

THE PRESENCE AND ABSENCE OF GOD

PART I

It is pretty obvious, I think, that our system of concepts, that is, the set of concepts we use to deal with the world, is a changing one. The development of science, of political institutions, of social practices, constantly forces us to coin new concepts and to abandon others. Thus, like everything else in this world, concepts come into existence, evolve, decay and disappear. Now it would be naive to think that the concept of God is free from the constraints and processes that the rest of our concepts are submitted to. Once this is admitted, we are automatically bound to accept, on purely *a priori* grounds, that it will always be highly implausible to hold that, throughout its history, humanity has had recourse to just one concept of the divinity. As a matter of fact, we know that this is not so and that different civilizations, different cultures, have produced different conceptions of God.

Probably it would be most useful, since there is a variety of views concerning concepts and their nature, to state, as clearly and briefly as possible, how I conceive them and, therefore, how they should be investigated. According to the view I adhere to, the study of concepts is to be conceived of not as a special kind of research of strange objects, but simply as the study of what it is to have a concept. Thus instead of asking the usual “what is ...?” kind of question, *i.e.*, the sort of question which leads nowhere since it indicates nothing about the way it should be answered, I prefer to ask: when, under what circumstances do we say of someone that he has got such and such a concept, that he has mastered it? And it would seem that the answer to questions like this one points, in any context whatever, to both linguistic and extra-linguistic activities, reactions and so on. That someone has acquired the concept of a table shows itself in his behavior, actions, demands, answers, wishes and so on concerning tables and I wish to maintain that the same holds, *mutatis mutandis*, for the concept of God. Thus in general to carry out a conceptual analysis boils down to examining applications of words in the relevant contexts. This makes it clear that such an analysis cannot simply be purely verbal or lexicographical research. Unless I am utterly mistaken (which I hope is not the case), this is, broadly speaking, what Wittgenstein called “grammatical analysis.”

The possession of a concept, we said, manifests itself in one's being able to use language in appropriate ways, that is, in accordance with its rules of use. Now there is a sense in which we can say that language is (and has to be) something eternally actual. We do not express ourselves in ways which were useful, say, 500

years ago, when other habits, practices and social organizations reigned. Language is something which develops at the same speed as society as a whole does. It can go neither more quickly nor more slowly. What this means is simply that we have the concepts we need, not others. Concepts serve particular goals, they fulfill specific functions. Nevertheless, since society is in a permanent state of change, concepts too have to modify themselves in order to go on being useful. So our concepts (*i.e.*, our uses of words) must be somewhat elastic; thus it would seem as if the alternative for our concepts were that either they adapt themselves to the new conditions or they simply vanish from life. Now the adaptation of concepts amounts to a change in the meaning of words. Words and expressions have to change their meanings because they cannot avoid being exposed to a sort of disconnection between their original, first or primary uses and the new practices associated with them. The phenomenon of conceptual modification is, for obvious reasons, difficult to perceive. One of them is that it is a rather slow process and therefore it is practically impossible for us to have a “perspicuous representation” of it; another is that it is a peculiarity of language that it can go on functioning as if nothing had changed or happened, even if the needs, requirements, practices, conventions which first brought it into existence have passed away. Thus it may very easily be the case that we go on using certain words or expressions even if as a matter of fact their content has been emptied, that is, even if the primary or legitimate applications of the relevant words are no longer required for and by life and, accordingly, have been abandoned.

The fact that several concepts are associated with one and the same word is nothing but the fact that signs may be used in different ways, that they may have different modes of application, even if we acknowledge that they are linked to each other by gradual transitions. What this means is simply that, when used in certain ways, words allow certain statements (questions, denials, etc.) to be formulated (certain speech acts can be produced, certain moves in the language-games are legitimate), while when applied in different ways those very statements may turn out to be senseless, and the other way around too. That is why we can speak of the expansion of language and of the evolution of concepts. Nevertheless, uses of words and expressions (that is, their meanings) inevitably depend upon the kind of society in which they are employed, by the kind of social relations that people are embedded in, by their respective technologies and, naturally, all of them change from case to case. For instance, Mayans, Romans or today’s New Yorkers are people, but they live in completely different situations; so they express themselves and think in radically different ways. They all have to eat, but they have different needs, presuppositions, conventions, etc., in connection with eating. They have, we can say, different concepts of eating. This shows that even words as fundamental as ‘eat’ may have different meanings. People do associate different things with them and clearly this is not something to be explained in purely psychological terms. That is

the way our language works. In sum, one and the same word may have (slightly) different meanings. Indeed this is a very common phenomenon. Obviously, this is an outcome we shall have to apply to 'God'.

It follows from what I have said, I believe, that to understand a concept of another culture is almost an impossible task, for to achieve that feat one has to reconstruct situations in which the words were actually employed, those situations being completely alien to us, unknown, difficult even to visualize. We can always make inferences, make guesses, imagine situations, but it is always on or from our own linguistic and extra-linguistic basis that these intellectual efforts are carried out. This shows how much truth there is in relativism: there certainly is such a thing, but it cannot be put into words, for the simple reason that the very moment we try to do it, we automatically blur the distinctions we wanted to emphasize. Conceptual relativism manifests itself in differences of actions and reactions among different people using the same word or expression. Take, for instance, 'love'. The word may be the same, but it arouses different expectations, wishes, reactions, etc., among people from, say, the Middle Ages than from people of the twentieth century. Once again, one word gives rise to different concepts, which naturally are not completely cut off from each other.

Obviously it would be sheer nonsense to assume (as, surprisingly enough, many people tend to) that conceptual change is tantamount to or necessarily involves conceptual progress, in some axiological sense. Indeed, if the outlook we have espoused here is correct, we have absolutely no right to say that our concept of love is "better" than, *e.g.*, the Roman one. It is simply different. The only thing we can say is that their concept would most probably be useless in our times, in our societies (one just has to read Ovidius to understand this). Most probably if a man tried to relate to a woman behaving and expressing himself as the average Roman used to do it, he would not only fail but would get into trouble. But it is equally clear that the argument goes in the other direction as well: a current Londoner's concept of love would be most inappropriate among Romans, it would be rather useless in their lives. Our concept of love would enable people in those times to do practically nothing. So concepts are neither better nor worse. They are just different, more or less apt, more or less useful. Conceptual difference is something that shows itself, but cannot be expressed in language. This is all relativism entitles us to say about it.

It is clear, I think, that what we have been saying applies to religious concepts as well and, especially, to the concept of God. Take for instance polytheism. Right now at least, the idea of a multiplicity of gods is perhaps an intelligible one, but surely it is also an idea we could do nothing with. We certainly would not go to the church in order to pray one day to this god and the next Sunday to another one; we

would need a multiplicity of popes, each one representing on Earth one and just one god; we would perhaps become wholly incoherent, trying to please one god and being indifferent to others; and so on. So polytheism does not represent a real religious option for us. Neither does natural religion, *i.e.*, the worship of natural phenomena. Scientific knowledge has made both options obsolete: nothing mysterious, fabulous, extraordinary is nowadays associated in the average man's mind with storms or with rainbows. But for that very same reason it is quite understandable that people of former ages worshiped the sun, the rain, the sea and so on. Indeed, it would seem to us as unreasonable if they hadn't! In this sense, it is we who have lost something, namely, the sense of the marvelous. What is ridiculous are not the different conceptions and practices that as a matter of fact have prevailed in different civilizations, but rather the idea that a single concept could possibly be the right one for the totality of mankind, *i.e.*, the very project of extending one's conception to cover the whole of history. This is the kind of mistake that a sound relativism simply blocks. Now, former conceptions of the divinity were associated with feelings of respect, awe, admiration, fear, etc., for phenomena people were not in a position to understand. So they construed a concept of God which was linked to feelings like the ones mentioned. Scientific progress has made those feelings redundant. Now the question is: what are we to replace them with?

In fact, what we have been saying gets strong support from the empirical research of linguists working on the origins of languages. As an example, let me consider for a moment (and take advantage of) certain views put forward in the excellent book by the Spanish linguist Francisco Villar, *Los Indoeuropeos y los orígenes de Europa (The Indoeuropeans and the Origins of Europe)*. Villar is concerned with the people who invaded Europe some 5000 years B.C. and whose language was the source of all of the so called "Indoeuropean" languages. Villar's masterful study is a reconstruction of that people's life, and that includes first of all language, but also their social organization, techniques of production and religion. He has lots of interesting things to say about the religious life of that epoch, but I shall concentrate on a couple of statements which are relevant for the idea I wish to convey.

One thing Villar confirms is that in their first stage of religious life, the Indo-Europeans worshipped exclusively natural phenomena. However, during the next twenty centuries something like a process of personification of the gods (no doubt induced by the structure of language) took place. The word 'God' ['deiuos' in the original Indoeuropean language and from which we have 'devás' (in Sanscrit), 'daeva' (in Avestic), 'deus' (in Latin), 'Deva' (in old Celtic), 'dievas' (in Lithuanian) and 'ivar' (old Nordic)] was gradually transformed into a proper name and (allowing ourselves to use Russell's theory of descriptions) meant (when used in

sentences) something like “the king of gods,” “the one who is (in some sense) above all of them.” But the really interesting point about this is that the primary function of the proper name ‘Deiuvos’ was to designate the celestial vault. Surely ‘God’ was used pointing to the sky, *i.e.*, that under which everything has to take place. Now this is both interesting and important, because it tells us something about what the word ‘God’ was introduced for and enables us to recall that, according to Wittgenstein, it is always philosophically interesting to know what the original language-game of a word is. This raises some important points that I shall briefly consider.

The rough picture of concepts I have just sketched, if acceptable at all, makes clear that it is simply absurd to suggest that the Indoeuropeans (to go on with our example) had a “false” conception of the divinity. The only thing we are entitled to say is that they had a different one and, in fact, the only conception which could possibly have been useful to them. I take it as superfluous to argue why such an abstruse theology as the Roman Catholic one would have been utterly unintelligible to them. It is worth noticing, however, that those people, that is, the people who actually invented the concept of God, had one advantage over us, an advantage which has to be taken into account, namely, temporal priority. Now if priority in time means something, it will then be admitted that it is us who modified the original concept (perhaps even distorting it), in the same sense as, *e.g.*, a geneticist introduces changes when he uses ‘father’ to refer to the man who gave his sperm to be artificially inseminated in a woman he does not even know. There is no objection to his use of the word, as long as he recognizes that he has drastically modified it. The same happened with ‘God’. Whether or not this change was justified is a different matter. At all events, probably many features of the original concept of God were lost (though not all of them since, for example, we still speak of the Heavens as being “above us.” Surely this is something we owe them. Thus even if a cosmonaut travels freely in space, he will still accept that somehow God goes on being “above him.”) However, our aim here is not to discuss the historical development of the concept of God and, therefore, since concepts have to be studied in context, we can leave aside all sorts of speculations concerning its origins. Accordingly we shall concentrate upon its present situation and, incidentally, upon contemporary philosophy of religion in general. In this respect, the view that I want to advocate is simply that in our culture, right now, the concept of God is a wholly useless one. This is a semantic way of saying that God is no longer with us or, as Nietzsche would put it, that He is dead.

PART II

The fact that we shall not be concerned here with the origins of the concept of God does not mean that we have to abandon history altogether. Indeed it will prove

highly useful to recall, however broadly, why and how the concept of God was important in order to understand why it can no longer be.

Let us concentrate on Western culture. Something perhaps undeniable is that there was a time in which the concept of God pervaded it. What I mean is simply (among other things) that people used to take the concept of God very seriously. It is not only their beliefs, and therefore their behaviours, which were moulded by it, but also their institutions, habits, traditions, ceremonies, politics, arts, etc. The concept of God did fill the world. Now something that has to be said in this respect is that the Western God (or, if you allow me to speak in this way, the Western concept of the divinity) is a terribly bloodthirsty one. Its victims can be counted by millions. Witches, Jews, free-thinkers, pagans of all sorts, Muslims, etc., were the target of the victorious institutions which, from the Fifth century onwards, had the monopoly of the new divinity. The monopoly was mercilessly maintained during more than twelve centuries. Here the paradox consists in that although presented as the God of love, the fact is that the Christian God always required the sword to be accepted by other peoples and communities. So as a matter of fact “our” concept of God is somehow linked to the concept of a warrior, of a “being” who has to win, to overcome, to conquer, to impose (through his holy armies) his rules, his commands, his wishes. No other God has behaved like that or, alternatively, in no other civilization have people felt the need to impose, regardless of the consequences, of the social cost, their concept of God upon the rest of mankind. But precisely that should make us suspicious, for surely there must be a reason why a concept is imposed by force. Such a fact must mean something, and what in this sense can be argued is that it had to be that way simply because the concept was in fact an unintelligible one. Its theoretical foundations were extremely and obviously weak. When we think of the people who were being indoctrinated, religiously assimilated, during, say, the sixth century, we cannot but feel sorry for them, for they were forced to allow as true something that their reason condemned as pure nonsense. No reasonable person (either then or now) could quietly admit that three persons are one, that the world had been created *ex-nihilo*, that logic and arithmetic were subject to the will of a being, that the Verb may become a person, etc. People simply did not understand that kind of absurdity. But the reply was ready: *credo quia absurdum*. That, however, was not an argument, but an order. It meant: there is nothing else to talk about. You have to accept these new “truths” we are teaching you and that’s all. And then, in conscious opposition to paganism (the adoration of the sun, of blood, of natural phenomena in general), intelligent, persevering, energetic, dedicated men, like the Fathers of the Church, went ahead with the new “programme” and made it triumph. From this perspective, Saint Augustine is, no doubt, simply outstanding, unequalled. The whole process, from the first conversions to the handling of power by the Church, was rather complex and lasted some four centuries. What was

gained? Very important assets for, let us not forget, we are speaking of a period of decay, of corruption, of social disintegration. Thanks to the new concept of God, social and personal life were somehow organized anew and in fact reorganized for the next ten centuries. As I have already said, knowledge, politics, the arts, class divisions, the sense of belonging to a particular community, the life of the individual, his ideals, feelings, etc., everything centered around this precious concept of God. Needless to say that at that stage God (however incongruous) certainly was alive.

Nevertheless, it was impossible for this universal order to prevail. Thus, in the name of God, the Church declared war against society as a whole so as to maintain the order that had proved so effective for so many years. This war was prompted by the conceptual rebellion led by the first scientists and free-thinkers. Some isolated people carried out, in the darkness of their rooms, small intellectual revolutions. These consisted first of modest and, above all, private factual discoveries. Very soon, however, the discoverers felt the need to make them public and to act accordingly. The point was simply that, from a particular period onwards, human knowledge (with all that that implies) simply could not get started and organized while having as its supreme concept the concept of God: there were too many and too obvious counter-examples, refutations, invalid explanations, fallacies, etc., implied by it. Nevertheless, during several centuries the best and most brilliant minds in the Western world were in charge of the defense of the intellectual *status quo*. We could easily name some of the ablest among them: St. Anselm, Ockham, St. Thomas, Vives. But what for our purposes is worth remarking upon is that it was from the inside of our own Christian civilization that the concept of God started to be disrupted and, little by little, displaced. The first battles took place in disciplines like astronomy and physics, but very quickly they covered other branches of science, like biology, economics and psychology. So far as politics is concerned, the French Revolution marked the end of the era of the Church's success. Napoleon made it clear to the world that the pope too could be put in prison and yet the world was not destroyed. At any rate the fact is that, towards the end of the nineteenth century, the concept of God was no longer the central one in our civilization. Life no longer centered around it. That is why Nietzsche was in a position to state that God was dead. And He certainly was.

It can be argued that the last blows to the formerly living and now decadent and obsolete concept of God were given by the great political ideologies of the Twentieth century, and especially by Marxism. Within the realm of politics, the materialist conception of history overran any religious opponent that could possibly arise. Probably some would like to think now that Marxism itself has been defeated on many battlefields, so perhaps God could be resuscitated. But this is an illusion

just as much as if someone tried to resuscitate the Indoeuropean conception of God. What is dead is dead and God is no exception to that law,

I want to argue that, as a matter of fact and in sharp contrast with what used to happen some twelve centuries ago, people nowadays do not take the concept of God seriously. Nothing really important in their lives depends upon it. For historical reasons, we have been deprived of one concept, of no more and no less than the concept which ruled the world for thirteen centuries. In this sense, the only thing to be said is that what we can feel is nothing but the absence of God.

PART III

We have now to give an answer to the question: what does 'the absence of God' mean?, trying to be as specific as possible. In reply, the first point I wish to establish is that the use of 'God' has almost completely lost its religious meaning. People may go on using the word 'God', but what we should be clear about is: to say what? Let's consider a couple of expressions in order to determine their real meaning.

Let us take first the expression 'Oh my God!'. There is no question that it is a most popular expression, but how do people apply it? Let us illustrate its use. People are on the beach and see a particularly attractive woman walking by. They express their admiration for her physical beauty by saying precisely: "Oh my God!." Or, for instance, take the case of someone who is lying on the street, moaning, giving expression in a pitiful way to his pain. Nowadays, the natural thing to say would be: "Oh my God!", meaning by that: "it is a terrible thing," "let's do something," etc. We could go on with as many examples as we would like, but they would all point, in one way or another, in the same direction: the expression 'Oh my God!' is mainly used to express admiration, surprise, fear, gratitude and so on, but it has practically nothing to do with God, in the real (?) sense of the word.

Let us consider now the name 'Jesus Christ' and ask: when, under what circumstances, is this proper name used in colloquial language? We can easily imagine situations in which it is rightly employed. For instance, when someone is being abused, insulted or swindled, he or she can express his anger by saying (with the appropriate gestures): 'Jesus Christ!.' In this sense, 'Jesus Christ!' is more or less equivalent to 'Bloody hell', which is obviously not a paradigm of a theological way of speaking. Normally, we could very well use the former expression to speak in a sardonic way, for instance when everybody around us knows that we are not Roman Catholic. Surely this is a use which would be unheard of in former times. That could even have been a rather dangerous linguistic game. The difference, one would like to say, is that in our days those kinds of expressions lost their literal

meaning. We kept the words (in fact, they are splendid), but we lost their content or, rather, we gave them a different one, since we use them in different ways. Now if what I have been saying is true, what has to be inferred is simply that we no longer use those expressions in a genuine religious way.

One thing that probably I have not emphasized sufficiently is the fact that not only things like institutions, governments, diplomacy, etc., were moulded by the peculiar Western conception of God, but also that private, individual lives were canalized by it. To get married, to have children, to work, to have fun, to joke and quarrel with friends, to acquire knowledge, relations with one's neighbours, etc., were lines of behaviour which already had a pattern to apply. To be happy was to do all a human being was able to do as long as he followed the instructions of the Church. A religious outsider was cut off from his own community and that was something to be avoided at all costs. Accordingly, the defeat of the Western conception of God was the defeat of a mode, of an ideal of life which, in spite of the weakness of its theoretical basis, was powerful enough to give a direction to human life. The meaning and value of life used to come from religion. But now that that which functioned as a sort of social cement has been defeated and, in fact, rejected, people feel the need to ask: What now? What are we left with? What is God (or "God") to be replaced with? The fact that we do not yet envisage a satisfactory answer to this question or, to put it in a different way, the fact that other concepts available to us, concepts like those of energy, revolution, democracy, liberty, property, etc., have failed to become the center of our life, is what is called "nihilism." In fact I think that a new concept has emerged which nowadays plays the role that 'God' used to play, but I shall argue that this change may be regrettable on different grounds. Nevertheless, it is perhaps not an error to assert that the defining feature of present life, of our life, is precisely our loss of God, our not having a vital use for the concept of God. Dostoievski had a striking and well known formulation for this situation. He said that if God did not exist, everything would be allowed, everything was permissible. I am afraid that this is precisely the case and, if I am not mistaken, this is just another way of saying that God left us, *i.e.*, that he is absent for us.

PART IV

Nihilism, understood as the absence or (to put it in more poetic terms) the death of God, is then nothing but the expression of the lack of a concept, *i.e.*, the concept of God. I am not referring to the situation in which a particular person or a particular set of persons refuse to have recourse to such a concept, but rather to the situation in which society as a whole does, the situation in which, as a matter of fact, the concept has been deprived of its genuine application and has been saddled with a spurious

meaning. However, the point I should emphasize now is that the lack of a concept cannot be represented as a purely verbal hole. Obviously, the lack of a concept manifests itself in the misuses the word is subject to, but also in the distorted practices and habits which finally replaced the older ones, which in turn were associated with the legitimate applications of the word. Thus the lack of a concept has practical consequences for, and in, peoples' lives. In this respect, what can we say about the nihilist, that is, about the human being of our epoch? In other words, how does the conceptual change I have been trying to sketch influence or at least manifest itself in present human life?

I think that the first thing to be said is that any society will always need at least one of what I would like to call 'super-concepts'. We can replace one by another, but we seem to need at least one. Now it seems to me that the disappearance of God as a real option goes hand in hand with the exaltation of the individual and his "rights." What I mean is simply that the concept which nowadays has acquired the status that "God" used to have is "individual." Everything now turns around it. We speak of human rights, women's rights, animal rights, children's rights, minorities rights, and so on, having in mind the individual conceived or seen from this or that particular point of view. The concept which now demands from us total submission is the concept of the individual.

Now although it is a fact that our super-concepts do serve to organize the rest of our concepts and that conceptual modification is demanded by life itself, it does not follow that conceptual alteration is necessarily to be welcomed. In the case we are concerned with (that is, the replacement of the super-concept "God" by the super-concept "individual") several features of this particular conceptual evolution can be easily pointed out as being both obvious and negative consequences. First, we should perhaps mention materialism, in the vulgar sense of the word. It is relatively clear that to people for whom the belief in God is a useless one, life can only be understood as a fortuitous adventure, as a purely contingent matter. What we ought to do, therefore, must be something related to this new perspective. As a consequence, morality in the traditional sense can only be seen either as something utterly despicable, ridiculous or, in the last analysis (as Nietzsche would suggest) as a special kind of weapon to be used in the struggle for power. For let us just ask: why should I be moral during my life time which, we now are prepared to acknowledge, begins and ends on this planet and last for no more than, say, 80 years? What could possibly be the point of being moral as if God did exist, as if there were a second life, as if Hell and Heaven were places in the universe, and so on, knowing of course that this is **not** the case? Why should I force myself to behave in such and such ways, apart from purely external social constraints or, eventually, personal requirements? So the rejection of the concept of God leaves open for a

coherent nihilist the road of hedonism, the pursuit of pleasure, of social success, of “happiness,” in the strictest personal sense of the word as constituting the meaning of life. What else could be important?

It is obviously wrong to suggest that the conceptual interplay I have been trying to highlight could not be provoked by speakers’ voluntary actions. However, I think it more plausible to suggest that what happens is that we construe and cling to the concepts which turn out to be essential to actual life. Language adapts itself to reality, both natural and social, as much as it contributes to its development and refinement. So the irruption on the conceptual scene of the super-concept “individual” should be no surprise to us: it is precisely the concept our age needs. Thus a criticism of this conceptual alteration amounts in fact to a criticism of our ways of living, modes of life, social organization and so on. It is the way society is actually organized and functions that makes us look to the individual as possessing more value than anything else. We have to emphasize his (or her) importance. This, however, carries with it social atomism, the desintegration (or transformation) of families, egoism, consumism, indifference towards other people, animals, nature. We value instead “personal fulfillment,” the indisputable right to privacy, democracy (as the individual’s right to choose his governors), etc. All this shows that human beings have been unable to create societies in which evil is not patently present: they correct certain evils but create new ones. Indeed, just as people’s minds were imprisoned within the limits set by the very complex concept of God when this occupied the central position, nowadays people are induced to fight everything which could threaten the position occupied by the super-concept ‘individual’. In other words, the individual is the new God. So happiness, success, failure, pleasure, work, love, friendship, etc., everything has to be understood from its perspective. This “new” super-concept fixes the framework for the application of the rest of our conceptual apparatus, in civil life, politics, scientific research, artistic creation, etc. But if we judge from the consequences, it is not at all clear that the change has been for the good of Man and that pessimism and bitterness are not the most appropriate feelings in this “dark age.”

PART V

I would like to make it clear that a sound historical perspective on language prevents us from falling into any kind of nostalgic mood. In the same sense in which we cannot travel backwards in time, we cannot re-impose older conceptual maps, we cannot go back to former conceptual structures. So, in the conceptual turmoil we live in, what can we rationally expect from the future? The *de facto* (though not *de jure*) abolishment of ‘God’ does not mean the victory of paganism, of older kinds of religion. Traditional religious patterns of education are obsolete, incompatible with

scientific realities and, above all, powerless. Who is afraid of what may happen to him or her in the life to come? The very idea sounds like a joke, though in fact it is simply the manifestation of a deep, radical conceptual change. However, I shall not pursue this line of thought. My interest lies rather in the diagnosis of current philosophy of religion. In this connection, I claim that if what I have been saying is true, then much of it is not false, but simply absurd. For instance, all the attempts to give a new proof of God's existence, say, in terms of modal logic, are not only fallacious but senseless. These are attempts to re-install at the centre of our conceptual map the concept of God, a concept which is, so to speak, a dead one. This is precisely, if I am not totally wrong, what cannot be achieved. It is evident, I think, that if God's existence could be proved, the concept of God should immediately occupy the centre of our thoughts, interests, etc. What could possibly be more important than God? It would be absurd to have the concept of God subordinated to, *e.g.*, "democracy," "liberty," "human rights," "energy," etc. We can elucidate concepts, but not impose them. Thus it makes no sense whatsoever to try to resuscitate it. On the other hand, hard social facts, in the broadest sense of the expression, make it necessary for the concept of an individual to be at the centre of our concepts and thoughts. It is neither by chance nor the result of arbitrary, personal decisions. Whether or not this new super-concept will prove to be effective enough to give coherence to our lives, to bind people in a single, common purpose or enterprise (as 'God' did centuries ago) or not, could not possibly be determined at this point in time. Conceptual adjustment takes time. Meanwhile we can only express our grief for our repeated failures to find an adequate replacement of the super-concept 'God' and for the sense of loss its decay has left behind it.