wittgenstein sometimes speaks along these lines. But the further we get from the original game paradigm, the more empty and unhelpful talk of 'games' and 'following rules' in the game becomes.

To borrow a criticism from Wittgenstein, we simply DO NOT HAVE rules to decide these boundary issues. There is no obviously right way to carve up our culture into 'games'. Wittgenstein himself only gave fragmentary examples. But if there are no rules for applying the concept of a language game, then by his own account, this concept is meaningless.

A related problem arises over his view that issues of proof only arise WITHIN the game. It is one thing to say that a game like cricket needs no justification — no-one expects cricket to be RIGHT about the world. (This is one reason we call such activities GAMES.)

Yet many of our most significant human activities involve attempts to understand the world, and depend for their meaning and success on 'getting it right'. Medieval medicine failed to stop the Black Death. Can we really maintain that the question whether the medieval medicine game was right or wrong, is meaningless? Tell that to the victims! Try also telling a religious person losing their faith, that the important thing is 'playing the game' for its own sake!

Wittgenstein's self-enclosed games are elementary rituals not at all like the creative dynamic between people actively engaged with the world and their wider culture. The metaphor fails him.

These difficulties show that we cannot split off one aspect of human life and thought from others and make it self-contained and self-justifying. No one area of language can determine its own reality. There is no such thing as a 'religious game' snugly enclosed in its own set of rules and practices. By removing the earth from the centre of the universe, Copernicus revolutionised religion as well as science, as did Darwin later. Our concepts have multiple interconnections with our wider culture. Any area of thought is vulnerable to issues raised from outside. Fundamentalists, and any other fantasists, are sick just because they refuse to open up their beliefs to critical assessment in the light of our wider cultural knowledge.

Nor can even the whole of our language determine its own reality. Post-modernists speak as if language determined everything about us. But language is only one aspect of our humanity. We have a biology, and as Freud and Jung showed, a psychology as well, which seems to link into states of consciousness beyond everyday experience and language. We are influenced but not determined by our culture, as the repeated failures of ideologies like communism to mould people in their own image shows. The human body is as much a carrier of reality for us as language. We see in three dimensions because of the structure of our eyes and brains, not because we have spatial concepts. Our language has multiple connections to our non linguistic outer and inner worlds. These wider connections make it possible for a whole conceptual scheme to prove 'wrong'.

#### *The Sliver Strikes Back . . .*

##### ***Berkeley's Ghost Haunts The Post-modern World***

It's time to pull threads together. Let's do so through this eighteenth century Bishop, whose views strikingly anticipated post-modernism. His fate was sad. His Ghost haunts the victory celebrations of post-modernism much as Banquo's Ghost haunted Macbeth's — as an ominous sign that not all is well.

For Berkeley, our only way of knowing reality is through experience. He did not consider the role of language in our experience, but spoke instead of our sense-impressions. Look at a tree, and you have a visual sense-impression in your mind. Touch the tree, and you have a tactile sense-impression. Etc. We can convert Berkeley into post-modernism by substituting at appropriate points such terms as 'language', or 'concepts' for his 'sense-impressions.'

Berkeley rejected the idea of a sliver of reality independent of our sense-impressions, since we can never, as it were, get behind our sense impressions, to check if they correspond with the 'real' world. An independent reality behind our experience would be forever 'an unknown 'X' about which we could say nothing. Such an idea has no content to give it meaning.

Truth is not correspondence between our sense-impressions and reality, but coherence within the pattern of our sense-

impressions. I confirm the existence of a tree, not by comparing my visual image with the real tree to see if they both look the same. I touch the tree to see if my visual sense-impression is followed by tactile sense impressions. When I find a sufficiently coherent bundle of sense-impressions all together, I say there is a tree there. Since truth is coherence within our sense-impressions, and there can be nothing else behind them, the physical world ITSELF is NOTHING BUT bundles of sense-impressions in the mind.

Now if the world is simply bundles of sense-impressions in the mind, then every time someone turns their 'head', that part of the world they alone are observing ceases to exist. Walk out of the kitchen and the washing up vanishes into oblivion (clearly a theory with some practical advantages!) As each person knows only THEIR sense impressions, we must all live in separate isolated universes within our own minds. As Berkeley knows only HIS impressions, the world is all in HIS mind.

Being a Bishop, Berkeley tried to call on God to rescue him from absurdity. Things continue to exist when no one is looking at them, because God is there all the time and God as we all know sees everything. [This was a bit of a cheat, even for a Bishop, for on Berkeley's own premises, To Be Was To Be Perceived, and he had never perceived God, so He could not exist. (The use of 'He' is not sexist here; in Berkeley's day She WAS a He.)]

The post-modernist world is not quite so precarious as Berkeley's — it does not vanish every time someone blinks. Nevertheless since it only exists as immanence IN language, it cannot exist before people developed language. World and language leaped into existence simultaneously, in a post-modern Big Bang, like our elephant in the torch beam.

The post-modern world also changes when human language changes. Since our world view, and that of a primitive tribe are incompatible, and there is no 'independent reality' to give meaning to the idea that one of us could be wrong, each society creates 'the truth' of their incompatible worlds. This is only possible if we literally inhabit different universes. The patterns of our language create our worlds, just as in Berkeley the patterns in our sense impressions create our worlds.

Such a breathtaking claim for language has not been made since the writing of St John's Gospel!

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##### ***Human At The Point of Delivery***

Any theory of human knowledge has to move us from statements about human subjective experience, to statements about the world. All our experience is 'human at the point of delivery.' Berkeley and post-modernism both make the mistake of trying to REDUCE the objective to the subjective. Berkeley reduces the world to the subjective sense experience of the individual. Post-modernism reduces the world to the subjectivity of a given language and culture. Both give an account of 'what exists' in terms of sensory or linguistic 'immanence'. The world is what appears to us through the medium of our senses or our

