

**ON THE EDGE OF AN ABYSS:**  
**WITTGENSTEIN ON RELIGIOUS EXPRESSIONS**

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## Abstract:

In my thesis, I pursue one goal and it relies, among other things, on one assumption:

Wittgenstein's thoughts concerning language provided him with seeing the key to philosophical dichotomies by dissolving them; In his first period of his thought, in TLP, Wittgenstein implies that the solution to the 'riddles' is in vanishing them by showing that they either are senseless or nonsense. In his later thought, however Wittgenstein undermined the riddles (and dichotomies) in his later thought rather by giving a conceptual analysis of the use of the words on each side of the supposed dichotomies and showing that, at least in many cases, there is no clear-cut distinction at all. If so, then I will argue how Wittgenstein does not argue for, or against, any side of the supposed dichotomy between 'faith' and 'reason'. Rather, he undermines the very distinction at stake. I take this assumption as a leading theme in understanding Wittgenstein's position concerning the religious belief and their expression in both, his early, and later periods.



## Chapter one: An overview of Wittgenstein's position on Religion

### Early Wittgenstein

Even in his earliest philosophical writings, later published as *Notebooks* (henceforth, NB), it seems obvious that philosophical argumentations for, or against, the existence of something called 'God' belong for Wittgenstein to the vast wasteland of metaphysical plain nonsense. As Hans-Johann Glock aptly puts it, Wittgenstein did not want to 'lose himself' to the illusion of the safe way to happiness known technically as conventional theistic religions. Neither did he succumb to the supposed rivals of theistic religions, atheism and agnosticism. (Glock 1996:320) <sup>1</sup>

In a sense, Wittgenstein's position concerning God and religion, in his early writings as well as in his later ones, cannot be associated with any "—ism." In *NB*, for instance, Wittgenstein does not talk about God except in a *philosophically* vague, highly passionate-romantic and somewhat pessimistic way:

The meaning of life, i.e. the meaning of the world, we can call God. And connect with this the comparison of God to a father.

To believe in a God means to understand the question about the meaning of life.

To believe in a God means to see that the facts of the world are not the end of the matter.

To believe in God means to see that life has a meaning.

However this may be, at any rate we are in a certain sense dependent, and what we are dependent on we can call God.

In this sense God would simply be fate, or, what is the same thing: The world—which is

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<sup>1</sup> I will evaluate Wittgenstein's criticisms to any form of apriori/empirical reasoning for, or against, the existence of an *entity* called 'God' later on.

independent of our will.

Certainly it is correct to say: Conscience is the voice of God. (NB: 73,74,75)

Although each of these remarks has a religious theme to it, none of them is, as it were, *metaphysically* promising. Indeed, one of the things that did not change in his thought, I will argue, was that, despite having an ignorant attitude towards the metaphysical-epistemic arguments concerning an entity called ‘God’, he was not dismissive of the meaning-giving aspect of God, ethics, and religion. In his early writings, it seems that we are faced with a pessimistic man who maneuvers, legitimately or illegitimately, around the meaning-giving feature of believing in an “independent will” that is inexpressible, unknowable, but value-giving. (Schroeder 2012)<sup>2</sup> Whether or not such an understanding of God as ‘the independent will’ and as ‘the meaning of life’ would be acceptable is one thing (which will be discussed and criticized according to the thoughts of later Wittgenstein), and whether or not such an understanding of God has any position in the structure of TLP, is another thing. I will argue in the second chapter that God, religion, and ethics have a special position among the showables: they cannot be said (or described) with the conception of language that TLP characterizes. However, following Cyrill Barrett, I will argue the meaninglessness of discussion about God, religion, and ethics, is not tantamount to think that all the mentioned issues were plain gibberish to Wittgenstein. Indeed, the linguistic dichotomy that Wittgenstein characterizes in TLP (i.e. “expressibles/inexpressibles”) can find a harmonious motif if the reader notices the relation between the “showables” and linguistic “inexpressibility”. My aim at the second chapter is to suggest that the “silence” of TLP in its last sentence might have a religious echo according to

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<sup>2</sup> An important source of this idea for Wittgenstein, as Schroeder states, is Schopenhauer. For further reading, see (Schroeder 2012).

which, one might say paradoxically, that: *No* words can capture God (ethics, religion) in its entirety but *silence*.

Early Wittgenstein implies that all the metaphysical arguments for or against the existence of a being called ‘God’ were based on a linguistic confusions. In TLP 5.63, while discussing the legitimate way of philosophizing, early Wittgenstein says “[T]he correct method in philosophy would be really be the following: to say nothing except what can be said, i.e. propositions of natural science—i.e. something that has nothing to do with philosophy—and then, whenever someone else wanted to say something metaphysical, to demonstrate to him that he had failed to give a meaning to certain signs in his propositions.”

To early Wittgenstein, hence, it seems that any metaphysician who argues for (or against) the existence of God is simply not doing philosophy in a (methodologically) *correct* way. Such a person, according to early Wittgenstein, is confused by sentences containing names with no referent in the world. We shall say, according to early Wittgenstein, since there is nothing in the world referred to by the term ‘God’, or to put it more precisely, since ‘God’ cannot be the name of any phenomenon (or fact, or state of affairs) *in* the world, every expression containing “God” would be gibberish: Expressing any proposition including ‘God’ in the metaphysical way is nothing but producing some meaningless noises to the early Wittgenstein.<sup>3</sup>

Despite his hostility to the possibility of meaningful discussion about God, ethics, and religion, early Wittgenstein himself does not nullify them of *a sort of* meaning that might give values to one’s life. In ‘Lecture on Ethics’ (henceforth, *LE*) Wittgenstein says: “to write or talk Ethics or Religion was to run against the boundaries of language. This running against the walls

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<sup>3</sup> For a detailed exegesis of the linguistic aspect of early Wittgenstein, see for instance, (Schroeder 2006).

of our cage is perfectly, absolutely hopeless.” (LE 12) Here, Wittgenstein reiterates that all the expressions about Ethics and Religion, based on his early understanding of language, run against the ‘meaningfulness’ of language in the Tractarian-logical sense. Such expressions lack a logical picture which is, in the logical space, the mirror of a possible fact *in* the world. However, Wittgenstein ends his lecture on Ethics by saying that:

Ethics so far as it springs from the desire to say something about the ultimate meaning of life, the absolute good, the absolute valuable, can be no science. What it says does not add to our knowledge in any sense. But it is a document of a tendency in the human mind which I personally cannot help respecting deeply and I would not for my life ridicule it. (LE 12)

If we understand the Tractarian criterion of meaningfulness as the only viable option of meaningfulness, then only scientific propositions can make sense and all the religious discourse, alongside aesthetics, logic and mathematics, would be picture-less, and, *ex hypothesi*, as gibberish as uttering ‘ahlkj ojlkhugalkk ;lkjhoihj!’ The criterion of meaningfulness, the picture-theory, of TLP, is, as follows: Words are combined in a sentence to represent a picture or model of a possible worldly state of affairs in the logical space. If the way that things are arranged corresponds to the way the way words present such a picture, then the sentence is true; and if not, then it is false. (Hyman 2003:2) However, as Wittgenstein explicitly asserts, the inexpressibility of the value-laden things in ethics, religion, and aesthetics is because there is no space for them according to the picture-theory. Language only says something, according to early Wittgenstein, if it describes (or misdescribes) the phenomena and the facts in the world. As Philips asserts, Wittgenstein clarifies his meaning by saying that “Ethics, if it is anything, is supernatural and our words will only express facts; as a teacup will only hold a teacup full of water and if I were to



pour a gallon over it.” (Philips 2001: 350) It is true that there is a big “if” at the beginning of the sentence but it is also true that Wittgenstein summarizes his ethics as “something supernatural” that can be expressed only by “the Supernatural” (CV:3, 1929),<sup>4</sup> meaning that, ethics, because of being “supernatural”, is beyond the kind of expression which can only say something about the facts *in* the world.<sup>5</sup>

A similar idea concerning the inexpressibility of ethics and religion can be seen in Friedrich Waismann’s reports in *Notes on Talks with Wittgenstein* recorded around the same time. In those conversations, Wittgenstein claims vaguely that ethics and religion cannot say anything meaningful but they “*point to something*” by “thrusting against paradox”, a pillar of logical understanding of language in TLP. The conversation goes, thusly:

[M]an has the urge to thrust against the limits of language. Think for instance about one’s astonishment that anything exists. This astonishment cannot be expressed in the form of a question and there is no answer to it. Anything we can say must, a priori, be only nonsense. Nevertheless we thrust against the limits of language. Kierkegaard, too, recognized this thrust and even described it in much the same way (as a thrust against paradox). This thrust against the limits of language is ethics. (Waismann 1965:12-3)

The paradoxical situation here is not in a blind spot of early Wittgenstein, either. Indeed it does not seem to be a complicated metaphysical puzzle at all. Wittgenstein thinks that words cannot capture ethics or religion except by, first, saying absolutely *nothing* about them; second, using some words such as “conveying something”, “silence”, etc. as word-codes for pointing to the unworkability of words (in the Tractarian sense of workability and meaningfulness) to bear the

<sup>4</sup> “Nur das übernatürliche kann das Übernatürliche ausdrücken.”

<sup>5</sup> Here, it should be noted that, the familiar way of capitalizing the names (“das Übernatürliche (the Supernatural)”) in German, in this case, is not devoid of religious connotations.

meaning of discussion concerning ethics and religion in the space of TLP. To use Wittgenstein's own analogy in LE, in the very same sense that no matter how much water one pours water, "a teacup will only hold a teacup full of water," we shall say, no matter how much one puts philosophical efforts to talk about God, ethics and religion, the words simply will not allow one to say anything meaningfully according to the Tractarian understanding of language. This idea can be read in at least two general ways. First, to say that, since language does not allow one to meaningfully think about ethics and religion, then every ethical-religion assertion is plain nonsense. Second, they need not be necessarily plain rubbish since, if according to the assumed logic of language in TLP, words cannot capture ethics, then it is not implausible to infer that the essential inexpressibility of ethics (which is manifested in what Wittgenstein refers to with "the thrust against paradox") is another way of saying that the realm of ethics does not belong to the world. As Hyman correctly maintains it, it seems that the second interpretation is closer to early Wittgenstein's position. Ethics, like aesthetics and whatever associated for him with the meaning of life or God, all contain values, and thereby, impossible to being put into words. (Hyman 2003:2-3) If so, then the paradoxical nature of the project of TLP concerning language and ethics would be, as follows: Ethics can neither be said TLP-meaningfully nor is it a plain gibberish. 'Inexpressibility' is essential to ethics and any ethical expression looks like a futile thrust against the paradox (i.e. to say something when it is impossible to say anything). The relation between ethics and language, I assume, can be seen in an encapsulated form in the "silence" *TLP* 7, as follows: "What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence."

Ethics and aesthetics are the same (TLP 4.621) and nothing can be said about them, early Wittgenstein thinks. Saying *nothing* and being "silent" are not unfamiliar ideas to Christian thought for *describing* how God cannot be "described". St. Augustine, a writer who influenced

on Wittgenstein,<sup>6</sup> put forward somewhat a similar understanding the relation between God's inexpressibility and silence, as follows: "And woe to those who are silent about You, since the talkative are dumb." (*Confessions* I:4)<sup>7</sup> It is especially important to see the similarity between TLP 7 and Augustine's sentence for two prime reasons. First, Augustine holds an understanding of language that, according to *PI*, can be taken as a proto-type of a picture-theory of Language discussed in TLP. In such a picture, language and words cannot capture and meaningfully say anything about God. Second, Wittgenstein criticizes TLP and Augustine's view of Language for having a narrow understanding of the concept of 'description'. Later Wittgenstein's understanding of language, not only repudiates some of his early ideas about language (e.g. inexpressibility), but also takes issue with some of his early ideas about the alleged essential inexpressibility of ethics, religion, and God.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Once Wittgenstein said to Drury that *Confessions* is possibly the 'most serious book ever written'. (Malcolm 1981)

<sup>7</sup> Also see, *Confessions* 1: IV.

<sup>8</sup> However, it should be noted that What is among other things radically different between TLP's 'silence' and that of Augustine's, the former has an individualistic-pessimistic tone while the latter are said as if the writer is seriously involved in talking to his ever-present interlocutor who cannot be called, i.e, God.

## Later Wittgenstein

Ethics and Religion, whatever they mean for Wittgenstein, play a significant role not only in his early but also in his later works. Norman Malcolm reports in his last book, *Wittgenstein: A Religious Point of View?*, that when Wittgenstein was working on the later part of *PI*, he said to his former student and close friend M. O’C. Drury: “My type of thinking is not wanted in this present age; I have to swim so strongly against the tide.” In the same conversation, Malcolm continues, Wittgenstein said: “I am not a religious man but I cannot help seeing every problem from a religious point of view.” (Malcolm 1993:1) Malcolm himself thinks that Drury’s recollections, alongside Wittgenstein’s orientation towards arts and literature, provide plausible material for considering the religious aspect of later Wittgenstein philosophy more seriously. (Malcolm 1981)<sup>9</sup> Whether Malcolm’s interpretation of Wittgenstein is accurate or not is an issue to which I do not enter. However, it seems plausible to focus on the influence of Wittgenstein’s later understanding of language on his interpretation of the ethical-religious expressions.

As I will argue, the seeming tension between Wittgenstein’s hostility to what is known (in mainstream contemporary analytic philosophy) as the ‘metaphysics of religion’<sup>10</sup> and his non-empirical (non-cognitive) approach to ethics and religion, is in fact not in tension at all. Although his thought changed in many respects from his early to his later period, this change occurred while still taking some assumptions for granted.

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<sup>9</sup> I will briefly summarize and evaluate Malcolm’s position (i.e. his famous ‘Four Analogy’) in the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter. Although, as I will argue, Malcolm’s analogies are not accurate, Malcolm’s hypothesis concerning the importance of Wittgenstein’s religious point of view is still, I suppose, correct.

<sup>10</sup> A recent example is Herman Philipse’s *God in the Age of Science?* (Philipse 2012). See especially his characterization of the possibilities for a religious discourse (“The Decision Tree for the Faithful”) as a quintessential example of what Wittgenstein, both early and later, criticized.

Although many concepts in Wittgenstein's thought were revised from his early to his later period, Wittgenstein's constant assumptions concerning God are, as follows:<sup>11</sup>

A) The term 'God' does not refer to any *entity*, if by 'entity' one intends an empirically sensible object. God is not a thing or a fact *in* the world.

B) If by 'argument' one intends an a priori reasoning or an empirical investigation, then all (rational) arguments for or against the existence of God are gibberish.<sup>12</sup>

C) There can be no systematic *theory* on God, ethics, and religion.

D) Religious and ethical expressions, unlike empirical ones, include value-laden meaning-giving concepts.

The first three theses are negative, meaning that, they describe how Wittgenstein is *not* making positive assertion about ethics, religion, and God. In the system of TLP, for instance, since God cannot be a fact, and because *in* the world there are only facts, then early Wittgenstein announces that "God does not reveal himself *in* the world." (TLP: 6.432) This proposition, however, is neither to prove nor to deny the existence 'God'; rather, it renders all such linguistic articulations as picture-less sequences of words with no significance.

Although in his later thought Wittgenstein rejects the TLP's picture-theory, he remains critical of a priori reasoning and empirical investigation concerning ethics, religion, and God. Wittgenstein once characterized the relation between religion and reasoning, for example, as follows: "Religion similes can be said to move on the edge of an abyss...Rules of life are dressed

<sup>11</sup> I will expand each of them in detail in the next chapters.

<sup>12</sup> These two theses, if are justified and textual, are sufficient to show that both early and later Wittgenstein would have deemed Swinsburne (Swinsburne 2004) and Plantinga's (Plantinga 2000) philosophical efforts as futile. For another noticeable example of 'confused'-in a Wittgensteinian sense-contemplation of religion, see Rundle 2004.

up in pictures. And these pictures can only serve to *describe* what we are to do, not *justify* them.” Wittgenstein continues: “Religion says: *Do this!—think like that!*—but it cannot justify this and once it even tries to, it becomes repellent; because for every reason it offers there is a counter-reason.” (CV P.29: 1937)

These remarks can be read in different ways. A possible reading of the quoted phrase, which seems to be in accordance with later Wittgenstein’s ideas about language in *PI*, is as follows. Since there is no systematicity in ordinary language, then we shall say *a fortiori* that there is no systematic theory that can capture the diversity of ethical-religious contexts. If so, then it is not implausible to think that it might be an oversimplification to think that a priori reasoning or empirical arguments concerning God can exhaust the diversity of the language-games in which a term such as “God” occurs.

As I shall explain, it is later Wittgenstein who develops and elaborates the idea that what early Wittgenstein had taken as ‘ineffable’ was indeed describable in a wider sense than TLP allows. It is not implausible to say, to put it in Russell’s idiom, though for different reasons, that “after all, Mr. Wittgenstein manages to say a good deal about what cannot be said,” that the idea of “inexpressibles” is an unnecessary paradoxical nonsense. In this thesis I will discuss three reasons behind later Wittgenstein’s hostility to *theorizing* (system-building) of the ethical-religious expressions, as follows: first, the unsystematizable diversity of the circumstances in which a term is (or can be) used. Second, the role of one’s upbringing, learning, and Form of life in the constitution of a religious belief. Third, the evaluative language of ethical-religious expressions that cannot be legitimately analyzed through the means of cognition, i.e. empirical-logical investigations, and scientific evidence.

The seeming tension between Wittgenstein's hostility to what is known (in mainstream contemporary analytic philosophy) as the 'metaphysics of religion'<sup>13</sup> and his non-empirical (non-cognitive) approach to ethics and religion, is in fact not a tension. Although Wittgenstein's thought changed in many respects from his early to his later period, this change occurred while still taking some assumptions for granted. Although many concepts in Wittgenstein's thought were revised from his early to his later period, as Cottingham and Schonbaumsfeld both note, some themes seem to remain constant in Wittgenstein's position concerning God in both periods. The central theme with which I start my discussion is that God is not an entity alongside other entities. (Cottingham 2009; Schonbaumsfeld 2007:157-8) However, the way early Wittgenstein arrives at it is different than that of later Wittgenstein. As we have seen, In TLP God is, at best, an unspeakable "thing" that does not reveal Himself *in* the world, and yet talk about him is not gibberish. It can give a certain meaning to one's individual life which is not describable in the Tractarian sense. According to later Wittgenstein, what it *means* for God to be, need not necessarily be determined exclusively by a Tractarian-Logical account of how language *ought to* work. In his later period, Wittgenstein says that if by "God" cannot be a *thing*, in the following sense:

God's essence is supposed to guarantee his existence — what this really means is that what is at issue here is not the existence of something [daß es sich um eine Existenz nicht handelt].

Couldn't one actually say equally well that the essence of colour guarantees its existence? As opposed, say, to white elephants. Because all that really means is: I cannot explain what 'colour' is, what the word 'colour' means, except with the help of a colour sample. So in this case there is

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<sup>13</sup> A recent example is Herman Philipse's *God in the Age of Science?* (Philipse 2012). See especially his characterization of the possibilities for a religious discourse ("The Decision Tree for the Faithful") as a quintessential example of what Wittgenstein, both early and later, criticized.

no such thing as explaining ‘what it would be like if colours were to exist’. And now we might say: There can be a description of what it would be like if there were gods on Olympus — but not: ‘what it would be like if there were such a thing as God’. And to say this is to determine the concept ‘God’ more precisely. (CV:82, 1949)

As Schonbaumsfeld mentions and Cottingham reiterates, there are different ways of understanding the German sentence (i.e. “daß es sich um eine Existenz nicht handelt”) in English. Winch has translated the German sentence as ‘what is at issue here is not the existence of something’ which is ambiguous between ‘daß es sich hier um keine Existenz handelt’(or‘daß es sich hier nicht um Existenz handelt’) and the original. But the phrase Wittgenstein actually uses implies that what he means is that what is at issue is not the existence of some entity (an existing thing — eine Existenz), and this gets lost partly in English translation which could also be read as saying that, what is at issue here is that something does not exist. (Schonbaumsfeld 2007: 163; Cottingham 2017: 646)

In the quoted section, Wittgenstein can be read in a way to be attacking a common assumption of the ontological arguments for God, e.g God’s essence guarantees his existence. (Cottingham 2007:11; Schonbaumsfeld 2009). According to such readings of later Wittgenstein, what is at stake when one discusses “God’s essence” is indeed *expressed* entirely (and should be searched for) in the grammar of the word “God,” the ways it is (or can be) used in different circumstances and language games. This idea, as I will explain it, is put forward in (*PI*: §§371-3) and in (*CV*: 82-7, 1949-50). In *PI* Wittgenstein says, as a characteristic of his later thinking, that “Essence is expressed in Grammar.” (*PI*: 371) Wittgenstein continues that Theology can be regarded as Grammar (*PI* 373), means that, in the very same sense that



Grammar can tell us what sort of object anything is, Theology as a grammatical investigation of the term “God” tells us what sort of object “God” is.

The relation among one’s formation of a religious faith, one’s upbringing, customs, practice and Form of life which altogether can describe Wittgenstein’s position on the topic. As Wittgenstein suggests, “perhaps one could ‘convince someone that God exists’ by means of a certain kind of upbringing, by shaping his life in such and such a way.” (CV 85,1950) According to Wittgenstein, it is a plausible option to think of one’s background and learning in the constitution of the concept of “God” in one’s life.

For some people, as Cottingham interprets Wittgenstein, it is the “lessons of life” that might (or might not) lead them to hold a religious faith, namely, to be passionately committed to a specific framework for interpreting the world. According to Cottingham, although religious expressions are, as Schroeder correctly points out, non-descriptive and non-cognitive (meaning that, religious statements do not describe any kind of reality, empirical or transcendent, and do not make any knowledge claims) ; but notwithstanding, the religious expressions have an expressive function, i.e. they express a passionate commitment to a specific point of view, i.e. a religious one. (Cottingham 2007).

As I will argue, following Cottingham, Wittgenstein’s position should not be identified with an “-ism” (e.g. “expressivism”) in philosophy of religion, if, for instance, by ‘expressivism’ one merely reduces the religious commitment to a blind obedience to the religious doctrines or a metaphorical-figurative expression of having an attitude to life. As Schroeder convincingly argues, in saying that religious belief can only be a “passionate commitment”, Wittgenstein is underlining the inescapability of a passionate, volitional element for seeing the world from a

religious point of view without saying that what is involved in the religious belief is merely a sort of unquestionable commitment (Schroeder 2007: 443). As Cottingham explains, in line with Schroeder, later Wittgenstein need not be saying that what is involved in the belief is merely the commitment – as if nothing else, no cognitive or doxastic elements, were entailed. (Cottingham 2007: 11) In many passages Wittgenstein himself makes it quite explicit that a religious belief is intertwined with a religious commitment: “hence although it is a [religious] belief, it is a way of living, or a way of judging life” (CV 73,1949)

## Chapter Two: God and Silence

### God in Wittgenstein's Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus

In what follows, I shall use the vocabulary of TLP in order to identify the location of God, if He has any, in the structure of TLP. I shall then, in the next chapter, emphasize the similarities and dissimilarities between the picture of God in early and later Wittgenstein by adopting the later Wittgenstein's vocabularies. Despite the fact that Wittgenstein wrote significantly scattered and vaguely on God (compared to Logic, Mathematics, Mind, etc.), as Cyrill Barrett (a former student of Wittgenstein) points out, seeing things from a religious perspective, as Wittgenstein himself once said to Drury was a character of Wittgenstein's thinking. (Barrett 1991: p, xiii) If there is any plausibility to this suggestion, then it is viable to evaluate the ethical-religious aspect of Wittgenstein's thought in each period.<sup>14</sup>

I shall argue that, although in his earlier period Wittgenstein thinks that all philosophizing about God and ethics is absurd effort for saying what cannot be said, Wittgenstein does not regard the ethical-religious expressions as plain nonsense. Indeed, as Wittgenstein says, such expressions are essentially inexpressible since they look like teacups that cannot contain more than a teacup full of water (*LE* 7). A promising point to see the relation between 'inexpressibility' (or saying nothing, or not being able to say anything), and God can be seen in a *Letter to Von Ficker* in 1919. In this letter, after underlining the equal importance of the

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<sup>14</sup> Peter Hacker, a leading scholar with insightful exegeses on Wittgenstein thought, thinks otherwise. In an exchange with Edward Kanterian, Hacker states that the ethical (and religious) themes were only minor periodical concerns to (only) the early young philosopher. Hacker goes on to say that Wittgenstein was not accurate in understanding himself in TLP; and to deem the ethical as the essence of the book is nonsense. (quoted from Conant 2005:41) It should be also mentioned that Barrett regards the ethical as *the* most important issue in Wittgenstein's entire career. This is up for debate, however, in contrast to what Hacker asserts, it seems also implausible to disregard the ethical-religious aspect altogether, either.

*philosophical* and the *literal (poetical)*<sup>15</sup> aspect of *TLP*, Wittgenstein emphatically ties the idea of “inexpressibility” to the essence of *TLP* (i.e. Ethics) in a specific sense:

I wanted to write that my work consists of two parts: of the one which is here, and of everything which I have *not* written. And precisely this second part is the important one. For the Ethical is delimited from within, as it were, by my book; and I’m convinced that, *strictly* speaking, it can *ONLY* be delimited in this way. In brief, I think: All of that which *many* are *babbling* today, I have defined in my book by remaining silent about it. Therefore the book will, unless I’m quite wrong, have much to say which you want to say to yourself, but perhaps you won’t notice that it is said in it. For the time being, I’d recommend that you read the *foreword* and the *conclusion* since these express the point most directly. (A letter to Von Ficker, quoted from Monk 1991:178)

The whole sense of *TLP*, based on Wittgenstein’s suggestion might be fairly summed up, as follows: “what can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence” can be taken as the foreword; and “what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence” can be taken as the conclusion. The echo of “silence” and the seeming disability to say anything meaningful about ethical, religious and aesthetic judgements are not necessarily because they are plain nonsense in the space of *TLP*. Rather, once the idea of linguistic ‘inexpressibility’ in *TLP* is seen as a, at least partly, ethical-religious element in the book, then ‘inexpressibility’ of the showables is paradoxically identical with “to say *Nothing*”, or as

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<sup>15</sup> “I believe I summed up where I stand in relation to philosophy when I said: really one should write philosophy only as one *writes a poem*. That, it seems to me, must reveal how far my thinking belongs to the present, the future, or the past. For I was acknowledging myself, with these words, to be someone who cannot quite do what he would like to be able to do.” (MS 146 25v: 1933-1934)

Augustine puts it passionately and paradoxically about God, “As far as sound is concerned, it is silent. But in strong affection it cries aloud.” (Confessions 10:2)<sup>16</sup>

In Wittgenstein’s preface to *TLP* the question concerning inexpressibles is noticeably manifested. He says that it is the language that can draw any limit at all for thought, that what can be said meaningfully is located inside the border drawn for thought by language. ~~On the contrary~~By contrast, what cannot be meaningfully said, according to Wittgenstein’s criterion of ~~meaningfulness~~meaningfulness, simply ~~are~~is not, so to ~~speak~~say, ‘thinkable’. Despite this, Wittgenstein goes on to say that “in order to be able to draw a limit to thought, which is indeed a limit to the expression of thought, we should have to find both sides of the limit thinkable (i.e. we should have to be able to think what cannot be thought).” (TLP, p.3) I shall develop this chapter more around one question arising from TLP’s preface. i.e., how something that cannot be expressed meaningfully can be thought? This question, I think, shows the relation between early Wittgenstein’s understanding of the *logic* of language on the one hand, and some ethical-religious concepts (such as God), on the other one.

According to Wittgenstein’s immediate response to the question “how can something that cannot be expressed meaningfully be thought?” he tries to limit thought by means of language from ‘within’, by showing what sort of expressions can possibly be said. Wittgenstein supposes this, and nothing else, can do the job of demarcating thinkables from unthinkables. Whatever resides ‘outside’ of Wittgenstein’s linguistic limit line is, as Hacker puts it, is plain

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<sup>16</sup> I will come back to inexpressibility in evaluating the later Wittgenstein’s criticisms of the early Wittgenstein.

nonsense (Hacker 2000).<sup>17</sup> Whatever resides inside the linguistic limit of TLP is a description (or misdescription) of the world.

As Zemach convincingly argues, if God has any significance in TLP, it should belong to the same non-homogenous category of ‘showables’ which neither belongs to the arid wasteland of nonsense nor to the meaningful region of empirical propositions. (Zemach 1967) Aesthetics, Ethics, and Logic, the representational for of a proposition, the Mystical, etc. are concepts in TLP that are associated with showables, i.e. things that cannot possibly be described by means of language in the Tractarian sense.

To give some examples, early Wittgenstein thought that logical propositions are vacuous tautologies that, rather than describing -facts of the world, define a framework for making the descriptions about the world intelligible (TLP 5.61; 6.124).<sup>18</sup> He thought that the representational function of language—the function which provides a one-to-one corresponds between the names and objects, as well as reflecting the relation among objects in the logical form—cannot meaningfully be thought since it is not a fact that can be said or described. Such a function rather shows itself. (TLP 4.12 & 4.121).

This is a good entry to see how Wittgenstein’s criterion for demarcating thought by focusing on the different kinds of expressions that can possibly be said (i.e. empirical propositions) opens a possibility for seeing God among the showables. My aim in the rest of this

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<sup>17</sup> He-Wittgenstein repeats this idea ~~mean~~while discussing the aim of philosophy and its relation to natural sciences, psychology, etc., in (TLP 4.114): It must set limits to what can be thought; and, in doing so, to what cannot be thought. It must set limits to what cannot be thought by working outwards through what can be thought.”

<sup>18</sup> Influenced by the works of Frege and Russell on Logic and Language, Wittgenstein took the logical constants not as representing any fact of the world. This idea is tied to Wittgenstein’s opinion about the logical propositions, as well. See especially 4.0312. For further reading on this very topic, see Schroeder 2006: 30-8; Hyman 2001: 1.

paper is to argue, first, ~~how~~that God is not among the ‘sayables’ in TLP. Regardless of God’s “existence,” ~~it~~He cannot *exist* in the world of facts since ~~it~~He is not a fact. My second aim is to argue that in TLP God is an inexpressible, not because of being the subject of mere nonsensical propositions, but because of being an inexpressible to early Wittgenstein.<sup>19</sup>

### God, logic, and language in TLP 3.031:

“God” is used in the text of TLP ~~for~~ four times, three of which I will discuss.<sup>20</sup> The first use occurs in (TLP 3.031) while Wittgenstein is trying to elucidate the logic-thought relationship started in (TLP 3). This relationship relies on two claims: first, thought is essentially logical (TLP 3); and second, “thought can never be of anything illogical, since, if it were, we should have to think illogically” (TLP 3.03). Misunderstanding these claims leads to ~~misunderstandings~~ about the relation between God, thought, and logic, which he intends to rectify. Wittgenstein says:

It used to be said that God could create anything except what would be contrary to the laws of logic.—The truth is that we could not *say* what an ‘illogical’ world would look like” (TLP 3.031)

This passage can be read in several ways. For instance,

Wittgenstein criticizes any sort of theological-metaphysical views that make claims about whether or not God could create an illogical world, since such a world is unthinkable. The

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<sup>19</sup> As I will argue later, in the second chapter of this thesis, one of the reasons that God does not seem a banal nonsense is that the relationship between ethics, as the essence of TLP and God are tied together. (see his letter to Ludwig Von Ficker quoted in Monk 1990:178). I shall expand this point by considering some conversations recorded by Rush Rhees in the next chapter.

<sup>20</sup> TLP 5.123 is dismissed here. Its absence does not damage my argument here.

problem with this way of putting forth the God-logic relation, according to Wittgenstein, is that the utterer tried fruitlessly to think about something that, *ex hypothesi*, could not be thought, i.e. an ‘illogical’ world. We simply cannot describe an illogical world since. If so, then the whole issue whether or not God can contradict the laws of logic is simply meaningless to early Wittgenstein.

### **God, Logical laws, and empirical law-propositions in TLP 6.372:**

Another appearance of “God” is in (TLP 6.372). In that part of the book, after maintaining the general form of a proposition in (TLP 6),<sup>21</sup> Wittgenstein claims that whatever ~~that~~ cannot be a subject of logical analysis, or as Wittgenstein puts it, whatever ~~that~~ cannot be a subjected to (logical) *laws*, is accidental (TLP 6.3). In this account, the so-called laws of induction, causality, sufficient reason, least action, continuum in nature, etc. are not, ~~strictly speaking,~~ logical laws (TLP 6.31- to 6.34); each of them, according to Wittgenstein, has the form of a logical law, meaning that, each of them looks like a logical law that sets ‘minimum principles’ for scientific/empirical conceptualization of the world (TLP 6.34).<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, they are *not* logical laws since they express something about the world. To Wittgenstein, what cannot be described by empirical conceptualization, i.e., what cannot be said, cannot happen in the world (TLP 6.362). However, the empirical propositions “try to make it look as if *everything* were explained” (TLP 6.37 to 6.372). For Wittgenstein, the inviolability of the so-called natural laws in the whole modern conceptualizing of the world is an ‘illusion’, the illusion of explaining everything (TLP 6.371). Wittgenstein asserts that the view of the ancient people is

<sup>21</sup>21 “The general form of a truth-function is  $[p^-, \zeta, N(\zeta)]$ . This is the general form of a proposition.” In his introduction to TLP, Russell explains that  $p^-$  stands for all atomic propositions,  $\zeta$  stands for any set of propositions, and  $N(\zeta)$  stands for the negation of all the propositions making up  $\zeta$  (TLP, xvi-xvii).

<sup>22</sup> See TLP 6.3431: “The laws of physics, with all their logical apparatus, still speak, however indirectly, about the objects of the world;” and (TLP 3.35): “Laws like the principle of sufficient reason, etc. are about the net and not about what the net describes.”



clearer in so far as they have a clear and acknowledged terminus; in comparison to inviolability of God and Fate in the past ages, the modern-scientific worldview tries to make it look as if *everything* were explained (TLP 6.372).

The important contrast between the modern-empirical investigation and contemplation about God in this passage can be summarized as follows: The logical laws are uninformative about the facts and the modern worldview (based on the empirical propositions) tries to make the illusion that it explains *everything* via scientific propositions seeming as firm as logical laws. Although the modern worldview and the ancient views about God and Fate are equally trying to explain *everything* in a sense but with at least one crucial difference. According to Wittgenstein, indeed the Ancients did not pretend to explain everything. They had “a clear and acknowledged terminus”, namely God and Fate, that was unexplainable. The Ancients could, for instance, say “it is God’s will that such and so happened” or “it is fate that such and such occurred” both could be a terminus to all explanations. This is while the Moderns think that with the laws of nature everything has been explained. Wittgenstein’s idiom is not evaluative in this remark. However, he is critical of the growing dominance of the scientific world-view and the illusion of explaining everything.

### **God, showables, and higher transcendental in TLP 6.432:**

The next occurrence of “God” in the text is in (TLP 6.432). However, we can have a better grip on this [fragment-section](#) if we see it in the chain of condensed fragments starting right after (TLP 6.372), throughout which Wittgenstein discusses many topics including will, value, the meaning of the world, Ethics, Aesthetics, death, eternal life, the riddle of life, and God. Following the TLP system of numbering, I shall restrict my assessment here to Fragments 6.43 (on Ethics, the exercise of good and evil will), and to 6.4 (on Value).

In (TLP 6.4) Wittgenstein contends that all propositions<sup>23</sup> are of equal value: they have no value at all since, they either can say something and describe natural phenomena (e.g. scientific propositions), or they cannot say anything at all. The first category is meaningful (true or false) propositions. The second category is logical propositions which say nothing at all. None of these categories can express values. (6.4) If a proposition can say something, it cannot possibly be about values. This is because if values exist in any sort of sense, they do not exist *in* the world (TLP 6.41; original italics). Therefore, they cannot be described or misdescribed in the Tractarian sense. On the other hand, the kind of expressions that try to say something that cannot be said (e.g. the ethical-religious expressions), despite being meaningless according to early Wittgenstein's picture-theory, can include "values." Wittgenstein does not say that values (or showables in general) either exist or do not exist. Both sorts of propositions are equally meaningless to early Wittgenstein, and thereby, they lack the kind of truth-value that empirical propositions can pose. He rather implies that, *even if* values "exist" in any sense, they cannot exist *in* the world of facts. (TLP 6.42).

Given the above analysis, we can see that God is associated with both 'the very existence of the world' and 'the mystical': "It is not *how* things are in the world that is mystical, but *that* it exists" (TLP 6.44).<sup>24</sup> Any attempt to frame a question concerning the very existence of the world, God, and 'the meaning of life' inevitably fails to make sense since "when the answer cannot be put into words, neither can the question be put into words. *The riddle* does not exist. If a question can be framed at all, it is also *possible* to answer it" (TLP 6.5). Unsurprisingly, the

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<sup>23</sup> Here in (TLP 6.4), the word "proposition" refers to the definition of proposition through Wittgensteinian purification of language. He defines a proposition in (TLP 6) as  $[p^-, \zeta, N(\zeta)]$ . This definition of proposition is at stake in (TLP 6.4).

<sup>24</sup> This part is advised to be read also with regard to Wittgenstein's Notebook. Many themes are similar in both texts. Especially see Wittgenstein's notes from 11.06.1916 to 8.07.1916.

*impossibility* of solving ‘the riddle of life’ is tantamount to the meaninglessness of the supposed riddle, as well.

### **God, the ladder of meaningfulness, and Silence in TLP:**

Despite being meaningless in the Tractarian space, a sentence containing ethical or religious words need not be plain nonsense. Although Wittgenstein contradicts his picture theory explicitly by expressing that he intended to *convey* something (or, *point to* something) about ‘showables’ by means of thrusting against paradox (i.e., saying something about unsayables), we can have a plausible interpretation of this statement if we consider ‘God’ as a member of the showables. The reading can go as follows in the space of TLP:

If God is not a thing (or a fact), then God cannot be ‘described’ in the same sense that one can describe a phenomenon *in* the world by means of empirical investigations or a priori reasoning. In TLP, a description stands for saying what is the case or not the case *in* the world. A description, which, by definition, is meaningful (with a Tractarian picture) can be either true or false. But if God cannot be meaningfully ‘described’ in the Tractarian sense, then the assertions including ‘God’—not as a name for an entity, but as a word associated with values and absolute judgements—are picture-less expressions that can neither be true nor false. The paradoxical situation of TLP, of which Wittgenstein is aware, is expressing what can be said in order to hint at what cannot be conveyed except by a ‘thrust’ against ‘the cage of language’. (Waismann 1965)

God, whatever He means to Wittgenstein, is simply not describable and verifiable in the space of TLP. Rather, as Philips puts it, God can be deemed among values that provide one with “the absolute’ judgement of values.” (Philips 2001:351-4) The meaning of the “absolute”

judgment in contrast to the “relative” ones, as Philips asserts, can be seen in Wittgenstein’s *Lecture on Ethics*, as follows:

Supposing that I could play tennis and one of you saw me playing and said, “Well, you play pretty badly” and suppose I answered “I know, I’m playing badly but I don’t want to play any better,” all the other could say would be “Ah, then that’s all right.” But suppose I had told one of you a preposterous lie and he came up to me and said “You’re behaving like a beast” and then I were to say “I know I behave badly, but then I don’t want to behave any better,” could he then say “Ah, then that’s all right?” Certainly not; he would say “Well, you ought to want to behave better.” Here you have an absolute judgment of value, whereas the first instance was one of a relative judgment. The essence of this difference seems to be obviously this: Every judgment of relative value is a mere statement of facts and can therefore be put in such a form that it loses all the appearance of a judgment of value: Instead of saying “This is the right way to Granchester,” I could equally well have said, “This is the right way you have to go if you want to get to Granchester in the shortest time”; “This man is a good runner” simply means that he runs a certain number of miles in a certain number of minutes, etc. Now what I wish to contend is that, although all judgments of relative value can be shown to be mere statements of facts, no statement of fact can ever be, or imply, a judgment of absolute value. (LE 5-6)<sup>25</sup>

Based on what I have said so far, focusing on God and ethics might be illuminating in understanding the transition from 6.5 to 7<sub>7</sub> as well. According to TLP 6.5 (i.e. “When the answer cannot be put into words, neither can the question be put into words. The riddle does not exist. If

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<sup>25</sup> For further reading on the ‘absolute judgement’, see (Rhees 1965) entitled “III Some Developments in Wittgenstein’s view of Ethics”.

a question can be framed at all, it is also possible to answer it.”), no meaningful expression, question, and answer can be maintained concerning the showables. Anyone ~~that~~who can transcend all Wittgenstein’s propositions, as he puts it, ‘can climb up beyond them’ and see the world aright. ‘Climbing up the ladder’ in this critical passage then can be an allusion to seeing the world aright, in its entirety. Wittgenstein describes such an experience , I think, also in (TLP 6.45), as follows: “To view the world *sub specie aeterni* is to view it as a whole—a limited whole. Feeling the world as a limited whole—it is this that is mystical.”

If God can have any intelligibility in TLP, its most noticeable echo should be heard-, after climbing up the ladder of Wittgenstein’s criterion of meaningfulness, in the “silence” of the last line of the book. As we have seen earlier, according to early Wittgenstein there is something essential about ethics for him that he described, as follows: “I see now that these nonsensical expressions were not nonsensical because I had not yet found the correct expressions, but that their nonsensicality was their very essence. For all I wanted to do with them was just to go beyond the world and that is to say beyond significant language. My whole tendency and I believe the tendency of all men who ever tried to write or talk Ethics or Religion was to run against the boundaries of language.” (LE 11-2) If I am not mistaken, then the last sentence of the TLP can be read in a way to convey something about God in early Wittgenstein’s point of view: “What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.”

## God and Later Wittgenstein: Introduction

Ethics and Religion, whatever they mean for Wittgenstein, play a significant role not only in his early but also in his later works. Norman Malcolm reports in his last book, *Wittgenstein: A Religious Point of View?*, that when Wittgenstein was working on the later part of *PI*, he said to his former student and close friend M. O'C. Drury: "My type of thinking is not wanted in this present age; I have to swim so strongly against the tide." In the same conversation, Malcolm continues, Wittgenstein said: "I am not a religious man but I cannot help seeing every problem from a religious point of view." (Malcolm 1993:1) Malcolm himself thinks that Drury's recollections, alongside Wittgenstein's orientation towards arts and literature, provide plausible material for considering the religious aspect of later Wittgenstein's philosophy more seriously. (Malcolm 1981)<sup>26</sup> Be Malcolm's speculations accurate or not, there are reasons for evaluating the impact of Wittgenstein's later understanding of language on his understanding of ethical-religious expressions. First, two sections in *PI* (*PI* 371,373) suggests to look for the "essence" in grammar, and more specifically, to look for the essence of God in the grammar and everyday use of the term "God" in different language-games. To see Theology as Grammar, as I understand later Wittgenstein and according to Hacker's note on *PI* §371 (*PI*, p. 256), is tantamount to saying that the grammar of the word 'God' describes what God means.

The second textual reason for assessing later Wittgenstein impact on the religious discourse is, Wittgenstein dedicates one fragment of his *PPT*, the later part of *PI*, to the grammar of "belief", and "believing in" in his philosophical considerations on *psychology*. As I will argue, his scattered remarks on religion, when seen in the light of his revision of the philosophical

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<sup>26</sup> I will briefly summarize and evaluate Malcolm's position (i.e. his famous 'Four Analogy') in the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter. Although, as I will argue, Malcolm's analogies are not accurate, Malcolm's hypothesis concerning the importance of Wittgenstein's religious point of view is still, I think, correct.

understanding of the way(s) language works, can give a plausible description of Wittgenstein's position concerning ethics, religion, and God.

In his *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology, and Religious Belief*, (henceforth *LC*) Wittgenstein discusses two ideas that he kept concerning religious beliefs. A religious belief is neither consistent nor inconsistent with empirical reasoning. In a sense, there is a gulf between these two views. Wittgenstein goes, as follows:

If some said: "Wittgenstein, do you believe in this [the Last Judgement, and Resurrection]?" I'd say: "No." "Do you contradict the man [who believes them]?" I'd say: "No."

If you say this, the contradiction already lies in this.

Would you say: "I believe the opposite", or "There is no reason to suppose such a thing"?

I'd say neither. (LC 53)

What is at stake in the conversation is that, according to Wittgenstein, if one cannot for whatever reason believe in a religious belief (e.g. a belief in the Last Judgement or Resurrection,) then it does not amount to saying that one is holding a belief opposing the religious beliefs at question, either. According to Schonbaumsfeld, Wittgenstein here attacks a dichotomy (i.e. "either/or"), according to which, one *either* holds the same belief *or* does not hold it.

(Schonbaumsfeld 2007: 34) Wittgenstein continues, as follows:

Suppose someone were a believer and said: "I believe in a Last Judgement," and I said : "Well, I'm not so sure. Possibly." You would say that there is an enormous gulf between us. If he said "There is a German aeroplane overhead," and I said "Possibly I'm not so sure," you'd say we were fairly near.

It isn't a question of my being anywhere near him, but on an entirely different plane, which you could express by saying:

"You mean something altogether different, Wittgenstein."

The difference might not show up at all in any explanation of the meaning. (LC 53)

The point of Wittgenstein's emphasis is not on holding (or withholding) a religious belief. He rather underlines the fact that, regardless of believing or disbelieving in the Last Judgement or Resurrection, one can *understand* the use of such expressions in different language-games. Noticing the role of language-games and diverse uses of the religious expression is the theme of the next lecture (Lecture II) in Which Wittgenstein describes the role of learning and descriptions in the constitution of the concept "God". It should be mentioned here that Wittgenstein's main points in the second lecture of LC largely endorsed by Wittgenstein, as we will see, in a discussion between Wittgenstein and Rush Rhees in 1944-5, as well. In the second Lecture Wittgenstein goes, as follows:

The word 'God' is amongst the earliest learnt-pictures and catechisms, etc. But not the same consequences as with pictures of aunts. I wasn't shown [that which the picture pictured].

The word is used like a word representing a person. God sees, rewards, etc. (LC 59)

Based on later Wittgenstein's idea of *family resemblance*, we shall say, the term God need not be *defined* in order to be meaningful. Rather, the everyday uses of such a term in different language-games determine a mesh of similarities and dissimilarities that need not necessarily share one particular feature. If so, then we can read the elaboration of lecture II in the third discussion with Rhees more plausibly. Wittgenstein goes, as follows:



Misunderstandings in Theology. Discussing what properties God has, We may discuss the properties of an oak desk. That when it is long in a damp room the drawers don't open easily. We may investigate to see whether it has that property or not, etc. Here there is no doubt of what we are talking about.

We have all learned to talk about God in definite ways - we have learned a particular use of the word 'God'. That he walked in the Garden, that he is a person, that he is in Heaven, and so on. As children we learn a particular – primitive – theology.

If we were to ask: how do we know that we are talking about the same thing, how do we know that we mean the same thing by 'God' – the criteria would lie in this use of the word you have learned.

If we learn, or are given, a different theology - this might of course be put by saying that we now have different views regarding God's properties. And so it might be suggested that we were wrong before. But might it not also be said that we learn to use the word 'God' in a different way? What is the criterion for saying that we are now talking about the same thing? It is not like the case where we are talking about this book or about this desk and can explain what we are talking about - explain that it is the same thing-by pointing to it.

Similarly with the case where we take two different tribes: Suppose we say "They believe that God has different properties than we say he has. Maybe they say that he is a person or that he is not a person. (Rhees 2001: 412)

Wittgenstein's point is not complex. The diversity of descriptions of God across culture and traditions seem to be a point in favor of Wittgenstein's remark. The anthropomorphic interpretation of God (and descriptions like "God the Father") and even using the masculine

capital pronoun “He”, are both parts and parcel of how some people learned “God” in some parts of the world. However, it is very hard to ascribe the picture of “God the Father” to non-Abrahamic religions, or, to refer to God by the equivalent of the gendered-pronoun “He” in the languages which lack gendered pronouns yet personify God (e.g. Persian)

Later Wittgenstein approaches the topic of religious belief from another perspective, as well. In (*PPF* X: §§91-2) Wittgenstein maintains two grammatical remarks about “believing”, as follows:

91. One can mistrust one’s own senses, but not one’s own belief.

92. If there were a verb meaning ‘to believe falsely’, it would not have a meaningful first person present indicative.

93. Don’t regard it as a matter of course, but as a most remarkable thing, that the verbs “believe”, “wish”, “want” display all the grammatical forms possessed by “cut”, “chew”, “run”.

As far as I can understand Wittgenstein, he maintains that, despite similarities, the expression “I believe” is different than “he believes” in the sense that, a sentence like “I believe falsely...” when reported *truthfully* cannot make sense. However it can be said “he believes falsely...”. This difference that Wittgenstein describes however, as Wittgenstein continues in (*PPF* 93), does not result in demarcating verbs. Although Wittgenstein’s discussion does not concern religious belief as such, when they are read next to some of his remarks about the religious beliefs, they might characterize Wittgenstein’s position more clearly.

While discussing the game of philosophical proof giving for (or against) the existence of God, Wittgenstein says:

A proof of God ought really to be something by means of which you can convince yourself of God's existence. But I think that believers who offered such proofs wanted to analyze and make a case for their "belief" with their intellect, although they themselves would never have arrived at belief by way of such proofs. Perhaps one could 'convince someone that God exists' by means of a certain kind of upbringing, by shaping his life in such and such a way (CV: 85,1950)

In this remark Wittgenstein suggests that perhaps a philosopher's proof for (or against) God is an effort to find an intellectual basis for what the philosopher has already believed (or disbelieved) in through the philosopher's upbringing. In other words, and based on what I said about (*PPF* X: §§91-3), the sort of intellectual certainty looked for in a proof for (or against) the existence of God cannot be obtained by separating the so-called "propositional content" of a belief asserted by "I believe such and such" from its first person present indicative. John Cottingham explains this matter differently, in the following way: analytic philosophers are often prone to use the "fruit-juicer" method when approaching modes of thought of which they are sceptical: they require the clear liquid of a few propositions to be extracted for examination in isolation from what they take to be the irrelevant pulpy mush of context. Yet to demand an answer to the Yes/No question: "Do you or do you not believe that P?", where P stands for a statement or series of statements in one of the Creeds, or some other doctrinal summary, often tells us surprisingly little about how a religious worldview informs someone's outlook. A juice extractor does not, as might at first be supposed, give us the true essence of a fruit; what it often delivers is a not very palatable drink plus a pulpy mess. Someone who has only tasted strawberries via the output of a juicer, and has firmly decided "this is not for me", may turn out

to have a radically impoverished grasp of what it is about the fruit that makes the strawberry lover so enthusiastic. (Cottingham 2007:5)<sup>27</sup>

Wittgenstein develops his ideas about the religious belief by saying that a religious believer can be said to be committed passionately to a framework for interpreting the world. Such a frame work, or as Wittgenstein puts it, “system of coordinates,” is as much an aspect of Form of life that cognitive reasoning is. Wittgenstein says:

It appears to me as though a religious belief could only be (something like) passionately committing oneself to a system of coordinates. Hence although it's belief, it is really a way of living, or a way of judging life. Passionately taking up this interpretation. And so instructing in a religious belief would have to be portraying, describing that system of reference & at the same time appealing to the conscience. And these together would have to result finally in the one under instruction himself, of his own accord, passionately taking up that system of reference. (CV 64, 1947)<sup>28</sup>

What this means, as John Hyman's correctly asserts, is that a religious person makes a passionate commitment to the use of certain concepts in a specific framework. And just as, for example, the metric system cannot be verified, neither can a system or framework of religious concepts. (Hyman 2001:6) However, the rest of Hyman's characterization of this system does not quite fit what Wittgenstein actually says. As Schroeder asserts, in saying that religious belief can only be “a passionate commitment”, Wittgenstein may simply be underlining the *inescapability* of a passionate, volitional element for having a religious point of view; but, as Schroeder continues, Wittgenstein need not be saying that what is involved in the belief is

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<sup>27</sup> For further reading, see Cottinghams *The Spiritual Dimension*.

<sup>28</sup> MS 136 16b: 21.12.1947

merely the commitment – as if nothing else, no cognitive or doxastic elements, were entailed. (Schroeder 2007) Wittgenstein himself makes it almost explicit about the religious belief that, “although it is belief, it is a way of living, or a way of judging life.”

As Cottingham argues, the system of coordinates described above looks like a metric system that, although is not itself a set of truth-claims, committing to it assumes some beliefs (e.g. belief in God) as a true statement. Understanding such a kind of “truth” is not possible by means of scientific and technological vocabularies. Its manifestation is in practice and in terms of moral and spiritual terms. (Cottingham 2017:646-7)

“The religious attitude at stake is an aspect of Form of life. Wittgenstein puts this idea, as follows:

"Convincing someone of God's existence" is something you might do by means of a certain upbringing, shaping his life in such and such a way.

Life can educate you to "believing in God". And experiences too are what do this but not visions, or other sense experiences, which show us the "existence of this being", but e.g. sufferings of various sorts. And they do not show us God as a sense experience does an object, nor do they give rise to conjectures about him. Experiences, thoughts,--life can force this concept on us. (CV: 85,1950)

Here Wittgenstein touches upon the role of one’s background and form of life in the formation of an attitude towards life, i.e. a religious attitude. To Wittgenstein, it seems that a religious attitude is associated with experiencing “suffering of various sorts”. Such an experience is not a sense experience if “sense experience” is exclusive to perceiving an object. Nor is it a sort of divine-faculty that receives suffering-data from somewhere in the world. Rather,

Wittgenstein's position can be more palpable if we notice that the verb "seeing" has several uses. In some cases it stands for seeing objects, while in some other cases it stands for seeing the (descriptive) likeness among the objects. A good example is the famous duck-rabbit image, which, is to show how 'noticing an aspect' in seeing an object (e.g. seeing as duck, seeing as rabbit) need not refer to anything called "a feature of the object." The "object", Wittgenstein maintains, is the same in seeing the duck-rabbit image as duck and as rabbit. However, the same object can be seen differently (Jakstas 2015:1-3). According to later Wittgenstein, the fact that the same object can be seen differently, i.e. with different likenesses, should be analyzed by paying attention to the conceptual relation between "seeing" and emotions, moods, certain circumstances, culture, certain world-view, and eventually form of life. Form of life can be seen as the bedrock of all explanations and, in an important sense, the religious attitude to the world is as much an aspect of the Form of life as the scientific and philosophical ones are. There need not be any evaluative priority as far as their origin is concerned.

## **“God” and its expression in Later Wittgenstein**

It is true that in *PI* the frequency of religious terms is not comparable to the frequency of philosophical terms associated with philosophy of language, logic, mathematics, mind, etc. and it is also accurate to say that for most of the examples in *PI*, it is hard to say what seeing them from a religious context would amount to. However, there are two sections in *PI* that suggest considering the impact of Wittgenstein’s revision of his early account of language on his understanding of ethics, religion, and God.

To interpret “God” as a thing in a philosophical argument, is an activity to determine the meaning of God for a specific purpose., i.e. to be able to define God by specifying the necessary and sufficient conditions for its existence or inexistence. I read later Wittgenstein as saying that the purpose of defining God as a thing in the philosophical context is based on the illusion of grasping the incomparable essence of language by means of definition. Based on later Wittgenstein’s family resemblance, we shall say that the term God need not be defined in order to be meaningful. Rather, the everyday use of such a term in different language-games determine a mesh of similarities and dissimilarities that need not necessarily share one particular feature. The philosophical urge to define concepts (and in this case, “God”), is in tension once we notice the grammar of the word “God”—when Theology is seen as Grammar (*PI* §373).

Later Wittgenstein’s position on “God” can be seen in contrast with his early thoughts, as follows: although both might accept that God does not refer to any phenomenon in the world, early Wittgenstein take it as an unsayable but not gibberish part of language. Early Wittgenstein’s position, as Cyrill Barrett discusses in his *Wittgenstein on Ethics and Religious Belief*, is closer to the Augustinian picture of the relationship between God and His inexpressibility in language according to which language cannot, as it were, bear the meaning

and value of what they try to hint at. However, later Wittgenstein criticizes his early understanding of language, and thereby, his understanding of the expression of religiosity. Wittgenstein's break with the idea of "inexpressible" in language through expanding the scope of "description", led him to pointing to the role of description in learning how to use religious-ethical vocabularies (in this case "God") in different language-games. To call the result of Wittgenstein's analysis "Wittgensteinian Fideism" can be, in one sense, a good description, and in another sense, a misnomer. The following remark of Wittgenstein is what suggests the label "fideism":

Amongst other things Christianity says, I believe, that sound doctrines are all useless.

That you have to change your life. (Or the direction of your life.)

That all wisdom is cold; & that you can no more use it for setting your life to rights, than you can forge iron when it is cold.

For a sound doctrine need not seize you; you can follow it, like a doctor's prescription.--

But here you have to be seized & turned around by something.--(I.e.this is how I understand it.) Once turned round, you must stay turned round.

Wisdom is passionless. By contrast Kierkegaard calls faith a passion.

Religion is as it were the calm sea bottom at its deepest, remaining calm, however high the waves rise on the surface.

"I never before believed in God"--that I understand. But not: "I never before really believed in Him." (CV:53, 1946)

As Cottingham correctly puts it in his benign fideist interpretation of Wittgenstein, the Latin word *fide* (faith), like its Greek equivalent *pistis*, imply a stronger volitional component



than simple assent – some further element of trust and commitment. (Cottingham 2009: 644)

However, as Cottingham continues, it is incorrect to read Wittgenstein in a radically fideist sense, meaning that, to understand later Wittgenstein as prioritizing fide over wisdom. The lack of an “intellectual” foundation for a religious belief in God in the described situation need not be taken as a devastating problem in the discussion about God once we notice the role of one’s upbringing and Form of life both, in the constitution of the concept of God, and, in adopting a religious framework of interpreting the world. What later Wittgenstein shares with Fideists (e.g. Kierkegaard) is that it is “ludicrous” to attempt to shore up the reasonableness of religious belief in the light of dispassionate scrutiny of the “evidence” in the empirical sense of the word.(LC 58)

In characterizing Wittgenstein’s position, I shall start with one of his break with the understanding of language he posed in TLP. Abandoning a basic pillar of TLP Picture-theory according to which language functions in one way provided the later Wittgenstein with the possibility of expanding his earlier understanding of “description” which, in TLP, was considered to be exclusive to scientific propositions. While giving some examples of the diversity and unsystematizability of “description(s)” and the “grammar(s)” of language, Wittgenstein presents an analogy to clarify himself:

Think of the tools in a toolbox: there is a hammer, pliers, a saw, a screwdriver, a rule, a glue-pot, glue, nails and screws. The functions of words are as diverse as the functions of these objects. (And in both cases there are similarities.) (PI §11)

As Glock puts it, this toolbox is like a language, the grammar of which is, “the overall system of grammatical rules, of the constitutive rules which define that language by determining what it makes sense to say in it” (Glock 1996:151). The linguistic rules are provided by describing, not explaining, the use of signs (PI §496) as well as following the rules in practice.

Indeed, in a sense, it might not be accurate to put ‘description’ and ‘practice’ separately in so far as grammar is concerned, since “*practice*”, as Wittgenstein says, “gives the words their sense.” (CV:85,1950)

In brief, one can say, according to the later Wittgenstein, language and “Grammar tells what kind of object anything is.” (PI §373) If so, then it seems plausible to follow Wittgenstein’s suggestion in the remainder of this section and consider “Theology as grammar”.<sup>29</sup> Based on this suggestive analogy, I shall argue for four similarities between Grammar and theology, as follows: if Grammar resembles a set of coordinates and standards for interpretation, then holding a belief in God looks like a commitment to a system of coordinates for a believer. The Grammatical rules are standards, “norms” so to speak, that despite being neither true nor false, govern the correct use of the words. Religious beliefs might also resemble some pictures that are *neither* true nor false; they do not either *justify* or *explain* anything. A religious belief, rather, looks like a picture that only serves to *describe* what we are to do by saying: *Do this! Think like that!* (CV:29, 1937) In the same sense that a grammatical investigation (conceptual investigation) is not a scientific one and should not be evaluated by means of scientific apparatus, a religious point of view should not be evaluated merely by means of cognition.

### **Faith and scientific evidence**

Scientific evidence can be in contrast with religious faith only when the latter is taken superstitiously, meaning that, only when the religious belief is taken as a sort of false science due to *fear*. (CV 89:1948)<sup>30</sup> As Cottingham puts it:

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<sup>29</sup> ‘Theology as grammar’: an allusion to a remark Wittgenstein attributed to Luther, who, he says, wrote somewhere that theology is the grammar of the word ‘God’. (Hacker and Schulte’s notes on PI: P.256)

<sup>30</sup> MS 137 48b: 4.6.1948

Certainly Wittgenstein dismissed the idea that something like the Resurrection could be established or refuted by appeal to a historical basis in the sense that the ordinary belief in historical facts could serve as a foundation (LC 57) I [i.e. Cottingham] take Wittgenstein's underlying point here to be the crucially important one that the role of evidence in religious commitment is entirely different from that which it occupies on the Humean' model – a dispassionate scrutiny of empirical probabilities based on past instances. (Cottingham 2007:15; 2009:647)

According to Wittgenstein a religious person is *committed passionately* to a system of coordinates. It is therefore not implausible to hold that such a system might make a passionate believer *interpret* what a scientist calls 'evidence' as non-evidence; or to put it more precisely, it is not implausible to think that due to the intervention of faith a religious believer might not *see* the 'scientific evidence' as a factual truth. This idea does not amount to saying that a religious person is entirely blind to the scientific 'facts'; Neither does it result in saying that a religious person is superior to the scientists. Wittgenstein's idiom is not evaluative in the mentioned occasions. However, he questions the *primacy* of the scientific interpretation of the world in Modern Times, sometimes known as the scientism.<sup>31</sup>

### **Faith and “Historical” truths**

In a similar way, Wittgenstein discusses the relation between faith and “historical truth”:

Christianity is not based on a historical truth, but presents us with a (historical) narrative and says: now believe! But not believe this report with the belief that is appropriate to a

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<sup>31</sup> For a further reading of the epistemic aspect of Wittgenstein's position, see Glock's “Relativism, Commensurability and Translatability” (Glock 2008)

historical report,--but rather: believe, through thick and thin, and you can do this only as the outcome of a life. *Here you have a message!--don't treat it as you would another historical message! Make a quite different place for it in your life.*--There is no *paradox* about that! (CV:32, 1931)<sup>32</sup>

If I am not mistaken, Wittgenstein again criticizes submitting to historicism, i.e. an interpretation of history which reduces all historical events to one or a few elements that determine the whole course of history, without immunizing religious faith from the *historical* criticism. For instance, Wittgenstein says that if the Last Judgement is taken as an historical event in the same sense that, say, World War I is, then the whole picture of the Last Judgement might become unacceptable to believe, at least, to some people including Wittgenstein himself (LC:53). However, as Wittgenstein continues, there can be instances when one has faith—when one says “I believe” — but might do so not entirely based on what one regularly bases one everyday beliefs on (e.g. “I believe that World War I happened”) (LC:54). In other words, Wittgenstein clarifies that, in a sense, a scientist, a historian and a religious person are each adherent to a different system of coordinates. However, there is no “ultimate” (whatever it means) reason or justification for an evaluative hierarchy in such systems and adhering to them. As Wittgenstein puts it, “justification by experience comes to an end. If it did not, it would not be justification.” (PI, §485) If so, then the experiential justification cannot be a reason for supporting the primacy of, say, empirical—a priori investigations over a religious point of view.

Wittgenstein reiterates a similar idea in *On Certainty* (OC) thusly: “The difficulty is to realize the groundlessness of our believing.” (OC§166) Although Wittgenstein is explicit in

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<sup>32</sup> “Can I say that drama has its own time which is not a segment of historical time. I.e. I can speak of earlier and later within it but there is no sense to the question whether the events in it took place, say, before or after Caesar's death.” (MS 110 67:12.2.1931)

saying that religious beliefs, when taken as a ‘historical truth’ in the same sense that one takes “World War I”, might seem ridiculously false to a historian (and even probably to Wittgenstein himself), but he is also critical of reading the religious narratives (e.g. the story of the Resurrection) from a *merely* historicist (or an empirical) view-point:

What inclines even me to believe in Christ's Resurrection? I play as it were with the thought.--If he did not rise from the dead, then he decomposed in the grave like every human being. He is *dead and decomposed*. In that case he is a teacher, like any other and can no longer *help*; and we are once more orphaned and alone. And have to make do with wisdom and speculation. It is as though we are in a hell, where we can do nothing but dream and are shut out from heaven, roofed in as it were. But if I am to be REALLY redeemed,--I need *certainty*--not wisdom, dreams, speculation--and this certainty is faith. And faith is faith in what my *heart*, my *soul*, needs, not my speculative intellect. For my soul, with its passions, as it were with its flesh & blood, must be redeemed, not my abstract mind.

Perhaps one may say: Only *love* can believe the Resurrection. Or: it is *love* that believes the Resurrection. (CV:34, 1937)

Ultimately it seems that the bedrock for all understandings is, in one sense or another, rooted in custom, practice, tradition, and upbringing. This bedrock is shared among all sorts of certainties, empirical certainty, logical certainty, certainty in *heart* and *soul*, etc. Wittgenstein says:

“In my heart I’ve decided it.” And one is even inclined to point to one’s breast as one says it. Psychologically, this way of speaking should be taken seriously. Why should it be taken less seriously than the statement that faith is a state of the soul? (Luther: “Faith is

under the left nipple.”)

Someone might learn to understand the meaning of the expression “seriously meaning what one says” by a gesture of pointing at the heart. But now one must ask: “What shows that he has learnt it?” (*PI*, §§589-90)

Although, as said earlier, *PI* does not include open discussion of religion, some of its examples are worth considering from a religious perspective. In the quoted sections, Wittgenstein implies two crucial aspects of the use of “Glauben” in the religious contexts. First, the expressions of some belief need a *psychological* attention, which is philosophically worthwhile to investigate. Second, in the philosophical analysis of such expressions Wittgenstein suggests to notice the criterion of *learning* in the use of “Glauben”. Both aspects, the relation between learning and the expression of a belief, were also discussed briefly at the beginning of Wittgenstein’s third discussion with Rhees. What is at stake there for Wittgenstein is to remind us that, first, God is a (vague) concept learnt by description which depicts a mesh of conceptual similarities and dissimilarities. Second, people use the reporting verbs (e.g. see) concerning God *not* in the exact way that they might use such verbs in other occasions. Wittgenstein explains the latter in *LC*, as follows:

"Being shown all these things, did you understand what this word meant?" I'd [Wittgenstein] say: "Yes and no. I did learn what it didn't mean. I made myself understand. I could answer questions, understand questions when they were put in different ways--and in that sense could be said to understand."

If the question arises as to the existence of a god or God, it plays an entirely different role to that of the existence of any person or object I ever heard of. (*LC*, 59)

The analogy that Wittgenstein presents between the use of “existence” for God and the use of “existence” for human beings can shed light on his position by being juxtaposed to Rhees’ recorded conversation from Wittgenstein in 1944-5. Although the LC remarks were composed in late 1930s, they can be defended as part of later Wittgenstein’s position concerning God, especially if we notice what Wittgenstein calls a misunderstanding in Theology (i.e. misunderstanding in the use of the term “God”). The conversation between Rhees and Wittgenstein goes as follows:

Misunderstandings in Theology. Discussing what properties God has, We may discuss the properties of an oak desk. That when it is long in a damp room the drawers don't open easily. We may investigate to see whether it has that property or not, etc. Here there is no doubt of what we are talking about.

We have all learned to talk about God in definite ways - we have learned a particular use of the word 'God'. That he walked in the Garden, that he is a person, that he is in Heaven, and so on. As children we learn a particular – primitive – theology.

If we were to ask: how do we know that we are talking about the same thing, how do we know that we mean the same thing by 'God' – the criteria would lie in this use of the word you have learned.

If we learn, or are given, a different theology - this might of course be put by saying that we now have different views regarding God's properties. And so it might be suggested that we were wrong before. But might it not also be said that we learn to use the word 'God' in a different way? What is the criterion for saying that we are now talking about the same thing? It is not like the case where we are talking about this book or about this desk and can explain what we are talking about - explain that it is the same thing-by

pointing to it.

Similarly with the case where we take two different tribes: Suppose we say "They believe that God has different properties than we say he has. Maybe they say that he is a person or that he is not a person. (Rhees 2001: 412)

It is hard to do justice to all the issues at play in this remark about the descriptive use of "God" in ordinary language and the ways language might go to holiday give rise to the *philosophical* problems. As Wittgenstein maintains, "the problems are solved, not by coming up with new discoveries, but by assembling what we have long been familiar with. Philosophy is a struggle against the bewitchment of our understanding by the resources of our language." (PI 109) In this very same sense, what Wittgenstein calls a misunderstanding in theology, is nothing but ignoring the grammar of the word "God" in everyday language. It is, for instance, due to learning such a concept ("God") in different circumstances that one can say "Wherever you are, God always sees what you do." In such a sentence, the verb "seeing" is used *as if* it describes a semi-human being, say a Father. But, despite all similarities, the verb "see" is not used for God *exactly* in the same sense that it is used to describe a human being. (Ibid:414) Wittgenstein summarizes his conceptual remark about the language of Theology, as follows: "the grammar of our language about God has holes in it IF YOU LOOK AT IT AS BEING THE GRAMMAR OF STATEMENTS ABOUT A HUMAN BEING." (Ibid: 414)

This remark brings us back to a central idea in Wittgenstein concerning God, that He is not an entity or a super-entity. Rather, describing God *as* a human being like "the Father" and even using the masculine capital pronoun "He", were both parts and parcel of how some people learned "God" in some languages and regions. It is very hard to ascribe the picture of "God the Father" to non-Abrahamic religions, or, to refer to God by the equivalent of the gendered-



pronoun “He” in the languages which refer to God by gendered-neutral- yet-personified pronouns (e.g. Persian).<sup>33</sup> However, lack of any of the described “properties” enumerated above for God does not necessarily result in the futility of using “God” in language.

A belief in God, from a religious point of view, can more resemble a *stance* (an *attitude*) towards all (causal) explanations about the world. Such a *stance* cannot be exhausted by a (or, a set of,) propositional justified belief:

If the believer in God looks around and asks "Where does everything I see come from?" "Where does all that come from?", what he hankers after is *not* a (causal) explanation; and the point of his question is that it is the expression of this hankering. He is expressing, then, a stance towards all explanations.--But how is this manifested in his life? It is the attitude of taking a certain matter seriously, but then at *a certain point* not taking it seriously after all, and declaring that something else is still more serious.

Someone may for instance say that it is a very grave matter that such and such a person has died before he could complete a certain piece of work; in another sense that is not what matters. At this point one uses the words "in a deeper sense".

Really what I should like to say is that here too what is important is not the *words* you use or what you think while saying them, so much as the difference that they make at different points in your life. How do I know that two people mean the same thing when each says he believes in God? And just the same thing goes for the Trinity. Theology that insists on *certain* words and phrases and prohibits others makes nothing clearer. (Karl Barth)

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<sup>33</sup> It is not surprising if one adds that the conceptions of God in, say east-Asian languages, might not even be associated with personification when referred to.

It gesticulates with words, as it were, because it wants to say something and does not know how to express it. *Practice* gives the words their sense. (CV:85, 1950)

Noticing the relation between what Wittgenstein regards as “word” and what he deems as “practice” in the quoted section can be helpful. According to Wittgenstein, if “word” exclusively stands for a propositional expression of a religious faith (e.g., a religious doctrine, a religious dogma), then a Wittgensteinian understanding of a religious attitude should be identified not by words, but by (and in) *practice*. Wittgenstein asserts that “an ‘inner process’ stands in need of an outward criteria” (PI, 580), and *even if* there is any ‘inner-ness’ or spirituality to the religious faith, then it should be identified through the *outward criteria* of one’s faith, i.e. one’s *practice*. The intertwinedness of practice and word, in later Wittgenstein’s position concerning faith is convincingly discussed by Cottingham, according to whom, later Wittgenstein’s understanding of religious faith is not merely a propositional attitude alongside other (epistemic) beliefs. Rather, as Cottingham continues, religious faith resembles a *stance*, a regulating attitude to life that can have meaning only in *practice*.

Unlike the cognitivist approaches to religion which are after an intellectual (epistemic/empirical) foundation for (or against) the religious faith, as Cottingham argues, what is at stake for later Wittgenstein is to remind us of the fact that a religious faith need *not* be founded on such a picture of intellectuality. Wittgenstein describes this idea, rather romantically-passionately in 1937, as follows:

But if I am to be REALLY redeemed,--I need certainty--not wisdom, dreams, speculation--and this *certainty* is faith. And faith is faith in what my *heart*, my *soul*, needs, not my speculative intellect. For my soul, with its passions, as it were with its flesh

and blood, must be redeemed, not my abstract mind. Perhaps one may say: Only *love* can believe the Resurrection. Or: it is *love* that believes the Resurrection. (CV:33, 1937)

This remark puts an emphasis on a family of religious concepts that cannot easily be regarded exclusively among the empirical-epistemic vocabularies: soul, heart, need, flesh and bone, redemption, and love. Except for the epistemic interpretation of “certainty”, the rest of the mentioned concepts, despite being used in ordinary language and different religious language-games, can hardly have any plausible place in the mainstream of Analytic philosophy of religion. However, according to Wittgenstein, it seems that the mentioned concepts (e.g. certainty, soul, heart, need, flesh and bone, redemption, and love) are in contrast with the intellectual need of an “abstract mind” for substantiating what s/he might have already decided to believe (or disbelieve) about God. While keeping this central themes untouched, Wittgenstein revises his articulation in 1944, as follows:

A cry of distress cannot be greater than that of one human being. Or again no distress can be greater than what a single person can suffer.

Hence one human being can be in infinite distress and so need infinite help.

The Christian religion is only for the one who needs infinite help, that is only for the one who suffers infinite distress.

The whole Earth cannot be in greater distress than *one* [or, one *single*,] soul.

Christian faith--so I believe--is refuge in this *ultimate* distress.

Someone to whom it is given in such distress to open his heart instead of contracting it, absorbs the remedy into his heart.

Someone who in this way opens his heart to God in remorseful confession opens it for others too. He thereby loses his dignity as someone special and so becomes like a child.

That means without office, dignity or aloofness from others. You can open yourself to others only out of a particular kind of love. Which acknowledges as it were that we are all wicked children.

It might also be said: hate between human beings comes from our cutting ourselves off from each other. Because we don't want anyone else to see inside us, since it's not a pretty sight in there. Of course you must continue to feel ashamed of what's within you, but not ashamed of yourself before your fellow human beings.

There is no greater distress to be felt than that of One human being. For if someone feels himself lost, that is the ultimate distress. (CV:46, 1944)<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> MS 128 49: ca. 1944

## Moore, ontological arguments, a fallacy?

The latest part of this chapter dedicates to a conceptual analysis of the psychological aspect of expressing a religious “belief” based on later Wittgenstein’s observations in PPF (Fragment X) concerning the use of “believing” in different circumstances. Wittgenstein’s discussion does not concern religious belief as such, rather he discusses the grammar of the word “Glauben” (which in German stands for some different *sorts* of “belief” including “religious faith”.) It should be also noted that what Wittgenstein calls “superstition” i.e. a pseudo-scientific belief in God out of *fear*, is “Aberglauben” which itself belongs to the “Glauben” family.

One of the warnings that Wittgenstein expresses about the grammar of “believing,” I think, seem to be applicable to another aspect of the ontological arguments about God. In his suggestive remark in CV, as I quoted before, a philosopher with a proof for God is trying to find an intellectual basis for what he has already believed through his upbringing. (CV 85:1950) Not every philosopher finds it convincing to give up on finding the ontological proofs for the existence (or inexistence) of God. Such a philosopher might argue that, even if one *assumes* that a proof for God is an effort for finding an intellectual basis for what one has already believed, it is still philosophically valuable to argue for the existence of God based on ontological arguments. In such a imaginary scenario, I read later Wittgenstein as if responding to such a philosopher, as follows:

Even in the assumption, the pattern is not what you think.

With the words “Assuming I believe . . .” you are presupposing the whole grammar of the word “to believe”, the ordinary use, which you have mastered.-- You are not assuming some state of affairs which, so to speak, a picture presents unambiguously to you, so that you can tack on to this assumption some assertion other than the ordinary one.-- You

would not know at all what you were assuming here (that is, what, for example, would follow from such an assumption), if you were not already familiar with the use of “believe”. (PPF,X:106)

Wittgenstein observation is not about a religious use of “belief” But I think, it can be applied to two discussions, ontological argument of God and Moore’s epistemological proof of an external world. On the one hand, in the case of Moore’s argument, Wittgenstein seem to say that if one can *assume* Moore’s use of “know” in “I know that there is hand here” is different than that of a skeptic’s.<sup>35</sup> In another word, if the skeptic could have assumed Moore’s use of “know” then the skeptic could not have doubted about the existence of the external world in the first place.<sup>36</sup>

By parity, and in the case of scenario I developed around the ontological argument, one can interpret Wittgenstein (PPF,X:106), when applied to the religious cases, as saying that one simply *cannot* assume all the uses of “belief” in an argument given the diversity of language-games. Both sides of both arguments, i.e. Mooreans and his enemies in epistemology and the opponents and proponents of an ontological argument in the philosophy of religion, might be said to making futile efforts by not noticing the diverse use of “believing” in different circumstances. Both camps might also underestimate the role of one’s background in learning for adopting a framework to interpret the world, be it scientific, philosophical, religious, etc. if this construal of Wittgenstein does not seem implausible, then when we applied such an analysis to the imaginary scenario I described about the ontological arguments, we shall see another attacking point of Wittgenstein to the arguments which are after finding an intellectual

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<sup>35</sup> Moore’s argument is roughly, as follows: 1- Here is one hand. 2- Here is another hand. There are at least two external objects in the world. Therefore, an external world exists. (Moore 1939:166)

<sup>36</sup> See OC

foundation for the belief (or disbelief) in God. I read later Wittgenstein in the following way: a philosophical argument *cannot* simply “assume” the role of education and understanding how to use “believe” in different circumstances and then still tries to find an intellectual foundation for religious faith. Here, what a philosopher intends to assume is not a “state of affairs” that either exist or it does not; rather, the diversity of the manifestations of believing (religious and non-religious) seem to present us only with an ambiguous picture with blurry edges with a fluid content. Wittgenstein can be read in such a way to say: “You would not know at all what you were assuming here (that is, what, for example, would follow from such an assumption), if you were not already familiar with the use of “believe”.” (PPF, X:106)

The point that a religious faith is not mixture of a proposition *plus* content *plus* emotions, is discussed in the literature of “Wittgensteinian Fidesism” especially after the works of D.Z. Philips on Wittgenstein. A religious point of view, according to this framework, is an aspect of Form of Life and one’s upbringing. This perspective does not (and need not to) have an intellectual foundation since, like wisdom, it lays on the bedrock of Form of life.

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