

# Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Religion\*

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## Introduction

To speak of Wittgenstein having a 'philosophy of religion' is in one way misleading, since he never produced any sustained piece of writing in this area. But religion was something about which Wittgenstein thought deeply, and his various scattered pronouncements on religious belief and commitment are rich and interesting enough to have exerted a strong influence on subsequent philosophical thinking about religion. Some have even seen him as the leading voice in a radical and controversial philosophical approach to religious language, the approach that has come to be known as non-cognitivism or anti-realism in the philosophy of religion. It is in fact doubtful that such an approach can be retrojected onto Wittgenstein himself, or that it represents a valid interpretation of his remarks about religious belief. But however that may be, Wittgenstein's diverse reflections on religion do succeed in uncovering a number of important features of the religious outlook that are easily overlooked, and which, when properly grasped, greatly enhance our understanding of what it is to subscribe to a religious worldview. These include (but are not exhausted by) a stress on religion as a form of life; a conception of religious claims as not competing with scientific explanations; the idea of religion as a framework of interpretation; and an emphasis on religious allegiance as passionate commitment. Wittgenstein's views may not amount to a systematic theory of religion, or of religious language, but taken together they amount to a distinctive and highly original contribution that no student of the subject can afford to ignore.

Religion, more specifically Christianity, was very important to Wittgenstein in his youth, and in certain ways it continued to exert its influence right up to the closing days of his life. He came from a wealthy Jewish family, long assimilated into Viennese high society; his millionaire father was nominally Lutheran, and his mother (whose father was Jewish though her mother was not) was a devout Catholic, and she had all her nine children, including Ludwig, baptised as Catholics (Kerr, 2008, p. 28). Although Wittgenstein underwent a crisis of faith during his time at secondary school, we know that by his early twenties he was still intensely interested in Christianity. He was known during his First World War service as 'the one with the Gospels': he had picked up a copy of Tolstoy's *The Gospel in Brief* in September 1914, which he 'read and re-read, and always had with him under fire and at all times' (Malcolm, 1993, p. 8). During his time as a prisoner of war, he decided to become a schoolmaster, and observed to a friend: 'I'd most like to be a priest, but when I'm a teacher I can read the Gospel with the children' (McGuinness, 1990, p. 274). Speaking later of this time, Wittgenstein remarked: 'When I was a prisoner of war in Italy, I was compelled to attend Mass on Sundays. I was very glad of that compulsion' (Rees, 1984, p. 109). When he was dying, in 1951, Elizabeth Anscombe and other Catholics were at his bedside, and he was given a Catholic burial, though one of his friends, Maurice Drury, later agonized over whether this had been the right thing to do (Monk, 1990, pp. 567-80). Wittgenstein could certainly not have been classified as a 'believer' in any orthodox doctrinal sense; but it is significant that he considered that 'Christianity is not a doctrine' (CV p. 32). Any possible turn back to the faith in which he was baptised would probably have had to have been on a very different basis—one he had vividly described over a decade before his final illness:

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‘faith is faith in what my heart needs, not my speculative intelligence. For it is my soul, with its passions, as it were with its flesh and blood, that must be saved, not my abstract mind’ (CV p. 38). In similar vein, he observed on another occasion: ‘the Christian religion is only for one who feels an infinite need ... To whom it is given in this anguish to open his heart instead of contracting it, accepts the means to salvation in his heart’ (CV p. 52). Yet despite his keen awareness of his own anguish, Wittgenstein himself never felt able to accept the offered ‘means of salvation’. His lifelong wrestling with these problems went hand in hand with his evolving philosophical ideas on the status of religious language, belief, and allegiance; the main elements in his subtle and complex account will now be examined in turn.

### **Religious language and the *Tractatus***

The famous last sentence of Wittgenstein’s first published work, the *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus* (1922), has clear implications for the credal claims of traditional religion: *Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muß man schweigen* (‘what one cannot speak of, one must pass over in silence’). The aim of the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein explains in his Preface, is ‘to set a limit to thought, or rather not to thought, but to the expression of thoughts.’ He goes on to say that it is ‘only in language that the limit can be set, and what lies the other side of the limit will simply be nonsense.’ The job of language is to represent facts in the world, as a picture represents its object; and it follows that all that can properly be *said* or asserted are the empirical propositions of natural science. Whenever someone wants to go beyond that, and say something metaphysical, then the correct method in philosophy would be to show the speaker ‘that he had failed to give a meaning to certain signs in his propositions’ (T 6.53).

This might at first seem to prefigure the views of the logical positivists, who were to dismiss all religious language, along with ethical and aesthetic language, as incapable of verification and therefore nonsense; but Wittgenstein’s position is more delicate and more interesting than this. In the closing sentences of the *Tractatus*, he talks about ‘the mystical’ (*das Mystische*): it is not *how* things are in the world that is mystical, but *that* it exists at all (6.44). And he goes on to mention some of the ideas that have traditionally been the concern of religion—God, death, the meaning of life. We are left with the thought that ‘there is that which cannot be put into words’ (*es gibt Unausprechliches*) but which can somehow *make itself manifest*, or ‘show itself’ (*zeigt sich*, 6.522). Though Wittgenstein does not explicitly put it this way, his position seems to leave room for the idea that religious talk, though ‘nonsense’ in the strict sense laid down by a correct theory of language, might nevertheless somehow be illuminating. For there are things that can be *shown*, even though they cannot strictly be *said* (cf. 4.1212).

The upshot is that there is an ambivalence in Wittgenstein’s attitude in the *Tractatus* to the claims of religion, which (though he himself never draws any such parallel) is in some respects reminiscent of what one finds in Kantian philosophy. Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason* had roundly condemned attempts to establish matters lying outside the limits of the phenomenal world described by science: if we leave the solid terrain of the ‘land of truth’ (*das Land der Wahrheit*), and launch out into the ‘wide and stormy ocean’, invoking ‘transcendent’ ideas, relating to objects that ‘lie outside all possible experience’, then, Kant argued, ‘we are cut off from any reasons that could establish the possibility of such objects’ (Kant, 1965 [1781/1787], A565, B593). And in a similar way, Wittgenstein’s insistence that ‘the limits of language are the limits of my world’ (T 5.6) seems on the face of it to close the door on any speculative metaphysics of the traditional kind that attempted to make assertions about God. But just as Kant, despite his views on the limits of knowledge, was able to ‘make room’ for religious faith (1787, B, Introduction, p. xxx), so Wittgenstein evidently retained a

respect, perhaps even a reverence, for the domain of the mystical, albeit that domain could never be captured in language. In this way, Wittgenstein's position puts one less in mind of the later verificationist steam-roller of logical positivism than of the much earlier 'apophatic' tradition in Jewish and Christian religious thought, which insists on the 'breakdown of speech' that, in the face of the unknowability of God, 'falls infinitely short of the mark' (Turner, 1995, p. 19). In lectures given some ten years after the publication of the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein discusses the realm of ethics and value—a domain he had called 'transcendental' in the closing part of the *Tractatus*, treating it, along with the aesthetic and the religious domains, as part of the 'mystical'—and he uses a striking image to convey the inadequacy of language in this context: 'Our words used as we use them in science are vessels capable only of containing and conveying meaning and sense, *natural* meaning and sense. 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 [even] if I were to pour out a gallon over it' (LE p. 7; cf. Clack, 1999, p. 35).

### Later developments

As many commentators have noted, Wittgenstein's view of the nature of language and meaning underwent significant changes between the publication of the *Tractatus* and the composition of his other great masterpiece, the *Philosophical Investigations*; and these changes have important implications for his view of religious language. In the *Investigations*, we find a much less monolithic conception of the role of language: instead of having the single function of depicting states of affairs, language takes many diverse forms, just as the tools in a tool kit have many different purposes (PI 14). There is no general form of language; rather, if we are interested in meaning of linguistic utterances we should think about their *use* in a particular practice or activity—in a 'language game'. 'The term "language-game" is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of a language is part of an activity, or of a form of life' (PI 23). One implication of this is that it is a mistake to try to assimilate all statements to the fact-depicting statements of natural science; and this in turn opens the way for construing religious language as having an entirely different function from the language of science.

### Religion not a rival to science

The view that religion is not to be construed as competing with science is a consistent theme in Wittgenstein's thinking about religion. In his 'Remarks on Frazer's *The Golden Bough*' (GB), Wittgenstein argues that the anthropologist James George Frazer committed a fundamental error in his account of ritual practices, by trying to understand them in quasi-scientific terms, as aimed at the production of certain effects (cf. Bouveresse, 2007). Elsewhere, Wittgenstein makes an important distinction between *faith* and *superstition*. Superstition, unlike faith, 'springs from fear and is a sort of false science' (CV p. 82). To take the baptism of a child as an example, if this is motivated by the belief that it will make the child's life more lucky or more successful, we have a case of mere superstition—a kind of primitive pseudo-technology. To promote the child's health and wellbeing one would do far better to have recourse to modern scientific medicine. But if the baptism is an act of joyful affirmation and thanksgiving for the new life—what Wittgenstein called a 'trusting' (*ein Vertrauen*, *ibid.*)—then it is a genuine manifestation of religious faith.

Wittgenstein's point here provides the material for a possible riposte to a common attack mounted by atheist critics of religion such as Sigmund Freud, namely that religious behaviour is an infantile response to our helplessness and the need for protection against natural threats—'the majestic, cruel and inexorable powers of nature' (Freud 1985 [1929], p. 195); David Hume similarly traced the origins of religion to the 'incessant hopes and fears

that actuate mankind' (Hume, 1757, Ch. 2). It is no doubt true that many religious adherents have had recourse to ritual practices in a desperate attempt to avert disaster; but assimilating all religious belief and activity to this model seems a massive over-simplification. The exclamation of Job in the Hebrew Bible, 'though he slay me, yet will I trust in him' (Job 1:4) looks much more like an expression of *Vertrauen* than an attempt at superstitious manipulation; and many other similar scriptural texts could be cited. So seeing religion as a primitive, quasi-scientific attempt to control a hostile world, while it may fit the way some religious practitioners think, does not seem to match what is going on in large chunks of mainstream religious thought and practice.

Not only does Wittgenstein implicitly reject the hostile construal of religion as a primitive pseudo-technology, but he also makes it clear that he does not see religion as in any way assimilable to explanatory cosmology or science. He had little truck with the kind of theological metaphysics that attempts to present God's existence as something that can be demonstratively established, or even shown to be reasonably probable. A believer, he observed, would never come to believe as a result of the supposed 'proofs' of God's existence (CV p. 97); and the whole project of 'philosophical theology', he once remarked, struck him as 'indecent' (Drury, 1984, p. 90). For those (including many prominent theologians and philosophers) who treat theism as a probable hypothesis for accounting for the existence or nature of the cosmos, Wittgenstein appears to have had something like bemused contempt: 'can you imagine St Augustine saying that the existence of God was highly probable!', he remarked to Drury (*ibid*; contrast, for example, Swinburne, 2011). Consistently with his move away from the monolithic science-oriented view of language he had espoused in the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein came to think that religious language should not be thought of as in any way competing with science: it had another function altogether.

### **Forms of life, and the importance of context and praxis**

The lesson to be drawn from Wittgenstein's later philosophy is that if we wish to understand any type of language, including religious language, we have to look at the 'form of life' in which it is embedded. Wittgenstein's interest in 'forms of life' (*Lebensformen*), was in some respects a 'holistic' reaction against the atomistic approach to meaning he had espoused in the *Tractatus* (where an individual proposition was taken to be a 'picture of reality', T 4.01). Our language games, he later came to see, are interwoven with a web of non-linguistic activities, and cannot be understood apart from the context that gives them life. Wittgenstein insisted that 'in a religious discourse we use such expressions as: "I believe that so and so will happen" ... differently to the way in which we use them in science'. So to believe in the Last Judgement is not assimilable to an ordinary belief that a certain event will very probably happen at some time in the future (LC p. 57). As one commentator has aptly put it, Wittgenstein's aim is to show how concepts such as sin, redemption, judgement, grace and atonement 'can have an indispensable place in an individual's or a community's way of life, and to show how we can resist assimilating the use of these concepts to hypotheses, predictions and theoretical explanations' (Hyman, 2001, pp. 6–7).

This leads us straight to a key feature of Wittgenstein's mature understanding of language: his emphasis on the role of activity or praxis in underpinning the way it works. 'It is characteristic of our language that the foundation out of which it grows consists in steady forms of life, regular activity. Its function is determined above all by the action which it accompanies' (CE p. 404). This implies, in the case of religious language, that if we want to grasp the meaning of, for example, the priest's pronouncing the words 'The Body of Christ' as he holds up the consecrated bread at the Eucharist, we cannot understand or evaluate the assertion in isolation (in the way we might, for example, understand and evaluate the assertion that the wafer of bread is of circular shape and 9cm in diameter); rather, we need to

place the utterance in the context of the entire liturgy of the Mass, the Gospel story of the Last Supper, the richly layered symbolism of communally shared bread and wine, and much else besides. This contrasts starkly with the stance taken by those critics of religion who proceed to evaluate religious claims on the basis of only a cursory grasp of their literal or surface meaning (compare the remarks on the Last Judgment offered in Dawkins, 2006, pp. 319ff). It does not of course follow that a richer contextual examination of the practices that give life to religion will end up *vindicating* those claims or justifying those practices; that question is one that Wittgenstein's remarks appear to leave open. But without a proper grasp of meaning, which in turn requires a preparedness to investigate context and praxis, the evaluation of truth cannot even get off the ground.

### **Wittgensteinian 'fideism', and his alleged 'non-cognitivism'**

The term 'fideism', which is often used to characterise Wittgenstein's position on religion (cf. Glock, 1996, p. 320), covers a spectrum of views that emphasise the role of faith in contrast to, or as a supplement to, reason, for the formation of religious belief. In the middle ages, Anselm and Aquinas, along with other Christian philosophers, produced rational proofs of God's existence, but Aquinas asserted that in addition to the truths discoverable by natural reason there were revealed truths that had to be accepted on faith (cf. Aquinas 1975 [1259-65], Bk. I, chs 4-6); and Anselm described his whole philosophical enterprise in the *Proslogion* by giving it the subtitle 'faith seeking understanding' (Anselm, 2008 [1077-8]). For both these philosophers, faith and reason have complementary roles, so their position is very much not an exclusively or even mainly a 'fideist' one. Nevertheless, in underlining the importance of faith (in Latin *fides*), they are stressing something over and above mere rational assent to a set of doctrines; for *fides*, like its Greek counterpart *pistis*, always connotes a stronger volitional component than simple assent—some further element of trust and commitment. As one moves towards extreme forms of fideism, such as that of Søren Kierkegaard, the volitional element becomes stronger. 'Faith does not need proof,' asserted Kierkegaard, 'indeed it must regard proof as its enemy' (Kierkegaard 1941 [1846], p. 31). And in a famous passage he observed: 'Christianity is spirit, spirit is inwardness, inwardness is subjectivity, subjectivity is essential passion, and in its maximum an infinite, personal, passionate interest in one's eternal happiness' (ibid., p. 182). Wittgenstein shared with Kierkegaard the view that passionate commitment is central to what makes someone religious; and just as Kierkegaard had argued that true faith requires subjective commitment, not objective certainty or probability, so Wittgenstein thought there was something 'ludicrous' in attempting to shore up the reasonableness of religious belief in the light of dispassionate scrutiny of the evidence (LC p. 58).

The Kierkegaardian or fideist influences on Wittgenstein's thought are particularly apparent in his often quoted remark in *Culture and Value*: 'it appears to me as though a religious belief could only be (something like) passionately committing oneself to a system of reference' (CV p. 73). The implication here might be taken to be that belief, in the normal sense of the term, namely assent to a proposition with a certain cognitive content, drops out of the picture completely in Wittgenstein's conception of religious faith, leaving simply the volitional act of committing oneself. Extrapolating from this, those later writers who espoused a 'non-cognitivist' or anti-realist approach to philosophy of religion maintained that religious language about God should not be understood as making factual claims, stating facts, or describing reality at all. Thus the well-known Welsh philosopher of religion D. Z. Phillips, explicitly invoking Wittgenstein's ideas about language games, stressed that if we want to understand religious talk properly, we should not interpret it as referring to the 'reality' of God. 'Theological realism', observed Phillips, 'often indulges in philosophy by italics. We are told that we could not worship unless we believed that God *exists*. We are told

that we cannot talk to God unless he is *there* to talk to. And so on. But nothing is achieved by italicising these words. The task of clarifying their grammar when they are used remains' (Phillips, 1993, p. 35).

There are two questions here. The first is whether rejecting a realist construal of religious language is tenable, and the second is whether this position can be laid at Wittgenstein's door. On the first question, many critics have insisted that the anti-realist approach fails to match the actual beliefs and practices of ordinary religious adherents: 'When ordinary people pray it is because they think there is a God up there listening. But whether or not there is a God listening to their prayer isn't itself part of the language game. The reason people play the language game of religion is because they think there is something outside the language game that gives it a point' (Searle, 1987, p. 344-5). What is more, to say that a religious belief just *is* a commitment appears to sidestep the question of *justification* in a problematic way (cf. Hyman 2001). Commitments, though it may be psychologically possible to make them in the absence of prior beliefs, seem to presuppose, for their validity, the objective truth of the beliefs logically required by the nature of the commitment. If I commit myself to a loved one, or to God, my commitment will lose its justification if the object of my commitment turns out not to exist, or to be wholly unworthy of my commitment.

On the second question, of whether Wittgenstein himself espoused this type of non-cognitivist view, Severin Schroeder has argued that that, contrary to the common reading of his remarks in *Culture and Value*, Wittgenstein is not proposing a *purely* expressivist construal of credal statements (Schroeder, 2007). In saying that religious belief '*can only* be a passionate commitment', Wittgenstein may simply be underlining the *inescapability* of a passionate, volitional element; he need not be saying that what is involved in the belief is *merely* the commitment— as if nothing else, no cognitive or doxastic (belief) elements, were entailed. On the matter of phrasing, Schroeder appears to have a strong case. To say, for example, 'that remark *can only* have been a joke' does not imply that it was humorous *and nothing else*; it does not, for example rule out its being apt, or malicious, or referring to a true state of affairs. In any case, there are, as Schroeder points out, many passages where Wittgenstein makes it quite explicit that belief *is* involved in religious commitment. In the very next sentence following his remark about 'passionate commitment', he goes on to say 'Hence, although it is *belief*, it is a way of living, or a way of judging life' (CV p. 73). What is more, we know from other remarks that Wittgenstein would have liked to commit himself to Christianity, but felt unable to make the commitment because he *could not bring himself to assent to the required beliefs*— for example a belief in the last judgment (CV p. 38).

A further text often cited in favour of a non-cognitivist interpretation of Wittgenstein's view of religious belief is his remark that saying (as many philosophical theologians have done) that God's essence guarantees his existence 'really means ... that what is here at issue is not the existence of something [*daß es sich hier um eine Existenz nicht handelt*]' (CV p. 94). But it would be rash to read non-cognitivism into this, given that it is actually quite close to standard mainstream Christian theology. On the standard conception found for example in Aquinas, God is not an individual being at all, not an 'entity' alongside the other entities in the world, but is rather the source of all being (Davies, 2002, p. 72); so it is not as if the theist's inventory of entities in the universe includes some extra item that is absent from the atheist's list. Hence, so far from being a heretical slide into a non-cognitivist or anti-realist view of God-talk, Wittgenstein's remark that in discussing God we are not dealing with *eine Existenz* is one that would seem quite in order to many orthodox theologians.

As noted above in our discussion of the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein himself was attracted in his early writings to the idea of religion as related to the domain of the ineffable (T 6.522).

In the light of this, it is plausible to interpret his later thinking about religion as preserving the core idea that our language about God cannot be construed as having straightforward propositional content (in the *Tractatus* sense), or as asserting the existence of an item in the world. But none of this entails a radically non-realist conception of religious discourse; it is simply that we need to be careful to avoid assimilating the reality of God to the reality obtaining within the 'world'— the reality possessed by contingent things, or, as the *Tractatus* put it, whatever happens to be 'the case'. Wittgenstein was clear that being religious is not a matter of proposing explanatory hypotheses about the world of a scientific or quasi-scientific kind, but rather of passionate commitment to a certain system of reference, a certain framework for interpreting the world. But this may be quite compatible with holding that that to adopt the framework in question does indeed involve assent to certain theistic beliefs.

### **Religion as a framework of interpretation**

A religious person passionately commits him or herself, according to Wittgenstein, 'to a system of co-ordinates' (*zu einem Koordinatensystem*). A variant reading has the more general phrase 'a system of reference' (*einem Bezugssystem*) (CV p. 73). These notions may seem at first to support the non-cognitivist interpretation of Wittgenstein's views on religion; for a system of coordinates (for example, the points of the compass, or the metric system) is not itself a set of truth-claims: 'a system of co-ordinates is ... an intellectual apparatus we use to construct truths and falsehoods; it cannot itself be either true or false' (Hyman, 2001, p. 5). One might draw a parallel here with the case of ethics, where Wittgenstein's mature view seems to be that 'to make [ethical judgments] is to adopt a certain framework of action and justification, which itself cannot be justified' (Glock, 1996, p. 110). The point here is that a system of reference or a system of measurement (for example the metric system) cannot itself be called true or false in the sense that a given measurement within the system ('this stick is two meters long') may be true or false. The metric system does not itself belong in the complete set of true propositions expressing metric measurements; rather it is a framework that generates the possibility of such measurements.

This point, correct though it is, does not however prevent one affirming the soundness of the metric system as a perfectly valid and rationally defensible framework for dealing with the world; and the same possibility still seems open in the case of a religious framework. Some systems might be rationally defended as more workable, more fitted for human life, more viable, than others. The amount of 'passion' with which one commits oneself to the use of such a system does not in itself affect this question of rational evaluability: no doubt some people are passionately committed to the use of metric standards, but that does not put the matter of the appropriateness and viability of the metric system beyond rational evaluation, or shift it to the non-cognitive domain of pure volitional or merely emotional preference. There is, moreover, one further suggestive point about the comparison of religious faith to a 'reference system', which also pushes things in a more 'cognitivist' direction. Although a system of co-ordinates cannot itself be true or false, the adoption of such a system does nevertheless itself *presuppose* certain truths— for example, the actual reality of the standard posited by the system (the paradigm 'meter bar', or the properties of light in the more sophisticated standard now used). In the same way, a religious 'system of reference' can be said to have cognitive implications (by presupposing that supreme creative reality without which the system would make no sense), as well as being, for those who adopt it, a valuable and rationally defensible way of making sense of human life (though 'rationally defensible' here would not, as with the metrical case, be understood primarily in scientific and technological terms, but rather in moral and spiritual terms).

On this interpretation, Wittgenstein's central insight is that the primary function of a religious outlook is to provide a framework for understanding and interpreting the world in

which we find ourselves. The religious adherent confronts, as we all do, a world full of pain and suffering, conditioned by the inescapable facts of human finitude and mortality; yet in the face of the resulting 'anguish' and 'infinite need' (CV p. 52) the believer passionately holds on to a 'system of reference' that allows those potentially terrifying or depressing features to be viewed through the eyes of faith and hope. What is thereby generated, without in any way removing the dangers or the suffering, is a sense of the 'peace that passeth all understanding' (Philippians 4:7); or, as Wittgenstein himself put it, 'feeling absolutely *safe*— I mean the state of mind in which one is inclined to say "I am safe, nothing can injure me whatever happens"' (LE p. 8).

### **The question of evidence**

If the kind of interpretation just proposed is accepted, a crucial question remains about its implications for the defensibility or otherwise of adopting a religious outlook: does the Wittgensteinian talk of holding fast to a system of reference imply a view of religion that tries to insulate it from all contact with evidence or argument? 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 p. 57). But this separation of a belief in the Resurrection from an 'ordinary' historical belief does not in itself rule out the possibility of evidence of a different kind. Wittgenstein's point may be 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 (the model which made Hume dryly observe that 'the Christian religion not only was at first attended with miracles, but even at this day cannot be believed by any reasonable person without one' (Hume, 1748, sectn.10)). The kind of evidence which, for the believer, supports faith is not evidence assessed from a detached standpoint, but experience that is available only as a result of certain inner transformations. This may partly be what Wittgenstein had in mind when he remarked 'Only love can believe the resurrection' (CV p. 39). Saying this need not imply some kind of subjectivism about religious truth; it merely makes the point that there may be some truths whose *accessibility conditions* include certain requirements as to the attitude of the subject (cf. Cottingham, 2005, ch 5). In other words, it may point to what one might call a 'Pascalian' epistemology: the idea that opening the heart may have the result of disclosing evidence that was before occluded. It is not that there is no evidence of any kind, but rather that, as Pascal put it, there is 'enough light for those who desire to see, and enough darkness for those of a contrary disposition' (Pascal, 1962 [1670], no. 149).

Interpreting the Gospel accounts of the early disciples' belief in the Resurrection in Wittgensteinian terms, we may say that they seized passionately upon a new framework of interpretation: what had seemed total failure, marked by a horrible and humiliating execution, was subsequently perceived as the prelude to the triumphant proclamation of a message of hope. As noted earlier, we do not have to say that this interpretive shift implies no cognitive change— no change in belief contents. In adopting such a framework, the disciples surely *did* shift their beliefs: with the new framework went a return from despair to faith in God, and a belief that his power was manifested in the risen Christ. Nor, picking up the point just made about evidence, do we have to say that the new belief was held contra-rationally, or without any evidence whatever; what is suggested instead by the Gospel narrative (for example the report that 'some doubted' even in the face of the post resurrection appearances of Christ, Matthew 28:17) is that the evidence was not 'spectator evidence', readily accessible to any dispassionate observer, but was evidence of the kind that requires an inner transformation to enable the subject to apprehend it (cf. Coakley, 2002; Moser, 2008).



Attributing to Wittgenstein something like this view of the kind of evidence relevant to religious belief receives strong support from one of his most pregnant remarks about religion: 'life can educate one to a belief in God' (CV p. 97). It is clear that 'education' involved cannot, according to Wittgenstein, be the kind that one receives in the study or seminar room, through a dispassionate study of the evidence or arguments for God's existence. Rather, the 'lessons of life' are ones that change one's emotional perspective, making one vulnerable, opening the heart, so that beliefs one was previously blocked from entertaining seriously now become live options (cf. Cottingham, 2009, pp. 224ff). Conversion, in short, is a matter of breaking down the barriers to perception, or demolishing the defences we all have against becoming open and receptive in this way. Wittgenstein himself confessed in 1946: 'I cannot kneel to pray because it's as though my knees are stiff. I am afraid of disintegration (of my disintegration), if I become soft' (CV, p. 63). And an enigmatic remark made in 1937 may also plausibly be taken as a comment on his own inability to become a believer: 'The *edifice of your pride has* to be dismantled. And that means frightful work' (CV p. 30).

These considerations need not, of course, in any way imply that anyone who (like Wittgenstein himself) fails to take the road to conversion is therefore making a philosophical or personal mistake. On this point, as in all areas of his life, Wittgenstein himself was ready to be harshly self-critical; but on balance his views on religious belief seem in the end to be philosophically neutral on the question of whether adopting such a perspective is the right thing to do—albeit they often show a distinct sympathy for the religious worldview, and even a longing for the 'safety' it seems to offer. What can be said, as we bring this discussion of Wittgenstein's views on religion to a close, is that his rich and fertile remarks have the merit of offering a far richer and more humane account of religion, and one that resonates much more closely with the actual struggles of believers, would be believers, and those who cannot believe, than the great bulk of contemporary work in philosophy of religion. Here, as in so many other areas, Wittgenstein's ideas, though they may be temporarily eclipsed by the vicissitudes of academic fashion, seem sure to retain their compelling power for many generations to come.

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