NATURALISM
and
RELIGION

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WITTGENSTEIN AND WITTGENSTEINIANS ON RELIGION

I

Wittgenstein once remarked, "I am not a religious man: but I cannot help seeing every problem from a religious point of view" (Rhees 1984, 79). Though he wrote very little about either religion or ethics, it is true that a sensibility to and concern for broadly speaking ethical and religious matters is pervasive in almost all of his work. He wrote extensively about language, meaning, intentionality, mind, consciousness, the self, logic, mathematics, and necessity, but woven into all these considerations, which have been central to the main historical tradition of philosophy, is a religious and ethical concern. Perhaps it is better characterized as an intense ethico-religious concern, for when he speaks of ethics it is always in a distinctively religious way. But this would be badly understood if it were taken, after the fashion of Richard Braithwaite and R. M. Hare, to be a reductive view of religion in which religion is viewed as morality touched with emotion associated with certain tra-

ditional narratives which may or not be believed (Braithwaite 1975; Hare 1973). Wittgenstein linked ethics and religion tightly. But, as we shall see, his thinking here was very different from that of the reductive, basically straightforwardly ethical accounts of religion of Braithwaite and Hare.

It should also be noted that Wittgenstein did not write treatises or even articles on either ethics or religion and that he did not even discuss the topics that moral philosophers normally consider. Moreover, it is clear that he would have regarded both philosophy of religion and ethical theory with great suspicion and even with disdain. John Hyman rightly observes that "Wittgenstein's influence in the philosophy of religion is due to scattered remarks, marginalia, and students' notes. He never intended to publish any material on the subject, and never wrote about it systematically" (Hyman 1997, 156). But all of that, as I will try to make plain, does not gainsay the import of my opening quotation from him.

In understanding what Ludwig Wittgenstein has to say about religion or indeed about anything else, it is crucial to understand how Wittgenstein proceeded in philosophy and why he proceeded in that way. Here we must see that and how Wittgenstein was remarkable in generating and carrying out two revolutions in philosophy, the latter one dismantling the philosophical practices, techniques, and conceptions of the former while keeping a very similar metaphilosophical conception of the aim of philosophical activity.[1] It is not an exaggeration to say, as P. M. S. Hacker does, that "Ludwig Wittgenstein . . . was the leading analytical philosopher of the twentieth century. His two philosophical masterpieces, the *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus* (1921) and his posthumous *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), changed the course of the subject" (Hacker 1999, 538). Hacker goes on to observe that "the first was the primary origin of the 'linguistic turn' in philosophy, and inspired both logical positivism and Cambridge analysis in the interwar years. The second shifted analytic philosophy away from the paradigm of depth-analysis defended in the *Tractatus* and cultivated by logical positivists . . . and Cambridge analysts toward the different conception of 'connective analysis,' which was a primary inspiration of Oxford analytic philosophy" (Hacker 1999, 538). However, this remark of Hacker's while saying something importantly on the mark is also in a way misleading, for not only in tone and attitude, but in method and aim Wittgenstein was very different from Rudolf Carnap or Hans Reichenbach (positivists) on the one hand and Gilbert Ryle or Peter Strawson (Oxford analysts) on the other. Wittgenstein would have rejected the "scientific philosophy" of Carnap and Reichenbach and the "descriptive metaphysics" (more descriptive than metaphysical) of Strawson as well as the avuncular complacently confident tone of Ryle's ordinary language philosophy. Both positivism and Oxford analysis would have struck him as scientistic—though Carnap's

and Reichenbach's plainly more overtly so. Moreover, the system-building of Carnap and Strawson would have been regarded by him as impossible (more "houses of cards") and, even if possible, unnecessary and indeed harmful.

Through both revolutionary turns, Wittgenstein held a therapeutic and antiscientistic conception of philosophy with a deep underlying ethico-religious intent. (Hence the word "harmful" in the previous sentence.) But it is important that we do not misunderstand Wittgenstein here. It is not at all that he wanted to replace logic, metaphysics, epistemology, or semantical analysis with moral philosophy, reformist moralizing, or some *lebensphilosophie*. Nothing could be further from his intent. Rather he thought *philosophy itself*, as a particularly bad species of intellectualizing, was bad for human beings since it stands in the way of our coming to grips with our lives. This coming to grips with our lives—something which he took to be supremely important—had, in his view, as well as in Kierkegaard's, nothing to do with philosophy. Philosophy just gets in our way here. Philosophical perplexities, both traditional and those arising in contemporary "scientific philosophy," arise from the often obsessively gripping but still misleading pictures of the workings of our language that we come to have when we reflect on it, though often we do not recognize that it is certain pictures of our language that are generating our perplexities. And it is where that happens that we get in philosophical trouble: we catch the philosophical disease. We do not command a sufficiently clear view of the workings of our language when we try to think about (for example) consciousness, thought, sensations, truth, warrantability, intentionality, and the like. The idea is not to provide some general descriptive account of our language (Strawson) or some formal scientific account of the semantics of our language (Carnap), but to provide, at our conceptual trouble spots, where we are experiencing mental cramps, a sufficiently clear representation of how our language works to break that perplexity. It will not, of course, cure all perplexities forever, but it might cure the particular one that is befuddling us and so we proceed on from case to case. In this way philosophy is to be therapeutic. It does not (*pace* Carnap or Strawson) yield a theory of any kind—the search for one is perhaps *the* philosophical illusion—but is an activity which, where successfully pursued, yields a sufficient understanding of the workings of our language and with that of our practices and forms of life to break the spell that a misleading picture of the workings of our language at some particular spot exerts on us. Philosophy is taken by Wittgenstein to be an activity and not something which constructs some theory to explain our language or the forms of life in which our language is embedded.

There has been a tradition in philosophy (extending even to Gottlieb Frege and Bertrand Russell) which regards philosophy, in contrast with

the empirical sciences, which investigate the domain of contingent truth, as the a priori science which investigates the domain of necessity. Wittgenstein argues in the *Tractatus* that this "view" is nonsensical. The propositions of logic are either tautologies or contradictions. They are not in any sense descriptions or characterizations of anything substantive. They neither (*pace* Frege) describe timeless relations between abstract objects (meanings) nor (*pace* Russell) do they describe the most general features of the world. Both Frege and Russell failed to see a crucial radical difference between the propositions of logic and empirical propositions. They thought that the propositions of logic, like empirical propositions, *say* something. Logical propositions, they thought, say very different kinds of things than what empirical science does, but they still say something. Wittgenstein denied this. The propositions of logic (tautologies or contradictions) say absolutely nothing and thus are degenerate propositions. They give no information whatsoever about the world or "the structure of the world" or about some "*noumenal* world" (assuming such a notion is even intelligible). So-called logical truths are simply tautologies. Wittgenstein remarks in the *Tractatus*, "I know nothing about the weather when I know that it is either raining or not raining. . . . All propositions of logic say the same thing, to wit nothing" (Wittgenstein 1921, 4.461, 5.43). Neither tautologies nor contradictions are bipolar (capable of being true and capable of being false). They have no truth-conditions or assertability-conditions. Tautologies are "unconditionally true" and contradictions "unconditionally false." A tautology is true under every possible assignment of truth so it excludes no possibility. A contradiction, by contrast, is false under every possible assignment of truth and thus it excludes every possibility. They both have zero sense and say nothing at all. But this vacuous logical necessity is the only a priori necessity that we have. There is no argument at all for a claim common to Descartes, Wolff, Kant, Husserl, and many other traditional philosophers that while the empirical sciences investigate the domain of contingent truth philosophy, by contrast, is an a priori science or a priori theory which investigates the domain of necessity. Pure reason cannot attain knowledge about reality, for to know the truth of a tautology is not to know anything about how things are or how things stand in reality or even about how in some substantive sense things must be. (There is no substantive a priori necessity.) In the philosophy of religion it is sometimes claimed we can obtain such a knowledge of God—that there are some necessary but still substantive religious propositions (Copleston 1956, 1957, 1975). But that belief rests on an illusion.

Wittgenstein famously in the *Tractatus* asserted that "what can be said can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence" (Wittgenstein 1921, 3). He went so far as to assert that "the whole sense of the book might be summed up" in those words (Wittgenstein 1921, 3). Propositions according to what is *Tractarian* doctrine (assuming for the nonce that he was serious about there being such doctrine and not purposefully for therapeutic purposes leading us down the garden path) can only describe facts, neither philosophy nor anything else can be used to explain how sentences must be related to the states of affairs they represent, for to do so is to try to do more with words than merely describe the facts (Wittgenstein 1921, 4.12). But when we try to do so—that is, when we try to do philosophy—we end up talking nonsense. Wittgenstein recognized that this claim entails that his own philosophical propositions in the *Tractatus* are nonsensical. But here he bites the bullet and remarks in a famous passage at the end of the *Tractatus*: "The correct method in philosophy would really be the following: to say nothing except what can be said . . . and then, whenever someone wanted to say something metaphysical to demonstrate to him that he had failed to give a meaning to certain signs in his propositions" (Wittgenstein 1921, 6.53). And then Wittgenstein goes on to say, "My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them—as steps to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.)" (Wittgenstein 1921, 6.54). Moreover, it is not just philosophy and metaphysics that are nonsensical, but religion, talk about the meaning of life, talk about making sense of life, talk about the meaning of the world, talk about God, ethics, and aesthetics. All such talk is nonsense—lacking in all propositional content—having no cognitive force. Such talk, Wittgenstein has it, belongs to "the mystical" and that is also something which is nonsensical.

On the standard reading of Wittgenstein, such talk—something identified with the meaning of life, which Wittgenstein understood as the meaning of the world—could not be just plain old nonsense, but must be deep nonsense hinting at *unsayable ineffable truths*. Something, that is, that can be *shown* but not *said*. It was, so this reading has it, Wittgenstein's belief at the time of the *Tractatus*—and before and way down to and through his "Lectures on Ethics" (1929–1930)—that all such talk—talk vital to our sense of life—could not be put into intelligible form. (Think, to feel the force of this, that "intelligible talk" should be pleonastic.) Nothing that touches on matters of value can be captured by words. People, of course, try to do so, but they end up, though unwittingly, talking nonsense. Any attempt to even articulate, let alone answer, "the problems of life" must be in vain. All thought, including philosophical thought, is useless here. And when "the answer cannot be put into words [then] neither can the question be put into words" (Wittgenstein 1921, 6.5).

Most straightforwardly understood we have here—once we take

away the rhetoric about *das Mystische*—what James Conant has called a "collapse into positivism," though (*pace* Hilary Putnam) it is not at all evident that *here* this is a bad thing (Conant 1989; Putnam 1995). That is to say, the importance we attach to religion, along with aesthetic experience, ethics, and metaphysics, is the result of an illusion. Hard as it is to face, we have, when we cut through the disguised nonsense, just plain nonsense. And, as Frank Ramsey famously said, if it can't be said it can't be said and it can't be whistled either. Wittgenstein quite unequivocally said such talk was nonsensical, but he would paradoxically just as clearly not say that religion and ethics were of no importance. For him they were of supreme importance though not as bits of philosophy or intellectualizing. He was very far from being a secularizer. So where are we here? It looks at least like we are in a very bad muddle.

The (as I mentioned) standard and pervasive interpretation of the Tractarian Wittgenstein (one I subsequently will resist) has it that the idea that we have nonsense full stop is not at all what Wittgenstein thought. Not even in that respect would he make one with positivism. Talk of a collapse into positivism here is off the mark. Rather, it is typically thought, what Wittgenstein felt was that what can be said—what can be put into words—is piddling by comparison with what cannot—*with what can only be shown*. Wittgenstein himself in a letter written to a friend in 1919 says of the *Tractatus* that it "consists of two parts: of that which is under consideration here and of all that I have not written. And it is precisely this second part that is the important one" (Luckhardt 1979, 94). The claim—certainly paradoxical—is that Wittgenstein believed during the *Tractatus* period, and at least up to 1929, that there are things that *can be shown that cannot be said*. As Hacker, for example, reads Wittgenstein, "What is shown by a notation cannot be said. Truths of metaphysics are ineffable and so too are truths for ethics, aesthetics, and religion. Just as Kant circumscribed the bounds of language in order to make room for faith, Wittgenstein circumscribed the bounds of language in order to make room for ineffable metaphysics" (Hacker 1999, 344).

Pace positivists, this standard reading goes, there are truths here and presumably sometimes insight into these truths. They are things that, though only with heroic difficulty, can be grasped but not said. They show themselves to us if we have insight. Among them (on such a reading) are the "ineffable truths" of religion that, Wittgenstein has it, for people who are genuinely attuned, form a passionately grasped system of reference. Still, given the traditional interpretation of Wittgenstein, these truths are ineffable and what the system of reference is is unsayable. But, for all of that, the traditional interpretation goes, they are of powerful significance.

Wittgenstein did indeed remark in the *Tractatus* "How things are in the world is of complete indifference for what is higher. God does not reveal himself *in* the world" (Wittgenstein 1921, 6.432). In the very next sentence Wittgenstein goes on to remark, "It is not how things are in the world that is mystical, but *that it* exists" (Wittgenstein 1921, 6.44). But he ends up—or so it seems—with another "unsayability" here. For, as he also says, "the fact" that the world exists is "the fact" that "there is what there is" (Wittgenstein 1961, 86). But "there is what there is," unless "is" in its two occurrences is used equivocally, is a tautology, so there is no fact at all and we have something on Wittgenstein's own Tractarian conception that is impossible to state. Remember that Wittgenstein stresses that tautologies say nothing. Yet the standard interpretation has it that Wittgenstein also believes that here is another supposed showable but not stateable something that reveals to us, in a way that cannot be said, a deep but ineffable truth. If the "is" in its first occurrence in "There is what there is" is used differently than the "is" in the second occurrence, then we also have something that is nonsensical. We simply have no understanding of what we are saying: nothing can be made of such remarks. Either way, it is here, *if* this is how we are to understand Wittgenstein, where, for all his concern with clarity, the charge of obscurantism seems at least to have force. He appears at least to be trying to say—or to gesture at—that there is something of which we must say that we can only show it but not say it. But trivially we cannot say what the "it" is that we are supposed to understand. But what then can understanding come to here? And how can "There is what there is" be the least bit significant? But then again what can understanding possibly come to here? How can there be an it which we are supposed to understand if we can't *say* what this *it* is? It would surely appear to be—against the standard interpretation—*nothing*. But nothing is not a strange kind of something. We just do not understand what we are talking about—or trying to think—here. Put even more strongly, we cannot know or understand what we are talking about or trying to think here for there is no *what* or *this* for us to be talking about or to somehow conceptualize or grasp as an ineffable something we know not what. It is better—shows more integrity and clarity of thought—to say that we have just plain nonsense here on Wittgenstein's Tractarian conception of language and not some "deep nonsense" taking us to some profound "ineffable truths" about the meaning of life, fate, and the meaning of the world itself (Wittgenstein 1961, 73).

There is a persistent tendency in our thought, both philosophical and religious, to believe that language cannot capture our deepest thoughts and feelings (Ambrose 1950). But that is nonsense and indeed Wittgenstein in his arguments in effect establishes this or, put more cautiously, at least gives us reason to question this claim of depth. We should just, without vacillation, acknowledge that Wittgenstein shows that it is nonsense full stop and that there is an end on it.

Still this doctrine of the unsayable but somehow showable with its supposed deep significance is the standard reading of Wittgenstein of the period of the *Tractatus*. And with *that interpretation* goes the not unfounded charge of obscurantism. But there is a minority view concerning Wittgenstein, with which my last remark in the last paragraph is attuned, represented powerfully by Cora Diamond and James Conant which sees things differently (Diamond 1991; Conant 1989, 1990). On this interpretation, Wittgenstein is not even giving one to understand or hinting at obliquely in indirect discourse, let alone trying (but failing) to assert, that there are things that can be shown that cannot be said, including the claim that what is shown by a notation cannot be said in that notation. And that among these "unsayables" there are deep "ineffable truths" that cannot be said, but, ineffable though they be, can still be known or at least grasped. Wittgenstein indeed does say that such remarks are nonsense. Any interpretation of Wittgenstein will acknowledge that. But in addition this minority view denies that the gnomic remarks in the *Tractatus* that get highlighted by Wittgenstein as nonsensical are "deep nonsense" pointing at something profound but unsayable. Rather they are just plain old nonsense—gibberish, though gibberish that tends to be disguised from us. And further, the claim is, Wittgenstein so regarded them. But the very conceptual work that Wittgenstein does should enable us to see that. That we typically do not understand that that is so is due to the fact "that we do not *command a clear view* of the use of our words—our grammar is lacking this sort of perspicuity" (Wittgenstein 1951, 122).

My aim here is not to try to adjudicate which reading most accurately represents Wittgenstein's thought. My hunches are with the second one and a principle of interpretive charity would push us, I believe, in that direction. But I will not try to argue that. However, I will argue that if Wittgenstein did not take that latter way he should have. This way of reading him saves him from obscurantism and, as I shall attempt to show, it still allows him to take the respectful attitude toward religion, or rather some parts of it, that he was so concerned to take.[2]

James Conant, in a subtle though somewhat overblown article, probes carefully what needs to be said here (Conant 1989). The standard interpretation, as we have seen, takes it that Wittgenstein is telling us—and some of his interpreters think that that is something very profound on Wittgenstein's part—that there are things he cannot say but which he can and is gesturing at. There are some particular things, some of them very crucial to our lives, that can be shown but cannot be said. Conant, *au contraire*, argues that Wittgenstein is giving us to understand, and rightly so, that "there is no particular thing that cannot be said. The 'what' in 'what cannot be said' refers to nothing" (Conant 1989, 244). The *Tractatus* ends as it does because of Wittgenstein's understanding that "beyond

what can be said there is nothing more to say or offer except more silence" (Conant 1989, 244). But at least some of the standard interpreters would respond in alarm that, so read, "Wittgenstein would become indistinguishable from Carnap" (Conant 1989, 244). On the standard view "Wittgenstein only agrees with Carnap insofar as he holds that the positions of ethics and religion are nonsense. However, [the standard view has it] they are supposed to be deep and significant forms of nonsense whereas for positivism they are void of any cognitive content whatsoever" (Conant 1989, 244). Conant, in a fine fit of reasonable common sense, wants to reject such a claim both as a correct reading of Wittgenstein and as an important bit of philosophy in its own right. And I want to reject it too for at least the last reason. If this is what it is to be Carnapian then we should all in that respect be Carnapians. It makes no sense to speak of something being "nonsensical yet significant" or "meaningless but *not* void of cognitive content." Those conjunctions are unintelligible. They could only be *made* intelligible by some arbitrary stipulative *redefinition* of some of the constitutive terms. They are not intelligible as they stand. And the arbitrary stipulative definitions are just that.

However, as Conant worries out, what, if we do not resort to bald assertion, are we to say to a standard interpreter who retorts "What kind of sense do you wish to make here?" Conant remarks, "They are willing only to concede that these conjunctions were, strictly speaking, nonsensical. Nevertheless, they would say, they were *not* incoherent, admittedly they could not be coherently expressed, but they are not unintelligible. Indeed, for these commentators, it was the possibility of making such conjunctions intelligible that was the singular achievement of such works as the *Postscript* and the *Tractatus* to have delimited" (Conant 1989, 245). Both Conant and I wish to dig in our heels here and reject this as good philosophy, good sense, good thinking about religion, and as a way to make the maximal sense out of Wittgenstein.

What argument can be made for such a digging in of one's heels? I will proceed indirectly by first intensifying our sense of what is at issue here. The standard interpreters maintain that for the *Tractatus* the propositions of ethics and religion—as well as all the important propositions of the *Tractatus* itself—are both nonsensical *and* deeply significant. They seem to lack cognitive content and still in some mysterious way have cognitive content, though an "ineffable cognitive content." Their significance is reputed to lie either in the fact that they do, or at least attempt to, *show the unsayable, exhibit in some unsayable way the ineffable*. This, Conant remarks,

> requires a conception of language as possessing capacities for exhibiting meaning over and beyond its ordinary capacities for conveying the sense of a proposition. Such a conception is required even if one only

> wants to maintain that Wittgenstein's deeply nonsensical propositions are only *trying* (but failing) to say something that cannot be said. For one needs an account of how one can so much as recognize what it is that a piece of nonsense is even just trying to say. (Conant 1989, 248)

The standard commentators wish to claim that there are *kinds* of nonsense leading to a *hierarchy* of nonsense. It is not only that we need to distinguish between intelligible nonsense as opposed to gibberish or gobbledygook, but we must go further and attribute to Wittgenstein the view that there are certain forms of intelligible nonsense, culminating at the top of the hierarchy of kinds of nonsense, in something which consists in certain ways of transgressing the syntax of our language which are ways that are "deeply revelatory of the nature of certain matters that lie beyond the scope of language" (Conant 1989, 246). In the case of religion, the deep nonsense at the top of the hierarchy of nonsense—the "profound intelligible nonsense"—is (in its generalized form) the claim that the deepest ineffable truths are revealed in mystical experience—the very paradigm of the (so-called) unsayable and inexpressible but still revelatory of "ultimate reality."

In his *A Study in Wittgenstein's Tractatus*, Alexander Maslow remarks that "mysticism is an important part of Wittgenstein's view. Mysticism becomes the last refuge for the most cherished things in life, in fact for all values, for all that cannot be discussed and yet is of the utmost importance to us" (Maslow 1961, 160). Commenting on this passage, Conant remarks "that Wittgenstein views mysticism as some form of 'last refuge' and that he has the greatest respect for the impulse to seek such refuge, both strike me as correct perceptions" (Conant 1989, 276). But he adds significantly that the claim that Wittgenstein wishes to condone mysticism as a refuge is without textual support. Wittgenstein says in the *Tractatus* that "the feeling of the world as a limited whole is the mystical feeling" (Wittgenstein 1921, 6.45). Wittgenstein wished to give a diagnosis of the source of that feeling. What he wished to diagnose was the claim that mystical experience, as it is understood by William James and others, is experienced as something utterly ineffable and yet seems to those who have had such an experience that it has (a) a distinctive *noetic* quality but is also (b) felt by them not to be identical with pure states of feeling. They are, or seem to be, states of feeling *and* states that seem to those "who experience them to be also states of knowledge unplumbed by the discursive intellect" (James 1935, 380). This is a rather standard characterization of mystical experience. Wittgenstein was not concerned to reject such descriptions of how things *seem* to the mystic, but was concerned to diagnose it: to diagnose, that is, what James, who gave a careful account of it, took mystics to be trying to say of their experience. But in doing that Wittgenstein was not at all acknowledging that there was or even could be such knowledge or understanding.

A crucial error in the traditional interpretation is "to mistake the views that are under scrutiny in the *Tractatus* for the views the author wishes to espouse" (Conant 1989, 248). Wittgenstein's diagnosis of our situation is as follows. The only alternatives to silence are (1) plain ordinary effable speech including scientific extensions of it; (2) *actually* unintelligible though *apparently* in some way intelligible talk; and (3) mere gibberish. Conant remarks, correctly, that (2) and (3) "differ only in their psychological import: one offers the illusion of sense where the other does not. Cognitively, they are equally vacuous" (Conant 1989, 249). There is, he goes on to say, no fourth alternative, as the standard interpretation would have it, namely the possibility of speech that lacks sense but still yields deep, unsayable, ineffable truths (Nielsen 1973). That, when we take away the obscurantist rhetoric, is just the contradictory claim that these mystical utterances both—and in the same respect—are void of cognitive content *and* somehow have it. When we inspect with an unclouded eye these oracular utterances, we go from an obscurity to a contradiction. Sometimes we are conceptually confused and *mistakenly* think a sentence has cognitive content—makes sense—when it does not. Here Wittgensteinian philosophical therapy can sometimes help. "The only distinction between deep nonsense and mere nonsense . . . that the *Tractatus* allows is between pieces of gibberish that *appear* to have sense and those that don't. In neither case does the book countenance the possibility of a piece of irreducible nonsense" (Conant 1989, 268).

This is not gainsaid by the famous ending of Wittgenstein's "Lecture on Ethics"—still very much in the Tractarian mode—where he says that religion "springs from the desire to say something about the ultimate meaning of life. . . . 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" (Wittgenstein 1993, 44). This shows clearly enough Wittgenstein's respect for human beings and his sense of what deep needs such religious utterances and the experiences that go with them answer to, but it does nothing to show that there is any error in our claim that, on his Tractarian account, religious conceptions—what Wittgenstein regards as *das mystiche*—must be just nonsense: straightforward nonsense. Seen clearly, that is, they are seen to be what they are, namely just nonsense though where seen through a glass darkly—seen confusedly—they remain *disguised* nonsense. But disguised nonsense is all the same nonsense and not something obscurely pointing to some deep "ineffable truth," some deep reality we cannot otherwise grasp. We never have "intelligible nonsense" or "ineffable knowledge" for there is and can be no such thing.

Conant *might* be thought to be blurring the austerity of the above conclusion when he says that the "*Tractatus* . . . does hold that we can

always breathe life into a piece of language by finding a use for it in ou lives" (Conant 1989, 260). However, we cannot do this without engagin in arbitrary stipulative redefinition of the religious utterances tha Wittgenstein is most concerned with—the supposedly "deep founda tional ones" that he has in mind, the ones that on his view make religion religion. They *have* no sense and the sense that we can *give* them in an attempt to breathe life into them renders them into empirical trivialities or at least empirical utterances that no longer meet religious needs—that no longer could serve as a last refuge for people with religious impulses.

Take, for example, what Wittgenstein in "The Lecture on Ethics" regards as the key paradigm religious experience. It is the experience a person has when he wonders at the very existence of the world—at *that* the world is, not *how* it is. It is the experience people have when it strikes them "how extraordinary that the world should exist" (Wittgenstein 1993, 41). Wittgenstein flat out says that the verbal expression "we give to these experiences is nonsense" (Wittgenstein 1993, 44). He remarks

> If I say "I wonder at the existence of the world" I am misusing language. Let me explain this: It has a perfectly good and clear sense to say that I wonder at something being the case, we all understand what it means to say I wonder at the size of a dog which is bigger than any one I have ever seen before or at anything which, in the common sense of the word, is extraordinary. In every such case I wonder at something being the case which I *could* conceive *not* to be the case. I wonder at the size of this dog because I could conceive of a dog of another, namely the ordinary size, at which I should not wonder. To say, "*I wonder at such and such being the case has only sense if I can imagine it not being the case. . . .*" But it is nonsense to say that I wonder at the existence of the world, because I cannot imagine it not existing. I could of course wonder at the world round me being as it is. If for instance I had this experience while looking into the blue sky, I could wonder at the sky being blue as opposed to the case when it's clouded. But that's not what I mean. I am wondering at the sky *whatever* it is. One might be tempted to say that what I am wondering is a tautology, namely at the sky being blue or not blue. But then it's just nonsense to say that one is wondering at a tautology. (Wittgenstein 1993, 41–42)

Suppose we say instead that in wondering (thinking one wonders) not *how* the world is but *that* it is we are still wondering about something that is the case, namely *that* the world is, and in doing that I am all the same making a nonvacuous contrast. I am wondering instead why there is not instead nothing. In wondering at that, I am wondering in every case at something actually being the case which I *could* conceive not to be the case. I can wonder in every particular case that could possibly be brought to my attention why it could not be the case and I understand

clearly that, as far as logical possibilities are concerned, it could not be the case. In wondering at the existence of the world I am wondering why there is not nothing rather than anything at all. Why could not all *empirical* existential statements be false and, if they were, then there would be nothing. But some empirical statements must be true for it even to be *possible* for us to know this or understand what is being said. And this makes the statement itself nonsense. Moreover, "nothing" does not stand for a something that might be the case but just doesn't happen to be. It is, to put it mildly, an opaque notion to try to conceptualize what it would be like for all empirical existential statements to be false at once. What we could say distributively of each statement taken by itself entails nothing of what we could collectively be taken to be saying about them. Wondering—trying to wonder—about why there isn't nothing is nonsense. It is like trying to say there might be nothing which is also some kind of something. It would be like saying "There is an is which is an isn't."

We might give, following Conant's instructions, "I wonder at the existence of the world" a sense by saying it is equivalent to "I wonder why people must die." But now we have turned a pseudoquestion into an obvious empirical triviality. If we are wondering why people must die there are empirical answers to that. We have given—rather farfetchedly—the religious pseudoproposition a use by turning it into a straightforward, perfectly secular, perfectly empirical remark. We have given it a use all right, but not a religious use or even a use which has much in the way of a religious significance.[3]

Suppose we say instead, in saying "I wonder why people must die," I mean "Why could people not be made of such a hard metal that they would never wear out and thus never die?" But again there are, to the extent that we can make sense of that, as perhaps we can in some science-fiction way, empirical answers to it and, even if there were not, what we have said, in so speaking, has no religious significance. It is not a reasonable candidate for giving a use to "I wonder at the existence of the world."

Suppose we say that in wondering why people wear out—don't just have endless duration—we are wondering why they are not immortal, why they do not have life eternal. But to have life eternal is not just to have endless duration, but to have a life such that the question of our dying cannot arise. Here we have a question that is religious all right, but we have simply substituted one form of nonsense for another (Nielsen 1989b and chapter 3). (Remember that "endless duration" is one thing, "eternity" is another [Malcolm 1960].)

II

I turn now from an examination of the so-called saying/showing distinction and remarks about *das mystische* in the work of the early Wittgenstein and its relevance for his and our thinking about religion to what I take to be more fruitful and more interesting considerations for religion emerging from Wittgenstein's later work, work which again, now for the second time in contemporary history, revolutionized philosophy. In my view, a view I share with Conant and Diamond, Wittgenstein continued to view philosophy as conceptual therapy, but his method for dissolving conceptual confusions—centrally the metaphysical confusions that stand in the way of our understanding—radically changed. In this way there was in his later work a radical dismantling of the *Tractatus* along with a continuity in his conception of the role of philosophy. I think this shift in method leads to a much more valuable way of doing philosophy and yields a much more adequate account of religion. (The fascination with—I'm inclined to say fixation on—the work of the early Wittgenstein rather than the later reflects for many philosophers a continued hang-up with metaphysics. They see the *Tractatus* for all its antimetaphysical thrust as the last great work, Wittgenstein's intentions to the contrary notwithstanding, of metaphysics.)

I shall very briefly say a bit more about what Wittgenstein's second revolution consists in and then turn to a detailed consideration of what it comes to for religion. Again there is a paucity of material directly on religion; during this later period, as well as in the earlier, Wittgenstein wrote nothing for publication specifically and in detail about religion. But there are many things, though often only indirectly, that are very suggestive for thinking about religion in quite different ways than has traditionally been done—in ways which I think cut through or rightly bypass much of the cackle that goes for "the philosophy of religion." Fortunately, as far as texts go, we have in a recent work written by a former student, close friend, and well known interpreter of Wittgenstein, Norman Malcolm, a work (*Wittgenstein: A Religious Point of View?*) which provides a detailed collection of remarks on religion made by Wittgenstein along with an analysis by Malcolm of those remarks followed by a substantial critique of Malcolm's account by Peter Winch. In this account of Wittgenstein on religion by two prominent Wittgensteinians, who are also philosophers of importance themselves, we have a perceptive and faithful account of Wittgenstein's views on religion, plus, particularly on Winch's part, the beginnings of a probing critique of them. (Winch is less of an uncritical disciple than Malcolm is.) I shall build on this material seeking to etch out (a) a portrayal of Wittgenstein on religion in his later philosophy and (b) an account of some Wittgensteinian emendations provided by Wittgensteinians (principally Winch) that will not only bring out the force of Wittgenstein's later account, but will, pointing to its vulnerabilities, enable us better to assess its soundness and import, both in its pristine form and in its critical Wittgensteinian reformulations. Here we can hopefully examine Wittgenstein's account of religion at its full strength. I shall attempt to do something of this.

But first a thumbnail general account of what the later Wittgenstein was up to. In *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), the central work of his later philosophy, as well as in work beginning as early as 1930 and in work following *Philosophical Investigations*, and most particularly in his last work, *On Certainty* (1969), Wittgenstein articulates his changed conception of how to proceed in philosophy and applies it to a range of philosophical problems. Propositions are no longer construed as having a fixed logical form and, more generally, language is no longer construed as having a fixed and timeless structure, but is viewed as changeable, and not infrequently changing, in which these forms of language are now seen as our historically and culturally contingent forms of life. The picture account of meaning is completely abandoned in his later work. The conception that words stand for simple objects that are their meanings is now regarded by Wittgenstein as a bit of incoherent philosophy. (On the Diamond-Conant reading of the *Tractatus* that was true of it too.) Instead the notions of language-games and practices are introduced. In being socialized—in learning, as we all must if we are at all to navigate in the world, to be human—we come to have practices in which words and actions are interwoven. In this activity, in learning to play these language-games, we come to understand words by coming to know their uses in the stream of life, and with this we come to know how to use words in the course of our various practice-embedded activities.

With this Wittgenstein abandoned his earlier formalist Tractarian demand that language, if coherence is our goal, requires determinacy and exactness and that the sole function of language is to describe. Rather language is seen as an activity that has many different functions, is embedded in different practices which answer to and structure our different needs, interests, or purposes. For someone to understand a word it is not sufficient to bring the learner face to face with its putative referent while repeating the word. In many cases nothing like this is possible and in all cases, or at least almost all cases, the learner must come to understand what *kind* of word he is being taught; to grasp this an extensive training needs to have taken place in which the learner comes to be at home with the everyday activities—the social practices—of which remarks using the word are a part. As Wittgenstein put it in an oft quoted remark from his *Philosophical Investigations*, "For a large class of cases—though not for all—

in which we employ the word 'meaning' it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in language" (Wittgenstein 1953, 43).

There is on Wittgenstein's account no standing free of our practices and forms of life or escaping the context, including the historical contexts, in which they are embedded. Both the Tractarian (on the traditional reading) and metaphysical realist conception of an independently articulated world are incoherent on Wittgenstein's later account. We have no coherent conception of a world that we can describe by accurately copying it or mirroring it or even representing it in our thought. There are no referents "out there" that simply force our concepts on us. We rather understand our concepts by coming to understand their use in our life activities. Concepts are aspects of our forms of life. They are not items forced on us by the world. To understand a concept is to understand the use of words expressing it as they function in our language and in our lives. And these will be various things, depending on the particular concept, as part of the varied contexts and the various purposes we have. These varied activities and ways in which we talk form our practices and they build together into our forms of life. We have no concepts or conceptions which stand independently of them.

Wittgenstein's earlier views—more accurately his metaviews—on religion, at least on the standard interpretation of the *Tractatus*, could not withstand his changed conceptions about language. As I have noted the idea of a general propositional form is illusory. There is no common property or set of common properties that all and only propositions have. There are many different kinds of structures that we call propositions. As P. M. S. Hacker has put it, many things count as "propositions":

> avowals of experience (such as "I have a pain" or "It hurts"), avowals of intent, ordinary empirical propositions, hypotheses, expressions of laws of nature, logical and mathematical propositions, "grammatical propositions" (in Wittgenstein's idiosyncratic use of this term) which are expressions of rules (such as "red is a color" or "the chess king moves one square at a time"), ethical and aesthetic and so on. (Hacker 1999, 545–46)

In the regimented, austere conception of *The Tractatus*, religious utterances are pseudopropositions lacking bipolarity. They are, that is, not capable of being true or capable of being false. They on that conception describe nothing, are without any cognitive content at all, and thus are nonsensical. By contrast, given Wittgenstein's later philosophy, they are not, at least on these grounds, nonsensical. On Wittgenstein's later, more relaxed and more realistic conception of propositions many of them are propositions. "Bipolarity is a feature of an important member of the family, but not a defining property of propositions as such" (Hacker 1999,

546). Moreover, Wittgenstein's earlier conception that it was the sole function of a proposition to describe is mistaken and importantly so. The "roles of many kinds of propositions, such as logical propositions and mathematical propositions are not to describe" (Hacker 1999, 546).[4] Yet for all of that, they are in order. We cannot take such a short way with dissenters and simply rule out religious utterances *carte blanche* as expressions of pseudopropositions and thus nonsensical because they fail to have the general form of a proposition. The shoe is on the other foot. The error—the illusion—is to believe that there is such a general propositional form: that there is something that propositions essentially are.

Wittgenstein continues, the above notwithstanding, to believe that religious beliefs are very different from factual beliefs. Surface appearances to the contrary, quite ordinary religious propositions are unlike factual propositions. They function very differently. But they are not, Wittgenstein now has it, any the worse for all of that. They are not therefore nonsensical.

A pervasive and, Wittgenstein believes, a pernicious error of our scientistic culture is to try to assimilate key uses of religious language (e.g., declarative sentences such as "God created the world.") to those of hypotheses, predictions, or theoretical explanations. To do that, he has it, is to completely misunderstand their use. It is to be fettered by one kind of use of language and to try to read it into other uses. When, for example, a religious person says "I believe that there will be a last judgment," it is a complete mistake, according to Wittgenstein, to take that utterance to be making a prediction. That is not the use, or even anything like the use, it has in religious language-games. In believing in the last judgment a person is not, Wittgenstein maintains, thinking that there will be, or even that it is probable that there will be, a certain kind of extraordinary event which will occur sometime in the future. The religious person—or at least Wittgenstein's religious person—is not thinking any such thing (Nielsen 1982, 43–64). He is not trying to make any kind of prediction at all (Wittgenstein 1969, 56). Rather, Wittgenstein equates having religious beliefs with (a) using affirmatively certain religious concepts and (b) having the emotions and attitudes that go with these concepts. He remarks, as we have seen, "that a religious belief could only be something like a passionate commitment to a system of reference" (Wittgenstein 1980, 64). But these beliefs—beliefs such as a belief in the meaning of life or the meaning of the world—can be neither true nor false. The question of their truth or falsity cannot even meaningfully arise. Moreover, they are beliefs which are neither reasonable nor unreasonable. But what Wittgenstein does regard as unreasonable are apologists either for or against religion who assume that religious beliefs can in any way be tested: can be shown to be either true or probably true or false or probably false by evidence or by argument or "grasped by reason" to be so. Views like that he regards as ludicrous (Wittgenstein 1969, 58).

Now with something of Wittgenstein's later conception of how to proceed in philosophy before us, I shall turn to an examination of *Wittgenstein: A Religious Point of View* starting with some central considerations by Norman Malcolm. They consist in a rather orthodox but still well thought out articulation of a Wittgensteinian point of view.

A *leitmotif* of Malcolm's discussion of Wittgenstein on religion is Wittgenstein's remarks in his *Philosophical Investigations* that "philosophy simply puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything" (Wittgenstein 1953, 126). Concerning this Malcolm remarks

> Wittgenstein is here proposing a radical change in our conception of what philosophy should be doing. To say that philosophy does not seek to explain anything is certainly not a true description of philosophy as it has been, and still is, practiced. Many philosophers would be dumbfounded or outraged by the suggestion that they should not be seeking explanations. The traditional aim of philosophy has been to explain the essential nature of justice, right and wrong, duty, the good, beauty, art, language, rules, thought. A philosopher may well ask: "What am I supposed to do if not explain?"
>
> In Wittgenstein's later thinking there is an answer. The task of philosophy is to *describe*. Describe *what*? Describe *concepts*. How does one describe a concept? By describing the use of the word, or of those words, that express the concept, that is what philosophy should "put before us." (Malcolm 1994, 74)[5]

There is no language-independent access to concepts, Wittgenstein is at pains to maintain in *Philosophical Investigations*, and Malcolm follows him here. Malcolm continues, "The description of the use of a word is called by Wittgenstein describing the 'language-game' with that word" (Malcolm 1994, 74). Then, without highlighting the therapeutic side of Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy, but in effect remaining faithful to it all the same, Malcolm remarks that it is not the task of philosophy to describe the use of a word in its *totality*, as if we had an understanding of what it would be like to do that, but only those features of the word that in certain determinate contexts give rise to philosophical perplexity. We assemble reminders to break a certain perplexity where we have mental cramps concerning the workings of our language. (Here again we see how very different Wittgenstein is from Strawson.) Describing the use of an expression is called, rather eccentrically but harmlessly by Wittgenstein, describing the grammar of the expression. But this, as by now should be evident, is not just giving an account of sentence-construction or syntax. The point of speaking of language-games is to bring into focus, and clear prominence, "the fact that the *speaking* of a language is part of an activity or a form of life" (Wittgenstein 1953, 23). Malcolm, uncontroversially and rightly, takes this to mean "that in describing the language-game, or some part of the language-game with a word, one is describing how the word is embedded in actions and reactions—in human behavior" (Malcolm 1994, 75). "Words," Wittgenstein remarks in his *Zettel*, "have meaning only in the flow of thought and life" (Wittgenstein 1967, 173). "Our talk," he adds in *On Certainty*, "gets its sense from the rest of our actions" (Wittgenstein 1969, 229). Our language-games embedded as they are in forms of life provide us a place for explanations, for giving reasons and for justifications inside the framework of these language-games or forms of life. But there is, *Malcolm* has it that Wittgenstein has it, neither explanation nor justification for the existence of these forms of language or language-games themselves.

Illustrating the way language-games work and their links with forms of life, Malcolm comments on our use of "motive." We not infrequently wonder about the motives of people. Normally the quickest and surest way to find out is to ask them. "Now of course he may not reveal it: perhaps he himself does not understand it, or perhaps he misrepresents it both to himself and to others" (Malcolm 1994, 76). But then Malcolm goes on to observe, "what is highly interesting is that if he does disclose his motive, typically his acknowledgement of it will not be based on any *inference* from the situation, or from his own behavior or previous actions—as would be the conjecture of others. He *tells* us his motive *without* inference" (Malcolm 1994, 76, first italics added).

We can, when we reflect about how this language-game works, just be struck by its sheer existence and contingency. And this is true not only with the language-games we play with "motive" but also with "intention" or with any other language-game (Malcolm 1994, 75–77). We have contingency here, not necessity. Gone are the supposed necessities of the *Tractatus* and indeed of the whole philosophical tradition. Reflecting on how Wittgenstein is reasoning and how Wittgenstein thinks we should reason if we would be realistic, Malcolm remarks, we "cannot explain why this use of language exists. All we can do is describe it—and *behold* it" (Malcolm 1994, 76). He quotes from *On Certainty* where Wittgenstein makes a general comment about language-games. "You must bear in mind that the language game is, so to speak, something unforeseeable. I mean it is not based on grounds. Not reasonable (or unreasonable). It stands there like our life" (Wittgenstein 1969, 559).

Religions, that is Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, etc., etc., are ancient and complex forms of life, that over time change in a myriad of ways with their distinctive but purely contingent language-games.[6]

Within these language-games there can be the giving of reasons, explanations, and justifications, but for the language-games and forms of life themselves, as we have noted, there can be no explanations or justifi-

cation and no foundations for them either. They are human activities that are just there and religious forms of life like other forms of life are neither reasonable nor unreasonable. They do not rest on some deeper metaphysical or theological foundations or any kind of grounding theory. They neither have some foundationalist epistemological grounding nor any other kind of grounding nor do they stand in need of such grounding, rationalization, or theorizing. They are, Wittgenstein argues, in order just as they are. They are just there, as we have already noted Wittgenstein saying, like our lives. There can, and indeed sometimes should, be *internal* criticisms within religious language-games. Some expressions of faith are less adequate than others, less adequately capture the aspirations of a particular religion, but there can be, Wittgenstein has it, no intelligible standing outside these forms of life and assessing them. Justification comes to an end when we come up against them. This is true for all forms of life, religion included. As Malcolm puts it, giving what he takes to be Wittgenstein's account, "Wittgenstein regarded the language-games, and their associated forms of life, as beyond explanation. The inescapable logic of this conception is that the terms 'explanation,' 'reason,' 'justification' have a use exclusively *within* the various language-games" (Malcolm 1994, 77, italics added). Or again, "An explanation is *internal* to a particular language-game. There is no explanation that *arises above* our language-games and explains *them*. This would be a super-concept of explanation—which means that it is an ill-conceived fantasy" (Malcolm 1994, 78). What we can and should do as philosophers is observe and describe language-games; and, with hard work and luck, we will come to see more clearly, by a perspicuous representation, the use of the terms of our language-games and the role they play in our lives. Philosophy, the kind of therapeutic philosophy that Wittgenstein, Conant, Diamond, Malcolm, Rhees, and Winch practice, enters when we become entangled in our concepts—the use of our terms. There in such particular situations philosophy can, by assembling reminders for a particular purpose, enable us to command a clearer view of our use of these terms and it can dispel our confusions about them. Philosophy, Wittgenstein has it, as do neopragmatists as well, "cannot explain why anything happens or exists" and "it cannot reveal the essential nature of anything" for there are no such essential natures. Its way of proceeding is descriptive and elucidatory, elucidatory in the service of dispelling the confusion we almost invariably fall into when we reflect on our concepts. We normally can operate *with* them without difficulties, but we often fall into confusions—suffer from mental cramps—when we try to operate *upon* them.

All of this, of course, applies to our religious concepts, as much as to any other concepts. When the engine isn't idling; when we work with them—operate *with* them rather than *upon* them—we understand them,

Wittgenstein gives us to understand, well enough, if we have been enculturated into such forms of life, but when we think about them, as when we think about other concepts as well, we almost irresistibly fall into confusion about them. The task of philosophers, for themselves as well as for others, is to dispel such confusions by providing *in situto* a perspicuous representation of these concepts. We move about, usually effortlessly, in our grammar, in our everyday practices. But in thinking *about* what we do with words we not infrequently fall into perplexity. In order to remove our misconceptions, Malcolm has it, no *theorizing* is called for, neither scientific nor philosophical. What is required is only that we *look* carefully at the grammar which is at our command. We can think with it even if we stumble, while still thinking with it, when we try to think about it. But in doing this Wittgenstein's counsel is, "Don't think, but look!" (Wittgenstein 1953, 66; Malcolm 1994, 79–80).

Philosophy, that is good philosophy, should replace our age-old metaphysical theorizing and its ersatz scientific replacements in a so-called scientific philosophy bent on formulating theories about the nature of meaning, thinking, reference, belief, knowledge, mind, good, and God. By contrast, good philosophy—therapeutic philosophy practiced after the fashion of Wittgenstein—cannot interfere with the actual use of language. For it *elucidation* comes to accurate description in the service of dispelling confusions *about* our use of language. We have a mastery of our language—of the use of our terms—but we fall into confusion when we try to think about them; when we reflect about our use and try to grasp "the essence" of our concepts expressed by these terms. Wittgenstein remarked in his *Philosophical Investigations* that our "mistake is to look for an explanation where we should see the facts as 'primary phenomena [*Urphänomene*].' That is, where we should say: *this language-game is played*" (Wittgenstein 1953, 176). Or again, "The question is not one of explaining a language-game by our experiences, but of observing a language-game" (Wittgenstein 1953, 176).

A language-game, as Malcolm well puts it, "is an employment of language that is embedded in one of the innumerable patterns of human life" (Malcolm 1994, 81). *Some* forms of life are forms of life that not all people in all cultures share (Malcolm 1994, 82). We cannot, Malcolm has it, explain why this is so: that is why some people have them and others do not. He remarks, "Neither philosophy nor science can explain this. What philosophy can do is to correct our inclination to assume, because of superficial similarities, that different language-games and forms of life are really the same" (Malcolm 1994, 82). Some words refer to or stand for something. They have a reference. But "Hans," "blue," "2," "the Empire State Building," "grace," and "God" do not all refer in the same way. We must, in particular, not assume that "God" refers like "Hans" or "the Empire State Building."

Wittgenstein, and, for that matter, Norman Malcolm and Peter Winch both following Wittgenstein, are as much set against the idea that there could be a one true description of the world or some ultimate explanation which would show us what reality really is as are neopragmatists such as Richard Rorty and Hilary Putnam. Such notions, they all believe, are without sense. Natural theology and natural atheology, as much as metaphysical realism, are incoherent. We can have no such knowledge and we do not need it. Religious beliefs neither can have any backing from metaphysics or natural theology or science, nor do they need it. (Here there is no difference between the earlier and the later philosophy of Wittgenstein.) But, by parity, atheological metaphysical theories or so-called scientific theories of a so-called scientific philosophy or a "scientific worldview," which are really metaphysical theories in disguise, are also incoherent and can provide no intelligible ground or basis for *rejecting* or *criticizing* religion. Such activities—theology and atheology—take in each other's dirty linen. Both should be set aside as houses of cards.

However, Malcolm is quick to remind us that Wittgenstein's account is not a form of irrationalism or nihilism which says goodbye to reason or reasonableness, though Wittgenstein, as much as does Paul Feyerabend, says farewell to Philosophical Reason or Scientific Reason. (So-called Philosophical Reason or Scientific Reason would be more apt.) But to be against Reason is not to be against reasoning and justification *within* language-games and to the reflective effort to make sense of our lives and to be reasonable. And that reasons, falsifications, explanations come to an end "does not mean that there are no reasons, justifications, explanations for anything" (Malcolm 1994, 82).

Within many of our language-games, when we are operating with them, and reasoning and reflecting inside their parameters, reasons, justifications, explanations often can be given and often are perfectly in place. What, however, Wittgenstein does stoutly claim, and Malcolm and Winch follow him here, is that the giving of reasons, justifications, and explanations come to an end *somewhere*.

> Where is that? It is at the existence of the language-games and the associated forms of life. There is where explanation has reached its limit. There reasons stop. In philosophy we can only notice the language-games, describe them, and sometimes wonder at them. (Malcolm 1994, 82)

There we see what has been called Wittgenstein's *quietism*. Quietism or not, for us here it is a key question whether, and if so how, it applies to religion—to Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and the like. What is at least initially unsettling in this context in thinking about Wittgenstein and Wittgensteinians such as Malcolm and Winch is that it seems that, if

their way of characterizing how to proceed in philosophy is correct, this means that no philosophical or any other kind of reasonable criticism, or for that matter defense, is possible of forms of life or indeed any form of life, including Hinduism, Christianity, and the like.[7] Is this where we are? Is this the end of the line?

III

It can be responded to such Wittgensteinianism that religions, and most strikingly Christianity with which Wittgenstein and Malcolm are most concerned, are *inescapably in part metaphysical religiosities* (Hägerström 1964). Moreover, the part that is metaphysical cannot be excised from the rest leaving the rest intact. Without a metaphysical part as a settled element (component) in that form of life, the form of life will not even be recognizable as Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, or Islam. There are no doctrineless or creedless religions. Religion is indeed a doing, a committing yourself to act or try to act in a certain way, but it is not *only* that. In Christianity, for example, God is said to be the ultimate spiritual being—the very ground of the world—transcendent to the world and, in being so, is eternal and beyond space and time. And it is an essential part of that very religion to believe that human beings have immortal souls such that they—that is we—will not perish or at least will not perish forever when we die: when, that is, we lose our earthly life. And in addition there is what Kierkegaard called the scandal of the Trinity, but still, he believed, a scandal to be accepted trustingly on faith. These are central beliefs for Christianity and without them Christianity would not be Christianity. It, of course, is not *only* a belief-system. It is also, as Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard stress, a demanding way of life that requires of believers—genuine believers—a reorientation of their lives. But it is also, and inescapably, a belief-system with a set of doctrines.

This belief-system is a metaphysical belief-system and Christianity integrally is a metaphysical religiosity. It simply comes with the religion. But, if what Wittgenstein, Malcolm, Winch, and the neopragmatists say is so, metaphysical belief-systems are all incoherent: "houses of cards," as Wittgenstein said. But then that very form of life, *metaphysically infused as it is*, should be said by Wittgenstein and Wittgensteinians to be incoherent. But that is not at all what they say.

Still, that antimetaphysical strain is central to their accounts. But, on another equally central part of Wittgenstein's account, Christianity can't be incoherent, for Christianity, as other religions as well, consists in a more or less integrated cluster of distinctive language-games—employments of language embedded in a pattern of human life—and thus a form

of life. But forms of life and language-games cannot on Wittgenstein's account be incoherent or illusory or even in any central or crucial way in error. Such notions have no application with respect to forms of life. So we can see here that something has to give. Two central points of Wittgenstein's account—or so at least it seems—are incompatible with each other. Religions are metaphysical schemes and metaphysical schemes are incoherent, but religions are forms of life and it makes no sense to say of a form of life that it is incoherent.

Wittgenstein, I think, would respond, and here I think Kierkegaard would respond in the same or a similar manner as well, that these doctrinal elements—these metaphysical or metaphysical-theological beliefs as important as they have *historically* been to Christianity and other religions as well—are nonetheless incoherent and should be set aside while still keeping other elements which are vitally important to those religious. These religious metaphysical beliefs are not what is really important in religion and religiously sensitive people have—though sometimes inchoately—always recognized that.

What Wittgenstein saw as important in religion is that, if one could have faith—if one could trust in God—that that will turn around one's life enabling one to be a decent person and to without vanity or arrogance do good in the world. He took *faith without works* to be utterly vain. Indeed it should not, as he saw it, properly speaking even be called "faith." Moreover, as he says in his *Notebooks* of 1916, "to pray is to think about the meaning of life" and that "to believe in God means to see that life has a meaning" (Wittgenstein 1961, 73; Malcolm 1994, 10). These remarks are, against most of the philosophical temper of Wittgenstein, utterly reductionistic. If what they say is so, it would make, by implicit stipulative redefinition, many reflective and sensitive atheists into believers in God. By verbal magic all sensitive, reflective, caring people become religious believers. It is to take what may very well be a *necessary* condition for genuine religious belief and turn it into a *sufficient* one. Is this the end of the matter? Perhaps not quite. Let me proceed indirectly by first recording some of Wittgenstein's specific comments about religion. Moreover, it is important to keep in mind the fact that historically religions have changed over time and that there is no reason to believe "history has come to end" and to think that they will not continue to change.

Wittgenstein had, as I have remarked, scant patience with philosophical theology or the philosophy of religion, but throughout his life he read and reread the gospels, thought at one time seriously about becoming a priest, and was deeply taken by the ancient liturgical prayers of the Latin rite and their translation in the Anglican prayer book, remarking that they "read as if they had been soaked in centuries of worship" (Malcolm 1994, 17). Speaking to his close friend, Maurice Drury, who had formed the intention to be ordained as a priest, Wittgenstein remarked

> Just think, Drury, what it would mean to have to preach a sermon every week. You couldn't do it. I would be afraid that you would try and give some sort of philosophical justification for Christian beliefs, as if some proof was needed. The symbolisms of Catholicism are wonderful beyond words. But any attempt to make it into a philosophical system is offensive. (Malcolm 1994, 11)

It was the *activist*, life-orientation involving *not* the speculative-cosmological side of Christianity that appealed to Wittgenstein. What gripped him was Christianity's call to radically alter the manner of one's life—to be just and caring with one another, to clearly see what a wretched person one was, to atone for one's sins, and to struggle to be a decent human being.

The influence of Kierkegaard on Wittgenstein was very deep. It shows itself in the above remarks about guilt and sin and, again quite differently, in his attitude toward the historical claims of Christianity and in what he thought philosophy could achieve vis-à-vis religion. Wittgenstein (echoing Kierkegaard) wrote, "Christianity is not based on a historical truth; rather it gives us a (historical) narrative and says: now believe! But not, believe this narrative with the belief appropriate to a historical narrative—rather believe, through thick and thin, and you can do that only as the result of a life" (Wittgenstein 1980, 32; Malcolm 1994, 32). Wittgenstein, again like Kierkegaard, saw religion not only as something that makes extreme demands on one, but as something which answers to the needs of genuinely religious people—people who not only see themselves to be extremely imperfect but as wretched. "Any halfway decent man," Wittgenstein wrote, "will think himself extremely imperfect, but a religious man believes himself *wretched*" (Wittgenstein 1980, 45; Malcolm 1994, 17). Somewhat earlier in his *Miscellaneous Remarks*, Wittgenstein wrote "faith is faith in what my heart, my soul 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" (Wittgenstein 1980, 33; Malcolm 1994, 17).

He, given his sense of what religion really is, is fully, intellectually speaking, on the fideist side coming down to us from Tertullian, Pascal, Hamann, and, most fully, from Kierkegaard. But in his very conceptualization of fideism there was also for religious persons an intense activist side very distinct from his Quietism in *philosophy*. This comes out strikingly in a remark he made in 1946:

> One of the things Christianity says, I think, is that all sound doctrines are of no avail. One must change one's *life*. (Or the *direction* of one's life.)
>
> That all wisdom is cold; and that one can no more use it to bring one's life into order than one can forge *cold* iron.
>
> A sound doctrine does not have to *catch hold* of one; one can follow it like a doctor's prescription.—But here something must grasp one and

> turn one around.—(This is how I understand it.) Once turned around, one must stay turned around.
>
> Wisdom is passionless. In contrast faith is what Kierkegaard calls a *passion*. (Wittgenstein 1980, 53)

For Wittgenstein, as for Tertullian, Pascal, Hamann, and Kierkegaard, religion was not a question of proving anything or even the articulating of doctrine, even a doctrine that orders one's life.

> [Wittgenstein] objected to the idea that Christianity is a "doctrine," i.e., a theory about what has happened and will happen to the human soul. Instead, it is a description of actual occurrences in the lives of some people—of "consciousness of sin," of despair, of salvation through faith. For Wittgenstein the emphasis in religious belief had to be on doing—on "amending one's ways," "turning one's life around." (Malcolm 1994, 19)

He came to have, mixed together with this striving to turn his life around and his realizing that this was what religion was about, an intense desire for purity together with an equally intense sense of his own impurity, his sinfulness and guilt, his standing under Divine judgment, his need for redemption and forgiveness. He had a keen sense of a judging and redeeming God, but the conception of a creator was foreign to him and, as Malcolm put it, "any cosmological conception of a Deity derived from the notion of cause or of infinity would be repugnant to him" (Malcolm 1994, 10).

In spite of Wittgenstein's statement that "I am not a religious man," I think that it is, as Malcolm puts it, "surely right to say that Wittgenstein's mature life was strongly marked by religious thought and feeling" (Malcolm 1994, 21). Kierkegaard has percipiently shown how difficult it is to be religious, how many people are deceived in thinking they are religious when they are not, and that some people who would honestly say they are not, and even some—say, some militant atheists—who would vehemently assert that they are not, are nonetheless religious and indeed deeply so. It is also the case that with his clarity of intellect, together with his deep religious sensitivity, Wittgenstein is likely to have had a keen sense of what a religious form of life is. I have claimed, as have many others, that there is no doctrineless religion and that religion inescapably involves making cosmological (metaphysical) claims (Nielsen 1989a, 1999). Wittgenstein firmly rejects this. Is he right to do so?

IV

Concerning what we discussed in III and what we shall continue to discuss here, it will be necessary, as Winch reminds us, "to observe the distinction between Wittgenstein's own religious reflections and his philosophical comments on religious discourse" (Winch 1994, 133). I shall be concerned centrally with the latter and shall show concern with the former principally to help us, if it can, to gain a purchase on how we should think and feel about religion. I want to try to see what kind of form of life it involves, what kinds of language-games are integral to it, what role it can and should play in our lives, and what philosophically we are justified in saying about these matters.

Pursuant to this I should say something about Peter Winch's discussion of Wittgenstein on religion and about his reservations concerning Malcolm's account. Malcolm's account of how Wittgenstein understands religion and how he understands philosophy in relation to religion is an important one. That notwithstanding, Winch, I believe, has brought out some key ways in which Malcolm's account is flawed. I want to highlight them and then comment on them.

1. As we have seen, Malcolm claims, and claims for Wittgenstein, that there is no explanation for the existence of language-games or forms of life. Winch says that this is misleading. I think he actually shows something stronger, namely, that, taken straightforwardly, the claim is just false. Still, though false, taken straightforwardly, we can give it a very specialized reading in which it is not false and, so understood, it makes an important point that is frequently lost sight of in thinking about what religion is.

Winch does not disagree with the general understanding that Wittgenstein firmly maintained that explanation has an end and that explanatory theories are inappropriate in philosophy (Winch 1994, 100). Good philosophy, he agrees, should be descriptive in the way Malcolm, following Wittgenstein, characterizes. That is not at all in dispute between them or between me and them as being something that Wittgenstein firmly maintained. Moreover, Winch, like Malcolm, thought that Wittgenstein was right about this. But Malcolm overlooks, Winch has it, "the very different issues that are at stake in various of the contexts in which Wittgenstein insists that 'explanation has an end' " (Winch 1994, 100). Winch writes that it "is misleading to say that 'Wittgenstein regarded the language-games and thus associated forms of life, as beyond explanation.' Language-games are not a phenomenon that Wittgenstein had discovered with the peculiar property that their existence cannot be explained!" (Winch 1994, 104–105). Malcolm maintains that neither the "hard" sciences nor the "soft" sciences can explain why various practices exist. But, as Winch points out, that is simply false. There are many cases, he observes, "in which historians, anthropologists, or linguists give well founded explanations of the existence of this or that practice. Why ever not! The important question for us [that is for we philosophers] to ask is:

what relevance would such explanations have to the resolution of philosophical difficulties?" (Winch 1994, 106). What Winch takes it that (*pace* Malcolm) we should *not* maintain is that language-games are *intrinsically* beyond the power of these sciences to provide explanations of, but rather what we should say is that any explanation they might offer would turn out to be quite uninteresting, and useless *as far as the philosopher's characteristic puzzlement is concerned* (Winch 1994, 106).

Wittgenstein, Winch has it—and it seems to me correctly as a bit of Wittgenstein interpretation—was not concerned to deny that there was any reasonable sense in which explanations of practices could be given. He was concerned, rather, "with the peculiar pseudosense in which philosophers seek 'explanations.' " Spinoza, for example, thought, as Winch remarks, "that because explanations have come to an end there must be something which has no further explanation, a *causa sui*" (Winch 1994, 104, quoting Spinoza). Wittgenstein was concerned to combat that, to show that that kind of rationalism is senseless: that it makes no sense to say that there is something beyond explanation—something intrinsically unexplainable—on which all ordinary explanations depend or that there is, if we push matters resolutely, some *ultimate explanation*—some super-explanation as it were—which finally explains everything and brings inquiry to an end. Wittgenstein does not think, Winch observes, "that explanations come to an end with something that is intrinsically beyond further explanation. They come to an end for a variety of quite contingent and pragmatic reasons, perhaps because of a practical need for action, perhaps because the puzzlement which originally prompted the search for explanation has evaporated (for one reason or another)" (Winch 1994, 104). There are many situations, perhaps most situations, in which we have no need "at all" to explain a practice. The practice seems to us—and sometimes rightly so—unproblematic. But then, as C. S. Peirce and John Dewey stressed, circumstances might arise in which we need, or at least want, an explanation for one or another specific pragmatic purpose—political, moral, sociological, or some combination of them or perhaps because the practice does not seem for some reasonably specific reasons to be working so well and indeed might not be working well. Such situations do arise and there is no reason to think such explanations, answering to such problematic situations, are impossible, always or even generally undesirable, or that they will invariably, or even standardly, degenerate into philosophical pseudoexplanations. Moreover, we do not have good textual grounds for thinking that Wittgenstein thought that.

Suppose, however, we stop talking about explanation and talk of *justification* instead. Wittgenstein also famously said that justification must come to an end or it would not be justification. Malcolm has stressed as a view which is both Wittgenstein's and right "that reasons, justifications, explanations, reach a terminus in the language-games and their internally related forms of human life." Let us set aside explanation and just concentrate on the giving of reasons and the justifying (if such is in order) of a form of life. Winch takes it, correctly, as a bit of Wittgenstein exegesis, "that the expression of religious belief is itself a language-game for which it makes no sense to ask for . . . rational justification" (Winch 1994, 111). *Within* a form of life, a justification of particular beliefs or particular conceptions in accordance with the constitutive norms and conceptions of that form of life can sometimes be given. But a request for a justification of the constitutive norms and conceptions—the very framework beliefs of a religious form of life—is another matter. Wittgenstein has it that to ask for justification here is senseless. Job's seeking to require God to answer to him is seen to rest on a mistake for one who has faith. The showing of why God's will is sovereign and should never be questioned—the challenging of the whole framework—is, given Wittgenstein's conceptions, out of place. Indeed, not simply out of place, but incoherent. Malcolm had remarked, Winch reminds us, that even in this technological and materialistic age, there are people who are inside the practices, the language-games of, say Christianity or Judaism, who pray

> to God for help, asking him for forgiveness, thanking him for the blessings of this life—and who thereby gain comfort and strength, hope and cheerfulness. Many of these people would have no understanding of what it would *mean* to provide rational justification for their religious belief—nor do they feel a need for it. (Malcolm 1994, 84)

And indeed Wittgenstein has it—and here both Malcolm and Winch follow him—justification here is not possible and, moreover, even if it were, there is no need for it. Asking for it is not only obtuse but is wrong, morally wrong.

There are at least three issues here. First, it seems fair enough to say that a plain, untutored person—say a minimally educated person living in an isolated community of believers—is being reasonable—or at least not unreasonable—in so believing. Moreover, it would, in most circumstances, be sadistic to challenge such a person's faith—a faith that that person regards as an undeserved *gift* from God. It would be unnecessary and pointless cruelty causing, if it was at all psychologically effective, unnecessary and pointless suffering. *Second*, there is the question that, if that person began to feel—say quite without wishing it—the irritation of doubt, whether (a) there are considerations available to an honest, reflective person sufficient to still, without subterfuge or self-deception, those doubts or (b) whether this is even an intelligible or legitimate possibility: whether it makes sense to have such doubts? They *may* themselves rest on philosophical confusions. Moreover, perhaps concerning something so

basic—something so much a part of the life of some people—we have something which does not admit of such rationalization, such a reasoning out of things? *Third*, whether, that isolated person aside, for anyone in our modern cultures there are considerations which that person, or several persons reasoning together and sensitively feeling through the matter, could articulate which would show that such beliefs were not only coherent but not unreasonable? Or to come to the opposite conclusion? Are these, as it seems Wittgenstein and Wittgensteinians believe—*must* believe?—bad questions? But if that is claimed, it seems to be in order for us to ask just *why* are these bad questions. Or are they really bad questions? Do we just have, in maintaining they are, Wittgensteinian dogma here?

I think any Wittgensteinian would respond to this last query and the second one as well by rejecting them out of hand. It is *practices* which give the intelligibility and coherence to talk—words as they are used in their living contexts, in this case the context of a living engaged faith. *If theorizing, he would say, makes the talk seem incoherent or unreasonable, then so much the worse for the theorizing.* Moreover, and in addition, religion is something special for it is not a matter, except peripherally, of the intellect but of the heart. The intellect in this context can only dispel bad philosophical reasoning that gets in the way of faith. There is in such fideistic reasoning a great distance between the confident doing of natural theology by Aquinas and Scotus and the fideistic reasoning of Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein: between the confident claim that if we reason carefully and attend to the facts we can see that it is irrational not to believe in God, to the acceptance of God simply on faith—on a faith, or a trust, that eschews all search for or recognition of the appropriateness or even the very possibility of justification, except in the purely negative sense of showing the mistakes of those who would say that without justification your faith is in vain. For to say that—to demand justification here—is not only unjustified but unjustifiable. Philosophical clarity, Wittgensteinians will argue, shows such argumentation is at best mistaken. If Wittgenstein and Wittgensteinians such as Norman Malcolm, D. Z. Phillips, Rush Rhees, Peter Winch, Stanley Cavell, and James Conant and neopragmatists such as Hilary Putnam and Richard Rorty are right about the incoherence of metaphysics and foundational epistemology, then the rationalistic arguments of the philosophy of religion or natural theology or atheology cannot get off the ground. Then isn't the conclusion we should come to about religion such a Wittgensteinian one? Though this, of course, does not mean that we ourselves should become religious, but that we should desist from making philosophical claims about religious belief resting on a mistake. That is itself, they would argue, a mistake—a very big philosophical mistake. We might continue perfectly appropriately, if we are, to remain atheists. But we should not engage in atheology—philosophical

arguments for atheism. Philosophy has nothing to say here either for or against religious belief. Isn't this the conclusion we should be drawn to?

2. Perhaps what has been said above should be sufficient to put such matters to rest, to lead us, if we would be reasonable, to react and view things in such a manner. Still such an equilibrium is seldom the case in philosophy over something so fundamental. So let us look at things from another angle. Malcolm, correctly catching something that Wittgenstein stresses, remarks that what for Wittgenstein is "most fundamental in a religious life is not the affirming of creeds, nor even prayer and worship—but rather, doing *good deeds*—helping others in concrete ways, treating their needs as equal to one's own, opening one's heart to them, not being cold or contemptuous, but loving" (Malcolm 1994, 92). Surely someone with any religious sensitivity—or indeed with just plain human sensitivity—will feel the force of that. That said, Winch's cautionary remarks are very important here. Winch says that the link between faith and works "is by no means as straightforward as Malcolm's discussion may suggest" (Winch 1994, 121). There are people with just the doings and feelings described above—people having exactly those attitudes—who lack religious sensibility who, as Malcolm himself in his seventh chapter reminds us, "take a serious view of religion, but regard it as a harmful influence, an obstacle to the fullest and best development of humanity" (Winch 1994, 121). Are we, to return to something mentioned earlier, to turn them into religious believers—people with religious faith—by *stipulative redefinition*? Wittgenstein remarked to Drury that it was his belief "that only if you try to be helpful to other people will you in the end find your way to God" (Malcolm 1994, chapter 1). Winch tersely and correctly remarks,

> It is important because Wittgenstein did *not* say that being helpful to other people *is* finding one's way to God, nor that it is a *sufficient condition* of doing so. He said it is a *necessary condition* of doing so. One cannot live a godly life *without* "good works"; but all the same there is more to the godly life than that. (Winch 1994, 121)

Moreover, as Winch also stresses, we cannot, as Malcolm sometimes seems to think, understand the "works" Wittgenstein stresses—understand the role they play in the believer's life—independently of their connections "with a particular faith on the part of the doer" (Winch 1994, 124). The doing of good, the being loving and humble, are for the religious believer *internally* connected to the "use of the language of faith in the life of the believer" (Winch 1994, 124). This seems to me, but *perhaps* not to Winch, to imply that such ways of being cannot in the thought and actions of a believer be disconnected from certain doctrinal strands and

the creedal expressions of a particular religion. But this at least seems to run against Wittgenstein's own setting of doctrines aside as not being what religion is or anything essential to religion.

It is not difficult to surmise how Wittgenstein, and Kierkegaard as well, would respond. "There you go again," they would no doubt snort, "with your stubborn and even arrogant intellectualism, turning religion into a *theory*—failing to see what is there before your eyes that gives religion its importance. It is not doctrines or creeds that count but commitment and concern turned into action on yourself, though at the same time with a certain inwardness, and *for* others. Religion is ultimate commitment and concern. Brush aside all this sterile intellectualism. Theorizing about religion is not the way to God: thinking of great intellectual mansions while you live in a little moral shack" (Kierkegaard's comment on Schelling and Hegel).

Theorizing about religion is, indeed, not the way to God, if there is a way to God. The way is in your action on yourself and for others, but, if it is done religiously, it is embedded in words integral to a form of life that would not be the form of life it is without the doctrines and the creeds. Religions are for the sake of life—for the very things Wittgenstein stresses—but genuine religious believers, immersed in those forms of life, see and feel their commitments and concerns and deeds in terms of these very forms containing, and inescapably, these doctrines and creeds. *They do not have religious feelings which swing loose from religious concepts.* Both their very understanding and deepest reactions are tied up (internally linked) with doctrines and creeds and the distinctive concepts that go with them. And their reactions and understanding here cannot be split apart (as if there were a "cognitive" and a "noncognitive" side to them). *There is no religious understanding without the reactions and no reactions which are intelligibly religious without that understanding.*

To try to reduce religion and religious belief to some basic deep commitment and a concern to be a decent human being, to really care about others and do good, even if we add—probably with very little understanding—"ultimate" to "commitment" and "concern," just takes what, as we have already observed, is a *necessary* condition for being genuinely religious (note the implicit *persuasive* definition here) and turns it into a *sufficient* condition. On such a view of things Marx, Engels, Luxembourg, Durkheim, Freud, Dewey, Weber, Gramsci all become religious. But that is a *reductio.*

3. Wittgenstein, under the influence of William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience,* came to recognize that the way in which people express their religious beliefs differs enormously (Winch 1994, 108). Even within a given confessional community there are "vastly diverse forms of religious sensibility. And these different forms of diversity criss-cross in bewilderingly complex ways" (Winch 1994, 109). Even if we avoid any attempt to so define "religion" such that it captures all and only the great

historic religions and those group activities and beliefs anthropologists firmly regard as religious activities of recognizable religions, e.g., the religion of the Dinka or the Neur, and concentrate only on those religions—Christianity and Judaism—in which Wittgenstein took the most interest, we still get very diverse forms of religious sensibility and conceptualization and interpretation of doctrine and even doctrine itself.

Wittgenstein saw life as a "gift" from God for which one should be grateful, but life, he firmly believed, was something that also imposes inescapable obligations. He also thought in his work and in his life he required help. Some "light" from above, as he put it. These attitudes, Winch observes, unlinked as they are with specific confessional commitments, are from the "point of a developed theological doctrine" inchoate (Winch 1994, 109). But this, as Winch is perfectly aware, would not have bothered Wittgenstein one bit. He set himself, as we have seen, against theological and religious *doctrine.* More worrisomely, from Wittgenstein's point of view, there are considering the above attitudes—the above expressions of religious sensibility—some serious and reflective people whose very seriousness manifests itself in opposition to such attitudes (Winch 1994, 110). Some people will have an attitude that accepts "one's fate as 'the will of God,' an attitude which neither pretends to provide any explanation of that fate nor seeks to find one" (Winch 1994, 110). This attitude characteristically goes along "with an attitude of *gratitude* for life" (Winch 1994, 113). But Wittgenstein remarks, commenting on the expression of a very different attitude,

> We might speak of the *world* as malicious; we could easily imagine the Devil had created the world, or part of it. And it is *not* necessary to imagine the evil spirit intervening in particular situations; everything can happen "according to the laws of nature"; it is just the whole scheme of things will be aimed at evil from the very start. (Wittgenstein 1980, 71)

But the reference to the Devil here is, of course, no more an explanation—nor does Wittgenstein think that it is—than is a reference to the will of God. Either viewed as attempts at an explanation would be what Wittgenstein called an unnecessary and stupid anthropomorphism (Wittgenstein 1980, 71). But faced with all the horrible contingencies of life, the suffering, cruelty, indifference, pain, jealousy, hatred, failures of integrity, the breaking of trust—the whole bloody lot—some would speak of neither God nor the Devil or of the goodness, in spite of it all, of the world or of the malignancy or maliciousness of the world. Indeed they would think (*pace* William James) that such talk makes no sense. Some would say, as I would, " 'That's how things are' without reference to God or the Devil" (Winch 1994, 114). I think (to abandon for a moment

a Wittgensteinian commitment to description and to speak normatively) this austere approach is a more proper frame of mind. We see that the plague is always with us, though sometimes rather dormant but at other times raging, and always as something that will return and we resolve to fight the plague. (Recall this was Albert Camus's figure of speech and his resolve as well.) But again this expression of attitude makes no more an attempt at an explanation than the expression of attitude that goes with speaking of God's will does or of the Devil having created the world does. Winch remarks perceptively that one "might want to single out the reference to the will of God as the only one that expresses a religious attitude; or one might want to single out 'that's just how things are' as the only attitude among these particular attitudes genuinely 'free of all superstition'" (Winch 1994, 114). Our language-games and forms of life, he observes, let us do either. And people, of course, do either. People, including reflective people of integrity, often differ here. And, as Hilary Putnam stresses, this is something to take to heart (Putnam 1995, 27–56). Moreover, it is not at all evident, to put it minimally, that there would be anything even approaching a consensus about which attitudes are the more appropriate or which run the deepest. Indeed not a few will think there is no answer to such "questions" and indeed no genuine questions either. And others would think that, even if in some sense there were, it would be inappropriate to ask them.

"It's God's Will," "It's the work of the Devil," and "That's how things are" are all nonexplanatory and in some language-games are where not only explanation stops, but where, Wittgensteinians would have it, justification and the giving of reasons stops as well. I think myself "That's how things are" is by far the more adequate way of viewing things. It is cleaner with less mystification and comes closer to—or so I think—telling it like it is. However, it should be immediately skeptically queried: how can I consistently say anything even remotely within that ball park, given my pragmatist and Wittgensteinian perspectivism and contextualism with its rejection of the idea that there can be a one true description of the world and my arguments to the effect that it makes no sense to say that one vocabulary is closer to reality than another or that we can coherently speak of standing outside all our practices and assessing them or that there is some unifying comprehensive practice that, like the Absolute, encompasses everything? (Putnam 1992, 80–107). I could say that for certain purposes "That's how things are" is the more adequate response and for other purposes the other ways are better, but I could not consistently, it is natural to respond, flat out say "That's how things are" is the more adequate conception. I could not say this because some noncontextualist conception of "That is how things are" is unintelligible. And, even more plainly and less controversially, I cannot even consistently say that that is

so because it comes closer to telling things like they are and is less mystificatory and obfuscating. There is no way things are *überhaupt* or even if there is, even if such talk somehow makes sense, we have no way of knowing or even plausibly conjecturing when this is so. So we are back with my pragmatic contextualism and how Wittgenstein sees things.

I think I can consistently have my pragmatist perspectivism *and* my claim about the greater adequacy of what I call my more austere "That's how things are" way of viewing things. I will now argue that this is so: that it is not a case of having my cake and eating it too. We have genuine descriptions and explanatory-practices which are nonconflicting alternatives to each other. For example, the giving of a physiological description of bodily movements or a description in terms of actions and intentions. Or, to take another, the giving of a common sense description of tables, bits of mud, water flowing, the moon being pink on a given night, in contrast to giving a scientific physical description where we will say different things about solidity, color, and the like. These are alternative descriptive and explanatory-practices utilized for different purposes. But none of these descriptions are "closer to reality" or more adequate *sans phrase* than any other. We can only say that for different purposes one is more adequate than another; not that one is a more adequate or a better telling it like it is than another *period*. There the story about my perspectivism and contextualism is perfectly in place. It is also the account that Richard Rorty and Hilary Putnam would give of things.

To say (1) "That's God's will," (2) "That's the Devil's work," (3) "That's how things are" do we not also have, in a way similar to describing things in terms of bodily movements and describing things in terms of human actions, different perspectives answering to different interests with none of them being in some general, "perspective neutral" sense, more adequate? We can and should retort by remarking that with "That's God's will" or "That's the Devil's work" we have *metaphysical* utterances penetrating into our common life. They are metaphysical conceptions. And they, being metaphysical conceptions, are nonsensical, as Wittgenstein, and both Malcolm and Winch following him, contend, and, as we neopragmatists do as well. They are, when expressed, utterances which, in being metaphysical utterances, are incoherent, yielding pseudodescriptions and pseudoperspectives from which no intelligible descriptions, interpretations, or explanations could flow. Premises (1) and (2) but not (3) yield nonsense, but not "intelligible nonsense" somehow conveying "cognitive depth" as traditionalist interpretations of the *Tractatus* claim Wittgenstein obliquely hints at. If Wittgenstein, the Wittgensteinians, and the neopragmatists are right in seeing metaphysical claims as houses of cards that require philosophical therapy to break their spell, we do not have three alternative perspectives here but only one (a) in effect summarizing a bunch of empirical observa-

tions and more or less concrete moral observations and (b) making a morally freighted generalization about them and two expressions of metaphysical fantasies that have crept into the language-games of *some* people. These metaphysical fantasies are, as Wittgenstein puts it in other contexts, wheels that turn no machinery, conceptions that do no work in these practices, and the people who use such phrases are only under the illusion that they have some understanding of what they are saying and that these metaphysical conceptions are functioning parts of our social practices with their embedded language-games. There are no metaphysical forms of life. (If it is replied they do rhetorical work this is in effect to concede the point.) And there are no metaphysical language-games, rule-governed social practices. The above cases are not like saying that we use physiological descriptions for certain purposes and action-intention descriptions for other purposes and that both can be perfectly in place for their own purposes but no one is just telling it the way things are. The three allegedly alternative characterizations under discussion consist in one actual characterization and two pseudocharacterizations and, of course, if this is so, we can, and should, say the one genuine one is more adequate. But that is not at all to say that it gestures at "the one true description of the world." There is no such thing.

Some (including Wittgenstein) might deny that "It's God's will" or "It's the work of the Devil" are metaphysical utterances. And if "God" and "the Devil" are taken to denote Zeus-like empirical entities then these utterances are not metaphysical. They are implicit, very vague empirical hypotheses. They are just crude, plainly false empirical propositions plainly disconfirmed. *Such* religious beliefs are superstitions and Wittgenstein was keenly aware of that and rejected *such* religious beliefs and such a way of looking at religion with disdain. But it is very unlikely that now—or even for a long time—many Christians, Jews, or Moslems so superstitiously conceive of God and the Devil. Indeed by now most of them do not. And where they do, Wittgenstein would have no sympathy at all with that. Where, alternatively, "God" is construed as an infinite individual transcendent to the universe, we plainly do have a metaphysical claim—and a very esoteric one at that—and as such it is held to be nonsensical not just by positivists but by Wittgensteinians and neopragmatists such as Putnam, Rorty, and myself as well (Nielsen 1982, 1985, 1989a). If to that it is said that is not how to construe "God" either, then it is difficult to know, unless we want to go back to the crude anthropomorphic construal or to a purely symbolic construal, how we are in some nonmetaphysical way to construe "God." Just what is this non-Zeus like, nonpurely symbolic, nonmetaphysical construal of "God"? Do we really have any understanding of what we are talking about here?

If instead it is said, "That's how things are" is itself a metaphysical statement this should be denied for it functions as a summarizing, somewhat moralizingly emotive, but all the same empirical, proposition standing in for (a) a lot more particular propositions such as people suffer, the wicked often flourish, starvation and malnutrition are pervasive, droughts and devastating earthquakes occur, people are struck down in their prime, alienation is pervasive, tyranny often goes unchecked, and the like and (b) the comment that this goes on at all times and in all places without much in the way of abatement. This—(b) in particular—*may* be an exaggeration, but that surely does not make it a metaphysical statement.

Suppose someone retorts that Jews and Christians do not have to treat "That's God's will" or "That's the Devil's work" in either the superstitious or the metaphysical way I attributed to them. Keep in mind, the response goes, that *practice* gives words their sense. Some mathematicians, when they speak of numbers, say they are abstract entities: real things but abstract things. And with this they become entangled in metaphysics. Indeed we have the shadow of Plato here. But they could, and most do, legitimately refuse to *so* theorize and just go on proving theorems, setting up axiomatic systems, or, as applied mathematicians, grinding out calculations for particular purposes and the like. Why cannot Jews, Christians, and Moslems do a similar thing? Why could they not, and indeed why should they not, just stick with their practices in saying and thinking the things about God that their language-games allow them to say? They need no more theorize *about* God than mathematicians *need* theorize *about* numbers. Indeed it is not only that they *need* not theorize, Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard would insist, but that they *should* not theorize. That is destructive of faith. It is my *intellectualism* again—and here I am a token of a familiar type—that is leading me down the garden path, that is making me mistakenly think that practices which actually are not unreasonable—indeed are compelling for the people who engage in them—are unreasonable and irrational.

It should be responded in turn that there are at least two disanalogies between the language-games of mathematics and the language-games of religion. First we know, without any metamathematics, without any theory of numbers, at least if we are mathematicians, how to establish truth-claims, or at least assertability-claims, in mathematics. Mathematics is a theory-structured practice and mathematicians in doing mathematics cannot but use theory and in that way theorize. We need not theorize *about* mathematics, but we, not infrequently, theorize, often to good effect, *with* it. Secondly, we have in mathematics some ability to say what we are talking about. We often talk nonsense in talking *about* mathematics but not always. But actual mathematical talk is another matter. We have no such ability with our talk of God, the Devil, or the soul. It is not just the metatalk that is troubling.[8]

Suppose, it is in turn responded, that this only shows some of the dif-

ferences between the language-games of mathematics and those of religion. We understand, if we are religious, that God is a *mystery* and—or so Wittgensteinians have it—that the very demand to be able to warrant our religious claims shows that we, in making that demand, do not understand them or understand what *faith* requires, including what it is to believe in God. Anything that we could warrant—establish the truth of—wouldn't be a genuine religious claim. To make such a rationalistic demand shows, Wittgenstein *et al.* would have it, that we do not understand religious language-games and that we are not operating from inside them. It would be like in logic to demand that an inductive argument be deductively valid. It would show that we understand neither what induction is nor what deduction is. We are just senselessly asking for induction to be deduction.

If this is what religious language-games are like, would it *not* be better *not* to engage in them? We do not know what counts for truth or falsity or in being reasonable or unreasonable here; indeed we do not even understand what we are saying. We are just in a fog. Nonsense engulfs us. Isn't talk of mystery just a high-fallutin' way of saying that? Once we see this clearly should we not desist—close up shop, so to say? Moreover, it is not just that we do not understand, we are forced, if we would play that language-game, to say things that we, if we reflect a bit, would not wish to say. Consider again Wittgenstein's remark in *Culture and Value* that we "might speak of the world as malicious" or "easily imagine the Devil created the world, or part of it" or that "the whole scheme of things will be aimed at evil from the very start." We not only *cannot* (*pace* Wittgenstein) easily imagine these things; we do not understand these utterances. We only, if we do not think, have the illusion of understanding them by extension from some familiar utterances we do understand. We understand what it is for a person to be malicious or an action or attitude to be malicious. We have truth-conditions or assertability-conditions for such claims. But for the *world* to be malicious? We can't intelligibly impute *intentions* to the world. That makes no sense at all. Speaking of the world being malicious is but a misleading way of making the perfectly secular utterance "Many people are malicious and this maliciousness is pervasive in our lives." Similarly while we understand "Sven created a new recipe" or "Jane created a more efficient electric car," we do not understand "The Devil created the world" or, for that matter, "God created the world." The former two sentences have truth-conditions or assertability-conditions. The latter two do not. Similarly language has gone on a holiday with "The whole scheme of things will be aimed at evil from the very start." Aside from not understanding what "the very start" comes to here, more importantly, we are, with such a remark, again imputing intentions and aims to what it makes no sense to say has or can have intentions or aims. To say Shakespeare's Richard III

aimed at evil or the Nazi regime or the Reagan regime aimed at evil makes sense, but the whole scheme of things, no more than the world, cannot be intelligibly said to *aim* at things either for good or for evil. A scheme of things or a world cannot have aims, form intentions, have desires, goals, and the like. There is and can be no such teleology of nature. There is no such functional language-game. Language is idle here. In support of this, we have supplied what Wittgenstein has called grammatical remarks. But would not Wittgenstein, of all people, perfectly well realize that? That is the way he repeatedly reasons. And the grammatical remarks I have assembled above seem to be plainly so. It looks like Wittgenstein, or anyone who tries to so reason, is in a double bind.

Of course Wittgenstein is right, as he says in the sentence following the one quoted above, that "things break, slide about, cause every imaginable mischief." But that, minimally hyperbolic though it is, is a purely secular utterance. We have not even the hint of a *religious* language-game here. *If* that is what we "*really* are saying in saying that the whole scheme of things will be aimed at evil," we have turned it, by stipulative redefinition, into an utterly secular platitude without a whiff of religion or religious sensibility. Where we understand what we are saying we do not have a religious language-game at all; where we have one we do not—the superstitious anthropomorphic ones aside—understand what is said and thus cannot understand what it is for something to be, for example, God's will and thus we cannot do God's will or fail to do God's will.

Suppose someone says that that is a philosopher's hat trick. People do God's will. People, following God's will, make pilgrimages to Lourdes, go to confession, give up philosophy, lead a life of celibacy, go to the Congo or Haiti to alleviate suffering, etc., etc. But to this, it in turn can be responded, that this—this doing of God's will—is but to do things that some people take to be obligatory, the right thing to do, desirable to do, and the like and that some of them associate these moral commitments with their *avowals* that that is doing God's will without understanding what God is or what his will is or how one could ascertain what it is to do God's will. It is just a formula they recite with, if they are genuinely theistically religious, great conviction and sometimes with intensity of feeling. But that does not, and cannot, turn it into sense, into an intelligible utterance.

Your intellectualism continues to get in the way, some will respond or at least think. The aim in speaking of religion, as Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein do, is to expose the roots of the intellectual's compulsion in approaching religion "always to reflect upon the task of living (a certain sort of life) rather than to attend to the task itself" (Conant 1993, 207). The thing to do is to go to church, to pray, to confess, to sing songs in praise of God, to alter your life by becoming more open and loving, to fight against your

arrogance and pride, and above all help your fellow humans by engaging with them in their life struggles. Don't think, act! Thinking will never lead you to faith. To think that it can is a grand illusion of much of the philosophy of religion business. Philosophy will not lead us to God or help us in our religious endeavors or even our religious understanding.

There is, both Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard have it, no summing "up the sense of a religion in philosophical or theological doctrines" (Winch 1994, 128). Kierkegaard stressed that religious belief stands at a very great distance from philosophical clarity. Such clarity is of no avail in coming to a religious life or, for that matter, in turning away from it and combating it. Wittgenstein, as we have seen, had scant use for religious doctrine, theology, or the philosophy of religion. He took it that one of the things that Christianity teaches us is that *even sound* doctrines are useless. The thing is to change your life or the direction of your life. Even achieving wisdom, if indeed we could do this, is of little value. Wisdom is cold and does not connect to your passions, does not grip your life, as religion does by taking hold of you and turning your life around (Wittgenstein 1990, 53). Wittgenstein, in a deeply anti-intellectualistic way, wrote, as we have already noted, that "Wisdom is cold and to that extent stupid. (Faith, on the other hand, is a passion.) It might also be said: Wisdom merely *conceals* life from you. Wisdom is like grey ash, covering up the glowing embers" (Wittgenstein 1990, 56). Religious faith is a passion yielding a trust that grips your life and turns it around. Trying to be intellectual about religion—trying to rationalize religion—will never get you anywhere. People who are gripped by religious forms of life will not try to show how the religious life is reasonable, though they need not say it is unreasonable either. They will see all argument and attempts at reasoning here either on the part of the believer or the skeptic as utterly pointless.

V

Is this the end of the line? Should we, vis-à-vis religion, take some such anti-intellectualist stance and claim that philosophical thinking, or any kind of thinking, only stands in the way of coming to grips with religion whether by way of faith or by rejection of religious faith? Perhaps one way—a somewhat indirect way—of coming to grips with things here is to contrast Pascal, and the world he lived in, with that of Kierkegaard or Wittgenstein and the worlds they lived in. Pascal was as much of a fideist as Kierkegaard or Wittgenstein, though I now think it is better to say Wittgenstein was a passionate friend of fideism rather than a fideist. Pascal says very much what we have noted Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard saying above about religion and passion and about doing

rather than thinking and about the role of faith. Yet for Pascal, in a way that is at a very great distance from both Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein, there "was only one true religion, Christianity; only one true form of Christianity, Catholicism; only one true expression of Catholicism, Port Royal" (Winch 1994, 108). Kierkegaard was a Protestant, but, unlike Calvin and Luther who believed Protestant versions of what Pascal believed, Kierkegaard would never for a moment have believed anything like that. The confessional group that is Lutheranism could not have had such a standing for him. Indeed he thought little of the possibility of being a Christian in Danish Christendom. The times, we should note, they are a-changing. Kierkegaard's cultural life, and even more so Wittgenstein's, is very different than Pascal's. And our cultural conditions are not Wittgenstein's. Today someone with deep religious sensibilities and something like a university education could not, without self-deception and irrationality, respond as Pascal did, though the latter's religious sensibilities are as deep as they go and he certainly had a fine education and a keen intelligence. To respond in a manner similar to Pascal's would now be perceived as fanaticism, by intellectuals, and indeed be, fanaticism or at least blind dogmatism. Wittgenstein was a person passionate about religion and while he did not regard himself as a religious person, he had the deeply embedded "ultimate" concerns and sensibilities of an intensely religious person. In that way he was a passionately religious person, if anyone ever was, but knowing what he does about religion, about the great diversity of religious responses, including in that diversity, deep religious responses and with them deep antireligious *religious* responses, he could never attach his faith—his, if you will, "infinite passion"—to any doctrine in the way that Pascal quite naturally did and as Luther and Calvin did. What was natural for Pascal's time and for Luther's is quite unthinkable for Kierkegaard's and Wittgenstein's (or for that matter for William James's). And for us the demystification of the world has gone even further. To repeat, "the times they are a-changing."

As we have seen, Wittgenstein wanted to eject all doctrine from the religious life or at least to regard it as of no importance. He, brought up a Catholic as he was, tended to use the vocabulary of Catholic Christianity; but it was clear enough that he attached little importance to the particular words that were used or, to be more specific and accurate, to the particular *doctrinal* formulae. Words used in prayer, words used in hymns and in rituals were—in just the form they took—very important to him. But while remaining intense about religious commitment and ambivalent but intense about the Catholic faith, still, as he saw things, the doctrinal content of that faith was not, to understate it, very important. Indeed for faith to be genuinely faith, it must for the person *in* the faith (though not at every moment of his or her waking life) be a matter of intense passion.

But, as Wittgenstein saw it, the content of that faith could, all the same, be very diffuse. Religious responses and religious conceptualizing vary greatly even within particular religious groups—say, Anglicanism, Presbyterianism, Reformed Judaism, Catholicism, Lutheranism. And, as things go on—as we stumble into our Brave New World—the diversity, and our sense of it, increases.

Wittgenstein was neither a believer nor a secularist, but there can be, and are, atheistical friends of religion and, what is something very different, even people who are antireligious *religious* persons. We can be, as I think it is plain that Wittgenstein was, firm friends of fideism, believing that fideism is the only acceptable religious response, the only religious game in town, yet be quite unable and, perhaps even if able, unwilling to believe. Still, he was firmly convinced, if one is to be religious, one should be a fideist.[9] In this rather extended sense only was Wittgenstein a fideist. Here he differs from Kierkegaard and Pascal.

Atheists—or through and through secularizers if the word "atheist" puts you off—come in various shapes and colors (Nielsen 1996, 427–50, 509–56). I am thinking of such different people as d'Holbach, Hume, Feuerbach, Marx, Gramsci, Santayana, Russell, Weber, Freud, Dewey, and Rorty. Many atheists are passionately antagonistic to religion and could never be thought of as atheistical friends of religion. I am thinking classically of d'Holbach and Diderot and among contemporary philosophers of Paul Edwards and Antony Flew. They see religion as a tissue of metaphysical errors and superstitions that yield no sound arguments for the existence of God at all and as being utterly incapable of in any reasonable way meeting the problem of evil or making sense of miracles or immortality. They see it as a groundless and pointless bunch of beliefs and practices that do more harm than good. Christianity, Judaism, and Islam are irrational and immoral belief-systems and practices. Religion, they have it, just leads us down the garden path. For them it is little better than superstition and a superstition with largely evil results. Here the conflict with Wittgenstein or Wittgensteinians is (to understate it) in tone and over what belief in God comes to. Wittgensteinians could say to such an atheist that, as you conceive of God and religion, it consists principally in a crude form of metaphysics that we have been as concerned as you to reject. Indeed such religion is ridiculous and religiously offensive; it is a superstitious set of beliefs. But Wittgensteinians will insist that religion isn't that. Religiously sensitive people would not so conceive of it, though they also stress that *some* people who are "minimally religious" (what Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard would regard as not genuinely religious at all) and even some who vociferously claim to be religious are religious in this superstitious and Neanderthal way. Some Wittgensteinians believe that "religious Neanderthals" and the d'Holbachians complement each other, they take in, that is, each other's dirty linen.

Atheistical friends of religion will, however, agree with rationalistic atheists—the d'Holbach-Flew sort described above—that sometimes religion integrally involves such crude metaphysics and they will believe, as well, that even in its genuinely religiously nuanced forms religion will contain cosmological elements that indeed are in error. Indeed they may think for *Tractarian* reasons that they are cognitively unintelligible. But with Wittgenstein they will agree that the cosmological side is not what is important about religion or what gives religion life. What gives it life is pretty much what Wittgenstein says it is, namely that religion helps us face and accept our tangled lives. They remain atheists because, setting cosmological conceptions aside as (to be pleonastic) bad metaphysics, as Wittgenstein does, what is left, as they reflectively sense these things, is inwardness and a certain kind of morality rooted in passion and the practices which are constitutive of religion. That, they agree, is all fine, but its substance, they point out, is *utterly secular*. Religious symbolism, however humanly important, is just that—*symbolism*. The substance is just that broadly moral substance and indeed it, given the incoherence of metaphysical concepts and most particularly supernaturalistic ones, cannot be anything but that. But unlike rationalistic atheists (the d'Holbach-Flew sort) they think this particular moral substance—this sense of what our lives and our values should be—is terribly important. Wittgenstein, and Kierkegaard as well, articulate for us, these atheistical friends of religion believe, a deep and compelling sense of what a really human life should be. So here we have what I have called atheistical friends of religion and *some* of them are even atheistic friends of fideism. George Santayana is a good example of such an atheist friend of religion.

What of what I have, not unparadoxically, called antireligious *religious* persons? Where do they stand in such a conversation? Like the atheistical friends of religion, they agree that Wittgenstein and Wittgensteinians with finely attuned religious sensitivity capture something that is deeply important in human life concerning which rationalistic atheists have a tin ear. This religious sensibility, they stress, is something that should not be lost. They see it in its strongest forms as a deep, humanly important response to life. Because of this stress, I have called them antireligious *religious* persons. Perhaps, less provocatively, they should be called instead intense religiously sensitive people—people such as Ludwig Feuerbach or George Elliot—but not literally religious persons, for, though they are sensitively attuned to religion, they passionately combat and reject religion. In this way they are not like the atheist friends of religion. (Contrast here Feuerbach and Santayana.) They believe that such finely tuned religious sensibilities should not be lost, while still believing that religious belief and practice should be firmly rejected, only kept in mind for what these beliefs and practices have been for some people—and not just for what they have

done to people—but still not to be lived, taken to be part of the repertoire of our affective and cognitive existence. The doctrines, many of the particular religious moral beliefs, religious stances, many of the attitudes toward life of religious persons and the institutional structures of religions should, they believe, drift, but not without continued remembrance, into obsolescence. In that they importantly differ from atheistic friends of religion. They actively—though, of course, without force—want to see Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and the like come to an end (quietly fade away) and a genuinely secular age come into being. But they also differ from such genial and bemused dismissers of religion as Bertrand Russell and W. V. Quine who could hardly be bothered to think very much about it. (When Russell, for example, did think a bit about it he stayed very much on the surface.) Feuerbach and Nietzsche, by contrast, passionately reject it, and not *just* because of its metaphysical nonsense, but for the human harm—or what they take to be the human harm—religion does and not just, as it were accidentally, but just in being what it is. Contemporary antireligious *religious* people (me, for example), if they were to study Wittgenstein, would recognize insights in Wittgenstein's understanding of what morality demands of people, but they (we) also see it as one-sided, and, if stressed, just as Wittgenstein stresses it, it does not yield the fullest kind of human flourishing of which we human beings are capable. Such a conception of the moral life feeds too much on a one-sided diet.

Such matters need long pondering and careful dialectical examination and I am not confident that there are the resources within Wittgenstein's conception of what philosophy sensibly can be to come to grips with such issues. (But *perhaps* we deceive ourselves in thinking there is any intellectually oriented way of coming to grips with them?) Remember that for him good philosophical work, work with a therapeutic intent, is an activity and not an articulation of a theory of any kind or the taking of any kind of moral or otherwise normative position or stance. He is bent solely on elucidation, though elucidation for a particular purpose. And this comes to giving a perspicuous representation through clear description—leaving all explanation, normative *theorizing* and criticism aside—of those stretches of language (which also, remember, are parts of our forms of life) that we get confused about when we think about them. Though we typically do not see that, it is so being entangled in our language that generates the urge to do philosophy in the bad metaphysical sense that Wittgenstein would theraphize away. However, remember that for him it is a therapy which, as he sees it, will never end and will yield (and then only sometimes) only small temporary victories where we in some particular areas come, perhaps, only for a time, to command a clear or a clearer view (though always for a particular purpose) of the workings of our language and thus of the forms of our life. Though we should

also recognize that Wittgenstein thought of his elucidations as having, in a very broad sense of "ethical," an ethical point. But, be this as it may, this clear or clearer view is given by attentive description, a description which shows that everything is there before us, that nothing is hidden. There is, that is, nothing somehow revealing fleetingly in its hiddenness some essence or fundamental underlying structure there to be unearthed or something deep and unstateable that cannot be said, not even indirectly, but can only be shown to us as some unsayable deep something, some "ineffable truth" (Malcolm 1986). There is nothing like this and there is no logical form of the world or of language or of thought. There are rather our practices there plainly to be seen, if only we will look, and, if we become perplexed about them, to be clearly described. What Wittgenstein calls for is description, though (*pace* Strawson), always for therapeutic purposes and not for theory-construction or for criticism. It is not even to be systematic description for its own sake. It is this that has been taken to be Wittgenstein's *quietism* or *neutralism*. But this—or so it at least seems—leaves us without the resources to come to grips with the issues mentioned in the previous paragraph.

There *may* be something more here that can be said, and of a *philosophical* sort, something that Wittgenstein's very way of construing philosophy *may* block. It will perhaps surface if we contrast Wittgenstein's way of construing philosophy with Rorty's or with a Deweyian pragmatism. Consider Rorty's remarks concerning the distinction he draws between *P*hilosophy and *p*hilosophy (Rorty 1982, xiii–xlvii). Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy, as therapeutic conceptual elucidation, should be located *as part of, but not the whole of*, what Rorty calls *p*hilosophy. *P*hilosophy, by contrast, has been a central part of the tradition from Plato and Aristotle down to Edmund Husserl and Brand Blanshard.[10] This tradition of *P*hilosophy has many variants. But they all claim to yield, and as part of a *discipline*, distinctive philosophical knowledge: some a priori knowledge that the *P*hilosopher can grasp, utilizing some specialized philosophical technique, that cannot be gained from common sense reflection and inquiry or from empirical inquiry. *P*hilosophy is the attempt either in the grand metaphysical tradition or in the tradition of foundationalist epistemology or in the philosophy of logic or language to construct a systematic a priori theory which, as part of an *autonomous* discipline, would in one way or another found or ground the various forms of life and critique or at least clarify our ordinary and scientific beliefs, as well as our nonordinary religious, moral, and aesthetic beliefs and responses, showing what their real nature and import is. Wittgenstein and Wittgensteinians as well as neopragmatists such as Putnam, Rorty, and myself, take *P*hilosophy, in all of its various forms, to be houses of cards: as something, root and branch to be exposed as incoherent. It takes in

some difficult cases the genius of Wittgenstein's probing to enable us to see how some bit of disguised nonsense is really plain nonsense and nothing more (Conant 1989). The very idea of having any such Philosophical knowledge or understanding makes no sense. We have only the illusion of understanding here and there is nothing with such Philosophy that we could build on to make sense of our lives or to understand our world more adequately. This is common ground between Wittgensteinians and neopragmatists including, of course, someone like Putnam, who seems to be a Wittgensteinian pragmatist (Putnam 1995, 27–56).[11]

However, Rorty argues, there is a contrasting activity he calls *p*hilosophy which, unlike *P*hilosophy, he takes to be unproblematical. Wittgensteinian therapeutics is a part of this, but by no means the whole of it. I follow Rorty here in articulating such an activity, though I am less confident than he is that it is so entirely unproblematical (Williams 1986, 21–24). But surely, if not securely unproblematical, it is not nearly as problematical as *P*hilosophy is. Rorty, following Wilfrid Sellars, construes *p*hilosophy to be the attempt to see how things, in the broadest sense of the term, hang together in the broadest sense of the term. Doing *p*hilosophy in this sense requires no specialized knowledge (no expertise in metaphysics, epistemology, logic, semantics, linguistics, or anything of the sort) and it is not something that has a disciplinary matrix and it is as old as the hills: people at all times and places have engaged in it. No matter what happens to *P*hilosophy, *p*hilosophy, like Old Man River, keeps right on rolling along, as an attempt, common to critical intellectuals—but not limited to them—to see how things hang together.[12] Giving up any claim to *P*hilosophical knowledge or expertise, *p*hilosophers are general all-purpose critical intellectuals (among other things critics of society) including, as I put it in my *Naturalism without Foundations*, "in their ranks all sorts of scientists (from both the natural and human sciences), historians, scholars in cultural studies and religious studies, former *P*hilosophers (reformed into *p*hilosophers), novelists, poets, dramatists, literary critics, literary theorists, legal theorists, and the like" (Nielsen 1996, 540). Anyone can join in; it is not a prerogative of the "experts," though no doubt, as an utterly contingent matter, some people, given what they have learned, have come in how they have lived their lives—including what they have been able to do with their leisure—to be a little better at forging a coherent conception of how things hang together and of understanding how they are to live their lives than others. (They may, of course, be better at *understanding* it while still being hopelessly inept at living it, a point not lost on Kierkegaard.) But there is here, as elsewhere, no a priori knowledge gained from the *P*hilosophical tradition, no "esoteric knowledge" or any kind of any privileged knowledge and there are no overall experts in seeing how things hang together. Foundationalist epistemologists as cultural overseers are out of business. In that important way there has been a demise of *P*hilosophy (Nielsen 1991, 1995).

I added the following in *Naturalism without Foundations*:

> So construed *p*hilosophy is not an a priori purely conceptual investigation. It will be broadly empirical and historicist and rooted in a consideration of the problems of the epoch in which the *p*hilosopher *p*hilosophizes. In doing *p*hilosophy, such all-purpose critical intellectuals (*p*hilosophers), coming from all over the place, with a heterogeneous bunch of skills, notions, and sensibilities, will be starting with their traditions, their own preconceptions, and their considered convictions. Some of them will, as well, sometimes use, in a pragmatic manner, certain *P*hilosophical notions or conceptual analyses, where *p*hilosophy, now as conceptual elucidation, functions purely as an elucidatory second-order discourse. But these things will be used with caution by the *p*hilosopher and only where they have a chance of working. And in being so used pragmatically, they will not be taken as contributing to or as presupposing a foundational theory or any kind of a priori theory or perhaps any theory at all. They will just be something which such *p*hilosophers (critical intellectuals) use in their attempts to see how things hang together and in looking with a critical eye for a conception of how things might better hang together. These *p*hilosophers—these critical intellectuals—will try to see how things hang together and they will, in doing so, and quite properly, ask critical questions concerning religion or any other practice, including *p*hilosophy itself. (That is why we have such a thing as metaphilosophy.) They will most particularly ask questions about how these beliefs fit together with our other beliefs, if indeed they do. Repairing the ship at sea, including sometimes throwing overboard some rotten planks, they will try for a time, but only for a time, and thoroughly fallibilistically, to see how things hang together. In doing so, the *p*hilosopher will not infrequently reject certain beliefs and conceptions—and indeed sometimes, though rarely, very fundamental ones—as not being conducive to our being able to forge a coherent picture of how things hang together and thus to a gaining of a better understanding of our lives and perhaps, as well, to a coming to understand a little more adequately how we might best live our lives both together and as individuals.
>
> What I characterized in section III.5 of this chapter, with my use of wide reflective equilibrium, was just such an attempt to articulate how to do that and something of a conception of what this would come to. It was not an attempt to articulate a foundational theory or indeed any kind of theory. And it most certainly was not an attempt to articulate an autonomous *P*hilosophical theory. But it was an attempt to do *p*hilosophy. It pragmatically used a few *P*hilosophical notions coming principally from positivist and other analytical traditions, but, in my utilization, they were not systematically tied to those traditions or to any *P*hilo-

> sophical view. Like any good carpenter, pragmatists use whatever tools and materials that come in handy for the problem at hand. There is, in such work, a Deweyan pragmatist *p*hilosophy and a roughly Wittgenstein therapeutic metaphilosophy. The latter has the purely negative task of making the world safe from *P*hilosophy. It is in this contextualist way in which we, without the "aid" of some superdiscipline, can critically appraise our practices, including sometimes showing that certain ones should be put out to pasture as in the past we put out to pasture our astrological and magical practices. (Nielsen 1996, 540–41)

I think Wittgenstein would resist much of this. He would be skeptical that with or without *P*hilosophy we can get very far with seeing how things hang together. I think *au contraire* that this is only true if we think, as I guess Wittgenstein supposes, that we would only be satisfied if we got something that was "completely clear" and "completely certain" and this, of course, as he has powerfully contended, is impossible. We, as the *Philosophical Investigations* well argues, do not even have any criterion for, or conception of, what is to count as "complete clarity." He seems to think in going on this quest for being able to understand how things hang together, we could not help but be driven into being *P*hilosophers and thus be taken down the garden path. People with the *P*hilosophical itch—and there will always be such people—will never stop being compelled to do *P*hilosophy and/or to exorcise such ghosts. *Perhaps* this is one with a common religious impulse? Be that as it may, there will never (*pace* Habermas) be, if Wittgenstein is near to the mark, a post-*P*hilosophical age. But we—that is "we" as individuals—need not be such Don Quixotes. Sometimes the therapy has worked. Moreover, there have been all kinds of attempts at coherence that make no such extravagant claims. Dewey's is a prominent one. And philosophers and other intellectuals can sometimes profit from Wittgensteinians' therapeutic accounts and no longer be a prey to such conceptual obsessions. Rorty is a very good example. Wittgensteinian therapy worked on him and, turning away from the obsessions of and about *P*hilosophy, he seeks to articulate a more adequate conception of life and of society, using wide reflective equilibrium (Rorty 1991, 175–96). By looking carefully and reflectively at our practices, seeing how they fit together, sometimes seeking to forge a better fit, sensing the historicity of things and the contingency of our various fittings, but also seeing that some of them answer better to our needs (including, of course, our intellectual needs) than others, we will—particularly if we sense the impossibility of meeting some of the more esoteric of them—gradually lose the need, in our attempts to see how things fit together, to have some metaphysical backing or irreducibly metaphysical religious orientation—some grounding of our practices and language-games. Wittgensteinian therapy, on a metalevel can, and should, go hand in glove with a Deweyan-Rawlsian broadly historicist and contextualist forging of a wide and general reflective equilibrium.

We should also be more *holist* than Wittgenstein or most Wittgensteinians are prepared to be. We should not take distinctive language-games to be autonomous, yielding their own wholly distinctive criteria of what it makes sense to say, what is justified, what is acceptable, and the like. We need repeatedly to attend to how our various language-games and practices relate, criss-cross and effect, or would effect, each other, if we saw with any clarity how they are related. Though no doubt, without any clarifying articulation, these different practices just do affect each other. But with a clearer understanding of how they relate and affect or could affect each other, we may gain a more adequate understanding of how things hang together and of the import of it. This may not happen, but it is not impossible that it could and it is worth struggling to attain. Here there should be no *quietism*. Such a struggle is both reasonable and worth the candle.

If we look at our religious practices, including those containing rather well firmed-up secular knowledge claims, we can come to see without any theory at all that certain religious notions make such a bad fit with other things that are very pervasive in our culture and important to us, that, in coming to understand that, we will come to see that there is very little, if any, sense in these religious notions. With respect to that it is surely right to tell us not to be so sure of ourselves and to look again to see if we are being blind to a fit that is there before our eyes which we simply do not see (Rhees 1997). (Perhaps we are ideologically blinkered here?) Wittgenstein has given us reason to believe, over the language-games he agonizes over, how often this is the case. But it is also possible that there is no fit—just clashing irreconcilable beliefs (sometimes just attempts at belief) and conceptions—or that a better fit can be made of the various things we know, reasonably believe, and care about, by jettisoning religious beliefs and practices; setting them aside so that they, though no doubt this takes time, will no longer play a part in our thought and behavior and in our conception of how we should guide our lives. It may be the case that there is a severe strain and indeed even a clash between different elements in our forms of life and that the religious element will, if we really press things with integrity, be the odd man out. It may be that, in the attempt to overcome the tension by making our religious beliefs and conceptions fit with the rest of our beliefs and conceptions, we will have to resort to increasingly *ad hoc* assumptions or esoteric readings of our religious beliefs and conceptions. It seems to me that something like this is actually happening and indeed has been happening for some considerable time (Nielsen 1996, 79–155).

Holistic description here also can serve as criticism. Philosophy, little p *p*hilosophy, utilizing the method of wide reflective equilibrium, need not, and sometimes should not, leave everything as it is. A critical *p*hilosophy will utilize Wittgensteinian elucidation principally to break the picture that certain *P*hilosophical conceptions seek to impose on us, but it will also engage in critical assessments—engaging with our lives as well as just with our cogitations—that pass without metaphysical extravagance or any other kind of extravagance beyond Wittgensteinian philosophical *quietism* and *neutralism*. This is done without trying to have some "ultimate vocabulary" or some ultimate point of reference or to claim that there is one and only one true description capturing how the world just is anyway. Indeed such talk makes no more sense than William James's talk of an "ultimate datum."

Wittgenstein well shows us the incoherence of such conceptions. But we have seen how we can, and sometimes should, criticize practices, and not just stop with the reminder that this language-game is played. But our criticism will itself rest on other practices. There is no Archimedean point, *independent of all practices*, from which to criticize any of them. But from this—to make a good Peircean point—it does not follow that *any* practice is immune from or beyond criticism. We can't criticize them all *at once* or stand free of all of them and criticize them. But where there is a clash among the practices or the irritation of doubt is at work—real live Peircean doubt, not what Peirce well called Cartesian paper doubt—concerning any one, or of several, of our practices, criticism is possible and in order. So we can see how a pragmatist need not, and should not, acquiesce in *quietism* (philosophical or any other kind). And we can see also how we can be pragmatists and consistently say that the Christian faith or any other faith or any set of beliefs and responses embedded in practices can rest on a mistake or (*pace* Putnam) be in deep and massive error (Putnam 1995). And this holds true not only for religious forms of life, but for *any* practice or form of life. We start with practices and it is important to see that and how many of them are crucial for our understanding and our lives and are irreplaceable. There is no place else for us to be than to start with practices and to remain with practices. Moreover, *taking them together*, we are stuck with them. There is no perspective outside of or beyond our practices as a whole. There is, that is, no leaping out of our skins, but for any one or several or for particular clusters of practices, where for *specific reasons* we come to have trouble with some specific practice or specific cluster of practices, it or they can either be reformed (sometimes deeply reformed) or sometimes even set aside. There is, to repeat, no practice which is immune from criticism. And the same is true, at least in principle, of clusters of particular practices. So we can repeatedly, relevantly, and intelligently criticize our very practices and the beliefs and attitudes that are a part of them. This includes our faiths—that is, our trustings. It is just that (1) we cannot criticize *them all at once* or stand free of all of our practices and (2) that in criticizing a practice or a cluster of practices we must also be using practices. Thus we have Peircean *fallibilism* and Peircean critical commonsensism—something that was fully incorporated into the texture of Dewey's philosophical practice (Peirce 1935, 293–304, 354–67; Nielsen 1996, 295–328). With this, and without falling into *P*hilosophy and the conceptual confusions Wittgenstein was concerned to dispel, we can do something critical concerning our forms of life. We can reasonably engage in an activity here for which Wittgenstein did not make space and indeed did not envisage.[13] With his feeling for a religious sense of life he would probably have thought it all *hubris*. But need it be?[14]

NOTES

1. Wittgenstein rejected the idea of "metaphilosophy" for he thought, and rightly so, so-called metaphilosophy was itself philosophy. What has come to be called "metaphilosophy" is indeed itself philosophy. It is (among other things) philosophical thinking about what we are doing, can intelligibly be doing, should be doing, and the point(s) of our doing it when we philosophize (Couture and Nielsen, 1993).

2. Andrew Lugg has remarked (*pace* Conant) that it is hard to avoid the impression in reading the *Tractatus* that Wittgenstein is putting forward views. Indeed, Lugg continues, he says as much in the so-called framing remarks. That impression is indeed hard to resist and hence the pervasiveness of the traditional interpretation. But this would saddle Wittgenstein with either or both an atomistic metaphysics and a doctrine of ineffability. The former would not sit well with his own conception of what he is doing and the latter is obscurantist. To make maximal sense of Wittgenstein it seems as if we are driven to something like the Conant/Diamond reading.

3. Andrew Lugg, who knows a lot more about the *Tractatus* than I do, says he would argue that what Conant says here has no basis in Wittgenstein's text. Even if that is so, it has a basis in Wittgenstein's "Lecture on Ethics" and has a considerable interest in its own right. Moreover, the "Lecture on Ethics" remains in the *Tractarian* spirit.

4. It is not that Wittgenstein came to have a new view about the kind of propositions logical and mathematical are. He never thought they described anything or were in anyway informative, but he came to have a new view about how they as nonrepresentational are to be understood. Again I am indebted to Andrew Lugg.

5. It might be argued that Malcolm's appeal to concepts as well as my own in the last few sentences is more Platonic than Wittgensteinian. But I do not reify or objectify the notion. I stick with *uses* of words, but I speak of concepts as a convenient way of noting I am, though I talk about the uses of words, not just talking about the uses of words in a *particular* language. Wittgenstein most of the time

wrote in German and he has been translated into French and English (among other languages). What he calls, rather eccentrically, "grammatical remarks" in the English translation carries over into the French and German texts. It is to make plain that "carrying over" that I speak of concepts.

6. I do not mean to suggest that religion or Judaism or Christianity are language-games. That is neither Wittgenstein's view nor my own. However, Judaism and Christianity contain language-games embedded in their practices and are not understandable without reference to them.

7. It could be said that Wittgenstein should be understood as only denying that it is possible to give reasonable *philosophical* criticisms or defenses of a form of life, but that he is not ruling out the possibility of giving any kind of reasonable criticism or defense of a form of life. But, given Wittgenstein's way of going about things, it is unclear what kind of criticism or defense of a form of life would be reasonable or that engaging in it would be a coherent activity. See more on this in Section V of this chapter.

8. One reader has remarked that the parallel with mathematics seems to beg the question. Many, he claims, of the same issues crop up in mathematics. And is it clear that all of the troubling issues can be shunted off to the metalevel? Why not say that metaphysics is intertwined in the practices of mathematics? Mathematics and religion run parallel here. I say in response that we can do mathematics, engage in the practices of mathematics, reason mathematically without ever raising the kinds of issues that Plato, Frege, Russell, and Quine raise. We cannot, however, escape metaphysics when it comes to religious belief and practice. It is right there in our very first-order religious beliefs and discourse.

9. What I have in mind here in saying he was a "friend of fideism" rather than a fideist is explained two paragraphs after the paragraph in which I signaled the occurrence of this note. I have in the past (Nielsen 1982, 43–64) thought of Wittgenstein as a fideist. My remarks in my present text indicate a correction. But Wittgensteinian fideism is alive and well and paradigmatically exemplified in the work of D. Z. Phillips (Phillips 1970; Nielsen 1982, 65–139).

10. Rorty would say "Rudolf Carnap and Hans Reichenbach" where I said "Husserl and Blanshard." Perhaps, as is frequently said, Carnap and Reichenbach were unwittingly entangled in metaphysics, that is, they did metaphysics in being antimetaphysical. Their critique of metaphysics, the claim goes, rests on metaphysical premises. But that that is so is not so evident as it is usually assumed. After all, they did not think there was any a priori *philosophical* knowledge. And it is not evident that they in effect assumed any.

11. Putnam's attitude toward metaphysics is somewhat different than Rorty's or my own. He agrees that metaphysical utterances are nonsensical, yet he thinks we need to acknowledge and keep firmly in mind the importance they have had in the history of human thought and that they continue to have in philosophical thought. I am less willing to genuflect before the tradition and would seek a more thorough transformation of philosophy (Nielsen 1991, 1995).

12. Remarking on the last few pages above, Lugg comments: "This seems to suggest there is one correct view and one right vocabulary, contrary to what you said earlier." *If* what I said in the past few pages, or anywhere else, commits me to that I would immediately retract it and go back to the drawing board. Neither my antirepresentationalism, perspectivism, or fallibilism fits with this. And, though I deploy the method of wide-reflective equilibrium, I also argue that the very idea, *sans* particular context, of the widest or broadest equilibrium does not have a coherent sense. One reflective equilibrium can be wider or broader than another one at a given time and in a distinct context. At least in certain respects and in a determinate context one equilibrium might reasonably be thought to be the widest and broadest on offer, but we have no idea of what the widest possible reflective equilibrium would be. Wide reflective equilibrium is at home in assessing accounts of justice, morality, law, and science. I also use it to apply to worldviews. There it is *somewhat* problematical, but not, I believe, impossibly so. But it is certainly not unreasonable to be skeptical about it in that context. But even this application of wide reflective equilibrium does not commit me to the idea of the one true description of the world or to speaking of the way the world is in itself. What it does commit me to is to the possibility that we can gain a coherent account of how and why our practices just happen to hang together and to how it may be possible to forge an even more adequate way for them to hang together. But there is no reaching for the Absolute or for a conception of the way things just are anyway or of the one correct view or right vocabulary. Such notions are at best mythical.

13. Perhaps I am too harsh on Wittgenstein here. He did not engage in critical social inquiry into social and moral issues in anything like the way in which Dewey did and Rorty does. I do not think Wittgenstein would have thought that was a philosophical activity at all. But Lugg may be right in saying that Wittgenstein leaves plenty of room for critical discussion of our forms of life. He only rejects the idea that this can be done in some sort of an a priori philosophical way. But it would have been useful if he had done some of this nonphilosophical criticism or have shown how he thought we should go about doing it.

14. I want to thank Stanley French and Andrew Lugg for their perceptive criticisms of an earlier version of this chapter. Their comments helped me very much. Sometimes, in the face of their criticisms, I have remained stubborn and did not budge. I hope that is not pigheadedness on my part.

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