

# **Inquiry into the Grammar of God: Wittgenstein and Religious Belief**

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If reason was bestowed on us by Heaven  
and the same can be said of faith,  
then Heaven has presented us with  
two incompatible and contradictory gifts.

— Denis Diderot

*Addition aux Pensées philosophiques*

## **Introduction**

These words of Diderot (1713-1784) cannot but capture the tension that finally emerged in the Age of Enlightenment, where, following the course charted by the earlier centuries of Humanism, and of scientific revolution, the relation between faith and reason is thrown in a roller-coaster ride that zooms from the depths of intimacy to the heights of antinomy. Yet, we are inheritors of a long religious tradition where belief, i.e., religious belief continues to play, if not a normative, at least a significant role in the general spheres of human existence. One way or the other, we encounter, if not venues of religious epiphanies that bring us personally to faith, people who themselves have held beliefs and to which they adhered to in total fidelity, with exemplary commitment, in things that they do, or leave undone. In an age where secularism is a given, if not a pervading attitude, to speak of religious attitude outside of religious belief, may no longer be astounding but even imperative.<sup>1</sup> Certainly, we

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find people who candidly professed their non-affiliation with any religious tradition, yet on the side, willingly admit that they share some form of religious sympathy. The American poet and philosopher George Santayana (1863-1952) is for one, and another is the Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) who though admitting that he's not a religious man, uttered that "I cannot help seeing every problem from a religious point of view."<sup>2</sup>

Wittgenstein did not write a comprehensive philosophical treatment of the nature of religious belief. Indeed, much of his seminal ideas on this regard are scattered implicitly in his two major works, the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*<sup>3</sup> and the *Philosophical Investigations*<sup>4</sup>, but more expressly in the posthumously published *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough, On Certainty*<sup>5</sup> and especially in the series of three lectures that he gave in Cambridge in 1938.<sup>6</sup> These lectures, published in 1966, fifteen years after Wittgenstein's death, are the compiled notes taken by his students.<sup>7</sup> Though these lectures don't exhaust the breath of Wittgenstein's ideas on religious belief, it does offer a substantial continuous presentation of how he treats religious belief philosophically.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. ARNOLD BURMS, "The Relevance of Belief," *Beyond Conflict and Reduction: Between Philosophy, Science and Religion*, Louvain Philosophical Studies, 16, ed. by William Desmond, et al. (Leuven: University of Louvain Press, 2001), pp. 147-158.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted from DRURY in "Some notes on Conversations with Wittgenstein" p. 79, in BRIAN R. CLACK, *An Introduction to Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p. 126.

<sup>3</sup> *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. by D. F. PEARS & B. F. MCGUINNESS (London: Routledge Classics, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd ed., trans. by G. E. M. ANSCOMBE (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2001). Heretofore references to this work is referred to as *PI* integrated within the text.

<sup>5</sup> *On Certainty*, trans. by DENIS PAUL & G. E. M. ANSCOMBE (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1972). Heretofore references to this work is referred to as *OC* integrated within the text.

<sup>6</sup> *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology & Religious Belief*, ed. by CYRIL BARRETT (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978). The three lectures referred to here are the three last sections of the work cited, discussing specifically on religious belief. Heretofore references to these lectures are referred to as *LRB* integrated within the text.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. MICHAEL MARTIN, "Wittgenstein's Lectures on Religious Belief," *Heythrop Journal* 32 (1991): 381, footnote number 1.

This study primarily aims to offer an exposition of Wittgenstein's idea of religious belief as generally expounded in his three lectures. In the process of presentation, it will become exigent to refer to some other relevant passages from his other works that will try to elucidate further his ideas. This study is an effort to point where the idea of religious belief leads to, not only in the contemporary discussion in philosophy of religion, but also, and perhaps more importantly, in the actual exercise of our own religious tradition, in the concrete incarnation of faith in the hustle and bustle of everyday life. "If you and I are to live religious lives," says Wittgenstein, "it mustn't be that we talk a lot about religion, but that our manner of life is different. It is my belief that only if you try to be helpful to other people will you in the end find your way to God."<sup>8</sup>

### Wittgenstein and Religious Belief

Although categorization by phases had its share of criticism, the study of Wittgenstein's philosophy is generally divided into two phases, the Early Wittgenstein, of which the *Tractatus* (1921) is the culminating apex; and the Later Wittgenstein (of which the generally held high point is the "unfinished" and posthumously published *Philosophical Investigations* (1953). Regarding the latter work, a substantial portion of part I was completed, in view of publication, already in 1945 with Wittgenstein himself writing the preface in the published work. As such, the three lectures on religious belief that Wittgenstein delivered to his students in Cambridge in 1938 would more closely belong to the Later Wittgenstein period.

The first thing that strikes any reader of the published lectures is the sometimes almost tedious philosophical treatment on the nature of religious belief. One cannot fail to notice that, unlike other philosophy professors, entering the hall with prepared notes, Wittgenstein's approach is an actual philosophizing on a particular given topic before his overwhelmed students.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the lectures show an assortment of "pictures" or illustrations by which,

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<sup>8</sup> Quoted from DRURY in "Some notes on Conversations with Wittgenstein" p. 114, in BRIAN R. CLACK, *An Introduction to Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Religion*, p. 111.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. BRIAN R. CLACK, *An Introduction to Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Religion*, p. 12. Note especially Theodore Redpath's recollection of Wittgenstein's lecture as quoted in the work cited.

as if to suggest, one might have a glimpse into the phenomena of belief being discussed. In this paper, ruling out variety of contested interpretations, I wish to focus on the nature of religious belief as generally described by Wittgenstein in these lectures. Three ideas come to the fore on this regard, namely, the incommensurability of religious belief, belief as nonrational (or 'not reasonable' to use Wittgenstein's term), and the 'non-cognitivism' of religious belief.

Religious belief is a specific phenomenon that presents itself, that appears, to human consciousness. The sense of the religious, of the divine, of the distinctly mystical and other-worldly, seems so engrained in the structure of human nature that, observing the development of socio-political civilizations down its earliest, observable phase, markedly indicate that the religious sphere is not lagging behind every development of human consciousness. This specific religious sense appears to be an *a priori* category of human existence that, in the litany of homo's, *homo socialis*, *homo sapiens*, etc., one can likewise safely refer to humans as a *homo religiosus*. But what constitutes religion? or the practice of religion, of the religious life? What is that fiber that runs through human existence that makes of him or her a *homo religiosus*? Is it that distinct experience, utterly alienated from the ordinary, but profoundly and immanently experienced as the distinct intimation of human existence with an Other, both radically distinct and intimately familiar, almost an alter-ego? The experience we generally refer to as religious that have become an unqualified predication of mystics in all major world religions? Or perhaps that human phenomenon of ordinary belief that has taken a religious color that constitutes humans as religious beings. Granting that this is the case, we may well investigate initially on the nature of this belief, of this ordinary belief that lie at the heart of religious expression.

In order to more properly analyze the grammar of religious belief, perhaps it would be most appropriate to start, not with the objectification of the phenomenon in question but return to its *arche* as a specific human activity, the act of believing. Wittgenstein distinguishes the act of believing with the process of thinking. According to him:

A proposition, and hence in another sense a thought, can be the 'expression' of belief, hope and expectation, etc. But believing

is not thinking. (A grammatical remark.) The concepts of believing, expecting, hoping are less distantly related to one another than they are to the concept of thinking. (*PI*, § 574)

Believing is a distinct act from thinking, but closely resembling other human acts such as hoping and expecting. But what is in the concept of these three that is said to be related. One may observe that in the enumeration of these three distinct human acts, of believing, hoping and expecting, the transitive character of these verbs become evident, that it entails an object upon which these acts are said to be applied, as in the sentence "I believe the testimony of Mr. Smith." Furthermore, one can likewise observe that taking these verbs as an 'expression' of a certain proposition *p*, as stated above, belief, hope and expectation appears as an assent to certain held statements, as in the sentence "I believe *that* God exists" or that "I hope *that* that God would reward my good works in the next life." Proposition introduced by these verbs indicate a manner of assent to such and such a proposition. The conceptual object of this becomes essential to us in order to understand why Wittgenstein seems to have approached religious belief in a different perspective, that is, dealing on the nature of that which we believe in, or the content precisely of what we believe. What are these contents of belief that Wittgenstein considered as a correlate to the phenomenon of religious belief? They include such propositions that dwell on immortality, last judgment and the 'reality' of God.

After having dwelt on the correlation between the act of believing and the content of belief, one can now proceed to the question of religious belief. Although Wittgenstein doesn't use this categorization, as a heuristic device, one may see that belief may be categorized into two levels, that of commonsense belief and religious belief. The nature of belief itself is not uncommon in human experience. Wittgenstein shows this clearly when he wrote:

When I sat down on this chair, of course I believed it would bear me. I had no thought of its possibly collapsing. (*PI*, § 575)

Much of our human activity rests on a certain pre-reflective assent to certain unexamined and unverified propositions such as *that* my chair would bear me, *that* my chair would not collapse when I sit on it. Religious belief would then be a certain assent to certain

proposition  $p$ , where  $p$  is a proposition that is religious in nature (precisely, immortality, last judgment and the 'reality' of God).

### On the Incommensurability of Religious and Non-Religious Belief

Wittgenstein introduces his topic by a consideration of the belief in Last Judgment. He says,

An Austrian general said to someone: "I shall think of you after my death, if that should be possible." We can imagine one group who would find this ludicrous, another who wouldn't....

Suppose that someone believed in the Last Judgment, and I don't, does this mean that I believe the opposite to him, just that there won't be such a thing? I would say: "not at all, or not always."

Suppose that the body will rot, and another says "No. Particles will rejoin in a thousand years, and there will be a Resurrection of you."

If some said: "Wittgenstein, do you believe in this?" I'd say: "No." "Do you contradict the man?" I'd say: "No."....

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

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

The difference might not show up at all in any explanation of the meaning. (*LRB*, p. 53)

Syllogistic logic has always upheld three fundamental laws: the law of non-contradiction ( $p$  is not  $q$ ), the principle of the excluded middle (either  $p$  or  $q$ ), and the law of identity ( $p$  is  $p$ ). Working out from this traditional framework of argumentation, one is obviously thrown into confusion reading the aforementioned text. One might say that the acquisition of knowledge is an acquisition of a certain framework on which reality and facts become intelligible within this said given framework. Confusion or lack of understanding is the consequence of an absence of this same framework or horizon of intelligibility from where the meaningfulness of certain facts or con-

cepts emerges. Stretching this common phenomenon, Wittgenstein saw this as symptomatic of a 'craving for generality' that may consequentially blur meaning of certain other concepts and facts that do not necessarily fit in this single given framework. D.Z. Phillips succinctly described this 'craving for generality' as "the insistence that what constitutes an intelligible move in one context must constitute an intelligible move in all contexts."<sup>10</sup> Departing from his project of establishing a "logically perfect language" as envisioned in his *Tractatus*,<sup>11</sup> that is to see language as isomorphic with the world; we see here already Wittgenstein's contention that language is multifaceted, that language corresponds to different meanings and uses (cf. *PI*, § 1ff). The word "belief" itself has many meanings depending on how it is used. This introduces the famous concept of language-games, that a specific discourse attains intelligibility on how it is used within a certain specific and predefined framework that is often referred to as a "form of life". All of us have a certain "form of life", in various level of depth, and in various type on which intelligibility is accomplished within a definite discourse. It is within this framework of understanding that Wittgenstein proposes that brings intelligibility to his introductory statements in his lectures summarized in the expression "You mean something altogether different, Wittgenstein", of speaking on an "entirely different plane".

But what is Wittgenstein saying precisely on religious belief? From here, perhaps we can turn to the issue that comes to the foreground, viz, the concept of religious belief as a 'picture'. This is in view of elucidating further the issue of religious belief.

Another heuristic categorization that may prove helpful in the discussion of the nature of religious belief is that there may be two kinds of beliefs: an ordinary one and a life-governing one. The aim is to introduce the notion of temporality in religious beliefs. Ordinary belief corresponds to commonsense beliefs in the sense that some beliefs that we have appear to our consciousness only within limited duration, and often subject to methods of verification.<sup>12</sup> As soon

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<sup>10</sup> D. Z. PHILLIPS, *Wittgenstein and Religion* (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1993) p. 63.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Bertrand Russell's introduction to the *Tractatus*.

<sup>12</sup> The question of verification is both crucial and problematic in Wittgenstein's philosophy. Nonetheless, the reader may refer to the following: *OC* §§ 3, 18, 52.

as evidence appears to prove the contrary, such beliefs are, so to speak, replaced or modified depending on the nature of its insertion within a specific system of frameworks. Life-governing belief, on the other hand, corresponding with religious belief, asserts its fundamental and normative role in the life of the believer. Religious belief is something that is at the foreground of an individual that determines the specific way or manner of comprehending reality and states of affairs. In this sense, religious belief is both unshakable and regulative. The 'unshakableness' of this belief "will show, not by reasoning or by an appeal to ordinary grounds for belief, but rather by regulating for all in his life." (*LRB*, p. 54). This understanding of 'unshakableness' evades the problem of change of belief because of some evidential grounds. Rather, we see here that what Wittgenstein is trying to affirm is the notion that religious belief is deeply wedded to in the manner of orientation by which an individual conducts his life. Ordinary belief presents itself in a detached manner, an intellectual given that is more often pre-thematic, but, life-governing belief presents itself in a form of *engagement* cutting across an individual's moral judgments and sensibilities. Perhaps herein lies the basis of what others speak of the incommensurability of religious beliefs with non-religious belief. Though both present themselves as an assent to certain propositions, religious belief takes on a different 'colour' and meaning that are laid bare within the context of a different criterion of intelligibility. Herein we touch on a very sensitive core of Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion. The question itself of a criterion on which one judges that such and such is true or not, puts in a balance the objectivity of truth of religious propositions. Further in this essay, one realizes that in Wittgenstein's philosophy, religious propositions function as 'pictures' which evoke in us certain forms of *engagement* that pulls us, evokes us into peculiar forms or manners of expression commonly described as religious. But one may ask now, other than provoking believers into certain behaviors or acts, does religious propositions also corresponds to specified real state of affairs or function only in an expressivist or emotive mode? Wittgenstein doesn't seem to offer substantial evidence providing objective truth-value to religious propositions. Sustaining this stance jeopardizes religious truth, wobbling into subjectivism or religious social constructivism. This non-cognitivism of religious belief remains the most insurmountable hurdle to which every philosopher of religion in the Wittgensteinian



tradition needs to prevail over. A cursory treatment on this issue is discussed towards the end of this essay to elaborate more the issue and effect some disentanglement but the way out still remains beyond arm's reach.

Now of course, one can ask, does this mean that religious belief is immune to any investigation to verify or falsify its truth-value? To stretch the analogy between religious belief and language-games may logically involve "the suspicion that religious beliefs are being placed outside the reach of any possible criticism, and that the appeal to the internality of religious criteria of meaningfulness can act as a quasi-justification for what would otherwise be recognized as non-sense."<sup>13</sup> But the very posing of the question betrays a certain understanding already innate that may be foreign to Wittgenstein's ideas, that is, to see religion and its dimension in human existence as, not only distinct, but more problematically, separate from other modes, which is obviously not the case. Care with analogy is pulled off when one sees that the aim is to find intelligibility within a certain domain of meaning.

### The Nonrationality of Belief

The task of philosophy of religion is to rationally argue the reasonableness of religious belief.<sup>14</sup> Does Wittgenstein propose an understanding of religious belief that is irrational, in the sense that it does not only differ but absolutely contradict the laws of reason? Is he following Kierkegaard's contention that we believe precisely because it is absurd?<sup>15</sup> One must situate this issue of the nonrationality of belief in its own context of intelligibility, in the sense that rationality here is understood in a different way. Perhaps here, instead of nonrationality, we can speak of 'rationality' with inverted commas (like the word 'dead' in his lecture where he obviously spoke of 'dead' not in the ordinary sense of the term). Reason has evidential grounds. The truth-value of any scientific statement rests on how securely the statement is deduced or inferred from reliable

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<sup>13</sup> D. Z. PHILLIPS, *Wittgenstein and Religion*, p. 57.

<sup>14</sup> C. STEPHEN EVANS, *Philosophy of Religion: Thinking About Faith*, Contours of Christian Philosophy Series (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1982), p. 11.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. MICHAEL MARTIN, "Wittgenstein's Lectures on Religious Belief", p. 380.

and verifiable evidences. In Wittgenstein's lectures, one cannot fail to notice that he is undermining reason on this respect.

The point is that if there were evidence this would in fact destroy the whole business. (*LRB*, pg. 56; cf. also pp.56-59, 64)

Even the question of historical basis needs to be understood quite differently from how we commonly understand and say that some "historical, empirical, propositions" are said to be founded on historical facts. Wittgenstein continues:

I would say that they are certainly not *reasonable*, that's obvious.

'Unreasonable' implies, with everyone, rebuke.

I want to say: they don't treat this as a matter of reasonability.

Anyone who reads the Epistles<sup>16</sup> will find it said: not only that it is not reasonable, but that it is folly.

Not only is it not reasonable, but it doesn't pretend to be. (*LRB*, p. 58)

Going back to the category aforementioned, ordinary belief would mean assent to certain propositions that are pre-thematic and may be subject to verification.<sup>17</sup> I may sit in my chair without the slightest doubt that it would hold me, however, if it does collapse, or make a sound suggesting that it might collapse, I would naturally verify or check if this chair could indeed carry my weight. Such seems not to be the case with religious belief. If we say that religious belief is an assent to a proposition *p*, where *p* would constitute something generally referred to as of religious significance, we say now that this assent, contrary to the assent in ordinary belief, is not grounded on the weight of evidence, historical, empirical or whatever. If this is the case, wherein does assent in religious belief grounded? One might say that it is grounded not on evidential reason but in the phenomenon that religious belief presents itself to us as a form of *engagement*, that it somehow pulls the person towards it. This is exemplified in Wittgenstein's discussion of 'pictures'.

The word 'God' is amongst the earliest learnt – pictures and catechisms, etc. But not the same consequences as with

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. I *Corinthians* 1, 18: "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."

<sup>17</sup> See footnote 12.

pictures of aunts. I wasn't shown [that which the picture pictured] (*LRB*, p. 59).

Two things need to concern us here in this short passage. First, we learn 'God' or who 'God' is through pictures,<sup>18</sup> but this 'picturing' is different from the ordinary sense of picturing. A 'picture' of God and a picture of my aunt, though both pictures, are likewise pictures in a different sense, in that in the former, that which is pictured is not shown and can never perhaps be shown. And one can say further that we will never see God the same way we could see our aunt *in persona*. Second, the picture of an aunt and the 'picture' of God does not result in "the same consequences". This statement is further elucidated later on in the lecture, on the criterion for meaning something different. Wittgenstein says, "not only what he takes as evidence for it, but also *how* he reacts, that he is in terror, etc" (*LRB*, p. 62, emphasis added). A picture can leave us indifferent, but in the same way, it can also elicit in us "consequences", reactions because of our encounter with a particular picture. A picture of one's aunt can elicit likewise hope or terror, but a 'picture' (read: belief in) of God who rewards or punishes elicits hope or terror but not in the same sense as the earlier case. Wittgenstein continues:

If we ever saw this [Michaelangelo's portrait of creation at the Sistine Chapel], we certainly wouldn't think this the Deity. The picture has to be used in an entirely different way if we are to call the man in that queer blanket 'God', and so on. You could imagine that religion was taught by means of these pictures. "Of course, we can only express ourselves by means of picture." This is rather queer... I could show Moore the pictures of a tropical plant. If I showed him the picture of Michaelangelo and said: "Of course, I can't show you the real thing, only the picture" ...The absurdity is, I've never taught him the technique of using this picture. (*LRB*, p. 63)

As religious pictures elicit in us both awe and wonder, fear and terror in a spontaneous sense, by impulse as it were, like in looking at a very horrible image or portrait, by which we cannot but be left indifferent, likewise religious beliefs in this sense (in the sense of 'pictures', but we of course do not stretch the analogy),

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<sup>18</sup> Life Michelangelo's painting of creation in the Sistine Chapel, see *LRB*, p. 63.

engages us in a series of spontaneous reactions, of impulses, by which our whole being becomes a correlate to this picture. For a person who, before his consciousness is a 'picture' of Last Judgment, any action is, so to speak, 'filtered' by this 'picture' that engages him or her. For a believer, this 'picture' cannot leave him or her indifferent.

But, does this mean that in a certain way, these 'pictures' determine our reactions. Not at all. Here, we enter into the discussion of what has been called 'aspect-seeing', most exemplified by the famous duck-rabbit portrait (cf. *PI*, part II, sec. ix). One can see the portrait as a duck, another one as a rabbit, or still another one as both, but the general idea is that, pictures (and by this one could say any reality that presents itself to human consciousness) can be seen in varied 'aspects', in various ways or manners depending on the vantage point one has taken. Wittgenstein says:

I have a statue which bleeds on such and such a day in the year. I have red ink, etc. "You are a cheat, but nevertheless the Deity uses you. Red ink in a sense, but not red ink in a sense" (*LRB* p. 61).

The point is, a single reality of a statue that bleeds is perceived differently. For some, it is only a red ink, while for others it is not.<sup>19</sup> The point is more clearly examined further in the lecture.

If you compare it with anything in Science which we call evidence, you can't credit that anyone could soberly argue: "Well, I had this dream ... therefore ... Last Judgment". You might say: "For a blunder, that's too big." If you suddenly wrote down numbers down on the blackboard, and then said: "Now, I'm going to add," and then said: "2 and 21 is 13," etc. I'd say: "This is no blunder."

There are cases where I'd say he's *mad*, or he's *making fun*. Then there might be cases where I look for an *entirely different interpretation* altogether. In order to see what the explanation is I should have to see the sun, to see in what way it is done, what he makes follow from it, what are the different circumstances under which he does it, etc. (*LRB*, pp. 61-62, emphases added)

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<sup>19</sup> The point is not that authenticity of miracles involving such occurrences is denied, but that the manner and belief by which any witness of these are manifested.

Between the two poles of madness and pulling a prank, there is the median named "different interpretation". True to its nature as an assent to a proposition, there is a subjective dimension on religious belief. There is not only a 'picture' that impresses itself on me, and by which I spontaneously *react*, but also a *response* by which I enter in *engagement* at the phenomenon that presents itself before my consciousness. In the case of the two persons mentioned by Wittgenstein in his lecture, one with the thought of retribution and the other without it, both of them, being confronted with illness interprets this reality in a different way. One says that this is punishment, the other doesn't think so. "I think differently, in a different way. I say different things to myself. I have different pictures" (*LRB* p. 55).

### Non-cognitivism of Religious Belief?

We have gone far in our discussion of the grammar of religious belief, and there are more things left unsaid that escape the limitation of this brief paper. Nonetheless, here we shall speak of the more contested idea leveled to Wittgenstein's idea of religious belief: non-cognitivism and/or expressivism.

Believing God and believing in God are two distinct things. Believing God is an assent to his communication to us, to his revelation. If we say, I believe Theresa, we mean that we believe her testimony, what she says, what she communicates. But this believing presupposes the obvious judgment that that which I believe is existing. This latter one is affirmed in the proposition I believe in God, or belief in God, or more properly, I believe *that* God exists. Among the so-called revealed monotheistic religions, every content of religious beliefs stands or falls on the reasonableness of believing *that* God exists.

Turning to Wittgenstein, we are left at a loss concerning the designation of the word "God". Reading Wittgenstein, one cannot but notice the many times he uses the word "God", yet one also wonders in the end what does he mean by this designation? What is its object, if this designation has an object at all? When he speaks of God, what is its criterion of intelligibility within his system of "beliefs" by which the meaning of this word becomes evident?

To speak of the grammar of belief in God would entail another paper. What I wish to present here now on this regard is something that might perhaps lose some knots in the entanglement of this belief. Discussing the question of the meaning of pain, especially on how one predicates this word to others, Wittgenstein made use of an analogy that may well suit our problem at hand. He says:

Suppose everyone had a box with something in it: we call it a "beetle". No one can look into anyone else's box, and says he knows what a beetle is only by looking at *his* beetle. – Here it would be quite possible for everyone to have something different in his box. One might even imagine such a thing constantly changing. – But suppose the word "beetle" had a use in these people's language? – If so it would not be used as the name of a thing. The thing in the box has no place in the language-game at all; not even as a *something*: for the box might even be empty. —No, one can 'divide through' by the thing in the box; it cancels out whatever it is.

That is to say: if we construe the grammar of the expression of sensation on the model of 'object and designation' the object drops out of consideration as irrelevant. (*PI*, § 293)

To quote this passage might appear a bit idiosyncratic to the task at hand, but this passage does at least point to some indications that may clarify some problems, albeit in an almost simplistic way. Taking this analogy and applying to our question, one can say that all of us have a box and inside this box is a "beetle". Suppose we trade off "beetle" with the word "God", we still have an analogy that makes sense, now no longer on the problem of designating pain on others, but on the question of whether belief in God has any conceptual content or object of designation. The word "God" would then be a certain "open designation" that is indifferent to any object to which it may correspond, for what matters is the *use* of this "open designation" within a specific language-game. What then of the object of this designation? It is irrelevant. The object is an "invisible referent" that is left out in the language-game. In a game of chess, it doesn't matter who or in what way the king is, as long as it functions as king in this specific game of chess. For Wittgenstein, what matters is the use of this "open designation", how it functions within

a certain mode of human existence: "But suppose the word 'beetle' had a use in these people's language?" (*PI*, § 293). In a sense, would this constitute a *negation* of the "invisible referent" in favor of the functionality of the "open designation"? Wittgenstein says that the object of the designation is irrelevant. It may be empty, it may be a "thing constantly changing" or whatever. The point is, it is irrelevant for what matters is *how* the "beetle" is being used in the language-game. When we are still children, we do not bother the existence of some particular things that present itself to our consciousness. We don't bother ourselves thinking whether that book exists or that armchair exists, but we do learn *how* to fetch books or sit in armchairs. Does this mean that we should not bother ourselves with the question of existence even later in life? Not at all, Wittgenstein says that such questions really arise, like whether unicorns exists, but it is only because "as a rule no corresponding question presents itself." He is asking us:

For how does one know how to set about satisfying oneself of the existence of unicorns? How did one learn the method of determining whether something exists or not? (*OC*, § 476)

Wittgenstein is posing a Herculean challenge. He is challenging not only the method by which we judge that this thing exists and that thing does not exist, but likewise, the very *way* by which we come to this method. Are we guilty of appropriating a foreign criteria of intelligibility with regards physical objects when the reality that confronts us is an "open designation" that finds definition only within an inherent context of meaning? Are we being guilty of a "craving for generality" that adulterates the very meaning a certain 'word' has simply because we fail to place it in its right niche? Do we really have the method by which we measure that reality confronting us in the phenomenon of religious belief, or perhaps we are only cupping water with our bare hands and recoil at the naked truth that despite all efforts, we only get them wet. Perhaps that's how far we can all get.

If someone *believes* something, we needn't always be able to answer the question 'why he believes it'; but if he *knows* something, then the question "how does he know?" must be capable of being answered. (*OC*, § 550, emphasis added)

Perhaps it is not sheer coincidence that the grammar of religious discourse would and should never confuse belief with knowledge. Indeed, who would have the temerity to say: "I know God" when the only appropriate and meaningful word in response to the invitation for engagement is a humble yet deferential "I believe ...". □

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