

Austin Farrer: A Most Pragmatic Personalist

Readers who are familiar with the work of Austin Farrer will not be surprised to discover that his work continues to inspire serious philosophical and theological enquiry. For those who are not, however, a word of explanation and introduction.

Austin Marsden Farrer was one of the last great metaphysical thinkers of the twentieth century.¹ In the preface to *A Celebration of Faith*, the philosopher (and friend of Farrer), Basil Mitchell, described him as ‘one of the most remarkable men of his generation’.² His was a mind given to ‘originality, independence, imagination and intellectual force to a degree amounting to genius, and the word was sometimes used of him’. Similarly, John Hick has avowed, ‘to read someone of Farrer’s stature is to lose any taste for the lower levels of theological writing’.³ And Charles Conti – co-founder, along with Tom Buford, of the International Conference on Persons – has devoted a lifetime’s study to ‘one of the most interesting of...[the twentieth] century’s philosophical theologians; a writer who possessed a mind as philosophically gifted as it was theologically rare’.⁴

Undoubtedly the most important Anglican theologian since John Henry Newman, Farrer, too, was an Anglo-Catholic, but of a rather different persuasion. Where Newman entered fully into Catholic theology, remaining there throughout, Farrer’s neo-Catholic, “high” Anglican period ended in a return to his pragmatic roots. In this, he kept faith (in both senses) with the communitarian interests celebrated in the Gifford Lectures of his former tutor, John Macmurray, while metaphysically extending them in his own extraordinary corpus.

Like the other thinkers in this all too brief volume, he is, sadly, not as often read as he should be (when he is, he is, perhaps, even less frequently understood). This is not entirely surprising. A prevailing climate of British empiricism that produced Logical Positivism in the formative years of the century and computational theories of mind in its senescence was unlikely to foster a sympathetic ear. And yet, he stood at the cutting-edge of modern philosophy. Forty-five years after his death, he stands there still; his “counter-episteme” offering a vital corrective to philosophers and theologians who pursue their enquiries without due regard to their role in the psycho-dynamics of personal identity.

His attention to the most vital topics of philosophical concern gives his work an enduring importance to modern thinkers who philosophise out of the human condition, enquiring after matters of lasting concern, if not of transcendental import.

Farrer was born in 1904 in Hampstead, London, originally of Baptist stock. (His father, Augustus, a Baptist minister and tutor at Regents Park College, translated Emil Brunner’s *The Mediator* into English.)⁵ His early schooling was at St. Paul’s in London. On going up to Oxford, he studied first at Balliol, under Macmurray, and then Cuddesdon Theological Seminary (where he is reputed to have trained with Michael Ramsey, Archbishop of Canterbury in the 1960s). As a scholar, Farrer quickly distinguished himself, gaining firsts in Honour Moderations (1925), *Literae Humaniores* (1927), and Theology (1928). He was also awarded the Craven Scholarship (1925) and the Liddon Studentship (1927).

In 1931, following a brief stint as a West Yorkshire curate, Farrer returned to Oxford as Chaplain and tutor at St. Edmund Hall. In 1935 he became Fellow and Chaplain of Trinity

where he remained until 1960 when he was appointed Warden of Keble. Farrer died in 1968, not long after being elected a Fellow of the British Academy; he is buried at Holywell Cemetery in Oxford.

A biblical scholar as well as a philosophical theologian, Farrer published several volumes on the Gospels, including *A Rebirth of Images: The Making of St John's Apocalypse* (1949), *A Study in St Mark* (1951), and *St Mathew and St Mark* (1954). There are also numerous collections of sermons and homiletic verses, five of which were published posthumously. Alongside these “church” pieces – and most definitely of a piece with them – stand Farrer’s philosophical works. Perhaps the most important are *Finite and Infinite*, his magnum opus, first published in 1943; his Gifford and Deems Lectures published as *The Freedom of the Will* (1957) and *Faith and Speculation* (1964) respectively; and the posthumous collection of essays, *Reflective Faith* (1972).

In all his works, severally and collectively, the reader will find an exceptional and captivating insight into the fundamental questions of philosophy and theology. Farrer was uniquely alive to the demands of both disciplines; in Conti’s words, ‘keeping heart and head in dynamic balance’.⁶ With a profound understanding of human nature, Farrer brought ‘passion to bear on philosophy...aligning integrity with religion.’ His challenge to the standard articles of Christian tradition was never less than penetrating. It was also timely. Against the grain of contemporary Positivism, Farrer refused to surrender the most difficult aspects of the faith out of which he philosophised. Rich in philosophical wisdom and psychological insight, faith (he believed) is central to the deepest understanding of our humanity, love-oriented unto a God of love.

More profitable than anything else on the current philosophical market, Farrer presents his readers with a vital connection of thought and action; a connection embodied in the life of faith. Sermons resonate unmistakably with philosophical writings, reminding us that praxis supplies the conditions by which *theoria* must be judged. Philosophers tend to reverse this, making inappropriate logical demands on more basic social interactions. But Farrer held fast to the epistemic conditions of active belief and the requirements of the ordinary believer. Make no mistake, he said, ‘[i]f we are not tough enough to assert that the act of religious obedience is our privileged access to the knowledge of God, we shall be beaten out of the field’.⁷ John Hick aptly termed this ‘rationality illuminatingly at work within the life of faith’.⁸ In the end, Farrer understood that any faith worth living must be capable of being thought and any philosophy worth thinking must be capable of being lived. This gives his work an unusual metaphysical edge. It overcomes the traditional polarisation of rationalism or realism from empiricism.

This “pragmatic sanction” also offers an important clue to the evolution of Farrer’s thinking.

Commentators commonly oversimplify Farrer’s theological development, characterising it as a move from orthodox apologetics to Wittgenstinian fideism, thereby defaulting on traditional rational theism.⁹ Certainly, there is little doubt that Farrer rejected “objectivist” theories of meaning along with their ‘wordless account of reality’. ‘No,’ he insisted, ‘truth is and must be immanent in discourse’.¹⁰ The Wittgenstinian implications of this may be evident, but they were no “late” development, appearing for the first time in *Faith*

and Speculation. The message is loud and clear in the earlier work. Like *Philosophical Investigations, Finite and Infinite* was written in response to ‘the breath-taking naivety of old linguistic realism’.¹¹

Wittgenstinian implications notwithstanding, Farrer had little sympathy for the God of language-games and frames espoused by D. Z. Phillips and his ilk. Logical grammar may be vital for thinking and talking about creation, but it is difficult to believe that it could ever, as Farrer might have said, save our souls alive.

Resisting the temptations of linguistic relativism, Farrer ‘did his theology metaphysically, approaching his task in the manner of *philosophia perennis*’.¹² He vigorously rejected the move to equate meaning with use, along with any idea of religion as a mere language-game. Imagine, he suggested, if we took the same approach to works of art: ‘How would you like to view the picture? From the floor, or from the gallery? By what remains of daylight, or by those fluorescent tubes?’ ‘Thank you,’ comes the Wittgenstinian’s breezy reply ‘I prefer to view it as a work of Tintoretto.’¹³ But this only confuses the conditions under which we experience our world with its putative provenance, so undermines the very idea of authorship.

The truth cannot be so easily uncoupled from the world “outside” language. Indeed, there must be more to real things than just our talk about them. Farrer had said as much from the outset: ‘that we should be able to talk about types of things, about which we can do nothing but talk’ simply isn’t plausible.¹⁴

Theology, of course, must be tougher than any analysis of the ways in which we think and talk about the world. However detailed and comprehensive their aims, our ‘several sciences and modes of knowledge’ are attempts to get ‘finite reality into focus’.¹⁵ But the theologian (if she knows her business and is tough enough to do it) will not be concerned with finite reality as such; she must try to view the world ‘as the field of divine activity’. Hence, theology does not fit neatly as one amid the spectrum of sciences. Echoing an old platonic metaphor, that is, ‘[t]he theologian is not picking a colour from a rainbow; he is looking at the sun’.

The intellectual journey from *Finite and Infinite* to *Faith and Speculation* was far more subtle than any lurch to Wittgenstinian fideism, linguistic idealism, could allow. As a result, it offers a more robust and consistent philosophical engagement with questions of theology. It represents a progressive attempt to reconcile metaphysics with the presuppositions of religious practice by means of the logic of what it means to be, or rather to become, a person. Supporting this, a visionary philosophy of mind first emerged in the central chapters of *Finite and Infinite*. There, however, it would be overwhelmed by the ontological demands of a more traditional Thomism. The result was a classical deployment of action-concepts: God as *Actus Purus*. Working out that concept of mind, or rather, of persons, in *The Freedom of the Will*, Farrer would use a full-blooded interactionism to purge classical absolutism from his theology. By privileging anthropology over *usiology*, he realigned metaphysics with the demands of religious belief. This resulted in the pragmatic theology of *Faith and Speculation*.

Returning philosophy and theology to ‘the way believers think, feel, and decide’ (as opposed to the way professional philosophers and theologians ‘think, feel and decide’),¹⁶

Farrer refused the false choice between the extremes of rationalist orthodoxy and contemporary revision. There is no sensible possibility of retreating into scholasticism, but neither is there a need to radically rethink theism. To redeem religion for empirical minds, theology need only recall its progenesis in religious *praxis*. That too is a mainstay of Farrer's methodology. Thus, when the process theologian John Cobb remarked, 'the ancient rift between the God of the philosophers and the God of religion remained as wide as ever', he was ready to add, 'if anyone came close to closing it, it was Austin Farrer'.¹⁷ Like Cobb and Conti, I am inclined to think Farrer succeeded, not least because, as Conti points out, Farrer 'kept faith with reason, [as we have seen] in both senses'.

Sharply contrasting with the realist revival of modern theology advocated by the likes of Peter Byrne and William Alston, Farrer's thinking was at once subtly anthropological and traditionally analogical. Rather than press into service an untenable epistemology and an unfathomable ontology (as realists are inclined to do) Farrer distilled an empirical mandate from the logically primitive description of persons seeking explanations. This mandate supplied the foundation for a personalist metaphysic. It offers a way of doing philosophy and theology that is both more original and more fertile than the thinking that currently dominates the field.

It began with a thoroughgoing revision of Aristotelian substance-categories. Rejecting classical concepts of "being" apart or *in se*, discrete reals abiding in ontological and epistemic independence, Farrer saw that real existence must be fully active, better still, *interactive*. Neatly, in a Latin phrase, *esse est operari*. Being-just-being-itself, he argued, is unknowable, strictly inconceivable. It (whatever it might be) stands beyond all coherent reference so remains logically underdetermined. Recapitulating the regulative principle from *Finite and Infinite*, he declared, 'no thought about any reality about which we can do nothing but think'.¹⁸ This, in turn, supplied the empirical mandate for a coherent epistemology. 'No physical science without physical interference, no personal knowledge without personal intercourse'.

Real things are known by their impact on our activities, their capacity to 'disturb and diversify the field' of our explorations.¹⁹ By their 'disturbance-effect' shall we know them; that makes "touch" the 'primitive sense' just because 'it worked through contact'.²⁰ Such are the first and most basic facts of experience. Indeed, Farrer argued, 'the world is not known but as the playground of human thews and human thoughts; were there no free play, there would be no knowledge'.²¹

The world, then, is a field of deliberate activity; real knowledge, a product of our encounters with, and in, this field. It follows that our basic concept of "real being" is not separable from, but continuous with, acts of exploration. That, in turn, locates our basic criterion of "real being" in the physical extensions of consciousness, so transforms *both* philosophy *and* theology, shows reason its human face. (For those still faced with the sort of philosophical minds that resist the force of action, Farrer's advice was simple. '[C]atch them in the posture of vigorous action (since philosophers off duty are agents too) and get them to introspect before they have introspected, before they have time to retire to their fly-pitch on the ceiling'. The difficulty, of course, is in finding philosophers 'off duty' and away from their 'fly-pitch'.)²²

This was Farrer's 'causal solution' to the problem of knowledge.²³ Contrary to those

who claim that he remained unaffected by contemporary empiricism – perhaps to preserve him from the muck and muddle of a world constituted by concrete contact, the interpenetrations of personal intercourse – Farrer had learned Ayer’s lesson well.²⁴ Action-concepts honour empirical conditions, converting verificationism into a principle of experientiable difference. So robust a criterion of knowledge extends easily across the spectrum of human knowledge. And, in seemingly anti-Wittgensteinian mood, he could claim that ‘[t]o know God is to know, and not to do anything fundamentally different; it is to accord some real being a conscious recognition’.²⁵

Farrer’s concept of the ‘self’ as actively extended or agency-personified is of fundamental importance to rational theology. Personal agency offers the prime analogue for conceiving God and the cosmological relation. It reminds us that both of these are human truths. Girded with a full-blooded activist epistemology, the analogy works like this. Real ‘being’ is primitively experienced *in* action; the self is *publicly* enacted. No ontological deficiency, as traditional thinkers suggest, sociality is the quiddity of consciousness. After all, mentality is first transacted *between* persons. It is an expression of ‘soulful’ social conjunctions. For ‘[m]ind does everywhere flow into mind’.²⁶ This, in a nutshell, provides the basis for conceiving a real confluence between natural and spiritual, and a more creative way of reintegrating finite and infinite.

Farrer had explored the prototypical mode of this integration in *The Freedom of the Will*. There, he described the alignment of mind and body in terms of their mutual participation in a *tertium quid*: patterns of conscious, physical activity. No longer at logical or ontological odds, mind makes peace with the body, enacting itself within a physical environment. Crucially, however, Farrer argued that the coveted connection of mind and body cannot be pressed home. ‘No bridge, we must agree, either mental or physical or neutral, is ever going to join the consciousness-story about us to the physiological story about us’.²⁷ The problem, he observed, does not lie with the ‘consciousness-story’. After all, if we do not know how to think, or act thoughtfully, then we do not know anything at all. Nevertheless, there remains an irreducible gap in the ‘empirical mapping’ of the physical system wherein consciousness is embodied.²⁸ Put simply, we cannot carry our alignment of mind and body right to the door of the physical system because we do not know where the door is. The ‘method of physical discovery,’ as exemplified by the physical sciences, is, Farrer reminds us, ‘physical interference’. But physical interference can only ever reveal physical forces in full flow, as it were, never where those forces engage with a “non-physical system”. Put simply, we can never quite put our finger on what Farrer dubbed the ‘causal joint’ between mind and body because we do not and cannot have anything to do with it.²⁹ Consciousness enters into the picture of physical activity (which constitutes our physical environment) simply by acting physically.

Upgrading the patterns of activity from the merely physical to the fully personal, we can see the same idea at work. In the full flow of shared activity, it is often difficult to clearly separate one action-pattern from another. In conversation – archetypal expression of personal consciousness – each plays his or her part in the whole. As we co-operate, our activities integrate, and our ‘selves’ along with them. The mutuality of conversation tells the tale: ideas transacted; meanings exchanged, appropriated and re-appropriated. The truth of this is, perhaps, all the more obvious in education itself. Those who have had the privilege of teaching will attest to the primal importance of creatively participating in the development of

other minds. They will attest, too, to the fact that, at its most successful (and most rewarding), it really is impossible to tell where the teacher ends and the student begins. The ‘causal joint’ between them is as obscure as that between mental and physical; for personal consciousness, as Farrer knew well, *is* the creative involvement of one mind in the development of another.³⁰

Nevertheless, in the course of human relations, we can always point to individual activities belonging to individual agents. We distinguish easily enough, who said what, who wrote which essay, and who marked it. The same cannot be said of finite-infinite relations. There are no “neon” miracles, no original digital identification, logos-loaded fingers pointing down from clouds that resonate with thunderous accusation. Farrer knew that too, of course. We may be ‘virtually unable not to suppose personal action, as a reality finding expression in the phenomena of personal conduct’.³¹ And yet, ‘with all the furniture of heaven and earth before his vision, the unilluminated can still say “There is no God”.’ Indeed, he may do so without fear of logical contradiction. For the theist must suppose that ‘God’s thoughts and the processes composing the world perfectly correspond’. So perfectly, indeed, that the ‘causal joint’ between Creator and Creation is utterly indiscernible. Amid the warp and weft of creation, that is, ‘[t]he hand of God is perfectly hidden’.³²

At this point, one might expect – as Farrer evidently did – the well-meaning empiricist to remind us that, without the ‘causal joint’, we may have done ourselves out of both a God and a mind. Dogged by naturalist reduction, that is, Farrer’s philosophical psychology appears to end in some version of behaviourism; his philosophical theology, in something very like Whitehead’s process metaphysics. As philosophical behaviourists reduced persons to the sum of their activities, so Whiteheadians conceived God as ‘equiprimordial’ with, or (in plain English) equivalent to natural processes. Sartre’s adage ‘you are what you do, no more,’³³ springs readily to mind. That much was already implied by Farrer’s activist premise: *esse est operari*.³⁴ If followed through to full effect, it would seem theologically disastrous, offering a personalism that lacked the means to satisfy the basic logical and psychological requirements of faith *or* philosophy.

Resisting the blandishments of reductive empiricism and atheist existentialism, Farrer held out for an agential “overplus”. No Cartesian revival casting consciousness in the role of ‘back stage artiste’ (in J. L. Austin’s always pithy phrasing);³⁵ Farrerian ‘prior actuality’ supplies the *adequate* (but *not* the *necessary*) logical conditions for construing physical events as acts. For acts are intentional. They require an agent of sufficient priority to intend them. In Farrer’s words, ‘[t]he *intending* is ahead of the *intended*, though it be but a hairsbreadth’.³⁶ The repetition here is as vital as the distinction it delineates. It rebuts the separatist tendencies of both solid-state and dynamically driven realists, demanding instead a concrete continuity between *intending* agent and acts *intended*.

The ‘hairsbreadth’ represents the briefest hiatus between awareness and response. Its absence leaves only a mechanistic reaction to external stimuli. Driven exclusively by reflex, the intending mind is reduced to the self-discharging patterns of the organism. But, Farrer observed, ‘[i]f I become conscious only of the circumstances to which my vital pattern of operation reacts, and only in reacting to them, consciousness has neither sense nor function.’³⁷

No room for logical isolation here; and no reduction will do. Participatory and

anticipatory “mechanisms” must both be actualised in a single physical act. So consciousness emerges in the transaction between vital bodily pattern and active response. It is this transaction which defines the logical priority of intentional consciousness: not deductive but presuppositional. In other words, intentions are disclosed in acting: they are recognisable *after the fact*, in and as their physical execution.

Thus, Farrer located intending agents in a social, as well as a physical, environment. Sociality, moreover, implies moral agency, designates intentions as honourable or otherwise. In this way, moral agency theologically extends the concrete analogy for transcendence. Conscious transactions require a moral response whereupon the personal analogue meets the faith-criterion, grounding the personal relation of Creative to created agency. Further, the idea of moral agency is continuous with personal action and shared discourse. This qualifies transcendence, or ‘prior actuality’, with concrete relation because moral agency supplies the priority of ownership: the agent who “stands behind” her acts.

This transcendent “self” is thereby transformed from a metaphysical entity into a metaphorical one. It represents the privileging of the “self” as moral-monitor over the “actor-self”. This is fundamental to a healthy psychology and a healthy theology since, for the believer, there is in moral agency an experience of divine Will *in action*. No wonder then, in the psycho-social implications of Farrer’s moral theism, Conti found God as ‘the soul of our conduct’.³⁸ This is the ‘God about whom we have something to do,’ the God who quickens moral conscience, the God who’s Will, as Farrer saw, is ‘written across the face of the world’.³⁹

Re-thinking the self on pragmatic grounds funds an existential rewrite of scholastic theology. So Farrer transformed absolute self-reference into a mode of being as becoming. If this transformation and its invigorated issue seem familiar, they should. They are built into the structure of consciousness. They retail a concept of the “self” as (co)dependent on divine “Otherness”, as persons themselves are dependent on human others. This is the crucial ingredient in any voluntarist revision of theology and philosophy. Farrer’s social re-construction preserved God from causal insolvency while simultaneously resisting hostile take-over by process equiprimordiality. Transcendence becomes the logical co-ordinate of divine Action. It is presupposed by the interpretation of actual facts as acts intended. Avoiding the sterility of ontological isolation and the inertia of acts held perpetually in abeyance, agential priority offers a more dynamic, and dialogical, conjunction. With ‘prior actuality’, Farrer invoked the Agent *of* the act. Chartered by acts immanently (or actually) intended, that is, transcendence can no longer sustain ontological chastity. It is, instead, a corollary of the personalist presupposition. It means that sooner or later any personal agent worthy of the name must be prepared to enact his or her identity. (Identities are *performed*, not *performed*.) It is this idea which underpins the central religious conception of God as Creative Agent, divine Person.

In working out the logic of transcendent personality like this, Farrer was evidently concerned with far more than the commonplace philosophical brawling over traditional theological categories. It went to the heart of Christianity. Setting his face against the trend to relegate transcendence to a merely ‘gratuitous philosophical encumbrance loaded onto a religion that can do very well without it,’ Farrer saw instead, ‘the defining form of our traditional faith’.⁴⁰ So transcendence had the utmost practical urgency. ‘[T]hrow it over,’ he said, ‘and you have a different religion – a different understanding of God’s love for us, of our present existence in relation to him, and of our ultimate hopes’. In philosophical terms,

transcendence concerns the structure and coherence of religious consciousness. And religious consciousness is consciousness of concrete relations, human and divine.

The emphasis here, as ever, is on Farrer's empirical mandate: the 'God about whom we have something to do.' Hence, theological demands for transcendent person find philosophical support in the more immediate needs of personal relation. However, the urgency of this idea does not arise from the application of abstract theological diagrams. It arises from the fact that personal relations denote the shape of consciousness itself. And personal relations require full consciousness of effect.

Farrer regarded the model of intentional agency, the person-model, as inescapable for religious thought. Not mere speculativist option or spiritualist "life-style choice," it is the image under which we "think" God. It provides (gender) specificity, but only in order to bring God closer to persons than impersonal forces. Hence, Farrer insisted, 'the personal character of our relation with [God], is the very form of it, not a metaphorical trapping which can be thought away while any substance remains.'⁴¹ It is, in short, the only means we have for making sense of our world and ourselves as acts of providential creation.

In such applications, projections become reflections: the image returns as the vital component in the psychodynamics of conscious development. This marks the "upwards" orientation of consciousness thinking itself in relation to "higher" forms of self-overcoming or transcendence. In Conti's words, 'limitation points to a "transcending archetype" responsible for being in its lesser or finite mode.' Such reflections hint at infinite extensions, glimpsed reflections of the perfection of consciousness, precisely because they are essentially *interpersonal*. In personal relations, that is, Farrer found a "crypto-apprehension" of Infinite Act': divine thumbprint pressed deep in the clay of human consciousness.⁴²

Revisiting the personalist presuppositions of theology in this way threw light on the deepest questions of identity. The theologian's task is to describe the nature of an existence directly experienced in ourselves. It is to "draw" reality on the grand-scale and, most importantly, locate our place within that image. Doing theology dynamically, that is, psychologically informed, as Farrer recommended, enables us to recognise the constitutive role those projections play in acts of self-construction. Without conscious participation in our projects we cannot become persons at all. So relocating acts of (theological and philosophical) investigation within a framework of personal enquiry initiates a reinvestment of the self in itself. Simply put, participation in our ideals and aspirations entails the enactment of our prospective selves. This returns theology to an older tradition exemplified in the practice of faith. It reconstructed anthropology as *applied* theology premised on personalist metaphysics.

In the end, then, by taking person-concepts as fundamental to religious thought and practice, Farrer's personalist metaphysic relocated the logocentric egoism of orthodox theology within a framework of personal action. This was not, however, a call for theological revolution. It was bigger than that. It was a reminder of the transformative possibilities of religious consciousness. It concerned the growth and development of the human soul. There lies Farrer's pragmatic sanction for religious belief. 'In creating all things,' he reminds us, the Creative Cause is 'creating us; and it concerns us to enter into the making of our souls, and of one another's'.⁴³ Such concern is, in the words of Charles Ryerson, 'not so much an existential quest as it is a realisation of what one has always essentially been'.⁴⁴ For Farrer, '[t]o enter into the action of God thus is what we mean by religion'. That means there is a

burgeoning psychology to be reaped from “talk about God” which is essential to philosophical theology and, more importantly, to the becoming of persons.

Selected Bibliography

For a full bibliography of Farrer’s published writings see Conti, *Metaphysical Personalism*, 277-287; for a detailed bibliography of secondary sources, see Hein and Henderson, *Captured by the Crucified: the practical theology of Austin Farrer* 197-208.

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Notes

1. The other being Alfred North Whitehead.
2. Basil Mitchell, ‘Austin Marsden Farrer’ in *A Celebration of Faith*, ed. Leslie Houlden (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1970), 13.
3. John Hick, ‘Foreword’ in *Reflective Faith*, ed. Charles Conti (London: SPCK, 1972), xiv.
4. Charles Conti, *Metaphysical Personalism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), xvii. See also Conti’s reference to

- Martin Warner's description of Farrer as 'perhaps the most profound twentieth century student of these matters' in *Religion and Philosophy* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992), 18.
5. Conti, *Metaphysical Personalism*, 224, n1.
 6. Conti, *Metaphysical Personalism*, xvi.
 7. Farrer, 'God and Verification I' in *Reflective Faith*, 139.
 8. Hick, Foreword' in *Reflective Faith*, xiii.
 9. Farrer himself must take some of the blame for this. 'As an "update" or long addendum' to *Finite and Infinite*, Conti argues, '*Faith and Speculation* constituted double jeopardy'. '[I]t effectively required the reader to puzzle out the improvements offered in *Faith and Speculation* by first working backwards into the dense, difficult arguments of *Finite and Infinite*, judging initially the strength of the programme and where it went wrong in order to see what was *now* on offer by way of improvement or correction. (It also required on to "fit in" the linguistic transition offered by the *Freedom of the Will*... with only the most summary remarks offered in the revised preface to *Finite and Infinite* [2nd edition, 1959] as exegetical clue.)' *Metaphysical Personalism*, xvii-xix. Indeed, it might have helped matters if Farrer had not used the highly misleading expression 'newly defined empirical principle' (*Faith and Speculation*, 23). The formulation of this principle in *Faith and Speculation*, 'we can think nothing as real, about which we can do nothing but think' (28, 36) was borrowed directly from *Finite and Infinite*. By neglecting to acknowledge this reiteration, however, Farrer undoubtedly contributed significantly to the confusion surrounding the development of his thinking.
 10. Farrer, *Church Quarterly Review*, 131 (1941); quoted in Conti, *Metaphysical Personalism*, 250-1.
 11. Austin Farrer, *Finite and Infinite* (Westminster: Dacre, 1959), ix.
 12. Conti, *Metaphysical Personalism*, xvii, quoting John Glasse.
 13. Austin Farrer, *Faith and Speculation* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1967), 21.
 14. Farrer, *Finite and Infinite*, 74.
 15. This and next, Farrer, *Faith and Speculation*, 20-1.
 16. Farrer, *Faith and Speculation*, 7. Hence the tendency of professional philosophers and theologians to confuse religion with research, imagining it to be, likewise, a disinterested enquiry into truth or reality. As I have indicated elsewhere (Smith, 'Lessons in Faith and Knowledge', *Minerva*, Vol. 15 November 2011) this seems to be *un risque professionnel*. Not surprising, perhaps, for, as William James pointed out, '[t]he theorising mind tends always to the oversimplification of its materials' (*The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Glasgow: Fount, 1985), 46).
 17. Conti, *Metaphysical Personalism*, xvii.
 18. This and next, Farrer, *Faith and Speculation*, 22. For Farrer's Latin tag, see *Finite and Infinite*, 21 and *Faith and Speculation*, 114.
 19. This and next, Farrer, *Finite and Infinite*, 234.
 20. Farrer, *Finite and Infinite*, 232. Stuart Hampshire would make the same point sometime later. 'Touch, and not sight, is primitively the most authoritative of the senses, the natural criterion of physical reality, just because acting upon objects necessarily involves touching, the contact of my body with the resisting body that is not my own' (Stuart Hampshire, *Thought and Action* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1983), 48).
 21. Farrer, *The Freedom of the Will* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960), 171.
 22. Farrer, *Finite and Infinite*, 109.
 23. Farrer, *Finite and Infinite*, 231.
 24. See the Wikipedia entry on Farrer for the odd and clearly mistaken suggestion that he 'was not influenced by the empiricism of such contemporaries as John Wisdom, Gilbert Ryle and A. J. Ayer'.
 25. Farrer, *Faith and Speculation*, 21.
 26. Farrer, 'You Want to Pray?' in *A Celebration of Faith*, 143.
 27. Farrer, *The Freedom of the Will*, 8.
 28. Farrer, *The Freedom of the Will*, 63.
 29. Farrer, *Faith and Speculation*, 65.
 30. For more on this see Smith, 'Lessons in Faith and Knowledge'.
 31. Farrer, *Faith and Speculation*, 126.
 32. Farrer, *A Science of God?* (London: Geoffrey Bles Ltd, 1966), 80; *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* (London & Glasgow: The Fontana Library, 1966), 95 & 99; and *Saving Belief*, 72. See also 'Transcendence and "Radical Theology"', in *Reflective Faith*, 176 for reference to the "act of

- condescension by which God serves his creatures in making themselves”. As Conti points out, this aphorism, borrowed from Mother Carey in Charles Kingsley’s *The Water Babies*, is ‘crucial to Farrer’s doctrine of the divine and human complementarity’ (‘Study Notes, *Reflective Faith*, 224-5, n5). On this, see also *Saving Belief*, 51, 82, 124. At root, Farrer’s point here is that we cannot discern the ‘causal joint’ between Creator and Creation: ‘We enter into...[God’s] action simply by acting, whether the action be a movement of thought or an employment of the hand’. Consequently (Farrer argues) the ‘causal joint...between infinite and finite action can play no part in our concern with God and his will. We can do nothing about it, nor does it bear on anything we can do’ (Farrer, *Faith and Speculation*, 65). It is, in other words, outside the terms of the empirical mandate.
33. See Sartre *No Exit* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 58 particularly, Inez: ‘You are – your life, and nothing else’; also, Conti, ‘The Author Responds’ in *The Personalist Forum* 12, no. 1, 92 and *Metaphysical Personalism*, 155.
 34. It is worth noting that Farrer’s encounter with the works of the noted process thinker, Charles Hartshorne, provided the crucial impetus in the activist revision of his own metaphysics. Farrer, as he said, had read Whitehead in his youth (see *Faith and Speculation*, 162) but he was introduced to Hartshorne’s process theism by John Glasse. By his own recollection (recorded by Conti) Glasse sent Farrer three of Hartshorne’s books after attending the Deems Lectures in New York. These included *Man’s Vision of God*, and *The Logic of Theism* (Chicago and New York, 1941) and *The Divine Relativity, a Social Conception of God* (New Haven, 1948). Glasse was uncertain about the third book, suggesting it was either *The Logic of Perfection, and Other Essays in Neo-classical Metaphysics* (LaSalle, Illinois, 1995) or *Anselm’s Discovery: A Re-examination of the Ontological Proof for God’s Existence* (publication details not recorded). Although uncertain, Glasse suggested the former was the more likely candidate (Conti, *Metaphysical Personalism*, 248-9, n14). These books, Conti notes, provided Farrer with ample ‘support for the cosmological format of *Finite and Infinite*’. Hartshorne too, conceived God in ‘the effectual mode, as a “causeological” Being’ (Conti, *Metaphysical Personalism*, xx). Consequently, Farrer would go on to rewrite the Deems Lectures as *Faith and Speculation*. See also Conti, *Metaphysical Personalism*, 249, n16, and especially Appendix 2 (265-9) for Farrer’s correspondence with Glasse, which provides an important insight into the development of Farrer’s thinking in his own words. In one of these letters, Farrer remarked that Hartshorne had ‘clarified certain issues in a way that can never be gone back on. He has shown that the Aristotelian hyperbole about the divine *autarcheia* [self-sufficiency, self-reference] is irreconcilable with Christian Theism’ (*Metaphysical Personalism*, 267).
 35. For this memorable expression, see J. L. Austin, ‘Performative Utterances’, in *Philosophical Papers*, ed. J. O. Urmson & G. J. Warnock (Oxford: Clarendon 1961), 223.
 36. Farrer, *The Freedom of the Will*, 48, my emphasis. I am particularly indebted to Dr Conti for pointing out the significance of the double reference here.
 37. Farrer, *Finite and Infinite*, 235.
 38. Conti, *Metaphysical Personalism*, xxxii.
 39. For these remarks see Farrer, *Faith and Speculation*, 112 and *A Science of God?*, 114. Farrer would also make the point in an article entitled ‘Old Age: Why Do We Have To Bear It?’, written for the Portsmouth Abbeyfield Society and reprinted in the *North End Review*, (1964), 7: ‘Human unhappiness is a human problem, and the kindness of God inspires human hands to undertake it’.
 40. Farrer, ‘The Prior Actuality of God’ in *Reflective Faith*, 185.
 41. Farrer, *Faith and Speculation*, 47.
 42. Conti, ‘Austin Farrer & the Analogy of Other Minds’, 53-4. For Conti’s comprehensive discussion of Cartesian projection, see *Metaphysical Personalism*, 234 n20. See also Farrer, *The Glass of Vision* (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1948) for a rather Hegelian conception of mind as ‘shadow of absolute spirit, which is the shadow of God’, 89.
 43. *A Science of God?*, 66.
 44. Charles A. Ryerson III, ‘An Imminent Transcendence’ in *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* XVI, no. 3 (1995), 323.