The world in which we find ourselves is religiously ambiguous. It is possible for different people (as also for the same person at different times) to experience it both religiously and non-religiously; and to hold beliefs which arise from and feed into each of these ways of experiencing. A religious person may report that in moments of prayer he or she is conscious of existing in the unseen presence of God, and is aware – sometimes at least – that his/her whole life and the entire history of the world is taking place within the ambience of the divine purpose. But on the other hand the majority of people in our modern world do not participate in that form of experience and are instead conscious of their own and others’ lives as purely natural phenomena, so that their own experience leads them at least implicitly to reject the idea of a transcendent divine presence and purpose. If they are philosophically minded, they may well think that the believer’s talk is the expression of what Richard Hare has called a blik, a way of feeling and thinking about the world which expresses itself in pseudo-assertions, pseudo because they are neither verifiable nor falsifiable and are therefore factually empty.¹ The religious person speaks of God as a living reality in whose presence we are, and of a divine purpose which gives ultimate meaning to our lives. But is not the world the same whether or not we suppose it to exist in God’s presence; and is not the course of history the same whether or not we describe it as fulfilling God’s purposes? Is not the religious description thus merely a gratuitous embellishment, a logical fifth wheel, an optional language-game which may assuage some psychological need of the speaker but which involves no claims of substance concerning the objective nature or structure of the universe? Must not the central religious use of language then
be accounted a non-cognitive use, whose function is not to assert alleged facts but to express a speaker's, or a community of speakers', emotions within the framework of a factually contentless blik, 'slant' or 'onlook'?

The logical positivists of the 1920s and 1930s expressed this by saying that since such sentences as 'God loves mankind' are neither analytically true nor empirically verifiable they must be cognitively meaningless. They asked how God-talk could be verified; and most of the responses which they received from the theological world amounted to a repudiation of the question rather than an answer to it. Later, Antony Flew in the 'Theology and Falsification' debate asked whether such sentences as 'God loves mankind' are falsifiable — that is, such that if they are false they could ever be discovered to be so.² What conceivable state of affairs, he asked, would show that there is no loving God? He was given two kinds of answer. One was the non-cognitivist response, embodied in Hare's concept of the blik and in R. B. Braithwaite's account of religious belief as a disguised expression of intention to live according to a certain ethical pattern.³ Such answers share the assumption that religious beliefs are cognitively empty. The other response was the cognitivist answer formulated in different ways by Basil Mitchell⁴ and Ian Crombie.⁵ These both point implicitly or explicitly, as it seems to me, to some notion of eschatological verification for their further development; and it is this notion that I want to discuss here.

The broad idea is that the theistic conception of the universe, and of what is going on in human life, is capable of experiential verification, although according to Christianity the verifying situation lies in the final fulfilment of God's purpose for us beyond this present life. Perhaps I may be allowed to repeat here a parable in which I have previously embodied this general idea, before going on to its more precise elaboration.

Two people are travelling together along a road. One of them believes that it leads to a Celestial City, the other that it leads nowhere; but since it is the only road there is, both must travel it. Neither has been this way before, and therefore neither is able to say what they will find around each next corner. During their journey they meet both with moments of refreshment and delight, and with moments of hardship and danger. All the time one of them thinks of her journey as a pilgrimage to the Celestial City, and interprets the pleasant parts as encouragements, and the