

**Believing the Word:**

**A Proposal about Knowing Other Persons**

There is a common picture of how we know other persons that ought to be replaced. It is a picture of penetration: we read others' words and gestures, facial expressions and tone of voice, as outward signs of inner states, thus penetrating through the outer shell to the inner core of the person. There is something violent about this picture; surely, knowing another person requires more respect for externals than that.

A better picture is available, I think, in the Christian theological tradition, though so far it has only been applied to our knowledge of God. Its roots go back to Old Testament talk about hearing the word of God. The picture is of receiving the other's word into our hearts, that it may dwell there and transform us. Instead of piercing outer walls to enter an inner space, we let a truth which comes to us from outside enter us and change our thoughts. The other we desire to know is not hidden inner territory to penetrate into, but rather someone who can give himself to be known by his speech. Hence knowledge of him is not so much an achievement of the knower as a gift bestowed by the known. Since human persons are made in the image of God, it makes sense to try applying this picture to our knowledge of one another.

In what follows I shall unpack the contrast between these

two pictures in less pictorial terms. I shall begin by attempting to put my finger on what is wrong with the first picture--where it gets its aura of violence (I). This diagnosis of the bad picture will lead to a proposal designed to catch the gist of the good picture. After briefly articulating this proposal in contemporary epistemological terms (II), I shall explore some of its implications, in the process heading off a few objections (III). At the end, I return to the proposal's place of origin and discuss some theological implications (IV).

## **I. Respecting the Other**

The picture I am commending originates historically in a theological account of the nature of Christian faith: the conviction is that we know God by believing his word. To believe someone's word is to believe that it is true--and that already shows us what is wrong with the bad picture. If knowing other persons were a matter of reading outward expressions as signs of inner states, then it would be irrelevant whether the outward expressions were true: all that would matter is that they conveyed the person's thoughts or feelings, directly or indirectly. The project of knowing other persons could proceed without ever recognizing the other as responsible for speaking the truth or saying things that make a claim on us. This accounts for the aura of violence in the bad picture: to penetrate through the externals is to ignore an indispensable locus of truth, responsibility, and ethical claims.

We can illustrate this point by concocting a rather nightmarish (but by no means impossible) scenario, and then reflecting on the way many of its elements are present in everyday life. Imagine two prison psychologists observing a "subject" behind a one-way mirror. They are trying to help this person: with the right diagnosis, they feel they can provide

appropriate therapy for his anti-social behavior. They are also testing a new technique for uncovering hidden pathologies: they observe their subject in isolation from all human contact, confined for months to a single room that is always well-lit, where everything he does is recorded from behind the mirror.

The prisoner is fully cognizant of this therapeutic strategy, and he knows a one-way mirror when he sees it. It is not hard to imagine the sort of thing he might say, addressing himself to the observers behind the mirror: "You have no right to do this to me. I am a human being, for God's sake! And I haven't done anything to deserve this. Besides, I have rights, and you're violating them." But of course there is no response.

The observers listen to his words and try to determine whether they express, say, veiled aggression or a desire to be nurtured.

Predictably, as the weeks go by the prisoner's discourse becomes less rational. Whining and begging alternate with outbursts of childish rage. The psychologists observe this with satisfaction: the barriers of rationalization are coming down, and the underlying pathology is beginning to emerge.

At this point, we can imagine one psychologist turning to speak to the other and beginning: "My hypothesis is that...." This is a moment worth thinking about. Here is a speaker who is assured of receiving a different kind of hearing than the subject

on the other side of the mirror. She can take for granted that her colleague will consider whether her words are true. This does not mean he will necessarily agree with her, but he will place her words in a category from which he rigorously excludes the prisoner's: he will treat them as truth-bearers, things which can bear the predicates "false" or "true." He need not actually deny that the prisoner's words also could be true or false, but the point is that is simply an irrelevant consideration for his diagnostic purposes. Indeed it might disrupt the procedures of clinical observation if he were to wonder whether utterances like "You have no right to do this to me" were true.

Something quite like this style of clinical observation can take place without one-way mirrors or coercion. The Freudian dictum "No means Yes" taught psychoanalysts to regard a patient's utterances as symptoms rather than attend to their semantic meaning or truth-value.<sup>1</sup> Nor does one have to be a psychoanalyst to listen to people this way. There is a more ancient "type," the courtier, the manipulator, the Machiavellian of the social life, whose motive in getting others talking is to unearth their secret wishes and fears. This is a role that many of us have played from time to time--listening to others not in order to learn what they have to say for themselves, but in the hope that they will inadvertently or incautiously give themselves away.

This, I propose, is not what we ought to mean by "knowing another person." My proposal has an ethical basis in the claim that we ought not to give the title "knowing another person" to a form of knowledge which does not respect the other as person. (I shall refer to this as "the requirement of respect" and I take it to be an ethical obligation). I take it for granted that a form of observation or listening that leaves out of consideration the truth-values of another's speech is disrespectful of the other as person.

I do not mean to say there is nothing we can learn by such methods. I shall however use the common vernacular distinction and label this disrespectful sort of observation, a way of "knowing about" other persons rather than of knowing them--or, equivalently, a form of knowledge *about* them rather than knowledge *of* them. In other languages we could make the distinction more unmistakable by using the word *connaître* rather than *savoir*, or *kennen* rather than *wissen*.<sup>2</sup> The point is that we may learn a great deal about people by observing them behind one-way mirrors, but this is not the sort of thing we usually mean by saying we know them, and (I propose) this is not the sort of thing we *ought* to mean when we say we know them. The prison psychologists are wrong to say that they know their "subject."

## II. The Truth of the Other

At this point we already have a necessary condition of knowledge of another person: it requires giving heed to the truth-values of the other's discourse. Because false utterances are not likely to provide the basis for such knowledge, I shall venture the stronger proposal that knowing other persons requires believing what they say is true. We need not believe everything they say, of course, but if we never regard anything they say as true then we cannot know them. Hence, more strictly put, the proposal is this: it is a necessary condition of knowledge of another person that the knower believe some of what the other person says.

This is plainly not a definition, nor anything close to a full account of the rich and complex phenomena of interpersonal knowledge. Much more goes into knowing other persons than just believing what they say. In particular, many pieces of knowledge *about* other persons (gained by observation, inference, testimony, etc.) doubtless contribute to knowledge *of* other persons. In fact, we shall soon find reason to think that some specific kinds of knowledge about other persons are also necessary conditions of knowledge of other persons--a finding that is after all hardly surprising.

It bears mentioning, then, that not all knowledge *about* other persons is disrespectful and violent--quite the contrary. Such knowledge can broaden and deepen our knowledge of another person when it is incorporated into a relationship that includes listening to the other person and attending to the truth of what she says. What my proposal is intended to exclude is knowledge that arises in contexts where such listening is absent. The point is that where the truth of the other's discourse is given no hearing, respect for the other as person is lacking, and therefore knowledge of the other *as person* is impossible.

This requirement of respect is more than just a stipulation setting limits on what deserves to be called "knowledge of other persons." It also indicates that believing others makes a positive contribution to knowing them. We need to consider next how that contribution is made.

It is not hard to see how believing another person's words could fit a very common conception of knowledge: justified true belief. If a person speaks the truth, and we have good reason to believe she knows what she's talking about, and moreover we have good reason to believe she is trustworthy, then believing what she says is a true belief grounded in good reasons--a form of knowledge, by most accounts.<sup>3</sup> Of course, it may not be a way of

knowing *her* (if for instance she is giving a paper on the latest research in molecular biology). The kind of utterance in which she could make *herself* known must be self-referential or self-involving in some way. But such utterances are not far to seek-- persons often describe themselves, tell us what they want, share their fears, confess their faults, dwell on their hopes, and so on.

On this score there is in fact an embarrassment of riches-- an enormous variety of ways that persons make themselves known in what they say. To get at the conceptual issues underlying the present proposal I need to consider a paradigmatic example of this. A fair amount follows from the choice of paradigm, which inevitably leaves some aspects of human life in the background and puts others front and center. My choice naturally reflects my convictions about what is important and valuable about our lives with each other.

Once again I shall be guided by the original theological model for my proposal, which takes the Gospel promise of grace in Christ as the word of God which we are to believe. This promise is the keystone of an over-arching covenant between the Lord God and Israel, the people he takes for his own and loves as a husband loves his bride. The words of the covenant, the wedding vow which unites this couple, are "You will be my people and I

will be your God."<sup>4</sup> So I will take as a paradigm the giving of a promise such as a wedding vow. I cannot think of a better example of persons giving themselves to be known in their words.

The question then is: how does this happen? How does such a promise give us knowledge of the promisor?

If the bad picture were our only option we would have to give an answer like: by revealing the feelings of her heart. But simply on empirical grounds, this answer is implausible. Too many good marriages have begun with two terrified people making their vows despite uncertainties and even active misgivings. Their wedding vows failed to reveal these misgivings, but nonetheless gave both of them an abiding reason to trust that they knew their partner--knew what their partner would do and be in the future.

For of course a wedding vow is not a report on one's feelings, but a promise to act and live a certain way from henceforth. The truth conditions of an utterance like "I will be your God" or "I will love and honor you" are fulfilled not by how the speaker is feeling at the moment but by what he proceeds to do for the rest of his life. Thus the promise itself directs our attention away from the feelings of the moment and toward the new life that it describes. For what makes the promise true is not how the promisor feels but how he proceeds to act.

In order for the promise to be a source of knowledge it must be true, in the sense that its truth-conditions are fulfilled by what the promisor subsequently does. This is truth in the bald semantic sense: "I will love and honor you" is true if and only if the speaker proceeds to love and honor the one to whom he speaks.<sup>5</sup> But by the same token this truth depends not on correspondence with facts already established but on what the speaker proceeds to do. The truth of the promise is thus up to the promisor. He gives himself to be known by keeping his word. Thus wedding vows are the basis of knowledge of other persons precisely to the extent that the partners do what they say.

This does not mean that the promisors' feelings are simply irrelevant. They are as relevant as feelings always are to actions. But a predictable pattern of action such as is promised in a wedding vow is tied to reliable patterns of feeling, which are in turn tied to settled dispositions, habits and traits of character. That is why keeping one's promise depends much less on the feelings of the moment than on virtues of character such as faithfulness and integrity. Even a feeling such as sincere resolve (if we may treat this as an episodic feeling rather than a disposition of character) is of less consequence in a fickle and thoughtless person than in a faithful one.

The relevant connection here is brought out by a lovely ambiguity in the word "true." In addition to the bald semantic sense (as when we say that a particular sentence is true) the word has an ethical sense, as when we say that a person is "faithful and true." The two senses are related, for of course a sentence is more likely to be true if it is the utterance of a person who is true to his word. English and Hebrew and many other languages use the word "true" or its equivalent in both the ethical and the semantic sense, with the former probably the earlier and more basic sense of the term. For outside of academic contexts (or more broadly, contexts of scientific inquiry) the question of truth will typically be a question about whose word can be believed.

Belief in another's word is true if her word is true, and justified if there are good reasons for believing that she is true to her word. When what we want to know is another person, the justification of our belief turns on the truth of that person. If we have faith in her, our beliefs about her will depend on what she says about herself, and if she is the kind of person who keeps her word it will be no accident that these beliefs are true. To that extent, the certainty of our knowledge of other persons varies not with our perceptiveness but with the faithfulness of the one we wish to know. A more faithful person is more knowable, because she is more capable of giving herself

to be known in a trustworthy and reliable way.

Perceptiveness is called for, however, in the judgment that a particular person actually is faithful or trustworthy. Such judgment stands in need of justification, because it is no good to bestow one's trust on just anybody, nor should we believe whatever anyone tells us, as if all persons were faithful and true. This is perhaps the most important reason why belief in what other persons say is necessary but not sufficient for knowing them. A well-grounded trust in another person's words requires reasons for believing the person trustworthy.

As the Biblical model again shows us, these reasons will typically take the form of a narrative. We say things like, "he is faithful and true--look at the kind of thing he does" and then launch into a story that illustrates his faithfulness, like the Passover Haggadah or the Passion Narrative. If the Lord God really is the one who "has helped his servant Israel...as he promised to our father Abraham and his seed forever,"<sup>6</sup> then he is one who can be trusted with our lives.

Sometimes we are eyewitnesses of the stories that go to show a person's truthfulness, but often we must trust the testimony of others. So the project of knowing another person typically involves us in a web of trust and testimony, dependent on the

truth of many other persons. The dialogue in which one person gives himself to be known by another is sustained in various ways by the community, as an individual's faith in the word of God could not exist without the witness of prophets and apostles, who not only give voice to the word of God but also bear witness to his faithfulness. The Christian faith is without justification if their witness is not trustworthy, just as it is without truth if God is not true to his word.

### **III. The Authority of the Other**

Under my proposal, the knowledge of other persons must be treated in connection with the epistemology of belief in testimony, for it is logically dependent on what people say about themselves, i.e. their testimony concerning themselves. Furthermore, we must often rely on the testimony of third parties concerning another person's truthfulness. This not only situates our knowledge of other persons in relationships of trust and respect, but also makes it radically dependent on the things other persons choose to say and do. This I believe is as it should be: knowledge of other persons ought to depend on attributes that are unique to persons and therefore of distinctively ethical significance, such as choice and action. However, this dependence has striking implications that are likely to take us by surprise, because they conflict with intuitions about the nature of knowledge that have deep roots in the Western tradition.

For the sake of contrast, consider an epistemic context where belief in testimony is not entirely appropriate. A student may believe the Pythagorean theorem because his math teacher tells him so, having good reasons for thinking she knows what she's talking about and is telling the truth. We might even deign to call this "knowledge," as so much of our knowledge of

mathematics and the natural sciences is of this kind (many of us know Godel's proof or the theory of relativity in just this way, for instance). However, we will surely say that this is not really *understanding* the Pythagorean theorem, Godel's proof, or the theory of relativity. It is important (we tell our students and ourselves) "to see it for yourself."

The notion that real understanding is something like seeing with your own eyes rather than believing what you hear has roots that go way back in the Western philosophic tradition, to the Platonist notion of *noesis* or *intellectus* as the vision of the mind's eye, and in modern times to Descartes' notion that real certainty requires the clarity and distinctness of a purely mental inspection--the kind we give to a mathematical proof when we check each step to be absolutely sure it's right.<sup>7</sup> This is a notion that makes good sense when applied to mathematics, but not when applied to the knowledge of persons. In mathematics we must often begin by believing the authoritative testimony of our teachers telling us of things we do not yet understand, in order ultimately to reach the goal of seeing for ourselves. But in knowing other persons such a goal is incoherent and unethical, because there is no getting around the authority of the person known, her right to speak for herself and have a say about how she is to be known. Hence in contrast to mathematics there is in the interpersonal realm no more perfect and certain form of

knowledge than that based on belief in authoritative testimony.

The authority we must believe in, in order to know other persons, is the authority of the person to be known. Knowing other persons is thus logically dependent on the authority as well as the truthfulness of the known. The authority of the known consists in the fact that persons cannot be known as persons unless they give themselves to be known by saying something true about themselves. This epistemic limitation is not something to be regretted, but an ethical feature of persons that ought to be honored and respected. It means that persons have the freedom to make themselves known or not, as they choose.

We cannot know others without their say-so, and the attempt to do so is a kind of violence.

Because persons have this freedom, we are dependent on their authority and truthfulness if we wish to know them. It is not just that they have the *right* to refuse to be known; as a rule they have the *ability* as well. All they have to do is keep silence or lie--or engage in any of the manifold subterfuges by which the lowly and oppressed escape the knowledge of their masters. The ruling ideology may favor the rulers and be imposed on the ruled, yet in actual speech the latter have an ironic way of adopting it which evades the former's attempts to define the ruled in terms preferred by the rulers.<sup>8</sup> Persons may often

appear to relinquish the authority to speak for themselves, but appearances are deceiving.

It is not always right to refuse to be known, but in this regard as in many others persons are free to make the wrong choices. Liars, for instance, choose not to make themselves known. Of course we can sometimes "see through" liars and discern what they are actually thinking, but this results in a piece of knowledge *about* a person which ought not to be counted as knowledge *of* a person. Above all, this kind of discernment ought not to be made the paradigm of how we know others, which is in effect what happens in the bad picture I mentioned at the beginning.

This is not to say that seeing through a liar is always wrong. Knowledge *about* other persons, even of the disrespectful sort that does not contribute to knowledge *of* other persons, is sometimes just what we need--the way we sometimes need violence in a just cause. It is often good to catch a liar in his lie, just as it is good to catch a thief in the act.

To make matters yet more complicated, we are sometimes glad to be caught ourselves. Here it is important to do justice to the complexity of the moral landscape of human relationships. For example, it can be a very good thing indeed when a friend of

mine sees through my deceit (perhaps through my self-deception as well) and knows what I am really thinking. This piece of knowledge *about* me may even contribute to her knowledge *of* me--precisely because she is a friend, someone who has a history of listening to me and taking my word seriously. Indeed, it is more than likely that the reason she refuses to believe me is precisely because she takes my responsibility as a truth-teller seriously. Yet the aura of violence has not entirely disappeared. She may say something like, "Come on now, you know you don't really believe what you're saying." This has the violence of a rebuke: it stings, but if the rebuke is wise and well-placed it does me good.

Of course one does not have to be a friend to know things about people that they do not know about themselves. It is not unusual, for instance, for a perceptive observer to see that someone is angry before the angry person notices or is willing to acknowledge her own anger. Yet it makes a great difference whether or not that observer is a friend, or at least someone who can be trusted. We do not welcome such perceptiveness when it belongs to someone who has no respect whatsoever for what we have to say about ourselves. And that is one reason why it makes sense to say that such perceptiveness by itself does not constitute knowledge of another person.

Another kind of complexity comes into view when we turn from people who choose not to be known to people who cannot choose to be known. If we cannot know persons who do not choose to make themselves known in what they say, what does this imply about persons who cannot choose to say anything? I do not mean mute people or those who literally cannot speak, but who succeed in communicating through sign-language or writing; for they are clearly capable of "saying things" in the requisite sense. Nor do I mean people in an irreversible coma. I know of no account of knowledge of other persons which would allow us to say we can know such persons (unless we already knew them before they were in the coma). This does not mean they are no longer persons, but simply that we can no longer come to know them as such--and that indeed is a large part of their tragedy.

The most important case of persons who cannot choose to say anything is very young children. My proposal evidently implies that the further they are from the capacity for linguistic communication (the kind of communication that involves semantic meaning and thus truth-bearers) the further they are from being known as persons. I think there is something right about this implication (marriage and adult friendship ought to be closer to our paradigm of knowing other persons than child-rearing) but there are some worrisome aspects as well. Ordinary children are not like someone in a coma; failure to perceive their personhood

is not tragedy but moral obtuseness. Moreover, one of the things I think we can perceive about these immature persons is that the relations of trust which bind them to their parents are significantly like the kind of faith-keeping that I have taken as the paradigm case of knowledge of other persons.

The proper way to accommodate this perception is to go back to the ethical consideration upon which my proposal is based. The fundamental claim here is what I called "the requirement of respect": that we should not say we know persons if we do not respect them. In the case of persons who can speak, this clearly means respecting what they say and considering whether it is true. But the case of children is different, because the younger they are, the less capable they are of doing that which demands this particular kind of respect. Thus among the many rights and privileges that young children do not have (voting, making valid contracts, various rights of self-determination, etc.) they do not in general have the right for their words to be taken at face value. We often do not take three-year-olds at their word, for instance, and this is usually wise.

Nonetheless, like the children themselves, the respect we owe them grows over the years. We start out carrying our young within our bodies and cuddling them on our breasts like many another animal; but we are the animal that has language,<sup>9</sup> and

this means that as our offspring grow they can come to speak for themselves, and thus be loved and honored in quite a different way--more like the way God is loved and honored. This capacity and our corresponding respect start out imperfect (like all growing things) as children first learn to communicate to others and then learn what responsibilities their communication entails.

But to the extent that they can communicate in a way that makes them responsible for what they say, they can be known more or less as adult persons are. This capacity is ever on the increase, and parents nurture it by being faithful themselves, like their Father in heaven--thus teaching their children to be faithful in turn, a process that begins long before the little ones have uttered their first words.<sup>10</sup>

In this regard there is an important asymmetry. Our children know us before we know them. Not only do they understand adult words before they can speak them, but more importantly they can trust in an adult promise before they are trustworthy themselves. Thus while a young child has little capacity to make herself known in her words, her parents can give themselves to her to be known in their words. Therefore, in the mutual trust that should enfold parent and child, the child can know the parent better than the parent can know the child. The deep point here is that it is precisely the more capable and knowledgeable person who is more knowable, but less able to know

the other. This is what we should expect if, as I have been suggesting, knowledge of other persons rests more on the power of the known to give than on the power of the knower to perceive. We know others by their grace, and a parent can be gracious in ways that are beyond the capacity of a child.

#### **IV. The Knowledge of God**

My proposal is grounded on considerations of semantics (rather than speech-act theory or theories of dialogue) and ethics (rather than theology or metaphysics). With regard to the latter, it is important to be clear, for instance, that the topic of discussion here is other persons, not other minds. Accordingly, the grounds upon which I have argued are found not in the metaphysics of mind but in the ethics of respect for persons. Skeptical questions do not properly arise here, as they might in discussions of "the existence of other minds." Failure to perceive that other human beings are persons is not a theoretical problem of epistemology but a practical problem of evil: we do not call it skepticism but disrespect, bigotry, or injustice.

Because my proposal is not grounded in premises concerning the nature of mind, it is relatively independent of debates on that topic, being compatible with a wide variety of positions

from mind-body dualism to the debunking view that dualist concepts of mind such as those which give rise to "the problem of other minds" are a mistake.<sup>11</sup> Hence it is not to be confused with Alvin Plantinga's contention that "belief in other minds and belief in God are in the same epistemological boat."<sup>12</sup> So far as I can see, my proposal does not commit us to believing in the existence of any minds at all, in the modern dualist sense required by "the problem of other minds."

Nor does it commit us to the existence of God. The proposal is logically independent of theology, in that one could accept it without being compelled to accept any theological convictions along with it. I have obviously been guided by a theological paradigm in constructing it and also in illustrating it, but the immediate reasons I have offered for believing it true are not theological but ethical: we ought to regard believing people's words as necessary to knowing them, because if we pay no heed to the possibility of their words being true then we are not respecting them as persons. Naturally, I think this ethical position is supported by theologies which hold human beings to be created in the image of God, but I see no insuperable obstacle to it being made to stand on its own, should anyone care to make it do that.

Of course given the existence of a personal God, the

proposal does have theological implications. In conclusion let me mention two of the most surprising, along with my reasons for thinking them consonant with the Christian theological tradition.

The first is that our knowledge of God is more certain than our knowledge of human persons. God is unlike us in that he always makes his promises wisely, never finds himself unable to keep them, and is utterly faithful. We can therefore know him with more certainty, because his word is more trustworthy. As Paul says, let God be true and every human being a liar.<sup>13</sup>

Of course reasons to doubt God are not far to seek, if that is what we are looking for. Indeed we often find them without looking for them, being (like the prophets and the Psalmist) positively assaulted by them and consequently hard-pressed to tell a story of divine faithfulness. There is a time for complaint and lamentation and supplication. But unless the Christian faith is false we will eventually find that the true story is one in which God turns out to have kept his word. Thus in the end there is a kind of "seeing for ourselves" that does not go behind or beyond the other's word, but experiences its truth and his truthfulness. It is the kind of beatific vision hoped for in the theodicy of Julian of Norwich, who hears Christ promise, "I can make all things well...and you shall see yourself that all manner of things shall be well....I shall keep my word

in all things and make all things well."<sup>14</sup>

Second, there is the question of how God knows us. God can see into our hearts, but according to my proposal this is not a way of knowing us as persons. Hence we have a problem, stemming from the asymmetry discussed above: once again, the more trustworthy person is more able to make himself known but less able to know the other--for knowledge of other persons depends on the grace of the known rather than the power of the knower. We in our faithlessness and sin cannot be known as truly and certainly as God. How then shall God know persons such as us?

Whenever the Bible speaks of God discerning the thoughts of human hearts, the thought of judgement is not far away.<sup>15</sup> But suppose we consider God's knowledge of human persons after the work of judgement is done. Is it not one of the motives of redemption to give an answer to our question? God rescues and redeems his fallen creatures, justifies and sanctifies them, sets them right and makes them holy, so that in the end they may speak a word worthy of all acceptance--even his own acceptance. Perhaps along with the commendation, "well done, good and faithful servant,"<sup>16</sup> the redeemed may hope also to hear God say, "well spoken, good and faithful servant." This is suggested by the eschatology, if I may call it that, of the Psalms. The same Psalmist who complains and laments before the Lord also vows that

if God will turn from wrath, forgive his sins and restore his life, he will return praises and thanksgiving in the congregation of the righteous, telling of the greatness of the mercy of God.<sup>17</sup>

Such is the song of the redeemed, exulting in the lovingkindness of God, telling the story of God and ourselves in words that are not vain and dishonest but faithful and true--so that in the peaceable kingdom where wrath and sin are no more, the glory consists not just in our knowing God but in his knowing us.

## NOTES

1. The dictum has its source in Freud's own writings: "The 'No' uttered by a patient after a repressed thought has been presented to his conscious perception for the first time does no more than register the existence of a repression and its severity; it acts, as it were, as a gauge of the repression's strength. If this 'No,' instead of being regarded as the expression of an impartial judgement (*of which, indeed, the patient is incapable*) is ignored, and if work is continued, the first evidence soon begins to appear that in such a case 'No' *signifies the desired 'Yes.'*" Sigmund Freud, *Dora: an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria* (New York: MacMillan, 1963), p. 76 (my emphases).

2. This ordinary-language distinction between knowing other persons and knowing about them does not imply any weighty epistemological distinction between belief-in and belief-that (H.H. Price) or "I-Thou" and "I-it" relations (Martin Buber). Or at least I do not intend any such distinction thereby. So far as I can tell, knowledge of other persons is made up largely of pieces of knowledge *about* other persons that are gained in the usual ways: observation, inference, familiarity, etc. Like other forms of knowledge, knowledge of other persons is distinctive because of the distinctiveness of its object--not because it has

a radically different epistemological structure or foundation. It differs from other kinds of knowledge in being shaped by ethical constraints, including those that stem from the requirement of respect for persons. Consequently it is grounded in the word of the other--but this does not make it unique or *sui generis*, but rather brings it under the heading of belief in testimony (as shall be discussed further on). Oddly enough, the possibility that other persons might tell us the truth tends to be overlooked by philosophical theorists of dialogue--perhaps precisely because they are so intent on finding a form of knowledge that is *sui generis*.

3. This is no place to enter into the epistemologists' debate about justification, warrant, and entitlement. I shall simply assume here that having good reasons is sufficient for epistemic justification, and that "justified true belief" is a good enough account of the nature of knowledge to be used in support of my contention that believing the word of trustworthy people contributes to knowing them.

4. These are the basic terms of the covenant in Exodus 6:7, Leviticus 26:12, Jeremiah 31:33, Ezekiel 36:28, and Zechariah 8:8 --a covenant renewed and fulfilled in the marriage of the Lamb and his bride, the New Jerusalem, in Revelation 21:3.

5. For present purposes I treat sentences like "I will..." as the standard form of a promise. I would re-phrase locutions like "I promise to..." into the form "I promise that..." and count them true if and only if the that-clause is true (in the bald semantic sense familiar from Tarski). The point of such rephrasing is to avoid considerations of speech act theory (illocutionary force, performative function and so on) in order to concentrate on the issue of truth. Of course for other purposes speech-act theory remains germane, but my aim here is to minimize dependence on theoretical considerations outside of ethics.

6. This of course is the Scriptural testimony of Mary, from the Magnificat, Luke 1:54f.

7. Cf. esp. *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*, §§2-7.

8. Cf. James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale, 1990).

9. As Aristotle saw: cf. *Politics* 1:2,1253a9 and 7:13,1332a5, as well as *Rhetoric* 1:1,1355b33. The phrase (*zoon logon echon*) is usually translated "rational animal."

10. Cf. Erik Erikson's classic description of "basic trust" as

the earliest issue that arises in human psycho-social development, in *Childhood and Society*, second edition (New York: Norton, 1963), pp. 247-251.

11. It may be incompatible with the project of eliminating "mentalistic" concepts altogether--depending of course on how exactly the elimination is to be accomplished. Like Ryle, I assume that our everyday talk of beliefs, thoughts, feelings and the like (our "folk psychology" as it has recently been called) is in good working order, and am persuaded that it does not have dualist implications.

12. Alvin Plantinga, *God and Other Minds* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1967), p. viii.

13. Romans 3:4.

14. Julian of Norwich, *A Revelation of Love*, edited by Marion Glasscoe (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1976), §31f (my translation).

15. Cf. e.g. Jeremiah 17:10, Matthew 12:25, Luke 16:15, 1 Corinthians 3:20, and esp. Hebrews 4:12f.

16. Matthew 25:21.

17. Cf. the conclusions of Psalms 22, 51, 54, 66, 71, and 116.