





Luigi Perissinotto, Vicente Sanf elix (Eds.)  
**Doubt, Ethics and Religion**  
Wittgenstein and the Counter-Enlightenment

# **APORIA**

Απορία

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Luigi Perissinotto, Vicente Sanf elix (Eds.)

**Doubt, Ethics and Religion**  
Wittgenstein and the Counter-Enlightenment



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# Doubt, Ethics and Religion: An Introduction

LUIGI PERISSINOTTO AND VICENTE SANFÉLIX VIDARTE

It will soon be the sixtieth anniversary of Wittgenstein's death in 1951. Since then there have been substantial changes in the way in which we read and understand the work of the Austrian philosopher. Wittgenstein is no longer regarded just as an analytic philosopher, or as a logical atomist and natural interlocutor of Frege and Russell or even as the pioneer of a new style of ordinary language philosophy; he has become a classic in the history of philosophy in his own right. In spite of his self-doubts on this issue, Wittgenstein was an extremely original thinker, highly personal in his philosophical and writing styles. Examining his work in relation to some of the great thinkers of the western philosophical tradition is both natural and necessary, not only because this serves to shed light on Wittgenstein's texts, but also because it enables us better to understand the (quite pessimistic) diagnosis he makes of the western civilisation.

Aware of the recent shifts in Wittgensteinian scholarship, over five years ago a group of European and Latin American specialists set up a research project with the aim of contributing to the now far more wide-ranging hermeneutical debate on the Viennese philosopher<sup>1</sup>. Our work has crystallised in a series of collective publications<sup>2</sup> – publications which are the product of a series of regular seminars in which we discussed the work of members of the project and of other scholars specifically invited for the

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<sup>1</sup> Our team has enjoyed and continues to enjoy the generous funding that the Spanish Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación has granted the research project FFI2008-00866/FISO: "Cultura y religión: Wittgenstein y la contra-ilustración".

<sup>2</sup> N. Sánchez Durá (Ed.), *Cultura contra civilización*; C. Moya Espí (Ed.), *Sentido y sinsentido* and A. J. Perona (Ed.), *Wittgenstein y la tradición clásica*, all of which were published by the Valencian publishing house Pre-textos in 2008, 2009 and 2010 respectively.

occasion, and of a series of annual conferences that focused on different aspects of Wittgensteinian philosophy.

Taking advantage of the generous offer made to us by Jesús Padilla Gálvez and Alejandro Tomasini Bassols, editors of the *Aporía* collection within the publisher Ontos Verlag, we are delighted to present a selection of the papers that emerged in connection with our most recent conference<sup>3</sup>. This selection of texts aims to situate Wittgenstein's work within some of the most important currents of modern Western philosophy. The piece by Jean Pierre Cometti compares the Wittgensteinian approach to the philosophy of religion and to ethics with that of other key authors belonging to the pragmatist tradition. The pieces by Vicente Sanfélix and Joaquín Jareño pursue that comparison further by contrasting Wittgenstein's work with those of other classics of philosophy and of Western culture, notably David Hume. The pieces by Julián Marrades and Chon Tejedor continue this task by focusing on the relation between Wittgenstein's work and that of Schopenhauer. The texts by Joan B. Llinares and Isabel Cabrera consider the relations between Tolstoy's work and Wittgenstein's thinking. Finally, the piece by Luigi Perissinotto draws a contrast between Wittgenstein's concepts of doubt and certainty and those belonging to the Enlightenment tradition. If this book serves to further the debate about Wittgenstein's thinking, we will judge our aim to have been more than fulfilled.

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<sup>3</sup> IV encuentro internacional cultura y civilización. Wittgenstein: duda, religión y ética. This was held at the Facultad de Filosofía y CC.EE. at the Universidad de Valencia on the 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> of May 2010.

# Is Wittgenstein a Religious Thinker?

JEAN-PIERRE COMETTI

*The soul answers never by words, but by the thing itself that is inquired after.*<sup>1</sup>

R.W. Emerson

It might seem unusual to associate Wittgenstein with religiousness. However, many of Wittgenstein's thoughts, like those of Kierkegaard, Pascal, Augustine or Tolstoi, have been conditioned by his interrogations about God and faith, to such an extent that one may legitimately wonder whether this is somehow relevant to our understanding of his philosophy. Such will be my perspective in the next few pages, but I will also examine how this aspect of Wittgenstein's writings may originally contribute to our thoughts on religious belief -in particular because Wittgenstein's reflections in this domain echo the positions such pragmatist philosophers as Peirce and James have sometimes adopted in relation with their own religious creeds.

## 1. Wittgenstein and Religious Belief

Wittgenstein's major texts about religious belief have been collected in *Lessons on Religious Belief*, a volume Cyrill Barrett edited in 1938 from notes taken by Y. Smithies, R. Rhees and J. Taylor. But there exist other texts about these questions, among which more personal notes one may find in interviews and in his notebooks<sup>2</sup>. I will not examine them all here

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<sup>1</sup> Emerson, 1926, 200.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Wittgenstein, 1991 and 1997. On this subject, see also Cometti, 1998.

for they have been abundantly commented upon, neither will I consider all of their aspects. I will focus my attention on a small number of questions that will enable me to see in a common light what I purport to be Wittgenstein's position, on the one hand, and the position of the founders of Pragmatism, on the other hand.

From the beginning, it appears that Wittgenstein and James have had in common the fact that they both wrote about religion, as philosophers or psychologists are apt to do, and also lived through a personal religious experience which is not irrelevant when one tries to understand their writings on the subject. This is why one may not assert that Wittgenstein was "religionless", as this was done in the preface to a paperback edition of *the Lessons on Religious Belief*. Wittgenstein's family had given up Judaism in favor of Protestantism but he never worshipped, in the common sense of the word, neither as a Protestant, nor as a Jew -and he always had mixed feelings about Catholicism. However it now seems clear that the religious question has always been in his mind, as his diaries testify<sup>3</sup>. The *Vermischte Bemerkungen* is the other place where Wittgenstein adopts a more personal stance and where he expresses "religious thoughts" as well as thoughts about religion.

However amazing this may seem to many, this will not surprise the reader who is familiar with Wittgenstein's ideas about culture, science and philosophy, for Wittgenstein considered these questions as *personal* problems and nothing was to be excluded from the range of such *personal* problems.

Naturally, to say that problems were personal does not mean that they were existential, neither does it mean that they had some psychological meaning. In his mind, philosophical problems originated in *linguistic* misunderstandings, or at least in our inappropriate *usages* of language. But beyond that, questions of language are related to forms of

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<sup>3</sup>The notebooks published in *Denkbewegungen* are very noteworthy in this respect. The beauty and powerfulness of many texts justify the comparison with Pascal and Kierkegaard. About these authors, see Drury's notes in Rhees, 1981.

life. Furthermore, such problems, which are food for high-flown philosophical debates, are not directly accessible to all: they are the objects of specific compulsions which, as Wittgenstein suggests, cannot therefore be dealt with from an exclusively “conceptual” viewpoint. “Authorized” French commentators tend to weaken the thrust of Wittgenstein’s thought by insisting that the difference between he and other philosophers resides in his conception of philosophy as a form of conceptual analysis whose major key and tool is his concept of “grammar”. This mistake comes in handy to those who wish to use Wittgenstein much as they use other philosophers recognized as such by the community of philosophy professors.

This should remind us of Wittgenstein’s energetic rejection of the very idea that his thought could one day become a doctrine and that other people might one day call themselves “Wittgensteinians”. Simultaneously, this should help us better grasp the link that existed between his religious and philosophical interests.

As I suggested, the very fact that philosophical problems do not exist of themselves and yet are forcefully imposed upon us through some specific compulsions justifies the parallels between philosophy and psychoanalysis occasionally made by Wittgenstein. This is precisely what excludes the very idea of a “conceptual analysis”, but also what explains two major aspects of the Wittgensteinian approach, or of the meaning he ascribed to it: firstly, the fact that to him dealing with philosophical problems required an exertion of the *will*; secondly, the fact that philosophy should be considered as *work on oneself*.<sup>4</sup>

These two ideas are intimately related. Philosophically, as anyone will agree, to work on oneself means to give oneself the intellectual means to tackle the questions one wishes to study. But this also means to give oneself the required mental means, i.e., to overcome and to habituate one’s mind to overcome the pulsions and obstacles that limit our vision and in

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Wittgenstein, 1980: “Philosophy like architecture is first and before all a work on oneself.”

which most of our mistakes originate. Wittgenstein has not dwelt much upon this point, but his conception seems to have been that images spring from our language's grammar which lead us astray. However, we are led by strong compulsions toward some of these images rather than others. Language, which permanently permeates thought though it be but its tool, exerts a specific suggestive force to which our usages -the language games- add their own strength related to our actions and our forms of life. This is the reason why -although the case of science is different- the resulting problems call for a type of clarification which requires an exertion of the will beyond the sole intellectual means at hand. In this sense, there is in the practice of philosophy something in the order of exercise, for no outcome will result without the adequate will. Somehow, to think philosophically is to act.

But then, one may raise the following question: "What exactly does philosophical thought act upon?". Furthermore, if this be the case, how is it related to religious questions and belief? Some of Wittgenstein's notes in his notebooks then become to make sense, although this is open to discussion. To my mind, these notes are relevant for one who wishes to evaluate Wittgenstein's philosophy as regards religious matters and others. They very clearly show that he personally was unable to separate his "work" -as he said- from his religious and moral interests. He systematically relates his work -his successes and failures- with what we may describe as his mental or psychological state defined according to what he called his "decency". To him everything seemed as if his capacity to work successfully in the philosophical field necessitated conditions of *will* and *decency* -and only God could answer his calls for such potential strength.

I believe it would be a mistake to once more push aside this strange combination as a mere uninteresting mark of strictly personal "eccentricity". However tempted we could be to dissociate Wittgenstein's general thoughts about religion one finds in other texts, from the generally more personal ones he expresses in his notebooks, I believe we should

make the effort to explore their possible interrelation. As we shall see, this is precisely what James very originally calls for. But how is this to be done?

There is at least one way of understanding why these two aspects of Wittgenstein's thoughts about religion should not be set apart. We know the *Lessons on Religious Belief* establish a very fundamental relation between what specifically belongs to religious belief and what manifests itself in a form of life. However apparently banal, the assertion of such a relationship does not only mean that every community has its beliefs or that the key to such beliefs is to be found in the culture or the society, or even in the illusions they breed. Certainly, such an anthropological point of view is not absent from Wittgenstein's thought, as his remarks on Frazer's *The Golden Bough*<sup>5</sup> clearly indicate, but the link he establishes between the religion and the form of life goes deeper than that. In particular, what he means is that questions of religion must not be dealt with like *doctrines* or systems of *ideas* which need to be discussed from a *theoretical*, or even from a strictly *intellectualist* point of view. On the contrary, one must gauge how they are rooted in common and *shared* practices. Simultaneously, this link indicates that religion -or religious practices- is not just the reflection of a mistaken awareness of reality -an "illusion" or an "opium". Intellectualist sophistry works at both ends. One may not discuss religion from a scientific viewpoint and a religious belief is not the expression of a theoretical view gone awry.

These are well-known tenets and we know what types of approaches of religious belief they aim to contradict. However, how may they be related to the type of experience Wittgenstein describes in his notebooks? Basically, I believe the relation Wittgenstein posits between religion and forms of life has two major consequences. Firstly, the engagement belief implies is a both religious and ethical engagement in a form of life which manifests itself in a specific language and experience and which conditions "will" -in the sense suggested above. This does not mean that our

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<sup>5</sup> Wittgenstein, 1993.

intellectual capacities and choices are *necessarily* determined by our religious beliefs, although they *may* be, but this does mean that our religious experience, and perhaps especially its ethical components, are able to communicate with our capacity to deal with philosophical problems, at least as long as we admit that they are not scientific problems but problems which essentially require that our linguistic usages and the nature of their links with forms or modes of life be clarified.

But such is not the most important consequence. Religious belief is unwavering, as both the *Lessons* and the *Notebooks* demonstrate. It escapes both scientific and historical evaluation, but it also belongs to a specific mode of certainty which, in a way cannot be questioned. One may be tempted to say that this is precisely the most questionable aspect of Wittgenstein's approach. In order to avoid all mistakes, it is necessary, however, to be more precise. On the one hand, the certainty we are dealing with is subjective -which may be surprising but is explained by reasons we are familiar with and which I will leave aside<sup>6</sup>- and it may consequently lead to other, competing certainties. But on the other hand, this certainty is precisely not only a certainty of thought, an *interior* or *intimate* certainty, so to speak. It cannot be set apart from a vital engagement, it point towards a form of life and its consequences in this context give it worth and truth. In other words, the link between belief and form of life unexpectedly confirms the pragmatic principle and seems to support William James's conclusion to *The Varieties of Religious Experience*<sup>7</sup>. Naturally, one should lead us to ask what Wittgenstein's thought shares with James's analysis of religious belief.

## **2. Pragmatism and Religion**

In the past few years, Hilary Putnam has become interested in James's and Wittgenstein's thoughts, with a special interest for their ethical and religious dimensions. It is not immediately clear how pragmatism -as

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<sup>6</sup> Think of course of the question of private language.

<sup>7</sup> James, 1985.

James suggests it- seems to be the best attitude available as regards religious belief. One could try and proceed through elimination, as I have partially done above. One may also try to understand this directly through a quick review of Peirce's and James's views.<sup>8</sup>

It is well known that Peirce was a deeply religious man, and Christopher Hookway has insisted on this point and on how much his metaphysical conceptions derived from this state of fact. Peirce's most original text on this subject is "A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God"<sup>9</sup>. Peirce's presents belief in God as one of the outcomes of what he calls "musement", thus allowing it to escape all practical considerations - and also theoretical, in a sense- since it has nothing to do with scientific aims or the quest for truth.

In a way, there is something like a hypothesis in Peirce's argumentation, for the suggestion it makes is abduction-based<sup>10</sup>. It cannot be tested like the hypotheses of science, but is there really no possible testing of such a hypothesis? Strangely enough this problem may be solved by using a principle which is explicitly presented as pragmatist. As Peirce indicates in another passage of the *Collected Papers*,

"If a pragmatist is asked what he means by the word "God", he can only say that just as long as acquaintance with a man of great character may deeply influence one's whole manner of conduct [...] so if contemplation and study of the physical-psychical universe can imbue a man with principles of conduct analogous to the influence of a great man's works or conversation, then that analogue of a mind - for it is impossible to say that any human attribute is literally applicable- is what he means by "God" "<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> On this several points, see H. Putnam, 1992, 1994, and my own remarks in Cometti, 2001.

<sup>9</sup> Peirce, 1980, 452-485. See also Hookway, 1985, 276-281

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Peirce, 1980, § 2 "The Hypothesis of God". As Hookway, 1985, 278 reminds us, pragmatism is to be an inquiry «which produces, not merely scientific belief, which is always provisional, but also a living, practical belief».

<sup>11</sup> Peirce, 1980, 502, in Hookway, 1985, 278.

These remarks raise many questions I will not dwell upon here. However, I will single out one of their aspects which is apt to cast some light on a possible pragmatist conception of religious belief Peirce shares with James, and which is analogous with a major dimension of Wittgenstein's own analyses.

Obviously, in this text, Peirce seems to perceive as essential a relationship between belief in God and the believer's life. He seems to think that what justifies belief has nothing to do with the kinds of proofs theologians generally seek, nor with what their rationalist adversaries criticize. Peirce's pragmatism, as well as that of James and Wittgenstein, changes the issues of the debate and keeps religious belief safe from the main models of justification and criticism it is usually submitted to. More or less, one may say that this changing of the issue is pragmatist because it is all about what *makes the difference*, whereas such debates are usually mired in confusion and miss the essential. However, as James's own position testifies, the pragmatist principle is not without encountering its own obstacles.

I will concentrate on two views developed in *The Forms of Religious Experience* and in *The Will to Believe*<sup>12</sup>. Under one aspect at least, James's and Peirce's viewpoints converge, i.e., the question of belief defines a category of problems whose meaning must be evaluated in the light of choices that concern the believer's *life* and engage his present and future conduct. The conceptions developed in *The Will to Believe* are very clear in this respect. A belief's legitimacy depends on choices that depend on nothing else, it is based on a type of certainty that has nothing to do with the guarantees we seek when dealing with theoretical or practical hypotheses. This is the reason why it was meaningless for James -as well as for Peirce and Wittgenstein- to consider religion as a "vestige" of bygone ages<sup>13</sup>. James's singular viewpoint gives sentiments -and even passion- a role that has contributed to cloud its originality and interest. But

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<sup>12</sup> James (1985) and (1987)

<sup>13</sup> Cf. James, 1985.

inasmuch as religion absolutely cannot be evaluated in the light of our knowledge of the world or of our sole reasoning, theories play but a “secondary role” in it.

“At this purely subjective rating, therefore, Religion must be considered vindicated in a certain way from the attacks of her critics. It would seem that she cannot be a mere anachronism and survival, but must exert a permanent function, whether she be with or without intellectual content, and whether, if she have any, it be true or false”.<sup>14</sup>

In *The Forms of Religious Experience*, James’s psychological vantage point leads him to introduce the idea of a finite god whose manifestations he purports to discover in the variety of well-known and identified forms of experience. Two things, however, are likely to be questioned by the reader at this point.

Indeed, as Peirce suggests -at least in the passages I have chosen to comment upon- pragmatism, more than any other philosophy, may help us to understand that religious belief finds its meaning and legitimacy, and even its “truth”, in the effects it has on the believer’s conduct in his life. One may wonder, however, if this shields religious belief from *doubt*, and if the related choices exclusively concern the believer. In other words, if we translate the question in the terms of the Wittgensteinian problematic of the rule: Is it possible to believe *alone*? Finally, if we remember what James tried to demonstrate in *The Will to Believe*, isn’t religious belief a particular case of wishful thinking?<sup>15</sup>

I will get back to the first two points when I deal with Wittgenstein, for the two related questions concern a point he broadly shares with James. However, the *wishful thinking* criticism concerns James -especially in *The Will to Believe*. Let’s turn the question differently. To what extent may someone who chooses a belief as a response to what James calls a “living

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<sup>14</sup> James, 1985, 507.

<sup>15</sup> See; Wernham, 1987. The idea that James is arguing in the defense of something like a willful blindness, we can find it in J. Hick, 1963, quoted by Wernham, 1987, 7. Hick takes the James’ essay as an “encouragement unreserved to wishful realities”.

choice”, durably and effectively engaging his life in the paths this belief helps him define, claim the very same paths justify the belief that was there origin? Needless to say this question is intimately related to the two first aforementioned points. The part James ascribes to sentiments makes it even more legitimate. Would religion, among other things, be but a way of engaging in wishful thinking?

At first sight, it is difficult to imagine how a pragmatist thinker who espouses James’s views in *The Will to Believe* may avoid the debate on doubt and truth. All the more so as one cannot see clearly how the *difference* this is all about would really *make a difference* since it solely depends on the projection of desires. But at this point several threads must be disentangled.

The original question was about the effects one may expect from a belief and whether these effects may, from a pragmatist point of view, acquire a belief-justifying status. In other words, the question is whether pragmatist principles -the “pragmatist maxim”- is applicable to religious belief, as Peirce and James obviously thought -although their positions did not entirely overlap. We have now reached a point where we are asking whether the relation between the belief and the believer’s life -and the choices this relation supposes- must be held as a case of straightforward and voluntary self-deception. This question has implications regarding the relations between belief -in the pragmatist sense-and conduct. It is also related to the idea we have of belief and of its conditions. If we restrict our reflections to what James suggests, it appears that he would be adopting an utterly indefensible view if he were saying that a living choice, motivated by the will to believe -in the passionate sense- would suffice to justify belief as long as this choice leads to durable consequences in the believer’s conduct that could be ascribed to it. In such a case, to believe would as absurd as to follow a rule alone. However, it seems that on that account James was misunderstood.

Despite the fact that, in his mind, one should always get back to the individual -in this context, the believer facing his belief- James never

thought that a belief could lead a life of its own. Certainly, this may sometimes happen, but such cases must be considered as exceptions. I have already mentioned the parallel with rules based on the principle that a belief, defined as a “habit of action”, has the status of a rule. I think we can say that when James invokes the relation between belief and the believer’s conduct he clearly understands that a belief is nourished by and proves itself in contact with the conditions it faces. The very idea of a “living choice” that he exposes in *The Will to Believe* allows us to understand this. He calls “living choice” the choices our will faces in a context of shared beliefs. Among the conditions of this choice is a context of common possibilities which excludes that anyone may “believe alone”, religiously or otherwise. In this respect, James shares Putnam’s idea of a “linguistic division of labor”<sup>16</sup>. This precisely means that choices in matters of belief cannot really be “private” choices and that they are experienced through the effects they produce -not only on the representation one has of oneself and of one’s conduct, but on what may know about it in a given context of shared values and criteria.

But in this case, why is religion reputed “indestructible”? How should one consider the varieties and apparent incompatibilities of beliefs? Wittgenstein’s writings address these questions in a manner that should allow us to further our reflection and to show what he and James have in common.

### **3. James and Wittgenstein**

Wittgenstein knew very well James’s book on the varieties of religious experience and he valued its teachings as well as its wealth of analyses. It is striking that, dealing with the question of religious “certainty”, Wittgenstein and James share the very same idea. In a letter to Rankin where he mentions the lectures that would ultimately lead to the publication of his book, James wrote: “The religion is strictly

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. Putnam, 1988. There is also a brief essay from James called «Tigers of India», that is a good illustration of his convictions on this subject.

indestructible”<sup>17</sup>. This is exactly what Wittgenstein says in his *Lessons About Religious Belief*. What is the source of this indestructibility? James’s reasons for it are not very different from Wittgenstein’s argument about what he describes as *unshakeable* in religious belief. Furthermore, the reasons given allow us to understand how the apparent incompatibility of beliefs greatly differs from the religious relativism James and Wittgenstein could be suspected to support.

These questions are raised in one of Wittgenstein’s interviews with Drury. Drury, who mentions Wittgenstein’s admiration for James’s *Varieties of Religious Experience*, pointedly quotes the following words which Wittgenstein wrote in *Remarks on Frazer’s The Golden Bough*: “Was Augustine in error, then, when he called upon God on every page of the *Confessions*? But – one might say – if he was not in error, surely the Buddhist holy man was – or anyone else – whose religion gives expression to completely different views. But none of them was in error, except when he set forth a theory”<sup>18</sup>. This reflection is in the same spirit as James’s when he rejected in his letter to Rankin what he called the conceptual interpretation of philosophy and theology. Indeed, for both James and Wittgenstein, to worry about the diversity of religions is a sign of confusion. Naturally, if one considers in each religion what looks like a doctrine, a theory or a worldview, then it goes with religions as with all the rest: plurality leads to incompatibilities which lead us to think, as in the case of cultures, that they cannot all be simultaneously true and that, as Wittgenstein suggested, either Augustine or the Buddhist monk is right. But who ever said that religions should be viewed as theories? Two theories which do not affirm the same thing about the same problem or notion cannot be simultaneously true -although the problem obviously is more complicated than this. But two different modes of life or ways of acting are not contradictory in any way. The question doesn’t even exist, and this is the reason why it is absurd to speak of the incommensurability

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<sup>17</sup> June 16 1901.

<sup>18</sup> Wittgenstein, 1993, 119.

of cultures. A culture, like a religion, is not a theory, even with we may have reasons to believe that they may be associated to a worldview. One should not focus on the ideas and concepts in a belief, as Frazer did. One must try and understand what a belief means as a *habit of action*, i.e., one should take into account the effects in one's conduct, and in the case of beliefs that concern the meaning men give to their lives or what is sometimes called values or God, one must judge on the basis of the stakes.

Certainly, this leads us to minimize how we consider other people's beliefs. But there is a difference between thinking that who believes and lives differently is wrong, and stating, as philosophers are most wont to do, that the plurality of beliefs raises a problem that must be solved theoretically, i.e., in some other way than by the kinds of pragmatic arrangements that actually allow, most of the time, to make different beliefs coexist without fears of rational chaos. This is probably the reason why James and Wittgenstein clearly think that the plurality of religions does not contradict the idea we may have of religion. The reasons that lead them to this common thought are different, but they spring from a common ground: as long as religious belief bases its certainty and justification on other resources than theoretical, philosophical or theological pretensions, then nothing can be opposed to it. And this is in no way to be associated with any sort of relativism. Anyhow, if these few reflections are in some way justified, then one should also admit that the link one establishes between religious belief and the conduct of life grounds a position that allows to give up the debates in which both philosophy and theology have often wasted their energies. James's religious pragmatism thus concurs with Wittgenstein's *Lessons* on religious belief—in which one may in turn also perceive how the pragmatist criterion of belief is being applied to the belief in God.

The relation between belief and a form of life is twofold. The anthropological approach is paramount in the *Lessons*. An approach we might term existential prevails in the *Notebooks* and allows us to describe Wittgenstein as a religious thinker. In the first case, the relation with a

form of life is actualized in shared beliefs. In the second case, Wittgenstein is perhaps closer to how James gives more weight to the mystical experience, the relation with a form of life takes a more personal turn and expresses itself in *choices* and in *prayers*. I will not here apply the *wishful thinking* objection which was used to criticize James, but I believe it is necessary to question anew the reasons we might have to describe as “unshakeable” what expresses itself through this experience.

In Wittgenstein’s thought, the anthropological and existential viewpoints combine in the link that unites belief with a *form of life* -i.e., with a pattern of conduct and a context made of rules and shared practices. To say that a belief is “unshakeable” consists in setting it within a horizon of certainty which is that of forms of life, and hence to this particular figure of arbitrariness and necessity that constitutes the strength of the rule. Simultaneously, it is a way of acknowledging its effects on both conduct and shared practices, according to a principle one may describe as pragmatist -although it is not without an appearance of circularity. On the other hand, on a more existential -and apparently *subjective*- level, the religious belief’s unshakeability appears to be grounded in what one might call a “right to believe” -as James did- which nothing can compel to be submitted to conceptual evaluations -as the case of mystique exemplifies. Such a subjective certainty, depending on how we see it, may easily however be perceived as a form of stubbornness -however noble. What exactly is the case? How may one link two forms of certainty when certainty is first expressed in a personal attitude of meditation and prayer apart from any context of shared values, as is the case in many passages of Wittgenstein’s *Notebooks*? To what extent may one stretch the “pragmatic principle”?

One easily understands that nothing can shake he whose life so closely fits his belief that jeopardizing the one would amount to jeopardizing the other. One also easily understands that in such a case the “right to believe” will justify the “will to believe”. Respect for sainthood probably is similar, and indeed the only criticisms a saint or a mystic may

fear are those aimed at his *life* rather than at his *belief*. This allows us to better understand that the unshakeability of belief is not that of interior certainty -and this certainly is important in Wittgenstein's case, as his actions testify. But here again, how may we represent to ourselves the choices of a form of life of which unshakeability testifies in relation with what a form of life, in the case of Wittgenstein, presupposes as *shared*- on an anthropological level?

To say the truth, we here face a major difficulty with no clear solution in view. It is not certain that the problem is not meaningless, but it should at least allow us to make a distinction between James and Wittgenstein, as I will briefly show in my conclusion.

The difficulty is the following: unless one chooses to revive the viewpoint of the *Tractatus* which, it seems to me, is not extant in the texts I mentioned, considering what a form of life is for the second Wittgenstein and the criticism he makes of all solipsist notions of interiority, how can one imagine that a belief may find its meaning in its effects, at least if this means in a model of conduct that corresponds to a choice of life only for the one who believes? At this juncture, I think there are two possibilities. Either one admits that this choice of life and the effects of belief, somehow or other, combine with forms of shared life, or one chooses to see in it a particular variation of the attitude which consists in rushing out of the boundaries of language.

I believe this last hypothesis is worth considering. I have no space left to do so, now, but I can add two things on this subject. Firstly, in accordance with what we might be tempted to spontaneously think, this is all about meaning and meaninglessness. Obviously, as demonstrated by the language of mysticism or of religious authors, religious belief, alongside philosophy, for example, is a special case of deviant usages to which a healthy grammatical therapy may be applied. Should one choose to be more Wittgensteinian than Wittgenstein himself and believe religious belief is to him what grammatical confusion is to philosophers? This question, to be dealt with seriously, would need to be put in the light of

what Wittgenstein called secondary usages, as Cora Diamond has suggested in a text I can here but briefly mention. However, we can see that the difficulty here stems from a certain language, if I may say so, and from how this language is articulated with a form of life of which it seems only one life testifies. In other words, the difficulty is akin to that met by philosophy every time a philosopher is a religious thinker at the same time. Such authors always resort to personal experience, as is the case with Kierkegaard, Augustine, Pascal and Wittgenstein.

#### **4. God's Action in the World**

By insisting on what brings Wittgenstein close to pragmatist thinkers, especially to James for which he had much consideration, I hope these reflections have allowed me to foreground Wittgenstein's originality in questions of religious belief. Although, as I will try to show now, these convergences do have their own limits, they do allow to show that the pragmatist "turn of mind" of the second Wittgenstein which best expresses itself in the role he gives to usage and language games in the analysis of language and of philosophical problems, unexpectedly endures in his reflections on religious belief and perhaps also, in some measure, in his own "religiosity". It goes with Wittgenstein as it does with a great number of pragmatist thinkers: the question will have to be raised, one day, whether religion did not find a place in their thought which it never had anywhere else in philosophy. In a way, the paradox manifests itself in the fact that this place suffers from a double exclusion: it is located neither in philosophy, nor in theology. Clearly, Hilary Putnam is a good interpreter, today, of what James meant when he wrote that "pragmatism seems to be the best attitude towards religion". Naturally, this does not solve all the problems, neither does it eliminate all reasons for perplexity, as the different attitudes of James and Wittgenstein testifies. Indeed, while both consider that the scientific and the historical viewpoints on religious belief are irrelevant, that it is absurd to see religion as a vestige of bygone social and cultural stages, and that there is something specifically "unshakeable"

in religious belief, Wittgenstein, contrary to James, gives the play of institutions and practices an importance James refused them, no doubt because to him the psychology of religious experience was the only valid viewpoint. In a sense, Wittgenstein's point of view is more metaphysical. This reason why the relation with a form of life bears different meanings in their respective thoughts, and why it causes more problems in Wittgenstein than in James. This is also the reason why James's God is different from Wittgenstein's. James's God is finite, Wittgenstein's is infinite. However, they do agree on two major points. Firstly, their religiosity and their analyses of religion never lead them to reject the plurality of religions. Secondly, a major part of their analyses is devoted to overcome Kant's interdiction that God act in the world. In Wittgenstein, and to a certain extent in James, this interdiction is lifted by ethical means and by the pragmatist principle which gives conduct and forms of life the function to authenticate belief and, in a particular sense, lets them manifest its own "truth".

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# To Get Rid of the Torments of the Mind.

## Hume and Wittgenstein on Religion

VICENTE SANFÉLIX VIDARTE

### 1. From Enlightenment to Counter-Enlightenment

Various writers have found affinities between certain aspects of the philosophies of Hume and Wittgenstein (for example, Strawson, 1985, or Fogelin, 2010). Yet Hume is not an author to whom Wittgenstein used to refer, and, in fact, if he did mention him at all it was rather to confess his lack of familiarity with him.

Moreover, with regard to the philosophy of religion in particular, it seems that one can hardly speak of an affinity between Hume's and Wittgenstein's points of view. Ultimately, their attitude to it appears, on the face of it, to be very different. Hume does not seem to have been a very religious man, whereas Wittgenstein, despite saying of himself that he, too, was not religious, nevertheless confessed that he could not avoid seeing everything in a religious perspective. One might, therefore, think that our proposal to relate Hume's and Wittgenstein's viewpoints on religion is arbitrary or, at least, that it needs some justification.

In one of his "against the current" essays Isaiah Berlin (1997) revealed how, through his influence on Hamann, "the magus of the north", Hume became one of the sources of German anti-rationalism. The Enlightened Scotsman converted into the inspirer of the German Counter-Enlightenment! Yet it is an acknowledged fact that Hamann, and Kierkegaard, whom he influenced, had an influence, in turn, on Wittgenstein and on his way of understanding religion. So it is no longer arbitrary to suppose that, albeit indirectly, Wittgenstein's philosophy had something to do with ideas that ultimately derived from Hume.

## 2. A god on permanent sabbatical

In his analysis of the discussion between Leibniz and Clarke (1956) (one might just as well say Newton, since he supervised Clarke's replies), the great science historian Alexandre Koyré (1957) hit on a brilliant title to condense the ultimate meaning of that dispute: it was a confrontation between two different conceptions of divinity, the god of the Sabbath on the one hand, and the work-day god on the other. Hume is commonly described as a Newtonian philosopher, but if one analyses Hume's positions against the background of this argument one is in for a surprise.

The very title with which Clarke published his correspondence with Leibniz signifies its content: "A collection of Papers ... relating to the Principles of Natural Philosophy and Religion". With regard to those principles, Leibniz and Clarke/Newton were in agreement on one point: there is an order in nature which can be considered proof of an intelligence that created it. The difference lies in the fact that for Newton this was not enough. We could admire a God who was simply the creator of the natural order, but not reverence or adore him. To move from admiration to adoration and reverence it was necessary to explain his dominion over the world, his ("particular", in Hume's terminology) providence over it; in other words, his constant intervention in it, for as Newton himself (1999) declared in the "General Scholium" in Book 3 of his *Principia*, a God without dominion or providence is nothing else but "Fate and Nature".

Now, it was precisely to make a place for this particularly provident god that Newton adjusted his conception of nature in a way that clashed with Leibniz's conception, which left god outside the world, as a purely otherworldly intelligence. And thus Newton, and his spokesman Clarke, thought that the physical world has an essentially entropic nature, that is, that there is a constant loss of energy and an ever-present threat of disorder, which is only avoided thanks to the provident intervention of the deity. Or else he stripped matter of all active power, so that it was suggested that the principle of all action that occurred in the natural environment was of a spiritual nature. Or he conceived space and time in

an absolute, infinite way, thereby facilitating their assimilation into the divine “sensorium”. Or he argued that the universe was a basically empty environment, so that the gravitational interaction of the masses dispersed in it became an action at a distance, not mechanical but, it was again suggested, spiritual.

Hume did not develop a systematic philosophy of nature, but from his discussion of the ideas of space and time in his *A Treatise of Human Nature* (2007) and from many of the observations with a cosmological bearing that are found in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (2008) one thing is clear: Hume takes great care to close all the doors by which Newton and Clarke allow God to enter the system of the world. Thus he does not believe in the void, nor in the absolute nature of space and time, but in their relative nature; he does not strip matter of any active principle, nor does he consider that chance is an ontological category but a mere expression of our lack of knowledge of causes, which, for that very reason, operate in a determinist manner, with an inexorable necessity that, as Newton indicated, is equivalent not to divine intervention but to nature pure and simple.

Thus, when Hume denied all particular providence in the realm of nature, he was merely closing ranks with Leibniz against Newton and Clarke. Banishing God from the natural world. Granting him, after his exhausting labour of creation, a well-deserved – and permanent! – Sabbatical. After his exhausting labour of creation? Did Hume really think it reasonable to believe in the existence of a god who had designed and created the inexorably ordered world of nature? Did he oppose a particular providence as conceived by Newton but grant the likelihood of a general providence? The issue that these questions raise is the delicate matter of Hume’s position with regard to the argument of design.

First of all, we must not forget that Hume constantly distinguishes between two types of religion: vulgar and philosophical or rational. The first type works with a concept of God (or gods, in its polytheistic version) as a particular providence, that is, as a being who occasionally intervenes

in the world. Newton is one example of the many thinkers who have vainly tried to provide a rational foundation for this conception, in his case on the basis of natural philosophy. The second type works with a strictly cosmological concept of God as a general providence, that is, as the principle of the general laws that govern the physical world. Is it rational to believe, on the basis of the evidence that the world presents, that such a principle exists? And, supposing that the answer to this first question is affirmative, can we specify its nature?

As I understand it, Philo's famous conclusion in the *Dialogues* expresses the strictly Humean point of view. On the basis of the empirical evidence one can only infer an ambiguous proposition concerning the existence of one or various causes of the order of the universe, and all we can say about the nature of those causes is that they probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence and to it alone, that is, not to any other of our faculties; and all this solely – the most important point, perhaps – provided we do not lose sight of the fact that one cannot draw any lesson about human life from this proposition, and that assent to it will really only be conceded by those who are already religious.

Stripped of its rhetoric, the concession that Philo/Hume makes to the deist or theist is very slight, limited to saying that his belief in the existence of a principle of order in the universe is not absurd, but that in any case its foundation lies not in empirical evidence but in that empirical evidence seen from the viewpoint of faith, and, above all, that this conclusion does not justify him in drawing up any kind of moral system on this basis. On this point, Newton was right after all. A God conceived as a general providence might be deserving of theoretical admiration, but not of reverence or adoration. The only worship that a religious man might reasonably render to God is that of mere belief in his existence.

If we turn from Hume to Wittgenstein we soon realise that, however different their philosophies may be, they come together on this point. Wittgenstein would agree with the severe epistemological criticism to which Hume subjects religious belief. Although he follows a different

route from Hume's, more logical than epistemological, Wittgenstein's conclusion is the same as that of the Scottish thinker. As we read in the *Tractatus*, "God does not reveal himself *in* the world." And this is not a conclusion of which the mature Wittgenstein repented. As he made clear in his 1938 classes on religious belief (Wittgenstein, 1966), someone who, like Father O'Hara, tries to justify his belief in God on the basis of factual evidence seems to him to be simply someone who is cheating himself. Religious belief that seeks such a defence is, in Wittgenstein's eyes, pure and simple superstition. The question of the existence of God is not a scientific question. And if it is treated in this way, its fate is determined from the very outset.

### **3. Against the existence of miracles**

But God is on a sabbatical that applies not only to nature but also to history. In other words, not only does he not interfere in the course of things, he also does not interfere in the course of human affairs. Just as it is not possible to believe rationally that the deity occasionally intervenes in the order of physical reality, it is also not rationally credible that he intervenes in the process of historical events. One cannot rationally believe in the existence of miracles.

In the first part of the tenth section of the first *Enquiry*, Hume (2004) offers a famous a priori argument against the credibility of testimony that attests to miraculous events.

Hume sets out from two premises which have a clearly empiricist bias. According to the first, the intrinsic probability that we must concede to a type of event is proportional to the uniformity of the experience of its happening. When that uniformity is absolute, without exceptions, then we are dealing with what Hume calls proof: this, in his view, is the case with the laws of nature that are established by "firm and unalterable experience". The second premise of Hume's argument is that the trustworthiness of a witness depends on various circumstances which

ultimately also come down to the degree of uniformity of the experience that we have of the agreement between his testimony and the truth. If our experience is that someone has never previously given false testimony, the trustworthiness that we should attribute to him must be absolute; that is, as high as the probability that an event predicted by a law of nature may happen. In other words, we could consider that his trustworthiness is proven.

Setting out from these two premises, Hume's argument is that the credibility that we must give to testimony that a particular event has happened must be in relation to the intrinsic probability of the attested event and to the trustworthiness of the witness who attests it. When an absolutely trustworthy witness testifies to the happening of an event that conforms with a law of nature we should attribute the greatest credibility to his testimony; or, in other words, we could consider his testimony as proof of the happening of that event. But as the trustworthiness of the witness and/or the intrinsic probability of the attested event decrease, the credibility of the testimony must also decrease.

In the case of miracles, since this category can only be aspired to by events that contradict a law of nature, and since these laws are proven, however great the trustworthiness of the witness may be his testimony can never enjoy credibility. What we would come to at most, if the witness were absolutely trustworthy, is the opposition of two proofs – the trustworthiness of the witness, on the one hand, and the event predicted by the law of nature, on the other – which, for that very reason, would destroy each other, obliging us to suspend our judgement. Yet this is an extreme case of the theory and one that never occurs in practice, since we will never find witnesses whose trustworthiness is proven. So it will never be rational to believe in testimony that attests the happening of a miraculous event.

In my opinion, if Hume's argument is understood as presenting a general thesis about the way in which we establish the credibility of testimony, its validity is rather slight and presents numerous problems. Perhaps all the problems can ultimately be traced back to the

oversimplified nature of the empiricist principles by which Hume was inspired. For is it really true that our belief in the validity of the laws of nature is inspired by the uniformity of our experience, or that we calculate the trustworthiness that we attribute to a witness on the basis of the percentage of true testimony that he has given us?

Rather than put forward examples of laws of nature that we have never corroborated, let's consider the number of deaths that we have actually witnessed which we take as a basis for considering it proven that all men are mortal. If we reflect a little, it is clear that the vast majority of the laws of nature and general truths that we take for granted and that, put in a late-Wittgensteinian way, constitute the bedrock of our world-picture have not been learned by us from experience, nor have we ever seriously put them to the test. Rather, they have been transmitted to us by testimony (from our parents, teachers, books and so on).

Similarly, it is not very realistic to think that the reliability that we attribute to people is related to the experience that we have of the truth of their testimony. The general attitude towards our interlocutors is, and can only be, one of trust. Doubt about the truthfulness of testimony is necessarily an exceptional, parasitic attitude.

These general defects in the crudely empiricist assumptions of Hume's argument are followed by many other particular but no less important defects. Nevertheless, I understand that when Hume's argument is interpreted as a specific argument against the rational credibility of miracles, and not as a general argument about the way in which we attribute credibility to testimony, it works perfectly.

Indeed, when the application of the argument is interpreted thus, it can be reconstructed in terms that are far less technical (for example, we do not need to contaminate it with any theory of calculation of probabilities), but perhaps for that very reason far less convincing. For what it is really telling us is that no testimony is capable of compelling us to give a supernatural interpretation of an event.

It is not that there is no possibility of the occurrence of an event that contradicts what is prescribed by the laws of nature that we hold as true, nor that we cannot imagine conditions in which testimony in favour of the occurrence of such an event would not be totally believable. The point is that in such a case nothing obliges us to adopt a miraculous interpretation of what has happened. In the presence of an inexplicable event, the rational response is to acknowledge our ignorance of its natural causes but not therefore to renounce the principle that such causes must exist.

Of course, we could also say that it is a miracle, that is, that the event is the result of the intervention of God in the world, either directly or by an interposed agent. But what is really crucial from an epistemological point of view is to perceive that nothing compels us rationally to interpret the evidence in this sense.

The same thing happens here as with the argument of design. If someone interprets an extraordinary event as a miracle, this is due not to the nature of the evidence that supports it but to his religiosity. Where the religious person sees a miracle, the non-religious person simply sees, at best, an event that cannot be explained by what he knows.

Let's go back to Wittgenstein. As we have suggested, his epistemology, at least as outlined in his last work, *On Certainty* (Wittgenstein, 1969), is much more plausible, because less crudely empiricist, than Hume's. Nevertheless, whatever differences they may have in the terrain of epistemology, once again they are in total agreement with regard to incredulity about miracles. "God does not reveal himself *in* the world." Neither in the physical nor in the historical world.

Towards the end of "A Lecture on Ethics", Wittgenstein (1993) speaks of one of those events that in everyday life we might describe as miraculous, thereby understanding an event the like of which we have never seen before. The example that he gives is that of the sudden transformation of someone into a lion. Well, not even such an extraordinary event as this must have an intrinsically miraculous meaning in the sense of religious. Of course, Wittgenstein notes, no such meaning

would be preserved if we decided to seek the natural explanation of the event. If we looked at things in this way all the miraculous aspect would disappear, and if we continued to described the event as miraculous all that it would mean would be that the event was one that had not yet been explained by science, that we had not yet succeeded in placing this event with others in a systematic scientific corpus.

Furthermore, what is clearly at stake in this whole discussion of the credibility of testimony of miracles is the possibility of considering religious discourse that incorporates such testimony as a rationally credible historical account. Well, Wittgenstein could not be more explicit and forthright on this point. As he says on several occasions and in several places (for example, in Wittgenstein, 1980), Christianity, as a religious belief, cannot find a foundation in any historical basis. A conclusion to which our Scottish sceptic would certainly not have been unwilling to subscribe.

#### **4. The miracle of existence**

Scepticism is a two-edged weapon, for if, on the one hand, it proscribes the rational justification of beliefs of a certain kind, in this case religious, on the other hand, if it is consistent, it prevents one from attacking them by appealing to rational foundations. What is situated beyond reason cannot be questioned by reason.

It is possible that when Hume, in the voice of Philo towards the end of his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, said that to be a philosophical sceptic is, in a man of letters, the first and most essential step towards being a sound, believing Christian he was using irony. The celebrated conclusion with which he ended his discussion of the credibility of testimony about miracles, namely that whoever is moved by faith is conscious of a miracle in his own person, must also have been ironical. And yet, as Berlin reminds us, the Counter-Enlightenment thinkers Hamann and Jacobi, though conscious of Hume's ironic intention, took his

declaration quite seriously. For them, as later for Kierkegaard, faith was a true miracle.

Wittgenstein, who of course felt a much greater respect for religion than Hume, was moved by that same scepticism. As he confesses in his “Remarks on Frazer’s *Golden Bough*” (1993), he also felt the need to plunge again and again in the water of doubt. Religious belief, for him, was certainly not something rational. Yet he was also not prepared to call it irrational, because of that epithet’s pejorative connotation.

His entire philosophy of religion sets out, in a way, like that of many of the Counter-Enlightenment thinkers, from the very point where Humean scepticism concludes: religious *belief* cannot be justified, or refuted, by any evidence ... although we might say, if we make the appropriate qualifications, that it is based on certain experiences.

And those qualifications are necessary because speaking of beliefs and experiences may again cause us to make the mistake of taking religion as a kind of knowledge, as a theory, and considered thus, Wittgenstein thought, it is clearly utterly absurd and puerile and any pretension that it should compete with scientific theory would be preposterous.

This may be why, in his reflections on *Culture and Value*, he referred to the immense harm that the word “believe” has done to religion. For, supposing religious belief is taken as a doxastic state, if religious opinion were a belief it is evident that it would be a mistaken opinion ... so mistaken that the magnitude of the mistake makes it hard to believe that anyone could commit it and, therefore, that religious belief really does constitute a doxastic state. An argument that Wittgenstein put forward in his *Lectures on Religious Belief*.

But then, what kind of belief is religious belief? And what kind of experience is the experience on which it is based? And what is this relationship, how are this experience and religious belief related? In a very late remark, made in 1950, Wittgenstein (1980) says that what shows us the existence of God is not visions or any other sort of sensory experience

but, for example, suffering of various kinds, and that these experiences do not show him to us in the same way that a sensory impression shows us an object or allows us to conjecture it.

For him, the relationship between religious belief and the experiences on which it is based is not an epistemic relationship. Experience does not justify religious belief in the way in which a visual experience justifies a cognitive belief. Also, religious experience is not a sensory experience of either an external or internal sense. For what Wittgenstein sets against visual experience is not pain but suffering (*Leiden*). These are what we might call emotional, vital or even spiritual experiences. They are experiences which, in some way, imbue all that happens to us, the whole of our experience. We could also say that they give a kind of overall meaning.

In the remark he made in 1950 Wittgenstein gave suffering as an example of religious experience, and in “A Lecture on Ethics”, in 1929, he gave three other examples of such experiences, namely: feeling absolutely safe, feeling guilty, and feeling wonder at the existence of the world (his experience par excellence).

These three experiences are characterised by their global nature. Feeling absolutely safe means feeling safe not from anything in particular but from everything, whatever happens. It is the *feeling* that anything that may happen to me, even being struck by lightning, would not be bad. Similarly, the experience of feeling guilty to which Wittgenstein seems to refer is not the experience of feeling that we should apologise for something or other but of *feeling* that our whole life is worthless. And the same applies to wondering at the existence of the world. It is not being surprised at something abnormal that happens, but *feeling* that anything that happens, however customary, is wonderful.

Now Wittgenstein says of these three experiences that they can be expressed in religious terms. And so we can say that “we are in God’s hands”, or that “God condemns our conduct”, or that “God created the world” to express each of them, respectively. It would also not be difficult

to understand what is involved in the suffering as a religious experience to which Wittgenstein was referring in 1950. Very probably, feeling that our pain is not gratuitous or arbitrary but that it has some meaning, that it is not pointless. And we might express this by saying something like “God is putting us to the test”.

Perhaps we are now in a position to form a clearer idea of the status that Wittgenstein concedes to religious belief. It is certainly not a doxastic state caused by a sensory experience that can, in itself, be asserted as a justification of its truth. Rather, religious belief is a way of expressing certain spiritual experiences.

This expressive quality that Wittgenstein attributes to religious beliefs enables us, on the one hand, to understand some other characteristics that he attributes to them, such as, for example, not coming into contradiction with each other. Since they are not states of a doxastic nature, they do not have a representative character. To say that a religious belief is mistaken would be like saying that crying is a mistaken expression of happiness. The fact is that crying can be as natural an expression of happiness as laughing. Or singing, or dancing.

For Wittgenstein, it is innate in man to act in certain ways when he has certain experiences. For example, beating the ground with a stick when he is furious. He does not do this because he believes that he can achieve anything by doing so, or because he thinks that the ground is to blame for what makes him furious and he wants to punish it. These, he says, are what we might call instinct-actions.

Religious practices must be understood as one type of this kind of action. They are the crystallisation of the human tendency to symbolisation, to the expression of experiences of a certain kind. And religious beliefs can only be understood as being embedded in these practices. They themselves form part of the ritual, they are rituals.

It is this practical dimension, we might add, that can enable us to understand the fact that with regard to them we still speak of belief,

defying the danger of confusion of which Wittgenstein warned. For ultimately, as the American pragmatists clearly saw, beliefs are not so much representations as guidance for action. But what, indeed, could religious belief be other than impassioned guidance for action? In his *Lectures on Religious Belief* Wittgenstein discusses what believing in the Last Judgement might mean. His thesis is that believing in something like this cannot mean making a prediction, based on evidence, about a series of events that will happen in the future. What the adoption of such a belief means is, rather, beginning to govern one's whole life by it; for example, deciding to act as if we had to render an account for what we do. Belief in the Last Judgement expresses this global way of experiencing our own actions. This belief provides us, as it were, with an image that serves as a guide and reminder in our conduct.

Clearly, understood thus, religious belief does not need to be based on any empirical evidence, neither on the verification of order in the physical world, nor on the recognition of a miraculous event in the sense of the term that refers to the unusual and improbable nature of something that happens. For the religious man, the mere existence of the world is more than miracle enough.

## **5. Between superstition and enthusiasm**

Wittgenstein's conception of religious belief has the undoubted merit of representing a sharp reminder for the naively positivist and evolutionist conceptions which interpret that belief as the outcome of some kind of epistemic deficiency and which therefore consider that science's systematic and efficient method of cognitive production will wipe out religion. Yet even Wittgenstein himself constantly admits that, as he metaphorically expresses it, science sends the religious sensibility of mankind to sleep.

Similarly, according to Wittgenstein, religious beliefs do not come into contradiction with each other and this is due to their expressive nature,

their quality of symbolic crystallisation, of allegorical manifestation of certain experiences. But the fact is that the history of humanity has been and, to a large extent, still is the history of a struggle between religions.

Wittgenstein's philosophy of religion seems incapable, therefore, of doing justice to certain historical phenomena. And this inability prompts us to wonder about the status of his theses. Are they really descriptive or prescriptive? Do they tell us what religious belief is for most of mankind, or what it should be (perhaps on the basis of what it is for a few)? In Humean terms: is Wittgenstein providing us with a characterisation of vulgar religion, or is what he is doing, knowingly or not, providing us with a philosophical religion that is, in fact, erected on clearly sceptical foundations?

On the face of it, the characterisation that Wittgenstein gives of religion does not seem to correspond to vulgar religion, that is, to religion as lived and understood by most people. The only option that remains, therefore, is to say that Wittgenstein is putting forward a philosophical religion. But, it is only fair to admit, a rather strange philosophical religion. At least in the eyes of a Humean.

In fact, when Hume speaks of philosophical religion he tends to think of a religious feeling based on a fundamentally intellectual experience: the realisation of the general order of the world, the experience that underlies the argument of design. Moreover, as has already been said, the philosophers' God is an essentially cosmological concept, without moral, or rather political, consequences. For the religious philosopher could certainly experience various kinds of emotion with his view of the order of the universe as a sacred order – wonder, satisfaction, consolation and so forth – which might prove of great importance in the overall context of *his* life. What it does not seem that one could deduce from this experience is a set of precepts with regulatory power for others. This philosophical religion, if that is what it really is, would be incapable of engendering any clerical power. And this, limiting the power of the clergy, is something that

Hume saw as a maxim that was both philosophically and politically healthy and reasonable.

Of course, if we are to judge by its consequences, it is obvious that Wittgenstein's philosophy of religion also has this – in Hume's eyes – healthy consequence. His instinct leads him to mistrust Saint Paul, as he says in his reflections on *Culture and Value*, because he has a tang not of the Gospels but of the Church, of hierarchy, rank and responsibilities. Moreover, the fact that Wittgenstein's philosophy has these consequences may be a symptom of its strictly philosophical nature ... but at the same time, and for this very reason, of its unsuitability as a theory of vulgar religion, for what would have to be explained, and what Wittgenstein's theory certainly does not explain, is the tendency of religious belief to generate clerics, hierarchies, responsibilities and so on.

But let's go back to the particular character that a Humean would find in what he would consider Wittgenstein's philosophical religion. Since it is not based on its consequences, as we have just seen, it would have to be based on the origin that is postulated for religious belief. And so indeed it is. For Wittgenstein's philosophy of religion does not postulate an intellectual experience as the origin of religious belief, but rather a series of experiences that are more of an emotional nature. Yet for Hume this is precisely what the origin of vulgar religion is.

Indeed, Hume also considers that religious belief is practically innate in mankind, although in his "Introduction" to *The Natural History of Religion* (2008) he points out that it cannot spring from an original instinct or primary impression of human nature because it is not completely universal and far less is it uniform in the specific form it takes. Similarly, he considers that something very similar to poetic imagination, the ability to give allegorical and prosopopoeial expression to certain experiences that have to do with the emotions aroused by the events of human life, lies at the basis of religious belief.

However, there are two important aspects that differentiate Hume from Wittgenstein. The first is that, although Hume recognises that the

emotions that form the basis of religious belief may be either positive (hope, gratitude, etc.) or negative (suffering, fear, etc.), he insists that the emotions from which it originates are more often the latter. As for Wittgenstein, although the experiences that we have mentioned as being situated by him at the basis of religious belief are also positive (feeling safe, wonder) and negative (the feeling of guilt, suffering), the fact is that, as I have discussed elsewhere (Sanf elix, 2007), his religious experience was fundamentally pessimistic and unhealthy.

The other great difference between Hume and Wittgenstein is that for the former this emotional basis would not in itself be sufficient to generate a popular religion, and it would be necessary for ignorance to be added to it. This is a point that would separate Hume from the expressive conception of religious belief and would place him closer to cognitive conceptions such as those of the positivists. In this case, Wittgenstein's arguments against Frazer would equally serve against Hume. But in this regard it must be said that many of the arguments that Wittgenstein puts forward against the cognitive conception of religious belief can turn back, like a boomerang, against his own expressive conception of it. For example, when he says that primitive people do not really believe that their priest can make it rain because if it were so he would perform his ceremony in the dry periods and not, as he does, in the rainy season, one might reply that, for the same reason, one cannot consider their belief as merely expressive, for then the time of year when the ceremony was performed would be a matter of utter indifference to them.

At a certain point in his criticism of Frazer Wittgenstein seems to be aware of this kind of difficulty and says that the notion of supernatural power to control the course of nature that a people recognises in its ruler is adapted to the experience of that people and of the ruler himself (for example, we might say, by not making him invoke rain except in the rainy season); and that this implies a certain hypocrisy, the same as is involved in most of the things that people do.

In other words, it is as if men needed to believe that their religious beliefs were true but at the same time were too afraid that they were false to put them to the test. And it is clear to me that this shows that the correct position in this matter is a complicated intermediate point between the cognitive and the expressive conceptions of religious belief. However, whatever the position on this point may be (and, in any case, it would have to be developed in greater detail), I think we are now well placed to understand what Hume would find strange in Wittgenstein's conception of religion, namely the fact that the version of it that he presents is devoid of all superstition.

Wittgenstein's believer is like the *muzhik* in Tolstoy's novels: simple but honest. There is a sort of nostalgia for purity and simplicity<sup>1</sup> which lead to a kind of primitivism<sup>2</sup>. The origin was better than what we have come to. This can be seen clearly when Wittgenstein reproaches Frazer for his inability to imagine a priest who is not like an English parson of our time, with all his stupidity and vapidness. But, we have to ask ourselves, why does Wittgenstein suppose that priests of some other time would be any less stupid or vapid?

Basically, Wittgenstein's philosophy of religion remains a sophisticated intellectual defence of a religious belief idealised as simple and innocent. That, I think, is why Hume would have considered Wittgenstein's philosophy of religion as a case of false consciousness: when it sought to describe a popular religion, basically it was simply putting forward a philosophical religion. As Hume did not have that beatific view of ordinary people, he was under no illusion about the mercenary, superstitious nature of many of their religious beliefs. Of course the peasant is giving expression to an emotional state when he prays to God or, more frequently, to a saint or virgin (an inevitable lapse of the

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<sup>1</sup> Scorn for all theology and all attempts to rationalise or intellectualise religious belief is a clear consequence of Wittgenstein's proposals and another of the points in which his philosophy does not do justice to the phenomenon of religion.

<sup>2</sup> It is worth recalling here that when Wittgenstein wished to emigrate to the USSR he wanted to go not to the cities but to the more primitive and rural far east.

monotheistic creed into polytheism) for it to rain; but this does not make him any less convinced that his prayer can help to bring rain (and I would venture to add that this conviction is a transcendental condition of the seriousness of his ritual practice).

At any rate, although Hume would consider that Wittgenstein's was a philosophical religion *malgré lui*, he might also add that it is a philosophical religion that has affinities with a certain variety of vulgar religion. For Hume, superstition is not the only possible degeneration of true religion<sup>3</sup>; there is also enthusiasm, a variety of popular religion which originates in emotions that are the opposite of those that are generated by superstition and which maintains that same contrariety in its consequences: an individualism, intimism and anti-clericalism that seem to bring it close to what Wittgenstein proposes<sup>4</sup>.

## 6. Conclusion

We have seen how Hume's and Wittgenstein's philosophies of religion intersect. Perhaps not by chance, given the direct influence of the former on certain authors who, immediately or intermediately, influenced the latter. We have also seen how they diverge. For ultimately they are two very different attitudes: non-religious (not to say anti-religious) in one case; philo-religious (not to say clearly religious) in the other; though in the end, as we know, philosophy is a question of character.

I have the impression that, precisely because Wittgenstein's philosophy of religion shares a sceptical basis with Hume's and because of

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<sup>3</sup> What Hume may understand by this is something that I shall not go into here. I shall only note that his position would most probably be very close to that of an Erastianism that might philosophically be founded on deism or, as in his case, on scepticism.

<sup>4</sup> Although Wittgenstein was buried in accordance with the Catholic rite, the most conspicuous example of Christian superstition for Hume, we might well say of him what the Scottish philosopher said of the Jansenists in his essay "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm": that they "are enthusiasts, and zealous promoters of the passionate devotion, and of the inward life; little influenced by authority; and, in a word, but half catholics". (Hume, 1994)

its emotive, expressive nature, it would have little to oppose to Hume's agnosticism or atheism. Wittgenstein could see in Hume someone who, as he notes in his diaries "Movements of Thought" (2000), has got rid himself from religion and thus from the torments of the mind. And this image would be correct, since philosophy, for Hume, was undoubtedly a way of achieving the tranquillity of the soul.

Hume, in turn, would probably have seen Wittgenstein as a religious person, and therefore spiritually tormented, but also, we might say, as someone who professes the least harmful, and therefore most respectable, form of religion. After all, Hume already knew that enthusiasm was more likely than superstition to become a friend of freedom and tolerance, despite its flirtations with egalitarian and revolutionary radicalism. All of which, incidentally, might also be applied to Wittgenstein, not only because of his particular pious Bolshevism (in this regard, see Sanfélix, 2008) but also because, ultimately, he never ceased to see philosophy as a fight.

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# The Existence of God

## (According to Wittgenstein)

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Ludwig Wittgenstein is generally acknowledged as one of the most renowned philosophers in history. A thinker deeply concerned with philosophical problems, he was highly interested in the status of religious beliefs and the role they play in our lives. As a central idea as the concept “God” is for such kind of belief, Wittgenstein paid special attention to its meaning and discussed the role that rational argumentative processes played on it.

Wittgenstein’s view on religion is, so to speak, anti-intellectualist<sup>1</sup>, something that will not change throughout his life in spite of changes in Wittgenstein’s ideas on meaning. In what follows, I will analyse to what extent attempting to rationally probe the existence of God is, according to Wittgenstein, a mistake.

What Wittgenstein understands with the term “God” is a complex and disputed issue. Though the depth of his reflection urges him to deal with the matter in different ways, it is true that there is a unitary background in his conception of a divine being, as by education and cultural environment Wittgenstein inherits Judaeo-Christian tradition. His reflection on it, at least as it abruptly begins on 11.06.1916 in his *Notebooks*, shows that the analysis of such a religious concept is a delicate matter and that the personal experience it is attached to plays a key role in the discussion and requires careful consideration.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Wittgenstein, 2000, 19.04.1937. Also 15.11 (or 12). 1931: “Christianity is really saying: let go of all intelligence”.

God escapes from our understanding of facts. That is the basic reason why it is so difficult to specify *who* or *what* he is. Experiences in the trenches of First World War and readings that grab Wittgenstein's attention make him associate the idea of God to mystical experience, but the traditional conceptualization of God as having a paternal (providential) behaviour is still present in Wittgenstein's conception. God becomes the answer to the problematic character of human life, and can be identified with the meaning of life. It is so that we can speak of facts surrounding us as something *given*, and such quality of being *given* shows that there is something (a will) alien to us. Something alien from a metaphysical – constitutive – perspective, though we experience an ontological dependence on it. So, we are speaking of two ontological poles we cannot separate. This is what allows Wittgenstein to say that God is also the world independent of our will (*Notebooks*, 08.07.1916). The *Tractatus* doctrine shows that it is, however, a concept with no reference, and it cannot take part in any state of affairs. But, can we believe in something that *does not exist*?

This debate on the question of the meaning of life leads Wittgenstein to take into consideration the epistemological status of religion and ethics. In the *Tractatus* we find that the only meaningful language is the scientific one. We find no place in such language to talk meaningfully about God, nor can we argue about his existence. Why such argumentation is not possible is a topic strongly discussed. *How* God remains out of any argument is something to be treated here in what has to do with the possibility/impossibility to demonstrate his existence. Wittgenstein directly deals with the cosmological and ontological arguments in an attempt to show their fallacious character.

### **1. The need to argue about God. The dogmatic value of arguments about his existence.**

The arguments about God's existence have usually been posited as a sort of rational guarantee for religious beliefs, in an attempt to justify them.

They have not been used to convince sceptics, though have been put forward to refute their doubts.

By means of its definition, the idea of *dogma* implies the impossibility of any doubt, criticism, or answer by rational argument<sup>2</sup>. It has to be accepted without any kind of intellectual counterparts. Accepting a dogma implies submitting to an authority and represents –so Wittgenstein thinks- the end of any argumentation. A dogma governs thinking, and limits its freedom of movement. A dogma allows no discussion and leads doctrinal developments and the specific understanding of how personal and group behaviours must go. Wittgenstein critically reacts to the demands derived from dogmas, given that they eliminate the possibility for debates and hold reason –so Wittgenstein thought- to unnatural limits. However, there is some ambiguity in Wittgenstein’s approach to this problem, due to the fact that regarding religious discourse rational argumentation must be left aside; first, because it brings paradoxes that cannot be rationally accepted<sup>3</sup>; second, it undermines the existential meaning of religious statements.

Consequently, Wittgenstein rejected that the demonstration of the existence of God was considered a dogma by the Catholic Church. It is in the First Vatican Council (1869-1870), when it is dogmatically proposed that the existence of God can be known with certainty by natural reason. Such dogma comes to help natural theology, though it does not exclude compatibility between faith and reason. It is the authority coming from its being a dogma what makes Wittgenstein react negatively, as he pointed out in a conversation with Maurice O’Connor Drury:

It is a dogma of the Roman Church that the existence of God can be proved by natural reason. Now this dogma would make it impossible for me to be a Roman Catholic. If I thought of God as another being like

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<sup>2</sup> See Wittgenstein, 1980, 11.09.1937.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Idem 24.09.1937: “Religion says: *Do this! –Think like that!* But it cannot justify this and it only need try to do so to become repugnant; since for every reason it gives, there is a cogent counter-reason” (italics in the original).

myself, outside myself, only infinitely more powerful, then I would regard it as my duty to defy him.<sup>4</sup>

Apparently, Wittgenstein's reaction shows the philosopher's typical attitude of disagreement before dogmatic obstacles. But it is more accurate to say that such attitude is expressing a justification of the supernatural character of the key concept of religion. A demonstration of God's existence would limit his very divine condition, and Wittgenstein's own words show what would be a distortion of God's essential ineffability, because in such case God would be "another being like myself", what would compel us to discuss with Him any issue our reason finds incomprehensible –or unjustifiable- if we take for granted that God must be omnipotent and omniscient.

Rational argumentation is something Wittgenstein wants to leave apart from religious discourse, so that we can speak of a God who is 'spirit', a God to whom we pray and who listens to our prayers; a God who acts as loving father and who redeems us. All this without any contradiction. The result of it is the submission of reason to belief, and to avoid arguments –as they are useless- to make room for faith:

"Go on, relieve! It does no harm. 'Believing' means, submitting to an authority. Having once submitted to it, you cannot then, without rebelling against it, first call it in question & then once again find it convincing."<sup>5</sup>

A review of Wittgenstein's work as well as of his personal comments will help us see what kind of interest Wittgenstein had on traditional arguments used to demonstrate God's existence.

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<sup>4</sup> Rhees 1981, 123: See, in this sense, the remark appearing in *Movements of Thought* dated on 17.03.1937: "I want to quarrel with God", and also the one dated the following day: "If you want to quarrel with God, that means that you have a false concept of God. You are superstitious. You have an incorrect concept when you get angry with fate. You should rearrange our concepts. Contentment with your fate ought to be the first command of wisdom".

<sup>5</sup> Wittgenstein, 1980, ca. 1944.

## 2. Cosmological Argument

In the *Tractatus* the only possible demonstration is logical demonstration. Something that does not increase our knowledge specifically. Deductions can only be made *a priori* (\*5.133), and we cannot infer a state of affairs from another state of affairs. Wittgenstein is clearly explicit in his rejection of the logical nature of causal nexus. Paragraphs 5.136 and 5.1361 clearly show his point of view and they lead to a statement not only critical in its content but it sounds –so to speak- programmatic in its intention: “*Superstition* is the belief in the causal nexus”<sup>6</sup> (italics in the original). All this shows the logical autonomy of states of affairs to the extent that it can be said that by the fact that today the sun is out we cannot deduce it will be out tomorrow. The only existing *necessity* is logical necessity (\*6.375).

Let us briefly remember that the cosmological argument is the argument stressing the importance of connection between cause and effect, which leads us to conclude that there is an ‘uncaused cause’ as the origin of the sequence of causes and their related effects. It is Aquinas’ Second Argument, one of his Five Ways (*Argument from Efficient Cause*), and it has been amply used to deal with the existence of God<sup>7</sup>. The sequence cause-effect seems to demand the existence of a First Cause which would give a logical solution to the illogical nature of an unending sequence. The existence of such Cause allows us to explain the universe from its origin. Taking into account its existence we can get to its cause by means of a logical explanation. Here, we are speaking of an *a posteriori* demonstration; that which goes from effect to cause. What for Wittgenstein is clearly problematic is the status of a logical connection concerning states of affairs. Understanding such issue we can derive a Wittgensteinian rejection of cosmological argument in terms of logic. But the thing is that – as Wittgenstein points out-religious statements do not refer to states of affairs. Are we giving a special epistemological status to such kind of

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<sup>6</sup> See, also, Wittgenstein, 1998, (15.10.1916): “But it is clear that the causal nexus is not a nexus at all”.

<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, Hawking, 1988. Hume, 1980. Mackie, 1982. Rowe, 1975, etc.

statements (“God exists”, “God is the First Cause”)? Such is not the case. We have only accepted the impossibility of a logical deduction that obviously cannot be valid for a senseless picture, that which has no possibility either being true or false (religious statements). So, once the nonsensical character of religious discourse has been argued, we are led to ask what we do with such kind of statements; between them “God exists” has a key role. The consequence coming from the *Tractatus* is that such statements are not proper statements, so “we must pass over in silence” (\*7).

In Wittgenstein’s *Second Philosophy* the cosmological argument does not find support if we consider his interpretation of the use of “cause”. Using causality in the religious realm is attempting to make religious language perform a task it is not able to: speaking of the world as scientific theories can do. The idea of cause is understood by means of the role it plays when it is used. It belongs to the domain of relationships between facts and we learn its use when we connect (or see connected) events. There is a language game where we learn how to connect cause and effect, that is, how to use both terms. We establish such connection by means of an impulsive –basic, natural- reaction that is at the back of its meaning. Such reaction allows us to use the connection as a fundamental –primary- certainty on how objects behave or the relationships there are between them. So, the very idea of cause is conceived in the game as that element of it which cancels the possibility of a continuous doubt on how things behave: “Doubting –I might say- has to come to an end somewhere. At some point we have to say –without doubting: *that* happens because of *this* cause”<sup>8</sup>. Doubt is always something coming after previous certainties. We use the concept even where we do not see connection, but we foresee there is. As a primitive fact of our behaviour we have learnt *to play* with the idea of ‘cause’: “The simple form (and that is the prototype) of the cause-effect game is determining the cause, not doubting”<sup>9</sup>. It is not the

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<sup>8</sup> “Cause and Effect: Intuitive Awareness”; in: Klagge/Nordmann (eds.), 1993, 377.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 397.

case of a special knowledge but a use derived from something we always have at hand, as we talk about a very basic reaction.

To what extent can we relate this to religious language and the proposal of *cosmological* demonstration? In this case we have to take into account two circumstances. The first is that logical connection cause-effect gives way to how *we use* the terms. That is, logical relation belongs to the language game of logic, and the relationship between cause and effect appears in the use we make of it –as a basic certainty- when speaking of facts. Moving its meaning to religious language is something illegitimate if we want to maintain the connotations of such use. In a remark of 1950, Wittgenstein himself asks:

“If the believer in God looks around & asks ‘Where does everything I see come from? Where does all that come from?’, what he hankers after is *not* a (causal) explanation; and the point of his question is that it is the expression of this hankering. He is expressing, then, a stance towards all explanations. –But how is this manifested in his life?”<sup>10</sup>

We cannot use the connection cause-effect as we do when we refer to *ordinary events*. First, because – as we have pointed out – such connection is directly linked to basic reactions guaranteeing our uses. Second, speaking about God is not like speaking about *ordinary events*. We are dealing with something extraordinary and supernatural. If we could speak about God as we do about facts, God would be an object like others, what would deprive Him of his divine attributes. He, then, would not be God. In a certain sense we can notice a sort of Humean background regarding the idea of cause, as we acquire a steady certainty with -so to speak- merely subjective support because of our tendency to trust regularities<sup>11</sup>. So, such confidence is associated with experiences of very basic connexions, but has

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<sup>10</sup> Wittgenstein, 1980, 1950.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Brenner, 2004, 54.

nothing to do with supernatural issues<sup>12</sup>: their use is fixed by the role they play in our lives (in the human *form of life*).

### 3. Ontological Argument

This kind of argument has also an illustrious past, and has been currently reformulated<sup>13</sup>, what shows the fecundity coming out from its inner coherence. It is the prototype of an *a priori* argument; it proceeds from the concept of God to the existence of such being named by the concept. But it is a kind of argument where one is not actually talking about the existence of anything. Wittgenstein writes:

God's essence is said to guarantee his existence –what this really means is that here what is at issue is not the existence of something.

For could one not equally say that the essence of colour guarantees its existence? As opposed, say to the white elephant. For it really only means: I cannot explain what 'colour' is, what the word 'colour' means, without the help of a colour sample. So in this case there is no such thing as explaining 'what it *would be like* if the colours *were* to exist.'<sup>14</sup>

We cannot think of God as a nonexistent being, given that the use we make of the concept is shaping its own characteristics. We cannot conceive God as nonexistent, so a demonstration of Him is absurd. The very use of the concept 'God' shows that we cannot say "what it would be like if there were God"<sup>15</sup>, because the possibility of his absence (inexistence) is something not included in the language game that has such concept as a key concept.

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<sup>12</sup> Indeed, for Wittgenstein, the idea of 'cause' is strongly problematic any time we want to use it in theology. See MS 130, 9-10 (Nachlass. The Bergen Electronic Edition. Accessed via Oxford University), 26.05.1946 (?): "As far as I can see the concept of causality plays a devastating role in theology. If one speaks, for example, of the supernatural effects of prayer or of the sacraments, what does "effect" mean in this context –or what does it mean when we don't understand God's intentions? What does "intention" mean in this context?" (English translation by Margaret Breugelmanns).

<sup>13</sup> Millican, 2004; Leftow, 2005; Dombrowski, 2006; Lowe, 2007.

<sup>14</sup> Wittgenstein, 1980, 17.03.1949.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 17.03.1949.

Attempting a demonstration of God's existence in this context is like attempting to demonstrate that colours exist. The presence of them in the language game of facts is unavoidable if we want to play the game appropriately. We learn how to use the terms with which the language game becomes coherent from specific usages. God's *essence* includes his existence as one of the characteristics that make comprehensible the use of such term. So, there is no logical derivation to undoubtedly demonstrate God's existence. This is the condition of use of the religious language game such as we know it. *This* is how we play the game. The existence of God is assumed as a special certainty of the language game in which it is being used.

#### 4. "Historical" Argument

Before analyzing how we can speak of God properly, let us briefly evaluate what we could call the "historical argument" or the argument based on "historical evidence". In principle, such *argument* faces an obstacle in the impossibility to find a reference for the term "God". In the *Tractatus*, we found that speaking of 'super-facts' or of facts of supernatural character was inconsistent. But in his subsequent reflections, Wittgenstein also stresses that treating God as a mere object<sup>16</sup> is paradoxical, what however does not preclude speaking of Him, something Wittgenstein frequently does. But we speak of God in so far as it is possible to do so within the proper language game. Let us analyse to what extent –according to Wittgenstein- we can speak of "historical evidence" to justify the existence of God. Two are the issues to address here: textual and testimonial evidence and evidence coming from miracles. Let us begin with the last one.

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. Wittgenstein, 1983, 59: "If the question arises as to the existence of a god or God, it plays an entirely different role to that of the existence of any person or object I ever heard of". Cf., also, Wittgenstein, 2000, on the paradoxical character of God's existence as another historical fact.

The evidential value of miracles is something discussed by Wittgenstein in a relatively early text. We use to understand the existence of miracles as evidence of God's action in the world. The acceptance of such exceptional circumstances as miracles are, would seem to guarantee that a supernatural Being is guiding events so that they behave in accordance to his will. The existence of such circumstances points at an origin transcending typically human ways of knowledge and control of reality. But Wittgenstein himself asks: Can experiences, facts, have supernatural value? In his "A Conference on Ethics" Wittgenstein deals with the matter and concludes that such a consideration of facts is paradoxical: "It is a paradox that an experience, a fact, should seem to have supernatural value"<sup>17</sup>. Wittgenstein's definition of miracle may seem to be somehow inaccurate, but it helps him to make the aforementioned criticism: "an event the like of which we have never yet seen"<sup>18</sup>. Such definition could evidently include many facts that in ordinary language we would never consider as proper miracles, but Wittgenstein uses it to stress that we have different ways to look at things.

We can imagine an actually extraordinary fact. Wittgenstein gives the example of someone in the audience whose head suddenly grows as a lion's one and begins roaring. If the matter is scientifically investigated, analysing the causes producing such surprising mutation, we do not need to call it 'miracle' anymore. If we look at it from a scientific perspective, anything miraculous disappears. It has nothing to do with any kind of "providential" intervention. If by *miracle* we mean "a fact has not yet been explained by science which again means that we have hitherto failed to group this fact with others in a scientific system"<sup>19</sup>, we are simply saying that our analysis is denying –from the beginning- the possibility to treat such fact as something supernatural. There are no facts that can be considered miracles in the absolute sense of the word. In a remark of 1929, Wittgenstein will write: "Only something supernatural can express the

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<sup>17</sup> "A Lecture on Ethics"; in Wittgenstein 1993, 43.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

Supernatural”. It is here where language fails to do its work. We cannot find any kind of evidence to use it as an argument.

Wittgenstein’s later reflection on miracles is still stressing that they are extremely rare facts, but facts after all, and they must be understood as such. The interpretation of their absolute character is given by that way of looking at them as *gestures from God*, so that such special consideration comes from how religious faith gives an interpretation of them. The two ways to look at the event –as a fact in *material* terms and as a miracle in *supernatural* terms- differ in essence as in practice. We cannot forget the symbolic character of miracles nor the influence that as such may exert on our conduct, but they cannot be accepted as evidence of anything beyond themselves as brute facts. Talking about the miracle of the Wedding at Cana, Wittgenstein writes:

What is magnificent is also not that Jesus provides wine for the people at the Wedding & also not that he gives it to them in such an unheard of manner. It must be the marvellous that gives this action content and meaning. And by that I don’t mean the extraordinary or the unprecedented but the spirit in which it is done and for which the transformation of water into wine is only a symbol (as it were) a gesture. A gesture which (of course) can only be made by the one who can do this extraordinary thing. The miracle must be understood as gesture, as expression if it is to speak to us. I could also say: It is a miracle only when he does it who does it in a marvellous spirit. Without this spirit it is only an extraordinary strange fact. I must, as it were, know the person already before I can say that it is a miracle. I must read the whole of it already in the right spirit in order to sense the miracle in it.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Wittgenstein, 2000, 06.05.1931 and 1980, ca. 1944: “A miracle is, as it were, a *gesture* which God makes. As a man sits quietly & then makes an impressive gesture, God lets the world run on smoothly & then accompanies the words of a Saint by a symbolic occurrence, a gesture of nature. It would be an instance if, when a saint has spoken, the trees around him bowed, as if in reverence. –Now, do I believe that this happens? I don’t. The only way for me to believe in a miracle in this sense would be to be *impressed* by an occurrence in this particular way. So that I should say e.g.: “It was *impossible* to see these trees & not to feel that they were responding to the words”.

So, miracles must be discarded as evidence to guarantee the existence of any supernatural power, given that their value is prejudged beforehand by our attitude towards facts. To see them as miracles we have to do it *in the right spirit*, which means that they are in direct dependence of religious discourse, where there is a specific predisposition to live life and to interpret it.

Another line of argument is that which refers to textual/testimonial evidence, that is, the one we can find in those texts where –in terms of historical but also theological valuation- it is spoken about God’s existence and about Christ’s consideration as God himself. The New as well as the Old Testament are the basic and singular references for that, and Wittgenstein treats them discussing some of their details. Let us see how Wittgenstein deals with them.

In principle, neither the New nor the Old Testament own historic relevance, which does not make them be unimportant. There can perfectly be historic background, but in terms of what “God exists” means such background is not actually relevant. In a conversation with M. O. Drury, Wittgenstein calls the Old Testament “Hebrew folklore”, a term that conditions the value of those stories in such part of the Bible. Analysing the role folklore has in a culture may help determining the scope of its meaning and understanding the connexion between symbols and human behaviour. But it is the symbolic value the one which predominates, fixing the criteria of belonging (individually and communally) to a specific culture. Wittgenstein uses the expression *folklore* to stress the narrative importance of what the Old Testament is telling: “For me too the Old Testament is a collection of Hebrew folklore –yes, I would use that

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Just as I might say “It is impossible to see the face of this dog & not to see that he is alert & full of attention to what his master is doing”. And I can imagine that the mere report of the *words* & life of a saint can make someone believe the reports that the trees bowed. But I am not so impressed”. See, also, *Culture and Value*, 08.09.1946: “The purely corporeal can be uncanny. Compare the way angels and devils are portrayed. A so-called “miracle” must be connected with this. It must be as it were a *sacred gesture*” (italics in the original).

expression”<sup>21</sup>. The important thing here is how religious feelings are expressed; they respond to our basic and fundamental interests. Something Wittgenstein sets clearly in his comments to Frazer’s *The Golden Bough*, where he debates the approaches of James George Frazer’s positivistic anthropology.

The New Testament shows the evidence provided by testimonies of the first Christian communities regarding Christ’s life and teachings. Though they do not intend to have only historical value, they are a good reflection of how the early Christians felt about Jesus Christ, who was believed to be God himself. So, the New Testament appears as testimonial evidence of the real and concrete presence of God in history. Wittgenstein gave them enormous value, because of their meaning in terms of historical and cultural influence and because of the impression they made on him, what compelled Wittgenstein to write: “The Old Testament seen as the body without its head; the New T.: the head; the Epistles of the Apostles: the crown on the head”<sup>22</sup>

But such interest and high esteem are not in contradiction with his criticism to the historical value of the Gospels to support divine credentials, which makes their use difficult as textual evidence in spite that there can be a unitary background based on the conviction manifested in early Christians’ faith. Wittgenstein’s criticism concerns not only the contradictions found in texts, but also the implications of associating supernatural value to concrete facts. Such consideration is, by definition, contradictory in the terms we commonly use to speak of facts and objects. As we have previously seen when we analysed the issue of miracles, it does not make any sense to attribute *eternal* meaning to a fact or an event<sup>23</sup>. Such difficulty appears specifically in the dogma of Incarnation, a miracle that was something impossible (and unconceivable) according to human parameters<sup>24</sup> due to the fact that it implies that God –the eternal-

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<sup>21</sup> Rhees, 1981, 116 (1929).

<sup>22</sup> Wittgenstein 1980, 1939-1940.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Wittgenstein, 2000, 19.04.1937.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Rhees, 1981, 177-178. Cf., also, Bouwsma, 1986, 57-58.

has become man –the temporal. Only in terms of faith can this coexistence of different natures be understood: “You can’t call Christ the Saviour without calling him God. For a human being cannot save you”<sup>25</sup> Wittgenstein writes.

The narrative model of the Gospels is not uniform, and has some contradictions, though Wittgenstein admits that they may have some historical coherence and background. But such coherence cannot be adduced as something decisive, which makes interpretative activity something essential for the meaning we want to give the Gospels in the context they belong to:

God has *four* people recounting the life of the incarnate God, each one differently, & contradicting each other –but can’t we say: It is important that this narrative should not have more than quite middling historical plausibility, *just so* that this should not be taken as the essential, decisive thing, so that the *letter* should not be believed more strongly than is proper & the *spirit* should receive its due. I. e.: What you are supposed to see cannot be communicated even by the best, more accurate, historian; *therefore* a mediocre account suffices, is even to be preferred.<sup>26</sup>

In a text written not long after, Wittgenstein is even more rotund when evaluating the weight of historical testimonies in religious matters. As such, those testimonies do not convince us of God’s existence. That is, there is no logical sequence guaranteeing such derivation nor they have enough strength to convince us by means of their conclusive character; only belief is what allows us to conclude that there exists a God, who is provident and has become incarnate in Jesus Christ. The way we read the documents is of specific importance here:

Christianity is not based on a historical truth, but presents us with a (historical) narrative & says: now relieve! But not believe this report with the belief that is appropriate to a historical report, -but rather: believe, through thick & thin you can do this only as the outcome of a life. *Here*

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<sup>25</sup> Wittgenstein, 2000, 21.11.1936.

<sup>26</sup> Wittgenstein, 1981, 22.10.1937, italics in the original.

*you have a message! –don't treat it as you would another historical message! Make a quite different place for it in your life. –There is no paradox about that!*

(...)

Queer as it sounds: the historical accounts of the Gospels might, in the historical sense, be demonstrably false, & yet belief would lose nothing through this: but *not* because it has to do with 'universal truths of reason'! Rather, because historical proof (the historical proof-game) is irrelevant to belief. This message (the Gospels) is seized on by a human being believably (i. e. lovingly): *That* is the certainty of this "taking-for-true", nothing *else*.<sup>27</sup>

As David Hume explained when he talked about the difficulties of individuals' testimonies to work as reliable proof in the case of miracles – how many testimonies would be enough to give full value to the existence of miracles? –, in Wittgenstein's case we can also question to what extent testimonies are of value. If we understand them with the spiritual strength and specific engagement with religious belief they have, then we can realise their importance to back the existence of miracles as such. This could make us think that for Wittgenstein the content of what we believe is of no particular importance; that only the strength of our commitment makes the content be valid. But it is clearly not so. Wittgenstein himself admitted that the existence of Jesus Christ we have learned from the Gospels and from historical research was something evident<sup>28</sup>. The problem arises when we give such narrations some special status, that is, when we call them Revelation. But what it is clear is that we are speaking of a very particular kind of belief: religious belief; that which has specific interest as it is incardinated in the most intimate aspirations of human beings.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 08-09.12.1937, italics in the original.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Rhees, 1981,116.

## 5. The *evidence* on God's existence

In the light of all we have said before, we can now ask what kind –if there is any- of evidence there is to demonstrate the existence of God. How we must understand it and how our convictions about it arise. Wittgenstein explicitly defines the scope of such *evidence* when he states: “Anything that I normally call evidence wouldn't in the slightest influence me”<sup>29</sup>. Reasons attempting to back or justify beliefs of religious kind would not be enough if we understand such reasons in terms of logical argumentation on the content of beliefs. If we compare what we call evidence for religious issues with evidence shown by science, we easily realise that we are not talking of evidence at all<sup>30</sup>. So, we must deal with the issue in a different way. Cannot, then, our knowledge properly deal with God? Is rational knowledge the only one able to establish boundaries in these matters? “Is God bound by our knowledge?”<sup>31</sup>, so that we cannot talk about Him in terms of truth or falsehood?

The unavoidable consequence coming from considering those questions is that believers walk along a very fragile path. According to Wittgenstein, a believer is someone who lives like a tightrope walker:

The honest religious thinker is like a tightrope Walker. It almost looks as though he were walking on nothing but air. His support is the slenderest imaginable. And yet it really is possible to walk on it.<sup>32</sup>

In a letter to Y. Smythies, Wittgenstein speaks of the kind of requirements involved in a believer's life. Such requirements make the life of faith be something really difficult, due to the fact that they show the enormous degree of confidence needed to accept so fragile foundations:

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<sup>29</sup> Wittgenstein, 1983, 56.

<sup>30</sup> There is a particularly meaningful text in this sense: “A dispute about religious belief cannot exist for you since you don't know what the dispute is about”; Wittgenstein, 2000, 27.01.1937; underlines in the original. See, also: “there is no sense talking about religious truth in general. What religious? What truth?” in Bouwsma, 1986, 54-56.

<sup>31</sup> Wittgenstein, 1969, \*436.

<sup>32</sup> Wittgenstein, 1980, 05.07.1948.

Deciding to become a Christian is like deciding to give up walking on the ground and do tight-rope walking instead, where nothing is more easy than to slip and every slip can be fatal.<sup>33</sup>

These statements set clear the difficulties linked to religious beliefs. Difficulties experienced by Wittgenstein first-hand. With such kind of beliefs we are not talking about hypothesis, probability or knowledge, something Wittgenstein wanted to emphasize in a conversation with Drury: “Can you imagine St. Augustine saying that the existence of God was ‘highly probable’!”<sup>34</sup>

What kind of evidence, if any, can we claim there is to *probe* God’s existence? Taking into account all we have said before, there remains small room –if any- for such *evidence*. However, we need some kind of *evidence* if we want to speak meaningfully of God’s existence. In this sense, it is of some help to use some of the arguments concerning the philosophy of psychology developed by Wittgenstein, which are connected to works like *On Certainty*. Let us remember that Wittgenstein himself had written: “If someone can believe in God with complete certainty, why not in Other Minds?”<sup>35</sup>

The argument we retake here comes from what has been published under the title *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology, vol.2, the Inner and the Outer*<sup>36</sup>. As M. Ter Hark points, in this work we are dealing with a typically philosophical problem: scepticism about the existence of other minds, which is nothing but the outcome of an inadequate conception of the “inner” and the “outer”<sup>37</sup>. We may conjecture that a solution for scepticism in one case can help us to give credit (validate) to our belief –or our arguments- in the other.

What kind of evidence can we have concerning others’ feelings and thoughts? How can we *know* what there is *inside* them? To what extent can

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<sup>33</sup> McGuinness, 2008, 07.04.1944.

<sup>34</sup> Op. cit., 105.

<sup>35</sup> Wittgenstein, 1980, 03.07.1948.

<sup>36</sup> Wright and Nyman, 1992

<sup>37</sup> Ter Hark, 1990, 140.

we be certain that they are not deceiving us and are being honest? In the language game of psychological concepts insecurity is a constituent part, and the evidence we may have is linked to such insecurity. Even that *evidence* which allow us to say that others are pretending may not be the same for different people; or may be enough for one and not for the other. In any case we cannot speak of conclusions valid for everybody<sup>38</sup>, though we can perfectly assert that we *know* that someone has a pain or is pretending to have it. Pretending, so to speak, is a more complex state of such primitive language game where the expression of pain is real<sup>39</sup>. How do we know that such expression is *authentic*? There are human basic reactions whose coincidence between different individuals allows us to speak of primitive language games from which the rest of games arise. Such primitive coincidences are the ones from which any communicative exchange develops. They are our *forms of life*, conditions of understanding anything surrounding us: rejoicing, suffering, obeying orders, is part of the *human form of life*. We found them as the rocky floor from which our most basic certainties arise.

Such certainties are the axis of our language games. Due to the existence of those certainties we can speak of knowledge and doubt, as doubt always presupposes certainty. We say we *know* when we are speaking of such certainty, which admits of no criticism because *it* is the foundations for any criticism. So, those basic certainties become fundamental conditions to play the game. Here it is where the concepts “attitude” and “opinion” play a special role. We have an *opinion* of what we have criteria to decide about its value or absence of it. An *attitude* is, so to speak, something more basic, fundamental. *Knowing* that someone has inner life is having the *attitude* that he/she has a soul. That is, taking for granted that he/she is a human being (with all that it implies): “Instead of “attitude toward the soul one could also say “attitude toward a human”<sup>40</sup>, Wittgenstein writes. *Attitude* comes before an *opinion*, and this is settled

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 154-155.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Valdés, 1996, XXII.

<sup>40</sup> Wright & Nyman, 1992, 38.

(based) on that. We are *certain* that there is a human being before us, what means that we use psychological concepts associating them to those certainties related to the existence of *inner* life.

How is all this related to the existence of God and the evidence for it? A Wittgenstein's remark gives us a clue: "*Isn't belief in God an attitude?*"<sup>41</sup> It is quite clear that if there is a fundamental concept in the religious language game that is the concept "God". The question, then, becomes unavoidable: how does such concept arise? If we accept that we cannot have direct evidence nor experience of it, as happens with objects, it must arise differently. For Wittgenstein is life itself, some particular experiences, which make such a concept, arise. The religious language game ultimately refers to human beings' very basic or *primitive* experiences. We may presume that the development of a *game* like the religious one is due to progressive and complex cultural relationships, arising as a practice where elements of different kinds intertwine. Though it is true that the religious language game share many elements with other language games (as social practices), there is in its origin very basic interests and experiences shaping its development. In this sense, Wittgenstein's criticisms to Frazer appear relevant. Basic experiences concerning different kinds of sufferings, the need of moral and spiritual rest, the wonder at the basic drives –instincts- of life, the feeling of dependence before the world surrounding us, the overwhelming enigma of death...; all these are elements that combine to make our belief in God arise:

Life can educate you to "believing in God". And *experiences* too are what do this but not visions, or other experiences, which show us the "existence of this being", but e.g. sufferings of various sorts. And they do not show us God as a sense experience does an object, nor do they give rise to *conjectures* about him. Experiences, thoughts, -life can force this concept on us.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Idem, 38 (italics in the original).

<sup>42</sup> Wittgenstein, 1980, 1950.

Reflections of this kind can make us connect such arguments with Wittgenstein's experiences during the First World War and see an underlying unity in the philosopher's view. The entries of *Notebooks* and *Secret Diaries* clearly show what is influencing Wittgenstein's conception of religious belief. Religion arises as an answer to the problem of life... because life is intrinsically problematic:

I may well reject the Christian solution of the problem of life (salvation, resurrection, judgement, heaven, hell) but this does not solve the problem of my life, for I am not good & not happy. I am not saved.<sup>43</sup>

Our fears disappear only with religious belief<sup>44</sup>, which places human beings before God: "I understood what it means that belief is bliss for a human being, that is, it frees him from the fear of others by placing him immediately under God"<sup>45</sup>.

All this allows us to understand the role the concept "God" plays in our lives; his existence (God's existence) is a prerequisite for the religious language game to work. Playing it implies taking for granted such existence, which works as a fundamental certainty where the language game of religious belief is settled. That does not mean that such certainty can be given isolated, as it is a basic element. Rather, it is how it is related to the rest of certainties in such language what gives it a special role<sup>46</sup>. So, we have *evidence* similar to that of the language game of psychology. We take for granted those certainties on which our behaviour is based. We take

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<sup>43</sup> Wittgenstein, 2000, 04.02.1937. Cf. Wittgenstein, 1980, ca.1944: "The Christian religion is only for the one who needs infinite help, that is only for the one who suffers infinite distress" (compare with the entry in MS 102, 39v-41v, 08.12.1914). See, also, Wittgenstein, 2000, 23.02.1937: "A religious question is either a question of life or it is (empty) chatter. This language game –one could say- gets played only with questions of life. Much like the word "ouch" does not have any meaning –except as a scream of pain".

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Rhees, 1981, 115-116. Also, Wittgenstein, 1980, 16.10.1946, or 1931: "How should we feel if we had never heard of Christ? Should we feel left alone in the dark? Do we not feel like that only in the way a child doesn't when he knows there is someone in the room with him?".

<sup>45</sup> Wittgenstein, 2000, 28.01.1937; underlined in the original.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Hoyt, 2007,41.

for granted that others have *inner life*, what makes us have the *attitude* that they are human beings. Wittgenstein remembers that such a matter is not an object of experience. That is, if one day we *discovered* that what we have in front of us is an automaton and not a human being, we would not have made any empirical *discovery*. What would have happened is that our *attitude* had changed.

Something similar happens to our belief in God. Such belief is conditioning our attitude towards life, shaping a model of behaviour which permeates our lives. That is the reason why we can say that a belief in God is an *attitude*, something on which the rest of our conducts (and of our understanding of meaning in the religious domain) is based. We can never *discover* that God does not exist. Stating that (his inexistence) would be but showing that our attitude –and with it our whole life- has changed. This explains why proofs on the existence of God are of no importance for our convictions:

A proof of God ought really to be something by means of which you can convince yourself of God's existence. But I think that *believers* who offered such proofs wanted to analyse & make a case for their 'belief' with their intellect, although they themselves would never have arrived at belief by way of such proofs.<sup>47</sup>

In view of all we have argued before, we can understand Wittgenstein's criticism to the arguments on the existence of God, and how such criticism is important in his conception of religious belief. Consequently, his argumentative line denies the intellectual value of such proofs, but also of any attempt to appeal to reason in religious matters. Is not there, then, room for argument of any kind? We can clearly say no if proofs on God's existence try to have probative value. That does not mean that we cannot postulate his existence from a reflection of logical kind about the world. But in such case there would not be logical entailment or conclusion guaranteeing the existence of a divine being.

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<sup>47</sup> Wittgenstein, 1980,1950.

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# Subject, World and Value

(Some Hypotheses on the Influence of Schopenhauer in the early Wittgenstein)

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## Introduction

It is an acknowledged fact that Wittgenstein read Schopenhauer's *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (*The World as Will and Representation*.<sup>1</sup>) in his youth, and possibly other works by the same author (Anscombe, 1963; McGuinness, 1988). In general, Wittgenstein is reluctant to recognize other authors' influences on his thought, but in his *Notebooks, 1914-1916*<sup>2</sup> he makes explicit reference to Schopenhauer, and it is also a commonplace that his influence is present in many of the theses and ideas of the *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus*<sup>3</sup> (Anscombe, 1959; Gardiner, 1963; Janik, 1966; Micheletti, 1967; Engel, 1969). Wittgenstein himself recognized in conversations with close colleagues that, as a young man, he came to think that Schopenhauer had got the basics right (Von Wright, 1954; Bouwsma, 1986). Such recognition cannot be seen to weaken in his later philosophy.

If we keep in mind the fact that such relevant texts as the *Notebooks, 1914-16* and the *Vermischte Bemerkungen (Culture and Value)* were not published until 1961 and 1977 respectively, it becomes less surprising that the study of the relationships between Wittgenstein's thought and Schopenhauer's philosophy was not begun until relatively late. Studies by Gardiner (1963) and Janik (1966), as well as Micheletti's monograph (1967), may be considered pioneering contributions. To these must be added the contributions of Morris Engel (1969), A. P. Griffiths (1974), Bryan Magee (1983), E. M. Lange (1989) and Hans-Johann Glock (1999).

According to these and other Wittgenstein scholars, Schopenhauer's influence on his thought permeates many concepts, theses and points of view throughout his work, in some cases Wittgenstein adopted the strict

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<sup>1</sup> Hereafter referred to as WWI and quoted by volumen, chapter and page.

<sup>2</sup> Hereafter referred to as NB and quoted by date and page of the English translation.

<sup>3</sup> Hereafter referred to as TLP and quoted by paragraph.

Schopenhauerian meaning, and in others, he revised and modified it in terms of his specific interests. My purpose here is to trace certain implications of an element of that influence providing a metaphilosophical key to the understanding of the true meaning of particular philosophical theses that Wittgenstein points out in the *Notebooks* and develops in the final part of the *Tractatus*.

The point in question is the following: Wittgenstein decided to outline a limit to the linguistic expression of thought employing, in a certain way, the distinction between representations and will that Schopenhauer had used to reinterpret the Kantian distinction between the phenomenon and the thing-in-itself. In same way as Schopenhauer, Wittgenstein maintains that the world of science corresponds to the phenomenon, to the world as ‘representation’, to the world of facts; and equally considers that everything that has to do with the matters of the greatest importance and value for us – the meaning of our existence or of the existence of the world, the relationship between the willing subject and ethics, the nature of art, the possibility of an existence beyond this world, etc., in short, everything that has to do with that which is vaguely called ‘the meaning of life’, resides in the will, which is outside the world. Even so, the possible Schopenhauerian source of the separation that Wittgenstein traces between fact and value, does not deny their deep discrepancies of content as regards conceptions of the subject, the world and will.

Continuing the thread of this last observation, I should like to clarify the way that I use the word ‘influence’ to label the way that reading Schopenhauer could have made Wittgenstein think. I have not tried to isolate and identify certain elements in particular texts by Wittgenstein that are taken from Schopenhauer’s philosophy, in the way that an archaeologist discovers pieces of an earlier building in a later one. My approach has been guided by an entirely different image, suggested by Wittgenstein himself: ‘I think there is some truth in my idea that I really only think reproductively. I don’t believe I have ever *invented* a line of thinking. I have always taken one over from someone else. I have simply straightaway seized on it with enthusiasm for my work of clarification. That is how Boltzmann, Hertz, Schopenhauer, Frege, Russell, Kraus, Loos, Weininger, Spengler, Sraffa have influenced me’ (Wittgenstein 1980, 18e-19e). If we compare Wittgenstein’s activity of clarification with the growth of a plant, we can think of the foreign elements as nutrients that have fed it according to its own nature (which he characterizes as enthusiasm!) In this process of absorption, the nutrients are metabolized according to the

specific needs of the plant that feeds on them. So that, if we look for their effects in the plant, we will only be able to find them transformed and adapted to the new context. The idea of ‘influence’, then, acquires the sense of an inspiration, rather than a loan. What I seek to suggest, when establishing comparisons between certain of Wittgenstein’s thoughts and certain philosophemes of *The World as Will and Representation*, is that Wittgenstein could find materials in Schopenhauer’s book that he apprehended and transformed until he changed them into his own thoughts that were, therefore, different from their place of origin.

### 1. Philosophy and the Question of Limits

There is considerable agreement among Wittgenstein scholars that the Kantian bias of the *Tractatus* is conditioned by the Kant he discovered in his reading of Schopenhauer. David Pears’ opinion in this respect is telling: ‘He [Wittgenstein] took much of the framework of the *Tractatus* from Kant through Schopenhauer, whom he had read and admired, and, though he modified this framework in his second period, he never destroyed it’ (Pears, 1971, 46). It would be proper, however, to define which aspects of Schopenhauerian Kantism were retained by Wittgenstein and which he rejected.

Schopenhauer combines elements taken from Kant with others taken from Plato in his philosophy. From Kant, he takes the idea of the world as ‘representation’, that is, as a phenomenon for us, as an object for understanding according to the ‘principle of reason’ (that establishes *a priori* the forms of space, time and causality as conditions of knowledge). The turn towards Plato takes place when also conceiving the world as a reality-in-itself endowed with an essence that we can know, not intellectually, but intuitively, even when it is not exhaustive and wholly satisfactory knowledge (cf. *WWR*, II, §41, 494). Schopenhauer distances himself from both when he characterizes essence as ‘will’, conceived as an originating and unconscious force, as an impulse to a self-assertion of existence that occurs in all beings, and which, in man, has the intellect as an instrument at its service.

But if the metaphysical push to affirm the will as the real essence of the world is Platonic, the contention of that push within the limits of experience is, again, of Kantian inspiration. Indeed, for Schopenhauer the essence of the world is not transcendent, but postulated as an explanatory

principle of the intrinsic coherence of experience, in a broad sense of the term. Now, that explanation should be circumscribed by experience and not seek answers to questions that exceed its limits (such as, for example, where does universal will come from or why does it also manifest itself as individual will). For this reason, Schopenhauer says, ‘my philosophy... is *immanent* in the Kantian sense of the word’ (*WWR*, II, §50, 641).

Thus, Schopenhauer joins Kant by reducing theoretical knowledge of the world to ‘representation’, to the group of phenomena subject to the necessary conditions of the principle of reason. And, in consequence, he also agrees with Kant in rejecting all transcendent metaphysics. But he distances himself from Kant when postulating the possibility of a higher type of knowledge than theoretical knowledge, namely: the intuitive knowledge of the reality-in-itself of the world as will. No matter how much Schopenhauer considers that his philosophy ‘abides by the facts of external and internal experience, just as they are accessible to each person’ (*ibid.*), his idea of intuitive knowledge of the will transcends the limits of experience in the Kantian sense of the term – that is to say, in the sense defined by modern natural science – and to that extent disagrees with Kant.

We might say that Wittgenstein’s position on this point is closer to the real Kant than the Schopenhauerian. In the *Tractatus*, he establishes that only the propositions that represent possible states of things can be true or false. Possible knowledge is thus circumscribed within the scope defined by the conditions of the meaning of language, and this implies restricting it to natural science (TLP 4.11). For Wittgenstein there is no knowledge possible of the world other than that which conforms to the conditions of what Schopenhauer called ‘the world as representation’, with the important restriction that Wittgenstein rejects all *a priori* knowledge of the world: natural science is empirical knowledge of contingent facts. In consequence, the propositions of transcendent metaphysics would be just as nonsensical (*unsinnig*) for him as those that express the presumed intuitive knowledge of Schopenhauerian will.

Wittgenstein defends the idea that philosophy is *a priori*, not because it deals with objects which transcend experience, but because it deals with the formal or structural features of experience. In this critical or reflexive turn, Wittgenstein joins Kant again. However, in the way that Wittgenstein determines this task, it is possible that Schopenhauer has exercised an indirect influence. The *Tractatus* tries to distinguish forms of discourse with meaning from others that lack it. This tentative effort is similar to the

one that Kant undertook in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, with a significant difference: Kant wished to mark the boundaries of human *knowledge*, while Wittgenstein intends, more radically, to mark the boundaries of meaningful *discourse*. Or, to put this more precisely, philosophy must fix the limits of *thought* by marking the boundaries of the linguistic expression of thought. This shift from knowledge to thought, from experience to language, could somehow be endorsed by having read Schopenhauer. Indeed, Schopenhauer put the emphasis on ‘representation’, rather than consciousness. The Schopenhauerian notion of ‘representation’ is closer to the symbolic or linguistic relationship between thought and reality than the epistemological – and according to Wittgenstein, psychologistic – conception of the ‘idea’ as a mental representation of the thing. In this sense, Schopenhauer’s *Vorstellung* could have contributed to the creation of the Wittgensteinian notion of *Abbildung* (*Representation*) (cf. TLP 2.151, 2.22, 4.015).

## 2. The Metaphysical I and the World

A central motif of the method applied by Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* is to eradicate psychologism from the logical analysis of the language, taking it in a similar direction to that started by Frege in the philosophy of logic and mathematics. In the expression of this task, Wittgenstein used a conceptual instrument that some interpreters (Black, 1964; Micheletti, 1967; Lange, 1989) consider to have been inspired by his reading of Schopenhauer, that is: a transcendental conception of the I that takes the form of the *knowing subject* in Schopenhauer and functions as a necessary condition of the world as ‘representation’, and takes the form of the *metaphysical subject* in Wittgenstein. The I of the *Tractatus* is located, as is the Schopenhauerian knowing subject at a higher level than the phenomenic I in Schopenhauer, and than the subject ‘as it is conceived in contemporary superficial psychology’ (TLP 5.5421). The notion of the metaphysical subject, perhaps inspired by Schopenhauer, plays a decisive role in Wittgenstein in the rejection of certain suppositions of metaphysics inherited from the modern epistemological tradition. Let us see.

Wittgenstein affirms that the I makes its appearance in philosophy is not a part of the world, but ‘a limit of the world’ (TLP 5.632). Just as the eye makes it possible for there to be a visual field coordinated with it, but without being part of it and without anything in it making it possible to

infer that it is an eye that sees it (TLP 5.633), thus too the I delimits the field of the thinkable – understanding by ‘thinking’ our projection of the meaning of the proposition onto the world (TLP, 3.11) – and it does this without being part of the world and without anything making it possible to infer in the proposition that has been thought that it is an I who thinks it. The limiting statute of the Wittgensteinian metaphysical I may be considered to be one of the acknowledged features of Kantism in the *Tractatus*. And, in view of certain analogies, it is worth asking if it does not also have a relationship with the Schopenhauerian knowing subject.

Schopenhauer uses the expression ‘knowing subject’ in two different senses: on the one hand, to designate the subject that knows things as objects conditioned by space, time and causality; and, on the other hand, to refer to the ‘pure subject of knowing’ (*WWR*, I, § 36, 179), which arises when the individual subject surrenders to the intuitive contemplation of the object, becomes lost in that contemplation and separates from his individuality. Then, the subject does not know things as singular phenomena, but as eternal objectifications of the essence of the world, that is, as ideas. If we make an abstraction of this strange mixture of Kantian and Platonic elements that Schopenhauer combines in this notion of the ‘pure subject of knowing’, we can preserve its atemporal and non-individual character as aspects in which it resembles the Wittgensteinian metaphysical I.

The similarity also extends to another aspect: the impossibility of being represented. To the extent that the ‘universal condition of all objects’, the Schopenhauerian subject ‘is always presupposed’ (*WWR*, I, § 2, 5), and we never know it. It cannot have a form of representation other than the one that conforms to the necessary conditions of space, time and causality. Since the knowing subject is outside space and time, it cannot be known. Neither does the Wittgensteinian metaphysical subject form part of the world; and, like the eye that cannot see itself, the metaphysical subject cannot be thought about.

But the analogy between both notions is broken at two crucial points. In the first place, the metaphysical subject of the *Tractatus* is not a subject of knowledge, but a subject of *thought* (*Denken*), understanding as such, not some mental process – thought thus conceived is a fact that forms part of the world and has a psychological subject (cf. TLP 4.1121) – but rather the action of projecting the meaning of a propositional sign onto the world (cf. TLP 3.11), by means of which an internal figurative relationship is

established between the sign and the possible state of things that it describes, constituting thus the propositional sign in the proposition or effective representation of a state of things. Nevertheless, the distinction that Wittgenstein traces between thought as a mental or psychological fact, and thought as a constituent activity of meaning, is a distinction between two irreducible levels that correspond with the Schopenhauerian distinction between the transcendental subject and the things in the world that it constitutes as objects of knowledge.

The other point of divergence lies in the fact that the Wittgensteinian subject is unable to be represented in a more radical sense than the Schopenhauerian transcendental subject. The idea of the subject is postulated by the latter as the necessary foundation of knowledge, since it defines the *a priori* conditions of every representation, that is to say, of every object. Subject and object are conceived as correlative terms of the cognitive relationship, in the following sense: since all possible knowledge is of objects given in the forms of space, time and causality, and these forms are *a priori*, it is necessary to postulate a foundation that is external to the object – that is, to the world as representation – as a necessary condition of it. Such a foundation is the knowing subject that Schopenhauer characterizes as ‘the supporter of the world’ (*WWR*, I, § 2, 5).

Schopenhauer flatly affirms that the subject cannot be known, because it cannot be given as an object. However, when conceiving it as a necessary condition of knowledge, he thinks of it by reference to the object, and, to that extent, it can be said that in some way he objectifies it. There is a latent tension in the claim to determine it as an *a priori* condition of the object – which implies rejecting that it may itself be an object of knowledge– while, at the same time, refusing that such a determination is a genuine ‘representation’.

If, from this point of view, we compare Wittgenstein’s metaphysical subject with the Schopenhauerian subject, what attracts one’s attention is that Wittgenstein no longer thinks of the subject as the correlate of something as an object. The absence of correlation is preserved by the characterization of the subject as ‘a limit of the world’. Indeed, the limit of a thing (let’s say, the limit of A) does not limit with A. Only something beyond the limit of A limits with A. This is what happens to the Schopenhauerian subject: as the presupposition of the world that it is, it falls beyond it. Wittgenstein affirms, simply that the subject ‘does not

belong to the world' (TLP 5.632). Comparing the subject/world relationship with the eye/visual field relationship illustrates this difference well: the eye does not belong to the visual field, but, as a limit of it, it does not seem correct to assert that it lies beyond it.

By characterizing the metaphysical subject as a limit of the world, Wittgenstein abandons the conception of the subject as 'the thinking, presenting subject' (TLP 5.631) of the modern epistemological tradition. We can find such a conception materialized both in the Cartesian *ego cogitans*, or thinking substance that has representations or ideas, and in the de-substantialized I that Hume describes as a 'bundle of perceptions'. The transcendental interpretation of the thinking I made by Kant and by Schopenhauer himself undertakes the de-objectification of the thinking subject, since it denies the possibility of there being representations of it, and redirects his concept from the sphere of representation or content to the sphere of form or the condition of possibility of every representation. But in that same de-objectification, there is a residual objectification. For, at the same time that it is affirmed that the subject cannot be an object, there remains a non-objective quasi-representation of the subject as a condition of the object, and, to that degree, the subject is objectified as the 'subject'. Wittgenstein parts company with precisely this residual objectification. His assertion that 'there is no such thing' as the subject that thinks and has representations (TLP 5.361), could imply that the metaphysical subject of the *Tractatus* is not a 'subject' in the sense of the modern epistemological tradition, as it cannot be conceived as a correlate of the world.

### **3. The Resolution of Solipsism**

Wittgenstein has the metaphysical subject play a role in the resolution of the problem of solipsism. If we now make an abstraction of the way Wittgenstein understands the proposition 'The world is my world', it could be understood in the following way: the world does not exist, only I and my mental states exist; the world is absorbed in my I; my I fills everything. This is the meaning that the metaphysical solipsist attributes to it. A presupposition of such an interpretation is that the terms 'world' and I designate objects (what the solipsist denies is precisely that the world exists as an object facing the I).

According to Wittgenstein, solipsism is based on an error as I and 'world' are not names, they do not designate objects (therefore, they cannot be part of facts nor, in consequence, can they be 'represented' by

language). The solipsist cannot give I and 'world' the meaning that he seeks to give them, hence his proposition 'The world is my world' fails by trying to mean something that cannot be said.

However, Wittgenstein considers that 'what solipsism *means*, is quite correct' (TLP 5.62), although it is expressed obscurely. What is there that is correct behind solipsism? No more, no less than the idea that there cannot be *another* world other than that which I see, I understand, etc.; because, if there were, it would be the idea of a world that is necessarily beyond my world and an idea to which I could not give any meaning, for which reason it is nonsensical. This is what is there is of truth behind the solipsist's proposition 'the world is my world'.

Wittgenstein takes possession of this idea, but gives it a slant, not only different, but opposite to that given by the solipsist (opposite, because solipsism's undoing as regards anti-realism, or its coincidence with realism, follows from Wittgenstein's interpretation). The meaning that he attributes to 'The world is my world' is based on the idea that the I of 'my world' is not an object, it is not the psychological I of solipsism, but the metaphysical *I* that does not belong to the world, but is rather a limit of it. We have already pointed out the comparison that Wittgenstein makes between this I and the eye (cf. TLP 5.633): just as the eye cannot see itself, though the existence of the visual field *shows* the coordination of the eye with it, the I that is the limit of the world can neither be represented nor stated, but the coordination of the world with it can be *shown*.

Where and how is such coordination shown between the I and the world, that is to say, where is it shown that 'the world is *my* world' (TLP 5.62)? In the language. Or, more precisely, is it shown in that '*the limits of my language* mean the limits of my world' (TLP 5.6). But, why is it shown there? Because 'logic fills the world' (TLP 5.61), that is, it establishes the limits of the possible: there cannot be *another* world that is illogical (a world we can think of outside logic), neither can there be *another* language that is illogical (a language that has meaning because, if not, it would not be a language, but outside logic). Now, this is like saying: there can only be *one* logical language; or it is like saying that all natural languages are a single language: 'the language which I understand' (TLP 5.62). And, for the same reason, there can only be *one* logical world: the world that can be expressed in this language.

In consequence, *my* language is *the* language, not because it is

*private*, as the solipsist thinks (private from the world, since the world does not exist, or only exists as the content of my consciousness, of my psychological I), but, on the contrary, because it is the language that *anyone* can understand; and *my* world is *the* world, because it is the only world that can be expressed in language. ‘Here we see that solipsism strictly carried out coincides with pure realism. The I in solipsism shrinks to an extensionless point and there remains the reality co-ordinated with it’ (*TLP* 5.64).

Some comparisons should be established between Wittgenstein and Schopenhauer’s strategies regarding the problem of solipsism, based on the following considerations.

Schopenhauer approaches the topic of solipsism from two different perspectives: that of representation and that of will. From an epistemological point of view, solipsism is ‘the last stronghold of scepticism’ (*WWR*, I, § 19, 104). The solipsist denies the reality of the external world on the basis that it cannot be proven that the representation that the subject has of the world has an objective and external cause to the knowing subject, and thence concludes that the world is a mere representation by the subject, this being the only thing that has a reality in itself. Schopenhauer’s objection to solipsism – an objection that he also extends to realism and the idealism – is that it makes the conceptual mistake of conceiving knowledge as a causal relationship. A causal relationship can only occur between objects of knowledge – the relationship of causality is the essential form of every object – and the object necessarily presupposes the subject as its first condition, which is why there cannot be a cause and effect relationship between them (cf. *WWR*, I, § 5). There is a radical asymmetry between the transcendental quality of the knowing subject and the empirical statute of the known object. This also holds for self-knowledge: the I is not known as a subject, but only as an object. For his part, Wittgenstein also brings into play a metaphysical notion of the I in his interpretation of the proposition ‘The world is *my* world’, in answer to solipsism.

But elsewhere Schopenhauer also formulates (cf. *WWR*, I, § 19) a specific, perhaps more relevant, argument against solipsism, that can be summarized as follows: we have double knowledge of ourselves, as representation and as will; on this basis, the solipsist infers from the fact that his own I is the only object *known* by him as representation and as being in itself, the consequence that *there is not* any other object that, in

addition to being his representation, has reality in itself. But such a conclusion is invalid and only attests to his ‘theoretical egoism’ (*WWR*, I, § 19, 104). Although Schopenhauer recognizes that this position is not theoretically refutable, he goes for a kind of pluralism or metaphysical egalitarianism, according to which the two aspects under which my I is given – as phenomenon and as thing-in-itself – can be extrapolated to every object. This is what he is saying when he proclaims ‘the identity of macrocosm and microcosm’ (*WWR*, II, §41, 486), a formula that might throw some light on this statement by Wittgenstein ‘Man is the microcosm: I am my world’ (NB 12.10.16, 84e. Cf. TLP 5.62).

The identification of the I with the macrocosm – or, overcoming solipsism in a type of metaphysical realism – does not occur in Schopenhauer via knowledge, but through the will. The knowing subject comprehends itself as representation, as a phenomenon subjected to the conditions of space-time and causality, and, to that extent, as an individual. Solipsism’s vision of itself moves within the limits of the world as representation. That vision can only transcend itself if the subject notices that there is something in itself that constitutes his true being and that is not phenomenon: something that is ‘in itself’ that presents itself to him as will, not as intellect, and that it is not temporary and personal, but eternal and impersonal. That noumenic I which identifies itself with macrocosm cannot be represented, there cannot be any intuition of it because it is outside space and time (in this sense, Schopenhauer characterizes it as ‘the dark point in consciousness’ [*WWR*, II, §41, 491]). But it is possible to conceive it as essentially identical to nature in its totality.

It is worthwhile wondering to what extent this vision of Schopenhauer’s underlies the following annotation by Wittgenstein: ‘This is the way I have travelled: Idealism singles men out from the world as unique, solipsism singles me alone out, and at last I see that I too belong with the rest of the world, and so on the one side *nothing* is left over, and on the other side, as unique, *the world*. In this way idealism leads to realism if it is strictly thought out.’ (NB 15.10.16, 85e. Cf. TLP 5.64)

#### 4. The Will and the World

In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein denies that there is any logical connection between the will and the world: ‘The world is independent of my will’ (TLP 6.373). The meaning of this assertion becomes clearer if it is read in

the light of certain observations in the *Notebooks* of 1916, and both contexts are read with reference to the Schopenhauerian distinction between will and representation. Let us see.

In the notes made on 4.11.16, Wittgenstein considers the possibility of contemplating a deliberate action (for example, my action of getting up from the armchair) from two perspectives: (a) as my act of will in moving the armchair, and (b) as my act of will in moving my body. There is, however, an evident asymmetry between (a) and (b): my will seems to be directly connected to the movement of my body, but it would be strange to think that the movement of the armchair directly obeys my will.

However strange it may seem that my will should be the cause of the armchair's movement, it must also seem strange that it is the cause of the deliberate movement of my body. Why? Because the causal relationship is a contingent connection, and the idea of the action of getting up itself, as a *deliberate* action, involves my perceiving such an action as *compelled* (*gezwungene*) by my will. Now, this supposes 'removing' the will from the world, or conceiving it as a limit – not as a part – of the world. To that end, Wittgenstein establishes there a distinction between the concepts of 'will' and 'desire':

a) 'Desire' is a fact that precedes action as cause precedes effect; if action follows desire – or accompanies the action – such an accompanying is '*accidental*' (*zufällig*) (NB 4.11.16, 88e). It is one thing to desire, and another to satisfy the desire: both facts are logically independent.

b) In contrast, 'the act of the will is not the cause of the action but is the action itself' (ib., 87e). What Wittgenstein means by this is that volition is not something that is *connected* to the action (as it is considered by psychology, for example), but rather the action itself perceived in a totally different way: for example, as something for which I feel responsible. This form of perception is the one I have with respect to the movement of my body, but not with respect to the movement of the armchair. Such a difference may describe thus: 'My wish relates to the movement of the chair, my will to a muscular feeling.' (ib., 88e).

If the act of will is an act that constrictively accompanies the action, then the relationship between the will and the world is not internal to the world, but external: 'The will is an attitude of the subject to the world.' (ib., 87e), and the world is that which clashes with the will and opposes it.

In this double consideration of intentional behaviour by reference, respectively, to 'wishing' and to 'willing' as situated in irreducible spheres, it is possible to glimpse the Schopenhauerian distinction between representation and will. Schopenhauer states that the body is given in two entirely different ways to the subject of knowing, in the first place, 'as representation, as an object among objects, liable to the laws of objects. But it is also given in quite a different way, namely as what is known immediately to everyone, and is denoted by the word will.' (WWR, I, § 18, 100). When we explain an action as being based on motives (for example, a wish), we locate the action and the wish on the plane of representation, that is, we consider them as objects that are related to each other causally. But this knowledge does not reveal the true meaning of his intentional behaviour to the subject that is only given when the subject perceives his bodily action as an immediate manifestation of the will. In such a case, 'the act of will and the action of the body are not two different states objectively known, connected by the bond of causality; they do not stand in the relation of cause and effect, but are one and the same thing [...] Resolutions of the will relating to the future are merely deliberations of reason about what will be willed at some time, not real acts of will. Only the carrying out stamps the resolve; till then, it is always a mere intention that can be altered; it exists only in reason, in the abstract. Only in reflection is willing and acting different; in reality they are one.' (WWR, I, § 18, 100-101). Wittgenstein will say: 'Wishing is not acting. But willing is acting' (NB 4.11.16, 88e). Therefore, for both Schopenhauer and Wittgenstein, the will is not the name of some object, it is incorrect to speak of the will as the cause of the behaviour of the body, and an act of will and a corresponding movement of the body are not two different processes, but the same thing considered from different aspects.

However, there still exists a relevant divergence: according to Schopenhauer, we have direct, intuitive knowledge – not scientific – of the will in its corporal manifestation (after all, the will is the world, seen from another perspective); Wittgenstein, on the other hand, denies all knowledge of the will, since it is external to the world, and the only possible knowledge is that which natural science offers of the world.

## 5. Ethics and the Willing Subject

Wittgenstein links ethics to the discovery of a deeper dimension of the world than that which belongs to the sphere of representation and can be expressed in language. Such a condition is that ‘the world must thereby become quite another’ (TLP 6.43), not because it changes something inside the world, but because the limits of the world change and the world reveals itself as being completely another.

A change of this nature also presupposes a metaphysical subject that is not part of the world that, as the bearer of value, is a condition of ‘the sense of the world’ (TLP 6.41). In the *Notebooks*, this subject is denominated ‘the willing subject’ (NB 2.8.16, 79e). It could be said that meaning enters the world through two different methods of projection: thought and the will. Both are outside the world, but, just as the metaphysical I that makes the meaning of language possible is an impersonal I, the willing subject is a personal I (‘my will’, TLP 6.373) and a real I: ‘The thinking subject is surely mere illusion. But the willing subject exists’ (NB 5.8.16, 80e).

It remains significant that, for Wittgenstein, the willing subject ‘is not an object’ (NB 7.8.16, 80e), and that he considers that the value-bearing will is not ‘the will as a phenomenon’ (TLP 6.423). Both points agree with the Schopenhauerian conception of the will. The specific meaning that Wittgenstein gives to the will – as well as the possible analogies that can be established with Schopenhauer – can be traced in the concatenation of the following theses:

(a) ‘The sense of the world must lie outside of the world... *In* it there is no value’ (TLP 6.41).

(b) The will is ‘the bearer of good and evil’ (NB 21.7.16, 76e), but is so as far as it ‘is not part of the world, but a boundary of the world’ (NB 2.8.16, 79e).

(c) Good and evil will are attitudes of the subject with regard to the world as a whole (cf. NB 4.11.16, 87e).

(d) The goodness or wickedness of the world have nothing to do with how the world is, but with what it is; that is to say, they do not alter the facts of the world, but the limits of the world (TLP 6.43).

(e) That change is shown in the resolution of life in the world: ‘The world and life are one’ (TLP 5.621).

(f) The solution to the problem of life – when it stops being problematic – is given for those that live, not in time, but in eternity, ‘if by eternity is understood not endless temporal duration but timelessness, then he lives eternally who lives in the present’ (TLP 6.4311).

It is worth wondering about the possible Schopenhauerian matrix of these of Wittgenstein’s thoughts. To find an answer, the following observations may be useful.

(1) Schopenhauer distinguishes two *visions of the world* that are irreducible between themselves: as representation and as will. Wittgenstein, for his part, distinguishes between the world as ‘the totality of facts’ (TLP 1.1), from which ‘we make to ourselves pictures’ (TLP 2.1), and the world just as ‘it is *given* me’ (NB 8.7.16, 74e) being the world to which my will gains access ‘completely from outside as into something that is already there’ (ibid.).

(2) The analogy extends to two possible *ways of thinking about the will*. Schopenhauer points out that the will becomes objectified as a phenomenon in the body, and thus it is possible to represent it as an object (this is the way, for example, that psychology considers it when it explains acts of will as the effects of motives, that is, as objects causally connected to other objects). However, it is only when we feel it as the deepest essence of ourselves and the world, that we capture the will as a source of all value (which is the only consideration of interest to philosophy). Wittgenstein, for his part, establishes a radical distinction between the will as a phenomenon or part of the world – a consideration that does not interest philosophy, but psychology (TLP 6.423) – and the will as ‘the bearer of ethics’ (NB 5.8.16, 80e), which does not belong to the world. And, mentioning Schopenhauer explicitly, states: ‘It would be possible to say (à la Schopenhauer): It is not the world as *Idea* (*Vorstellung*) that is either good or evil; but the willing subject’ (NB 2.8.16, 79e).

(3) Both trace a distinction between two possible *attitudes of the I with regard to the world* that we can call the objectifying attitude and the attitude of identification with the world. In Schopenhauer, the first of these responds to the ‘ordinary way of considering things’, characteristic of knowledge as representation, which considers ‘the where, the when, the why, and the whither in things’ (*WWR*, I, § 34, 178), tracing the relationships between objects in conformity with the principle of reason. But there is another possible attitude to the world, more elevated and less

common, that occurs when the subject surrenders himself to the intuition of objects and allows his consciousness to become filled to the brim by his contemplation. When this occurs, ‘we lose ourselves entirely in the object..., we forget our individuality, our will, and continue to exist only as pure subject, as clear mirror of the object’ (*ibid.*). In this contemplative attitude the subject is ‘pure’ as long as it has become empty of all subjective content (of individuality, of will, of his temporality) and reduced to a point – a simple position of consciousness – whose whole content is the other of the I, the world, but no longer as an object. The contemplative attitude dissolves the subjectivity of the I and the objectivity of the world to the extent that both ‘become one’ (*WWR*, I, § 34, 179).

In Wittgenstein, we can find a apparently similar distinction to this. On the one hand, there is the attitude towards the world of science that formulates questions and offers answers about real or possible facts. The scientific attitude objectifies the world as the set of the facts that can be represented in language. On the other hand, in the *Notebooks*, Wittgenstein notes a different attitude that leads to being in ‘agreement’ with the world (NB 8.07.1916, 75e). He considers this attitude as a precondition for a happy life, an idea that we shall return to shortly. The thing that is interesting to highlight here is that it is a way of locating oneself in the world that Wittgenstein calls ‘the life of knowledge’ (NB 13.08.1916, 81e), and that it leads to seeing oneself in perfect continuity with things: ‘A stone, the body of a beast, the body of a man, my body, all stand on the same level. That is why what happens, whether it comes from a stone or from my body is neither good or bad’ (NB 12.10.1916, 84e).

There are several possible points of convergence with Schopenhauer here: whoever adopts this attitude comes to see their own body as being situated *inside* the world, as one further object among others, and to consider whatever happens to him as lacking value, because good and evil depend on the will, which is outside the world. Moreover, seeing oneself as a being at the same level as other objects, the I can adopt an attitude of acceptance towards the world without restrictions and renounce wanting things to be this way or that, under the false supposition that they *are* good or bad. Such an attitude with respect to the world as a whole is what Wittgenstein understands by good will (cf. TLP, 6.43): that which gives meaning to the world as a bearer of value (cf. TLP 6.41).

(4) It would still be necessary to establish another analogy in the way that each man distinguishes two different *attitudes of the I with regard to*

*its own temporality*. Schopenhauer affirms that, when one contemplates oneself through the prism of the principle of reason, ‘the individual is only phenomenon... for this knowledge, the individual receives his life as a gift, rises out of nothing, and then suffers the loss of the gift through death, and returns to nothing. We, however, wish to consider life philosophically, that is to say, according to its Ideas, and then we shall find that neither the will, the thing-in-itself in all phenomena, nor the subject of knowing, the spectator of all phenomena, is in any way affected by birth and death.’ (*WWR*, I, § 54, 275). The reason of it rests on this: whoever lives philosophically, recognizes that ‘the present alone is the form of all life, and is its also life’s sure possession which can never be torn from it. [...] The present alone is that which always exists and stands firm and immovable (*WWR*, I, § 54, 278-279).

These very ideas resonate in the Wittgensteinian conception of the happy life as eternal or atemporal life, and of this as life in the present: ‘Only a man who lives not in time but in the present is happy. For life in the present there is no death.’ (NB 8.7.16, 74e-75e)

## 6. The Happy Life, Sin and Salvation

Wittgenstein says that only good or evil will can change the limits of the world. ‘The world must thereby become quite another’ (TLP 6.43). Of course, this complete conversion does not consist in transforming the world by means of the production of new facts. A change like this would only take place *within* the world – and would therefore not change it *completely*; but, moreover, this idea lacks meaning, because there is no logical connection between the will and the world that guarantees that what we want to happen will happen, therefore, if it did in fact happen, we would not be able to attribute it to our will (cf. TLP 6.374). To put it another way, the will cannot have effects within the world, since it does not form part of it; it can only change it from outside, that is to say, as a whole.

The question, then, is not to do with changing the world, but of changing world. And this change can only happen in a change of the will that leads the I to want the world, to accept the facts in their entirety. Good will is that which wants what actually is. It is the bearer of happiness that lies in accepting the world, or of unhappiness that lies in not accepting it. But the will is the bearer of happiness or unhappiness, not as if a cause –

not like an action or an effort – but as a change in the 'I'. At this point Wittgenstein meets with Schopenhauer. 'For a blissful condition of man, it would not be by any means sufficient for him to be transferred to a "better world"; on the contrary, it would also be necessary for a fundamental change to occur in man himself... To be transferred to another world and to change one's entire nature are at bottom one and the same thing... Accordingly, here is to be found the point of contact between transcendental philosophy and ethics.' (*WWR*, II, §41, 492).

The complete change of world that Wittgenstein associates with good will may be illustrated by way of this observation in the *Notebooks*: 'It is generally assumed that it is evil to want someone else to be unfortunate. Can this be correct? Can it be worse than to want him to be fortunate?' (NB 29.7.16, 78e). Just as the correct understanding of logic depends on a way of looking at it, so Wittgenstein seems to link the correct way of living with a way of wanting it to proceed to a way of seeing the world as a whole, and breaks away from the creation of desires that are internal to the world since they are subject to accidental circumstances. It could also be expressed this way: happiness derives from an inert will that wills, but does not wish. 'And yet in a certain sense it seems that not wanting is the only good' (NB 29.7.16, 77e).

The Wittgensteinian ideal of a happy life has little to do with the old ethics that considered virtue a necessary condition of a happy life. Nor does it agree with the ordinary conception of happiness as the continuous satisfaction of our desires. What both visions have in common is what Schopenhauer called an optimistic vision of ethics, according to which happiness depends on working: he who works well is not guilty and is therefore happy. In contrast, Schopenhauer thought that there was a more original sin than the one that leads to evil acts: the guilt of being, of existing. 'Original sin is really our only true sin' (*WWR*, II, §48, 604). But that guilt is not erased by work, for to work as we should, we would have to be as we are not. What we need is to become something totally different and even opposite to what we are, 'we need a complete transformation of our nature and disposition' (*ibid.*), a salvation that produces a rebirth in us. Now, since the sin is to exist, and the principle of existence is the will to live – 'the will wills life absolutely and for all time' (*WWR*, II, §45, 568), salvation must come from detaching our will from life, from a negation of the will to live.

That negation has its roots in the comprehension of the ‘inborn error’ (*WWR*, II, §49, 634), according to which the destiny of human life is happiness: original, because it is consubstantial with our being, since our essence is nothing but the will to live; but finally it is an error because the whole of human existence clearly shows that our destiny is unhappiness. The spring of Schopenhauerian ethics is to rescue us from that error, to suppress the illusion of happiness that binds our will to life. But this renunciation of existence is not achieved by means of work, but by the acceptance of pain and misery, by contemplating them under a new light. An example will clarify the meaning of this: the optimist who believes in happiness as the destiny of the virtue that he puts into practice feels the suffering that accompanies life as an injustice, and tries to compensate for that injustice by venting his pain on others by means of violence or cunning. This kind of behaviour is a typical phenomenon of the will to live. In contrast, he who thinks of the misery and suffering that life has dealt him as the authentic destiny of human life, can renounce happiness and find comfort in that resignation. Such detachment from existence can be expressed in multiple ways (in asceticism, in the abandoning of any inheritance, in the search for adversity, in the renunciation of any chance privilege...) and has nothing to do with an effort of the will.

Without a question, it would be excessive to state that the happy life that Wittgenstein aspires to passes through metaphysical pessimism and the negation of the will to live in Schopenhauer’s sense. But, at all events, it does pass through a renunciation of happiness conceived as the satisfaction of the desires via an acceptance of the personal destiny that life has laid out, and an attitude of resigned asceticism that would have to be indifferent to success or failure in ordinary life. Ethics, good, the truly valuable, do not seem to be marked by anything that has to do with the will conceived as an agent that intervenes in the march of the world. The happy life is characterized, rather, by an attitude of the I that can bear the misery of the world and can contemplate its joys as gifts of fortune that can be renounced (cf. NB 13.8.16). It is an open question whether in this Wittgenstein is indebted to Schopenhauer; he probably also learned it from others. But it is difficult to deny the existence of a certain family air between certain basic options and the deepest values that support their respective conceptions of ethics.

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# The Ethical Dimension of the *Tractatus*

CHON TEJEDOR

## Introduction

In this paper, I propose to explore a new understanding of the ethical dimension of the *Tractatus*. There is no doubt that Wittgenstein regarded his book as having an important ethical purpose. In a 1919 letter to Ludwig Ficker, Wittgenstein writes:

[...] the point of the book is an ethical one. I once wanted to include in the preface a sentence that is now actually not there, but that I will write to you now since it might be a key for you: I wanted to write that my book consists of two parts: of the one that is present here and of everything I have *not* written. Precisely this second part is the important one. For the ethical is delimited as it were from the inside by my book; and I am convinced that *strictly* speaking it can ONLY be delimited in this way. In short I think: everything of which *many* nowadays are blethering, I have defined in my book by being silent about it [...]. I would recommend you to read the *preface* and the *conclusion* since they express the point most directly.

The letter to Ficker suggests both that the main purpose of the *Tractatus* is an ethical one and that this purpose can only be fulfilled by being silent about ethics. The notion of silence in ethics emerges once more in the main text of the *Tractatus*:

So it is impossible for there to be propositions of ethics.

Propositions can express nothing that is higher. (*TLP* 6.42)

It is clear that ethics cannot be put into words. Ethics is transcendental. (*TLP* 6.421)

The view that silence is essential in some areas is also present in the final remark of the *Tractatus* (*TLP* 7 – which Wittgenstein may well have regarded as the ‘conclusion’ he mentions in the letter to Ficker) and in the version of the *Preface* that was finally published:

What we cannot speak of, we must pass over in silence. (*TLP* 7)

What can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence. (*TLP Preface*)

The claim that ethics cannot be put into words gives rise to an obvious tension – one that lies at the very heart of the *Tractatus*. For, if ethics cannot be put into words, if there can be no ‘propositions of ethics’, how can a *book* – something that is, on the face of it, made up of words – have an ethical dimension? Part of the aim of this paper is to defend a new approach to this fundamental question of Tractarian scholarship.

My approach offers an alternative to what I call the Schopenhauerian reading of the *Tractatus*. The Schopenhauerian reading I will be considering here hinges on two main assumptions: firstly, that the *Tractatus* posits a transcendental subject as a condition both of representation and of ethics; and secondly, that morality involves a transcendental choice between two attitudes towards the world (a morally good attitude that makes for a happy life and a morally bad one that makes for an unhappy one). In this paper, I argue against this Schopenhauerian reading and present a different way of approaching the ethical dimension of the *Tractatus*. The paper consists of three parts. In part I, I give a brief account of the Schopenhauerian reading, as it is presented by Martin Stokhof. In part II, I present the problems with this reading. Finally, in part III, I introduce an alternative understanding of the ethical purpose of the *Tractatus*.

## **1. The Schopenhauerian reading**

The Schopenhauerian reading suggests that Wittgenstein posits, in the *Tractatus*, a transcendental subject as a condition of both representation and ethics. This view is motivated in great part by the fact that the *Notebooks* discuss such a transcendental subject (the ‘willing subject’ as Wittgenstein calls it) and at several key points go as far as endorsing it. The Schopenhauerian reading adds that the willing subject of the *Notebooks* is the same as the metaphysical subject of *TLP* 5.641:

What brings the self into philosophy is the fact that ‘the world is my world’.

The philosophical self is not the human being, not the human body, or the human soul, with which psychology deals, but rather the metaphysical subject, the limit of the world – not a part of it. (*TLP* 5.641)

The idea is therefore that *TLP* 5.641 embraces the notion of a willing subject understood as a transcendental condition of representation and ethics. In this section, I will give a brief overview of the Schopenhauerian

reading of the *Tractatus*. Although I will touch upon the issue of representation at a couple of points, I will for the most part remain focused on the ethical aspects of the Schopenhauerian reading.

According to Stokhof, both Schopenhauer and Wittgenstein posit a transcendental subject understood as the condition of representation and ethics. Schopenhauer calls it the 'noumenal will'; in the *Notebooks*, Wittgenstein calls it the 'willing subject'. Both authors distinguish this notion of transcendental subject from the notion of phenomenal or empirical self: the self that has wishes and desires. According to this reading, both Schopenhauer and Wittgenstein advocate the view that happiness and willing involve the abandonment of one's empirical desires and wishes: the abandonment of our empirical will.

In this view, the main difference between Wittgenstein's views and Schopenhauer's relates to their accounts of the phenomenal or empirical world. Schopenhauer views the phenomenal world in strictly deterministic terms; in contrast, Wittgenstein regards the empirical world as fundamentally contingent. For Wittgenstein, the empirical world is the totality of facts and there is no *a priori* necessity as to which facts should obtain. Indeed, in his view, there is no necessity outside logic, and thus no necessary connections between facts other than those arising from logical, internal relations (for instance, the relations of entailment between certain propositions). Interestingly, Schopenhauer's strictly deterministic view of the world and Wittgenstein's view that the world is fundamentally contingent coincide in rendering the notions of human freedom and moral responsibility similarly problematic. Furthermore, according to Stokhof, both authors adopt a similar strategy in the face of this difficulty: the strategy that consists in locating freedom of choice and moral responsibility at the limits of, rather than within, the phenomenal or empirical world. For Wittgenstein, although the empirical will is incapable of genuine freedom and responsibility, the willing subject is capable of these. Although I have no control (no choice) over which facts obtain in the world, I do have a choice as to which attitude to adopt towards these facts. Specifically, it is open to me to adopt an attitude of acceptance towards reality, or one of rejection. The attitude of acceptance is the ethically correct one – it is that which makes for a 'happy life'. The attitude of resistance, in contrast, makes for an 'unhappy life'.

According to the Schopenhauerian reading of Wittgenstein's position, adopting an attitude of acceptance (i.e. leading a happy life)

involves the denial or abandonment of one's empirical wishes and desires. Wishing necessarily involves suffering, since there is no necessity as to its fulfillment. There are no necessary connections between our wishes and the facts that would fulfill them – that is, wishing for certain facts do not necessarily bring them about. There are not even necessary connections between our wishes and our actions: it is possible for me to wish to perform a certain action and fail to perform it. The wishing impulse is the impulse to control the facts that make up reality – but such a control is illusory. The wishing impulse is thus the source of all suffering and the happy life must involve the abandonment of this impulse.

Whilst the fundamental contingency of the world means that we can exert no control over which facts obtain, there remains room for choice: I can choose to adopt an attitude of acceptance towards the facts or one of rejection. According to the Schopenhauerian reading of the *Tractatus*, accepting that the world is beyond our control and that we can exert no influence over it involves abandoning our desires and wishes. This choice between abandoning one's desires so as to harmonize with the world and embracing our desires in a vain attempt at controlling the world is central to Wittgenstein's ethical thinking.

## **2. Problems with the Schopenhauerian reading**

There are, in my view, three major problems with the Schopenhauerian reading. The first problem stems from its reliance on the view that Wittgenstein retains, in the *Tractatus*, the notion of a transcendental subject as a condition of representation and ethics; the second arises from Wittgenstein's insistence on the need for silence in ethics; the third concerns the way in which the Schopenhauerian reading portrays Wittgenstein's notion of being in agreement with the world. In this part, I will consider each of these in turn.

### **(i) The notion of a transcendental subject**

As I mentioned earlier, the Schopenhauerian reading is predicated on the assumption that Wittgenstein retains, in the *Tractatus*, the notion of willing subject from the *Notebooks* –that is, the notion of a transcendental subject understood as a condition of both representation and ethics. In my view, this assumption is incorrect.

In the *Notebooks*, Wittgenstein discusses three notions of the subject: the ‘thinking subject’ (mentioned explicitly in e.g. *NB* 4.8.16 and *NB* 5.8.16), the ‘willing subject’ (e.g. *NB* 2.8.16 and *NB* 5.8.16), and the ‘metaphysical subject’ (*NB* 4.8.16 and *NB* 2.9.16). In *NB* 5.8.16, Wittgenstein draws a contrast between the notion of ‘thinking subject’ and that of ‘willing subject’. The notion of thinking subject is that of an object-like, thinking (or – more generally – representing) subject. This notion is rejected by Wittgenstein in the *Notebooks*, as well as in the *Prototractatus* and the *Tractatus*. In contrast, the notion of willing subject does appear to be endorsed in at least some sections of the *Notebooks*. Consider notably *NB* 5.8.16, where Wittgenstein writes:

The thinking subject is surely mere illusion. But the willing subject exists.

If the will did not exist, neither would there be that centre of the world, which we call the I, and which is the bearer of ethics.

What is good and evil is essentially the I, not the world.

The I, the I is what is deeply mysterious. (*NB* 5.8.16)

*NB* 5.8.16 therefore appears to endorse the notion of a transcendental subject, of the type discussed by the Schopenhauerian reading. We know, however, that Wittgenstein’s thoughts on these issues were in flux when he was writing the *Notebooks*: not all of the views from the *Notebooks* survive into the *Tractatus*. The question before us is therefore: does Wittgenstein’s endorsement of the subject as transcendental condition of representation and ethics survive into the *Tractatus*? I suggest that it does not. For the *Notebooks*’ discussion of the subject, the I, the will, etc. ends with two entries that provide strong evidence against such continuity. These are the entries dated 9.11.16 and 19.11.16:

Is belief a kind of experience?

Is thought a kind of experience?

All experience is world and does not need the subject.

The act of the will is not an experience. (*NB* 9.11.16)

What kind of reason is there for the assumption of a willing subject?

Is not my world adequate for individuation? (*NB* 19.11.16)

These are the last entries of the *Notebooks* to discuss the notion of the subject; in this respect, it is fair to regard them as concluding the *Notebooks*’ discussion of this question. Since experience is a form of

thought, of mental representation for Wittgenstein, *NB* 9.11.16 must be read as suggesting that mental representation does *not* require a transcendental (that is a willing, non-object-like) subject. In the next entry (*NB* 19.11.16), Wittgenstein moves to an even stronger view: he argues that there is, in fact, no reason *whatsoever* to posit such a subject. These are the last entries from the *Notebooks* to mention the transcendental subject: Wittgenstein never returns to this notion in the *Notebooks*. This, in my view, is highly significant. It is as if, having played with the Schopenhauerian idea of a transcendental subject, Wittgenstein finally comes to the conviction that this notion must be rejected. There is indeed no further mention of the expression ‘willing subject’ in the *Prototractatus* or the *Tractatus*.

There is, in addition, biographical evidence to support the view that Wittgenstein had a change of heart concerning his views on ethics and the transcendental subject in the run up to writing the *Tractatus*. Wittgenstein’s thoughts about the willing subject developed most rapidly during the weeks he spent with Paul Engelmann, whom he met in Olmütz in October 1916. Ray Monk writes:

Engelmann was the closest friend Wittgenstein had had since leaving England. The friendship owed much to the fact that the two met each other at a time when both were experiencing a religious awakening which they each interpreted and analysed in a similar way.

Monk also quotes the following passage by Engelmann:

In me, Wittgenstein unexpectedly found a person, who [...] suffered acutely under the discrepancy between the world as it is and as it ought to be according to his lights, but who tended also to seek the source of that discrepancy within, rather than outside himself. [...] This] enabled me to understand, from within as it were, [Wittgenstein’s] utterances that mystified everyone else.

The strongly Schopenhauerian remarks from the *Notebooks* end abruptly in late November 1916, with the two entries I mentioned above (*NB* 9.11.16 and *NB* 19.11.16). Shortly thereafter, Wittgenstein leaves for Vienna for Christmas and then returns to the front. By the time Engelmann and Wittgenstein meet again in December 1917, it is clear to Engelmann that Wittgenstein has had a change of heart. In January 1918, Engelmann writes a letter in which he expresses his concern over Wittgenstein’s spiritual condition. Referring to their recent meeting he writes:

It seemed to me as if you – in contrast to the time you spent in Olmütz, where I had not thought so – had no faith.

To this, Wittgenstein replies:

If you tell me I have no faith, you are *perfectly right*, only I did not have it before either. It is plain, isn't it, that when a man wants, as it were, to invent a machine for becoming decent, such a man has no faith. But what am I to do? *I am clear about one thing*: I am far too bad to be able to theorize about myself; in fact, I shall either remain a swine or else I shall improve, and that's that! *Only let's cut out the transcendental twaddle* when the whole thing is as plain as a sock on the jaw. [My italics in the last instance]

Wittgenstein's reply to Engelmann is in many ways puzzling and I shall be returning to it at the end of this paper. At the same time, however, it does indicate a clear change of heart on Wittgenstein's part. In my view, it shows that, by the winter of 1917–1918, when Wittgenstein was writing the remarks that would come to form the *Prototractatus*, he had given up on the 'transcendental twaddle': he had abandoned the Schopenhauerian notion of a transcendental subject as condition of representation and ethics. If he did seriously espouse this notion earlier in the *Notebooks* – as he appears to have done before November 1916 – he had abandoned it by the time he was writing the *Prototractatus* and the *Tractatus*. This is why there is no mention of a willing subject in these works.

## (ii) Silence and ethics

We are now in a position to consider my second objection to the Schopenhauerian reading, the one that arises from Wittgenstein's insistence on the need for silence in ethics. For a defender of the Schopenhauerian reading might protest at this stage that the notion of willing subject *is* retained in the *Prototractatus* or the *Tractatus*: that it is simply retained under a different label, namely that of 'metaphysical subject'. After all, the metaphysical subject *is* mentioned in both the *Prototractatus* and *Tractatus*. Indeed, both *PTLP* 5.33552 and *TLP* 5.641 appear actively to endorse this notion, as we noted earlier. This reply from the Schopenhauerian camp does not ultimately hold water however. For, first of all, it is highly unclear that the expressions 'willing subject' and 'metaphysical subject' are intended to be interchangeable. Both expressions feature in the *Notebooks* – but, crucially, they are never used in

the same entries. And there is nothing in the entries that do mention them (i.e. that do so separately) to suggest that these expressions are regarded by Wittgenstein as equivalent in the *Notebooks*. In other words, there is nothing in the *Notebooks* to suggest that the ‘metaphysical subject’ is the same as the ‘willing subject’ for Wittgenstein.

But there is a second, more fundamental problem with arguing that the metaphysical subject of *TLP* 5.641 is the willing subject of the *Notebooks*. For *TLP* 5.641 starts off by noting that ‘there really is sense in which philosophy can [“must” in *NB* 11.8.16] talk about’ the metaphysical subject. The entry as a whole reads:

Thus there really is a sense in which philosophy can talk about the self in a non-psychological way.

What brings the self into philosophy is the fact that ‘the world is my world’.

The philosophical self is not the human being, not the human body, or the human soul, with which psychology deals, but rather the metaphysical subject, the limit of the world – not a part of it. (*TLP* 5.641)

If the metaphysical subject were the willing subject of the *Notebooks*, *TLP* 5.641 would thus be advancing both that the willing, non-object-like subject is a transcendental condition of the world (a limit in *this* sense) and that the willing subject can be talked about. This suggestion is deeply problematic, however. For any attempt to talk about a non-object-like condition of the world would surely, in Wittgenstein’s view, constitute an attempt to say what cannot be said. As such, it would result in nonsense. If so, it is highly unclear why Wittgenstein should encourage philosophers to continue *talking* about it.

In my view, the metaphysical subject of *TLP* 5.641 is not the transcendental, willing subject of the *Notebooks*. When Wittgenstein suggests that the metaphysical subject is the limit of the world in *PTLP* 5.33552 and *TLP* 5.641, he does not mean that it is a transcendental condition of the world. That would suggest that he was engaging in the kind of ‘transcendental twaddle’ he condemns in his letter to Engelmann. There is indeed a different way to interpret ‘metaphysical subject’: we can interpret it as standing for all possible thought, for the totality of possible thoughts. In my view, the metaphysical subject is the limit of the world *simply in that* it encompasses all possible thought – one cannot go beyond all possible thought: *that* is the limit. Since every thought can be expressed by means of propositions, there is indeed a real sense in which

philosophers can (perhaps even must) *talk* about the metaphysical subject. This is a view I have defended elsewhere, as part of my discussion of Wittgenstein's remarks on solipsism.

(iii) The notion of a transcendental choice

The third major problem with the Schopenhauerian reading, as it is presented by Stokhof, concerns its characterisation of Wittgenstein's notion of agreement with the world. In Stokhof's reading, when one becomes clear as to the fundamental contingency of reality, one is presented with a *choice*: the choice between adopting an attitude of acceptance of or one of resistance to the facts; the choice between adopting the attitude of attempting to pursue those facts that would satisfy my desires or the attitude of abandoning my desires. In my view, the importance attributed to choice here is misplaced. What is more, it results from placing undue emphasis on the notion of a transcendental, willing subject. For the notion of transcendental, willing subject encourages us to think that certain facts are closer to us (in the sense of being more under our control) than others. Indeed, the view that I can choose to abandon my desires implies that I can control –at least to some degree– certain mental facts (namely my desires). As soon the notion of transcendental willing subject is abandoned, however, as soon as it becomes clear that I am an *merely* an empirical self, *exactly* on a par with other contingent facts, this notion of choice loses its grip. Without the notion of transcendental subject, the idea that I might choose to abandon my desires is undermined. After all, both I (as empirical self) and my desires are facts for Wittgenstein; and, outside logic, the relations between facts are only contingent. I, as empirical self, cannot necessitate the abandonment (that is the *non-obtaining*) of any facts –not even if the facts in question are my own desires.

In the Schopenhauerian reading, there is an ethical point to the *Tractatus* in that the book teaches us that reality is contingent and then presents us with a choice. The choice is between an intrinsically good attitude towards the world (the attitude of good willing, which involves the abandonment of desires and results in happiness) and an intrinsically bad one (bad willing which insists on holding on to desire and results in unhappiness. According to this reading, the *Tractatus* recommends that we choose the former. In my view, this misrepresents Wittgenstein's

understanding of the ethical dimension of his book. In part III, I present an alternative understanding of the ethical purpose of the *Tractatus*.

### 3. Ethics without a Transcendental Subject

Wittgenstein's approach to ethics is intimately connected to his view that there is no necessity outside logic. The view that there is no necessity outside logic entails that no facts obtain necessarily and that there are no relations of causal necessity between facts.

Wittgenstein explains in the *Preface* that the *Tractatus* aims at the clarification of thought and language. The process of clarification in which we engage when we read the *Tractatus* culminates in the realisation that we are factive, empirical selves on a par with other facts in the world and that there is no necessity outside logic. I would suggest that this realisation has, *in and of itself*, a fundamental ethical dimension for Wittgenstein: for to recognise the essential contingency of reality and of ourselves as facts *is* to undergo a profound ethical transformation.

In order to see this, it is worth turning our attention briefly to Wittgenstein's 'Lecture on Ethics'. Although Wittgenstein only gave this lecture in 1929, the evidence suggests that his ethical views had not changed since he wrote the *Tractatus*.

In the 'Lecture on Ethics', Wittgenstein draws an important distinction between the notions of relative and absolute value.

Every judgment of relative value is a mere statement of facts and can therefore be put in such a form that it loses all the appearance of a judgment of value: Instead of saying "This is the right way to Granchester," I could equally well have said, "This is the right way you have to go if you want to get to Granchester in the shortest time". ('Lecture on Ethics')

Relative value emerges when we adopt an instrumental attitude towards reality: it emerges when we come to regard facts as means to be used in order to achieve our particular ends. Absolute value, in contrast, emerges when we consider facts in and of themselves, as opposed to from the point of view of how we may *use* them to fulfill our ends. In effect, absolute value emerges when we become fully clear as to the essential contingency of facts. In the 'Lecture on Ethics', Wittgenstein explains that he associates the notion of absolute value with the experience of

‘[wondering] at the existence of the world’, that is, with the experience that makes him inclined:

to use such phrases as ‘how extraordinary that anything should exist’ or ‘how extraordinary that the world should exist.’ (‘Lecture on Ethics’)

The contrast between relative and absolute value in the ‘Lecture on Ethics’ helps to throw light on the *Tractatus*’ approach to valuing. From the point of view of the *Tractatus*, the idea that it is possible to use facts as means to satisfy our ends involves the illusory belief that we can exert genuine control over reality. This instrumental attitude to reality results from a lack of clarity as to its essentially contingent status: it arises from the misguided sense that we can (necessarily) cause the world to be different. The sense that we exert genuine influence over reality vanishes, however, as soon as we come to ‘see the world aright’ (*TLP* 6.54): it vanishes when the process of clarification in which the *Tractatus* engages us culminates with the realisation that all facts are fundamentally contingent. This realisation is the realisation that our desires and our (empirical) minds are exactly on a par with all other facts. The idea that mental facts are on a par with other facts also emerges in the ‘Lecture on Ethics’.

Now perhaps some of you will agree to that and be reminded of Hamlet’s words: “Nothing is either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.” But this again could lead to a misunderstanding. What Hamlet says seems to imply that good and bad, though not qualities of the world outside us, are attributes to our states of mind. But what I mean is that a state of mind, so far as we mean by that a fact which we can describe, is in no ethical sense good or bad. (‘Lecture on Ethics’)

For Wittgenstein it is a source of profound wonder that *any* possible state should obtain as a fact. This sense of wonder arises in connection to *all* facts: physical facts (the rocks, plants, animals, human physical bodies we encounter in reality) but also mental facts. Mental facts include desires, beliefs, wishes, and, more broadly, minds. This is important, because it marks a crucial difference between Wittgenstein’s ethics and Schopenhauer’s. In Wittgenstein’s view, the process of conceptual clarification of the *Tractatus* culminates in the realisation that desires are mental facts and that all facts are fundamentally contingent. Becoming clear about this is coming to view our desires (along with all other facts) with a profound sense of wonder. That I should have *any* desires – that these mental facts should obtain at all – is quite extraordinary. As soon as

one starts to view one's desires in this way, one comes to value them absolutely, as a precious and fragile gift.

This, of course, differs in an important way from Schopenhauer's view on desire. As we saw earlier, Schopenhauer believes that we can and should *choose* the attitude of *abandoning* our desires. He suggests that, although I cannot freely choose what desires I have, I can choose to let go of those desires I do have. Imagine that I have a desire for warmth. Although I cannot choose to have a desire for coldness instead, I can let go of my desire for warmth: I can choose to abandon my desire for warmth. To this limited extent, freedom is possible within Schopenhauer's view: I am free to choose to let go of those desires I do have. Letting go of my desires is the ethically correct choice, for Schopenhauer: my life will be a good, happy life if I make this choice.

Wittgenstein's position is different. To begin with, there is in his view no suggestion that we are faced with an ethical *choice*. He allows that there are two possible attitudes towards the world, but he does not suggest that we *choose* (let alone *freely* choose) between them. Instead, Wittgenstein's suggestion is that our attitude towards the world goes hand in hand with the conception of the world we happen to have. I do not freely choose between valuing things relatively or valuing them absolutely, just as I do not freely choose between the confused and the enlightened conceptions of the world. There is no choice to be made between the two attitudes: it is not as if I can choose between two attitudes that are equally available to me at any one point. Instead I find that, at any given point in time, I either conceive the world clearly and value it absolutely (in which case I am not conceptually confused and do not value the world relatively) or I value facts in a relative manner as part of a confused conception of the world (in which case I do not, at that time, have a clear conception of the world and do not value facts absolutely). This is why Wittgenstein says, in his letter to Engelmann: 'I shall either remain a swine or else I shall improve, and that's that!'

Wittgenstein's view therefore differs from Schopenhauer's with respect to the issue of choice: for Schopenhauer, there is a free choice to be made, albeit a limited one; for Wittgenstein, there simply isn't. Wittgenstein's view also differs from Schopenhauer's in another important respect: they differ in their treatment of desire. Both philosophers agree that we cannot change our desires: I cannot choose to have a desire for coldness rather than a desire for warmth. However, they differ in their

treatments of the desires we do have. Schopenhauer recommends that we strive to *abandon* or let go of the desires we do have: I should, in the above example, try to let go of my desire for warmth. For Wittgenstein, in contrast, my desire for warmth is part of the fundamentally contingent reality (of the world as totality of facts). As such, it can be a source of profound wonder: it is to be valued, in and of itself, in an absolute manner. Instead of attempting to let go of the desires I do have, I should simply value them for the fundamentally fragile gifts they are. Valuing them in this way involves, of course, recognising that attempting to fulfill them may prove to be an inherently pointless Endeavour.

Before we draw this discussion to a close, it is worth sounding a note of caution. For Wittgenstein's position could be understood as an invitation to cease all action, to stop striving towards any goals, or to stop trying to improve oneself. If I am not genuinely in control of anything, what is the point in my attempting to act or in my trying to improve myself? This is by no means Wittgenstein's position, however. Indeed, we should note that this suggestion (the suggestion that one should cease trying to act or cease trying to improve oneself) relies on the mistaken assumption that I *am*, in fact, in control of at least *some* aspects of my life: I am sufficiently in control to make the decision to cease to act or to cease to strive! Wittgenstein sees this as a misapprehension. I may, at any given time, have the *desire* to stop acting or have the desire to stop improving myself, but there is absolutely no guarantee that these desires will be satisfied: I may have these desires and yet continue to act and continue trying to improve myself.

For Wittgenstein, the key really is in our recognising the fundamental contingency of all facts presented before us: whether these facts are desires to continue improving ourselves or desires to give up, whether they are actions or inactions. Wittgenstein's experiences during World War I, whilst he was developing the *Tractatus*, show that trying to improve himself, trying to become a better (that is, a clearer, more authentic) person – is central to him, and would remain so for the rest of his life. In Wittgenstein's view there is no inconsistency between accepting the desire to improve oneself (the desire for whatever might bring this improvement) and the recognition that this desire may never be granted.

## Conclusion

For Wittgenstein, the point of the *Tractatus* is an ethical one. The reason for this is not that his book succeeds in conveying a putatively unsayable, yet substantive, Schopenhauerian view, such as the one described by Stokhof. Instead, the point of the *Tractatus* is an ethical one because the book engages us in a process of conceptual clarification which, if successful, culminates in our valuing all facts (including our own desires) in an absolute manner. In this respect, it is likely that when Wittgenstein speaks of a ‘machine for becoming decent’ in his letter to Engelmann, he is really referring to the Tractarian system. The mention of a machine is potentially misleading here, however. For the idea is not that reading the *Tractatus* will *cause* (in a way that implies causal *necessity*) an ethical transformation in us. The idea is, rather, that the book *may* succeed in its task of helping us gain conceptual clarity. When the *Tractatus* *does* succeed in this task it effects a profound ethical transformation in us. For being conceptually clear *is* valuing all facts in an absolute manner.

Wittgenstein allows that there are two attitudes towards the world: the conceptually confused attitude of valuing individual facts in a relative manner and the conceptually clear attitude of valuing all facts absolutely. He does not, however, suggest that we can or do, at any point, choose between these two attitudes. Instead the suggestion is simply that, when we are conceptually clear we value the world absolutely; and when we are conceptually confused we value it relatively –that is, we place no genuine value on it at all.

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# The early Wittgenstein, Tolstoy's *Kurze Darlegung des Evangelium* and Nietzsche's *Der Antichrist*

JOAN B. LLINARES CHOVER

To understand the religious background to Wittgenstein's work and the man himself, it is helpful to bear in mind the Catholic education his mother gave him from infancy, and to take note of at least some of the authors who influenced him in this area from adolescence and youth, for example, Angelus Silesius, Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer, William James, and the two greatest Russian writers of the nineteenth century, Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky. It may also be appropriate to add Nietzsche to this list, as we shall try to explain.

The curious feature here is that the singular vision that Nietzsche, author of *Also sprach Zarathustra*, had of Christianity would have been impossible in his final lucid stage (we refer to the works of 1887-1889 that he published or left ready for printing, and which were largely brought together in one volume, published with deficiencies and manipulations in 1904) without his meticulous and annotated earlier reading of certain of Dostoyevsky's novels and a long essay by Tolstoy, *Ma Religion* that had been published in 1885. Nietzsche read Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky in French, rather than German translations, because he considered them as exceptional interlocutors in the environment of the best culture of his time, being that created in Parisian circles. Tolstoy's work (on the hundredth anniversary of the Russian novelist and thinker's death) will help us, therefore, to specify aspects of the philosophy of religion both in the mature Nietzsche and the young Wittgenstein, particularly in *Der Antichrist* and the so-called *Geheime Tagebücher*, respectively.

As is well-known, this 'secret' section of the *Tagebücher* is written in code, on the opposite pages of three books of notes that cover the period from August 1914 to August 1916. Known as the *Notebooks 1914-1916*, they were written at the front during the First World War and during the gestation of what were to become the *Tractatus*.

However, we should like to point out some important omissions. We shall not be looking at the traces, noticeable in the Wittgenstein of those years, of his passionate reading of what is surely the best of Tolstoy's legacy – his literature. There are documents from the time that show that he both knew and greatly valued not only Tolstoy's posthumous story *Hadji Murat* (1912) but also his *Volkserzählungen* (his Russian Folk Legends). Nor is it trivial that we shall ignore his readings of Dostoyevsky, especially *Verbrechen und Strafe* (as 'Crime and Punishment' has finally been translated – it was previously known as *Schuld und Sühne*) and *Die Brüder Karamasow* as we believe that they provide clues that make it much easier to understand what is meant by being 'born-again', as well as for defining and discussing what is meant in Wittgenstein by 'religion' or 'being religious' and even the 'mystical'. What we present here is, therefore, a minuscule part of a complex relationship.

The basis of our considerations is to be found in these two annotations of the *Geheime Tagebücher*, corresponding to the parts written on 2.9.1914 and 8.12.1914 respectively and which read: "*Gestern fing ich an, in Tolstois / Erläuterungen zu den Evangelien zu lesen. / Ein herrliches Werk.*" Y: "*Nietzsche Band 8 gekauft / und darin gelesen.*"<sup>1</sup>

## 1. A Misleading Title

We will begin by clarifying a textual problem: Wittgenstein gives the name of Tolstoy's book as "*Erläuterungen zu den Evangelien*" (for example, on 2.9.1914 and 8.9.1914), though in the annotation of the 11.10.1914 he gives its title as "*Darlegungen des Evangeliums*". To complicate matters further, it is known that, in a letter to L. von Ficker, Wittgenstein refers to this work as "*Kurze Erläuterungen des Evangeliums*"<sup>2</sup>. Three different ways, therefore, of giving the title of a specific book that he acquired at the time. Yet which specific work was he referring to?

In 1891, the Berlin publishers Hugo Steinitz published F. W. Ernst's translation of the Russian work *Krátkoye izlozhenie Yevánguelia* by L. Tolstoy under the title *Kurze Auslegung des Evangelium*. In 1892, however, the publisher Philipp Reclam of Leipzig published a new translation, with a foreword by the new translator, Paul Lauterbach, a Tolstoy expert who was interested in the changes in the Russian text upon

<sup>1</sup> The original text quotes Wittgenstein, 1991. Hereafter referred to as GT.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Valdés Villanueva, 2006, 324, note 3.

which the great novelist continued to work, but he published it under a slightly different title: *Kurze Darlegung des Evangelium*. Therefore, in 1914, there were at least two different editions of Tolstoy's book in German and they were certainly not based on exactly identical original manuscripts in Russian, as can be deduced by comparing several noticeably different passages in these translations – not simply because of choices of terminology that do not coincide, or the obvious stylistic differences in the personal way the two translators write – on occasions there are entire pages that do not appear in one, which demonstrates that the manuscript that served as a source was another, one less explicit and developed. At that time, Tolstoy was working unceasingly on what he considered to be the heart of his message, the authentic gospel. Indeed, the mature Tolstoy invested a great deal of energy and writing on explaining his religion from 1878 until his death, that is, more than thirty years of intense efforts spent on research, as well as teaching and popularization, as we shall now see.

Professor Valdés suggests that it is 'reasonable to suppose that the edition that Wittgenstein bought in Tarnów was the Reclam one', but does not give any reasons for his supposition<sup>3</sup>. W. Baum, the editor of the GT, is of the same opinion because in note 15 of his edition<sup>4</sup>, explaining what Wittgenstein wrote on 2.9.1914, he says: 'The work by Tolstoy that Wittgenstein refers to is a translation into German of a text by Tolstoy, entitled *Kurze Darlegung des Evangeliums*. Wittgenstein had acquired the booklet (a double volume of Reclam's well-known 'Universal-Bibliothek') by chance some days earlier.'<sup>5</sup>

Our confusion when reading these notes is double, because it is currently possible to consult that German translation of Tolstoy's KDE on the Internet thanks to a copy held by the University of California, and upon examination, it can be seen, on the one hand, that Baum does not quote the title exactly (at the end of 'Evangelium(s)' he has as extra S) and, on the other, that the Spanish editors, who seem to be interested in the traces of the work in Wittgenstein, have chosen to translate a section of a German translation that, according to their own indications, is not the one used by

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<sup>3</sup> See the note quoted op. cit. ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit. p. 49.

<sup>5</sup> This will be quoted as KDE. Page numbers in this German translation will be shown with the prior abbreviation s. and ss.

the young Wittgenstein<sup>6</sup>, as if the specific version of a text that one reads were unimportant. Many Wittgenstein commentators are even more audacious, because they neither base their work on the German translations nor do they go back to the Russian original of KDE, they merely mention a recent English reissue, *The Gospel in Brief*, a way of proceeding that would alarm any philologist, and with good reason, but as is well-known, the care applied to religious and literary questions is not the same as that used with scientific and mathematical texts, as corresponds to our civilisation's prevailing values.

For this reason, we believe that the only rigorous way to approach the question requires both taking note of what Wittgenstein's wrote in his GT and the German translation of Tolstoy's work just as he read it. Although, in his note, Baum does not justify his decision in favour of the Reclam edition either, we suppose that it may be justified by the existence of copies Wittgenstein acquired and gave to his friends, as it is known that he did, and that are perhaps filed with other elements of his legacy, or by the study of the quotations that he wrote in his GT, comparing both texts and confirming their identity, as anyone can verify.

## 2. Tolstoy's Religious Works

In the 'Vorwort' (KDE s. 5) Tolstoy explains that the brief version of the gospel that he offers us is '*ein Auszug aus einem grösserem Werke, das im Manuskripte vorliegt, in Russland aber nicht erscheinen darf.*' The work could not appear in his own country because of censorship, obviously, since in czarist Russia questions that affected the Orthodox Church as the official church were under strict government control. There was a kind of a ministry dedicated to such tasks and police control was implacable. There was neither freedom of the press nor in publications of a religious nature, far less if they presented a version of biblical texts that departed from the canonical version. In his novel *Resurrection* Tolstoy himself, who was eventually excommunicated by the Orthodox hierarchy in 1901, portrayed the outrages and injustices in the treatment of evangelical 'sects' and their

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. the translator's introduction, op. cit. p. 22 and the 'Conclusion', ibid. p. 309.

wailing presence in Russian jails<sup>7</sup>. So, what “*grosses Werk*” did KDE summarize?

At the beginning of 1880s, the magnum opus that Tolstoy was focusing his enormous capacity for work on was, as he indicated himself, divided “*aus 4 Teilen*”, the *first*, of a personal nature and the one that, in our opinion, refers to materials that would go towards the book that we know today as *A Confession*; the *second*, a “*Darlegung der christlichen Lehre nach den Auslegungen der Kirche... nebst den Beweisen für die Falschheit dieser Auslegungen,*” in our opinion, referring to materials that would go towards the book known today as *Critique of Dogmatic Theology*; the *third*, an “*Untersuchung der christlichen Lehre ... allein nach dem, was von Christi Lehre auf uns gekommen ist*” and a “*Übersetzung der vier Evangelien und einer Verschmelzung derselben in eines*”, the *fourth* forms a “*Darlegung des wirtlichen Sinnes der christlichen Lehre, der Gründe um derentwillen sie enstellt worden ist und der Folgen, die ihre Predigt haben muss*”, an exposition that can largely be found in the book today known in Spanish as *Cuál es mi fe*, in English as *What I Believe*, and in French as *Ma religion*. Given this, it is obvious that “*diese “Kurze Darlegum des Evangelium” nun ist ein Auszug aus jenem dritten Teile*” (KDE s. 5), that is, the work that we know today as *The Four Gospels Harmonized and Translated*.

Thus, it is advisable to bear in mind that Tolstoy's obsessive dedication to religious problems led him to write numerous pages, in particular the following texts: (1) an autobiography, significantly entitled *A Confession*, written between 1879 and 1882, published in Russian in Geneva in 1884, with the relevant subtitle, ‘Foreword to an unpublished work’. With Tolstoy's successive research from 1878 onwards, as the years passed, this ‘unpublished work’ continued to grow and took shape, as we have partially indicated, in the following books: (2) A critical essay, written between 1879 and 1881, entitled *Critique of Dogmatic Theology*, (3) a work with a critical edition in Greek, Russian translation and comments, entitled *The Four Gospels Harmonized and Translated*, published in its original version in Geneva in 1890, from whose

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. our presentation to the Congreso de filosofía de la Societat de Filosofia del País Valencià, entitled “Antropologia Filosòfica i Literatura: La religió en la novella de L. Tostói “Resurrecció” (1899)”, (Philosophical Anthropology and Literature: Religion in Tolstoy's novella ‘Resurrection’) awaiting on-line publication.

manuscripts, almost all dating from 1881-1882, *The Gospel in Brief*, as it is known in English, was derived – a compendium previously prepared by one of Tolstoy’s disciples, V. I. Alekseyev. This was revised, enlarged and prefaced by the author and was the one that, in German translation, accompanied Wittgenstein during the First World War, the KDE. And (4) the essay *What I Believe* which had been finished in January 1884 and was published in Russian in Geneva that same year. Tolstoy completed his reflections on a crucial problem, non-violence, with (5) the essay *The Kingdom of God is Within You* (1890-1893). We have not enumerated the *articles* on religious themes from these decades that are, certainly, very pertinent for the nuances that they provide, such as *Religion and Morality* (1893), or *Church and State* (1882), for example, or the *Pensées de Tostoï*, published in Paris in 1898 (with its equivalent in German *Über Gott und Christentum (On God and Christianity)*)<sup>8</sup>, and in English, *Thoughts and Aphorisms*), nor the *letters*, nor the writer’s *diaries* during those years, nor yet his various essays and other works of *literary creation* that are also directly related with that problem; we refer, for example, to *What is Art?* (1897) – read by Wittgenstein – to *What is to Be Done?* of 1884-1886, and to *Resurrection* (1899), respectively, referring only to texts that synthesize what was explained in shorter works and in Tolstoy’s dedication to narratives and popular theatre, which were very productive at that time.

With respect to the five long works on religion that we have listed, it may be pertinent to add that these had a gestation period of several years, from 1877-1878, when Tolstoy anxiously finished writing *Anna Karenina*. At the time, he was nearly fifty years of age, and since they could not be published in Russia without severe cuts imposed by the censors, they first appeared unabridged in other countries. By then, he was a very famous author and the number of his disciples grew year on year, many having to go into exile for possessing forbidden copies of these works and thereby contributing to their diffusion. Tolstoy’s international prestige was already immense. It was multiplied by the threatening political situation that turned him into a privileged focus of attention, and he was visited by journalists from all over the world. However, this facet has almost entirely disappeared for us now, his literary legacy, largely from the period prior to his ‘conversion’, being what has lasted. In fact nowadays, Tolstoy’s

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<sup>8</sup> Texts translated by M. Syrkin and published in Berlin by Steinitz in 1901, successfully used for understanding the relationships between Tolstoy and Wittgenstein, for example, by Ilse Somavilla in her illuminating article “*Spuren Tolstoï in Wittgensteins Tagebüchern von 1914-1916*”.

religious essays are very scarce in European bookshops, although there are indications of a certain *revival*. Yet it is reasonable to suppose that the Wittgenstein of 1914, like the young Gandhi, or B. Schaw, R. Rolland, S. Zweig ... and many of the Zionists of the time would also have a conception of Tolstoy where those sapiential characteristics would stand out strongly, recognizing him above all as a great independent religious thinker, which led to his being excommunicated by the Orthodox church as if he were a dangerous heretic and, consequently, his extraordinary civil burial. In 1910, as Vargas Llosa put it, 'years previously (Tolstoy) had ceased to be merely one of the greatest novelists of all times, and had become a prophet, a mystic, an inventor of religions, a patriarch of morals, a theoretician of education and an imaginative ideologist who proposed pacifism, manual and agricultural labour, asceticism and a primitive, *sui generis* anarchist Christianity as a remedy for humanity's wrongs ... The things he said reverberated the world over and on at least four of the five continents there arose, during his own lifetime, agrarian communities of young Tolstoyans ... who abandoned the cities, renounced the pursuit of money and went to be morally regenerated, sharing everything and working the earth with their hands.'<sup>9</sup>

In fact, there are striking elective affinities between Tolstoy and Wittgenstein or, if you prefer, there is a certain relationship or family likeness, and it is customary to mention evident parallels between the two men. Both were descendants of very wealthy families, yet preached austerity, detachment and asceticism with their own lives, giving away their considerable personal inheritances. Despite their 'aristocracy', they valued work, above all manual labour, as indispensable. Tolstoy, while physically strong, was not very nimble-fingered and Wittgenstein was an engineer with flair. They both loved music, solitude and nature. Both had experience of war and had demonstrated their spirit and courage. They were both affected by serious crises that led them to the brink of suicide, and confronted with death, both experienced a kind of 'religious conversion' though distanced from churches or confessional sects, institutions and hierarchies. They were both deeply concerned with teaching and spent several years of their lives as teachers, even writing teaching manuals in the form of dictionaries or spelling primers. They both distrusted the academic environment and official teaching, and because of their inquisitive dispositions, their frank intelligence and their assorted

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<sup>9</sup> Vargas Llosa, 2010, 29.

interests, they did not experience the schism between the so-called ‘two cultures’. Both men often kept a personal diary, confessing deeply personal matters, setting down in writing their sensual and spiritual problems. Though having very different experiences and influences, both are characterized by a vision that counterpoints love and sexuality, perhaps to an unhealthy extent. They were both strongly influenced by the work of Schopenhauer; neither had much liking for Shakespeare; and so on. We believe that it is not outrageous to imagine that, had he lived a couple of decades earlier, Wittgenstein, who tried to live as a worker in the USSR, might have wished to live out his fantasy existence as a manual worker within a group of sincere Tolstoyans who, congruently, had chosen to live somewhere that was silent, isolated, and of a beautiful, rural nature.

### 3. From Existential Crises to the Writing of the Abbreviated Gospel

Let us now recall the context in which KDE was written and its development. The principal years spent on writing *Anna Karenina*, from 1873 to 1875, were marked by painful bereavement in his own home. Tolstoy lost three children and two aunts whom he loved very much – one of them had been like a mother to this hypersensitive orphan. In this context, in a letter dated March 1876, he tells his cousin Alexandrina that he has met a certain count who is a strong believer: ‘He cannot be contradicted because he doesn’t try to prove anything. He simply says what he believes and, when listening to him, one feels that he is happier than those who do not believe, above all one feels that a faith such as his cannot be obtained by an effort of mind, but rather must be received as a miraculous gift. That is what I want!’<sup>10</sup>

One night in 1876, having finished *Anna Karenina*, he was seized by an access of terror: he thought that he was dead, locked in his coffin. He transferred this traumatic shock to his work: in the eighth and last part of *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy narrates his crisis via his fictional *alter ego*, the character of Levin, the name being a diminutive of his own<sup>11</sup>. Life seemed to him even more terrible than death, weighed down by insoluble

<sup>10</sup> Quoted by H. Troyat, 1965, 198-199.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. chapters VIII-XIX of the last part of *Anna Karenina*. I think it helpful to point out that during the trip they made to Iceland in 1912, D. Pinsent ‘compared his friend Wittgenstein with Beethoven and with Levin, the character from Tolstoy’s novel, *Anna Karenina*’, as mentioned by Baum, 1988, 64

problems: where did life come from, what did it mean, why have we been given life? His minutely reviewed scientific convictions did not provide him with any solutions. He read Plato and Spinoza, Kant and Schelling, Hegel and Schopenhauer. 'At one time, reading Schopenhauer, he put in place of his will the word *love*, and for a couple of days this new philosophy charmed him, till he removed a little away from it. But then, when he turned from life itself to glance at it again, it fell away too.'<sup>12</sup> He then began to read theological works, verified the opposing positions of Catholic and Orthodox theologians, and these constructions also crumbled. Life became a torment, a bitter, intolerable joke, caused by the cruel irony of a wicked genius... 'And Levin, a happy father and husband, in perfect health, was several times so near suicide that he hid the cord that he might not be tempted to hang himself, and was afraid to go out with his gun for fear of shooting himself.'<sup>13</sup>

In *A Confession*, Tolstoy narrates those years of crisis succinctly and without intermediaries, until he finds a way out<sup>14</sup>. The backbone of his autobiography is the search for the meaning of life, that being the central question. We think that Wittgenstein's *Notebooks 1914-1916*, written at the front, invites a rereading of this dramatic confessional tale in its most genuinely philosophical and religious dimensions. The presence of death is a decisive experience in both authors' return to religion, which is why they both understand it so radically, as a true power of salvation, capable of transforming life, not as the result of a metaphysical argument.

The *Critique of Dogmatic Theology* is a frontal attack on ecclesiastical teachings. As a self-confessed follower of Rousseau, claiming to be a good son of the Enlightenment and thus necessarily employing understanding and reason, Tolstoy rejects whatever he believes goes beyond them. This includes, for example, the dogma of the Trinity, or that Jesus is the second person of a God who is three and one, born of the Virgin Mary conceived by the Holy Spirit, or that he rose again on the third day, as well as everything related to angels and demons, the creation of the world in six days, the myth of Paradise, Adam and Eve and the snake, or the doctrine of salvation and eternal damnation, and so on. For Tolstoy, all of these are vulgar legends, mere superstitions. He does not

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<sup>12</sup> Quoting the work in Spanish translation, L. Tolstói, 1986, 962-963.

<sup>13</sup> Op. cit. p. 964. In chapter IV of *A Confession*, Tolstoy admits that he too had suffered exactly the same anguish and fear.

<sup>14</sup> Tolstoy, 2008.

think that it is necessary to pray to have faith, as if human beings were unaware of the precarious and ephemeral situation in which we live, like those who are shipwrecked and in great peril, always at the mercy of death that visits us whenever it wants. In religion, the fundamental question for Tolstoy is to know what the human being should do, how he should live. The gospel is, finally, the proclamation of a rule of life that can be reduced to five commandments that refer to the five temptations that are to be defeated (not to get angry, not to commit adultery, not to swear, not to fight evil with evil, not to treat anyone as an enemy), those commandments come down to a central rule: ‘to love God and your neighbour as yourself’, which is the equivalent of this fundamental precept: ‘to treat others as you wish them to treat you’. For Tolstoy, this is the novelty of Jesus’ teaching, just as he explained it in the *Sermon on the Mount*, in clear contrast with traditional Jewish doctrines, that is, the law of Moses and later ecclesiastical doctrines, perverted in the interests of the State by the service of the three supposedly Christian churches.

In his essays, Tolstoy tries to be clear and intelligible for any reader, so he does not worry if he repeats himself and chooses to employ very flexible existential metaphors (the oriental fable of the dragon and the well; the immense forest that has neither paths nor exits; the boat in stormy waters; the ship with neither captain nor compass, bound for nowhere, and so on, like the prophetic dreams of some Kaspar Hauser), as well as very effective – though perhaps excessively Manichean – structural oppositions with clear and firm contrasts between black and white, as well as right and wrong, life and death, light and darkness, the vital situation after recognizing the evangelical doctrine (‘now’) and existence without that faith and without the morals that derive from it (‘then’), that is to say, the antithesis between Jesus’ law and the law of the world, the genuine Gospel and the church, the true and rational life as opposed to the false and absurd life, the opposition between faith and scientific reason, the heart and the intellect, the individual and the mob, the boy and the adult, the voice of one’s own conscience and public opinion or ‘what they will say’, between sense and nonsense, the spirit and the flesh, eternity and time, and even between men and women, sickness and health, good sense and lunacy, town and country, agriculture and industry, war and peace, and so on.

Tolstoy bluntly generalizes and universalizes, with the result that everything that we know about the author of Ecclesiastes, Socrates, Buddha, Confucius or Mohammed comes down to one and the same vital wisdom, because deep down all the sages agree and say the same thing –

that is, what Jesus expressed with the greatest clarity and well-defined practical consequences. This wisdom, which to Tolstoy's mind had become forgotten and perverted and therefore needed to be proclaimed again, is that which he expresses in his indefatigable writing, translating, commenting and compiling the gospels in his own personal way.

#### **4. Tolstoy's *Kurze Darlegung des Evangelium* in Wittgenstein's *Geheime Tagebücher***

Let us now return to the previous thread and those *Secret Diaries*: Wittgenstein bought Tolstoy's *Kurze Darlegung des Evangelium* at the end of August of 1914 and, as he notes on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of September, *had begun reading it from the first of the month*.

On the second, he acknowledges some disappointment, because although he considers it "*ein herrliches Werk*", he adds shortly afterwards that "*es ist mir aber / noch nicht das, was ich davon er- / wartete*". Nonetheless, one day after that, on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, he notes that "*in Tolstoi gelesen / mit grossen Gewinn*". It is striking that he does not say that he has read the 'Gospel', or the 'abbreviated Gospel', but rather that he has read 'Tolstoy', as if the writer's voice and his personal message should matter greatly to him, rather than an Evangelist's version of the person and teachings of Jesus, or the persistent question of who the historical Jesus was, the problem of the sources, primitive Christianity, and so forth.

Five days later, on 8.9.1914, he writes: "*Jeden Tag viel / gearbeitet und viel ins Tolstois Erläuterungen / zu den Evangelien gelesen!*". And again we wish to stress that he does not simply note that he is reading the Gospels, but 'Tolstoy's comments on the Gospels'. It is the clear emphasis on *Tolstoy's authorship* that is again surprising: that mediating presence stands out, with his personal points of view and existential commitment, and not simply his work of translating the words of Jesus of Nazareth and aligning the four Evangelists. It seems, therefore, that what interests Wittgenstein most is Tolstoy's perspective of the New Testament, the hermeneutic work that he subjects it to, his particular religious message as a path to personal health. In fact, one month later, on 11.10.1914, he writes: "*Trage die "Darlegungen des Evangeliums" von Tolstoi immer mit mir / herum, wie einen Talisman*". It is not necessary to underline the magical-religious character that he attributes to this book here, as if it were an amulet connected with astrology and everything in the cosmos, an

object charged with forces that protected him against being hunted from outside, such as the bullets of enemy rifles, or from within himself, such as the temptations that besiege the soul and the body and desire its strength. Wittgenstein *always* carries it with him, as a basic necessity, a proven remedy, until it became one of his distinguishing characteristics and he would give it to his best friends.

Let us start another section and specify what Tolstoy, according to what he says himself in the “*Vorwort*”, does in this book. He synthesizes the four Gospels according to Jesus’ original doctrine, and endorses the truthfulness of his interpretation with a double argument: on the one hand, the unity, clarity, simplicity and entirety of the teaching thus presented, that is, its economy and coherence, and, on the other, its alignment with the internal feelings of everyone seeking the truth (EA p. 34). In this way, it lapses into a type of arrogant ‘begging the question’ that serves to legitimize his work by the presumed superior purity of his intentions and, at the same time, dismiss the ecclesiastics as well as the historians and freethinkers of the nineteenth century, such as D. F. Strauss or E. Renan, who tackled the scientific-positivist study of the Gospels and who continue to fail to understand them because their interests are awry and they seek their own advantage. Jesus’ teaching is summarized in twelve points that are the equivalent of the content of the Lord’s Prayer, just as Tolstoy translates and interprets it.

The deep mark the book made on the young Wittgenstein’s diaries can be observed particularly in certain themes that are repeated in both texts, as it were *leit-motivs* that connect them and give them structure. Here is a possible list: the antithesis of the *spirit* and the *flesh*, the soul and the body; the consideration of the temptations of *sensuality*, depression, fear and sin; *freedom* as an experience of the spirit; the meditations on the question of *time*, the present and eternity; the vindication of work, both manual and spiritual, as a path to salvation: “*Die Gnade der Arbeit!!*”, as Wittgenstein will say (2.11.1914); the conception of the *true life*, a life that is happy and reasonable, rational and blessed; the experience of *death* as a moment of truth and a radical affirmation of life and its meaning; the discovery of ‘the only thing that is necessary’; the acceptance of *divine will* as a liberation from crises and doubts; isolation and solitude as existential conditions and as preludes to religious experience; religion as *light* and *clarity*, as *peace*, as *happiness* and fullness of meaning; genuine faith as *praxis and a way of life* that is pleasing to God; the need to fulfill the difficult commandment of *never resisting evil and not confronting people’s*

wickedness; and so on. Following the Tolstoyan gospel and the most personal part of Wittgenstein's diaries along each of these central themes provides valuable nuances for outlining their respective visions of religion, and which should then be complemented by what each states in other, later texts.

Here and now, we will only note one question, of celebrated Augustinian derivation, that of *time*, an experience that also marked them both. Wittgenstein's reading of KDE resonates in this note which he made on 12.10.1914: "*Über die nächste / Zukunft völlig im ungewissen! / Kurz, es giebt Zeiten, wo ich nicht / bloss in der Gegenwart und nur dem / Geiste leben kann. Die guten / Stunden des Lebens soll man als Gnade / dankbar genissen und sonst gegen das / Leben gleichgültig sein.*" We can see the Tolstoyan roots of this conception (which, as is known, could also be argued from Schopenhauerian texts). We can already find these six theses in the "*Vorwort*" of KDE, the last of the twelve that summarize the central meaning of the teaching of the Gospels according to Tolstoy's hermeneutics:

7. Das zeitliche, fleischliche Leben ist die Speise des wahren Lebens, der Baustoff für das vernünftige Leben.
8. Und darum liegt das wahre Leben ausserhalb der Zeit allein im Gegenwärtigen.
9. Der Trug des Lebens ist der Zeit, in Vergangenheit und Zukunft verbirgt den Menschen das wahre Leben, das in der Gegenwart.
10. Und darum muss der Mensch dahin streben, den Trug des zeitlichen, des Vergangenheits- und Zukunfts-lebens zu zerstören..
11. Das wahre Leben liegt nicht allein ausserhalb der Zeit, als ein Leben im Gegenwärtigen, sondern ist auch ein Leben ausserhalb der Persönlichkeit, als ein allen Menschen gemeinsames Leben.
12. Und darum vereint sich, wer im gegenwärtigen, allen Menschen gemeinsamen Leben lebt, mit dem Vater, dem Ursprunge und Grunde des Lebens (ss. 6-7, pp. 29-30).

These theses are detailed in chapter VIII of KAE entitled "*Das Leben ist keines in der Zeit*" (s. 126 and ss.), and we would refer the reader to check them in the text. We think that they decisively marked Wittgenstein's way of experiencing 'religion' at the front. We must now tackle the second part of our objective in this article.

## 5. Nietzsche's 'Der Antichrist', Tolstoy's Christianity, and the Young Wittgenstein

The entry made on 8.12.1914 of the GT may be found surprising: in the recognized context of war where Wittgenstein found himself, meditating on the logical-philosophical problems of what would become the *Tractatus* and suffering from a foot wound, one suddenly reads: “*Nietzsche Band 8 gekauft / und darin gelesen. Bin stark / berührt von seiner Feindschaft // gegen das Christentum.*” As the editor W. Baum explains in the corresponding note<sup>15</sup>, the eighth volume of the *Works* of Nietzsche was published in Leipzig in 1904 and contained the following texts: 1. *Der Fall Wagner*. 2. *Götzen-Dämmerung*. 3. *Nietzsche contra Wagner*. 4. *Umwertung aller Werte: Ertes Buch: Der Antichrist*. 5. *Gedichte* (the *Dionysos-Dithyramben*). And he specifically adds: ‘What most interested Wittgenstein in this volume was undoubtedly *Der Antichrist*’. It may be opportune to add that this edition – where in a non-disinterested way it is incorrectly supposed that the Nietzschean legacy included more books of *The Revaluation of All Values*, thereby preparing the fraud of *The Will to Power* – is very dissimilar from the one that can be read today in G. Colli and M. Montinari’s critical edition. The adjective ‘idiotic’ applied to Jesus (with obvious roots in Dostoyevsky) does not appear in it, nor, for example, does the text end with that terrible page entitled ‘*Gesetz wider das Christentum*’, which had he seen it, would have shocked young Wittgenstein even more.

His reading of this text, which must have interested him enormously, has a strong relationship with Tolstoy’s work because, as specialists well know, he was one of the authors who most strongly influenced the preparation and writing of *Der Antichrist*<sup>16</sup>, specifically by his essay *Ma Religion*, which Nietzsche read in 1887-1888 in the French translation published in Paris in 1885 by Librairie Fischbacher, as noted above. He made numerous notes while reading it, sometimes copying out passages in full. Such notes, more than forty in number, can be consulted in the Colli-Montinari edition of the complete works of Nietzsche<sup>17</sup>. Both Tolstoy and

<sup>15</sup> Baum, 1983, 109.

<sup>16</sup> Hereafter referred to as AC.

<sup>17</sup> In the footnotes that, with the valuable assistance of A. Morillas, we have prepared for our Spanish translation of the posthumous fragments of the philosopher's mature years, we have indicated the numbers of the page or pages from the mentioned French

Nietzsche carried out their interpretations of the Old and New Testaments consulting the studies of philologists and historians who were extremely famous at the time, such as D. F. Strauss and E. Renan, whom both comment on and criticize, though they do so based on quite different suppositions and considerations. Nietzsche remained an expert professor of classic philology *par excellence*, committed to a peculiar version of *psychology* that had an intimate relationship with his philosophical project based on the complex ontology sketched out in the concept of *Wille zur Macht*.

Perhaps it would not be inappropriate to point out some aspects of AC where, to our reading at least, the influence of Tolstoy is particularly clear in Nietzsche and in his concept of 'Christianity'. By this term both authors understand two things: what Jesus of Nazareth lived and preached; this personal experience, according to both Tolstoy and Nietzsche, deserves special attention and should be distinguished – with the greatest care – from something that is very different but, unfortunately, is usually also called 'Christianity', what Paul and others preached as the purported message of Jesus and which the various Christian Churches have continued to modify, particularly since Constantine and the new circumstances of Christianity, which were the product of its relationships with the established powers and its return to Jewish conceptions, partly to adapt to the mood of the public to whom they addressed themselves.

Both Tolstoy's powerful criticisms of dogmatic theology and the mature Nietzsche's ferocious attack on this ecclesiastical and priestly Christianity focus on the second meaning of this term, not the first. This distinction is unfortunately absent from various commentators on Wittgenstein's work who only distinguish the negative part of AC. In this, they are it faithful to the letter of what he noted in his diary, but they miss the opportunity to highlight the remarkable parallelisms between the text and the Tolstoyan vision of evangelical Christianity.<sup>18</sup>

Here are some features of the image that Nietzsche offers of Jesus in the aphorisms of AC, an image, as we have mentioned, marked strongly by what he read in Tolstoy, but also, let us not forget, Dostoyevsky. Nietzsche had not only read some of Dostoyevsky's books, for example, *The House*

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translation to which each refer. Cf. Nietzsche, 2008,. Cf. particularly fragments 11 [236-282] of a notebook of November 1887 – March 1888, pp. 427-437.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. for example, Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, 1994, 126.

of the Dead (*Souvenirs de la maison des morts*) and *The Possessed* (*Les possédés*), but among other things he also knew, through various articles and an excellent book by E. M. M. de la Vogüé, *Le roman russe*, what Dostoevski had written both in *Crime and Punishment* and in a strange novel with suggestions about the figure of Jesus, entitled *The Idiot*. We think it worthwhile to highlight Dostoyevsky's Christological hermeneutics and summarize the Tolstoyan interpretation of Christianity, as well as the great influence both authors had on Nietzsche's AC, because it may help to clarify Wittgenstein's reading of both KDE and AC.

In aphorism 27 of this text, the *political* dimension of the Jesus of Nazareth type is presented as if he were a kind of young Dostoyevsky, or convinced Tolstoyan, who would be condemned to hard labour in Siberia in the nineteenth century for having subversive ideas:

Dieser heilige Anarchist, der das niedere Volk, die Ausgestossnen und "Sünder", die *Tschandala* innerhalb des Judentums zum Widerspruch gegen die herrschende Ordnung aufrief - mit einer Sprache, falls den Evangelien zu trauen wäre, die auch heute noch nach Sibirien führen würde, war ein politischer Verbrecher, soweit eben politische Verbrecher in einer *absurd-unpolitischen* Gemeinschaft möglich waren.<sup>19</sup>

However, as aphorism 29 explains, Nietzsche is particularly interested in Jesus' *psychological type*, because he considers Renan's interpretation (Jesus as *hero* and as *genius*) to be superficial and mistaken; the Dostoyevskian version (the *idiot*, that is, Prince Myshkin as the Christological figure) and the Tolstoyan (the *non-resistance to evil* as the central commandment of the Sermon on the Mount; the true evangelical message announcing that *the kingdom of God is within you*) seem to him far more correct and, without mentioning these authors, explicitly assumes their teachings with unmistakable details, literally transcribed from his knowledge of *The Idiot* and *Ma Religion*:

Herr Renan, dieser Hanswurst in psychologicis, hat die zwei *ungehörigsten* Begriffe zu seiner Erklärung des Typus Jesus hinzugebracht, die es hierfür geben kann: den Begriff *Genie* und den Begriff *Held* ("héros"). Aber wenn irgend etwas unevangelisch ist, so ist es der Begriff *Held*. Gerade der Gegensatz zu allem Ringen, zu allem Sich-In-Kampf-fühlen ist hier Instinkt geworden: die Unfähigkeit zum Widerstand wird hier Moral ("widerstehe nicht dem Bösen!" das tiefste Wort der Evangelien, ihr Schlüssel in gewissem Sinne), die Seligkeit im

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<sup>19</sup> Nietzsche, 1980, s.198.

Frieden, in der Sanftmut, in Nicht-feind-sein-können. Was heisst "frohe Botschaft"? Das wahre Leben, das ewige Leben ist gefunden, - es wird nicht verheissen, es ist da, es ist *in euch*: als Leben in der Liebe, in der Liebe ohne Abzug und Ausschluß, ohne Distanz. Jeder ist das Kind Gottes - Jesus nimmt durchaus nichts für sich allein in Anspruch -, als Kind Gottes ist jeder mit jedem gleich ... Aus Jesus einen *Helden* machen! - Und was für ein Missverständnis ist gar das Wort "Genie"! Unser ganzer Begriff, unser Cultur-Begriff "Geist" hat in der Welt, in der Jesus lebt, gar keinen Sinn. Mit der Strenge des Physiologen gesprochen, wäre hier ein ganz andres Wort eher noch am Platz: das Wort Idiot.<sup>20</sup>

The good news announced by Jesus corresponds to a physiological habit that Nietzsche diagnoses by means of characteristics that he seems to have taken, one by one, from the Tolstoyan interpretation of the Gospel:

Man übersetze sich einen solchen physiologischen habitus in seine letzte Logik - als Instinkt-Hass gegen *jede* Realität, als Flucht in's "Unfassliche", ins "Unbegreifliche", als Widerwille gegen jede Formel, jeden Zeit- und Raumbegriff, gegen Alles, was fest, Sitte, Institution, Kirche ist, als Zu-Hause-sein in einer Welt, an die keine Art Realität mehr rührt, einer bloss noch "inneren" Welt, einer "wahren" Welt, einer "ewigen" Welt... "Das Reich Gottes ist *in euch*"...<sup>21</sup>

This aversion to every formula and all conditioning within the coordinates of space and time, this internal, true and eternal world, refer to the concept of 'spirit' that Tolstoy presents in its KDE and which reappears so often in Wittgenstein's *Tagebücher*.

In aphorism 31, Nietzsche finally admits the enormous debt that he owes to the two great Russian writers, to Dostoyevsky, obviously, but also, though implicitly, to Tolstoy's particular version of the Final Judgement, which is in no sense at all either post-historic or celestial:

Jene seltsame und kranke Welt, in die uns die Evangelien einführen - eine Welt, wie aus einem russischen Romane, in der sich Auswurf der Gesellschaft, Nervenleiden und "kindliches" Idiotentum ein Stelldichein zu geben scheinen - muss unter allen Umständen den Typus *vergrößert* haben... Man hätte zu bedauern, daß nicht ein Dostoiowsky in der Nähe dieses interessantesten *décadent* gelebt hat, ich meine, jemand, der gerade den ergreifenden Reiz einer solchen Mischung von Sublimem, Krankem und Kindlichem zu empfinden wußte...

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<sup>20</sup> Op. cit. ss. 199-200.

<sup>21</sup> Op. cit. s. 200.

Einstweilen klafft ein Widerspruch zwischen dem Berg-, See- und Wiesen-Prediger, dessen Erscheinung wie ein Buddha auf einem sehr wenig indischen Boden anmutet, und jenem Fanatiker des Angriffs, dem Theologen- und Priester-Todfeind, den Renans Bosheit als “le grand maître en ironie” verherrlicht hat... Als die erste Gemeinde einen richtenden, hadernden, zürnenden, böseartig spitzfindigen Theologen nötig hatte, *gegen* Theologen, *schuf* sie sich ihren “Gott” nach ihrem Bedürfnisse: wie sie ihm auch jene völlig unevangelischen Begriffe, die sie jetzt nicht entbehren konnte, “Wiederkunft”, “jüngstes Gericht”, jede Art zeitlicher Erwartung und Verheißung, ohne Zögern in den Mund gab.<sup>22</sup>

Tolstoy’s presence in the text of AC is rarely more obvious than in aphorisms 32 and 33. Traditional theology’s conceptions of ‘sin’, ‘reward’ and ‘punishment’ fall apart here, and innovative theses that will also mark Wittgenstein’s philosophy of religion are defended. These are: the fundamental importance of the way of life (*Wandel*), of *praxis* as the only truthful and congruent manifestation of genuine religious belief, and *silence* as the pertinent road for such experience, and they are radically different from those enunciated and described by our civilization’s scientific-technical language, replete with legal formulas, orders and verbal credos. In any event, language serves to present signs, analogies, metaphors, complementary ways of seeing and suggesting aspects of what may be perceived, as if from the standpoints of eternity and blessedness. Genuine Christian faith is not the result of a rational proof, the exercise of dialectics, of syllogisms and argument, nor is it affected by alternative reasoning. It has taken root at another level, in the deep feelings of the heart, that of the living life:

Die “gute Botschaft” ist eben, dass es keine Gegensätze mehr gibt; das Himmelreich gehört den *Kindern*; der Glaube, der hier laut wird, ist kein erkämpfter Glaube... Dieser Glaube formuliert sich auch nicht, - er *lebt*, er wehrt sich gegen Formeln... Man könnte, mit einiger Toleranz im Ausdruck, Jesus einen “freien Geist” nennen - er macht sich aus allem Festen nichts: das Wort *tödtet*, alles, was fest ist, *tödtet*. Der Begriff, die *Erfahrung* “Leben”, wie er sie allein kennt, widerstrebt bei ihm jeder Art Wort, Formel, Gesetz, Glaube, Dogma. Er redet bloss vom Innersten: “Leben” oder “Wahrheit” oder “Licht” ist sein Wort für das Innerste, - alles übrige, die ganze Realität, die ganze Natur, die Sprache selbst, hat für ihn bloss den Wert eines Zeichens, eines Gleichnisses...

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<sup>22</sup> Op. cit. 202-203.

Das *Verneinen* ist eben das ihm ganz Unmögliche -. Ingleichen fehlt die Dialektik, es fehlt die Vorstellung davon, dass ein Glaube, eine "Wahrheit" durch Gründe bewiesen werden könnte (- *seine* Beweise sind innere "Lichter", innere Lustgefühle und Selbstbejahungen, lauter "Beweise der Kraft" -). Eine solche Lehre *kann* auch nicht widersprechen...

In der ganzen Psychologie des "Evangeliums" fehlt der Begriff Schuld und Strafe; insgleichen der Begriff Lohn. Die "Sünde", jedwedes Distanz-Verhältnis zwischen Gott und Mensch ist abgeschafft, - *eben das ist die "frohe Botschaft"*. Die Seligkeit wird nicht verheissen, sie wird nicht an Bedingungen geknüpft: sie ist die *einzig* Realität – der Rest ist Zeichen, um von ihr zu reden...

Die *Folge* eines solchen Zustandes projiziert sich in eine neue *Praktik*, die eigentlich evangelische Praktik. Nicht ein "Glaube" unterscheidet den Christen: der Christ handelt, er unterscheidet sich durch ein *andres* Handeln... Das Leben des Erlösers war nichts andres als *diese* Praktik, - sein Tod war auch nichts andres... Er hatte keine Formeln, keinen Ritus für den Verkehr mit Gott mehr nötig, - nicht einmal das Gebet... er weiss, wie es allein die *Praktik* des Lebens ist, mit der man sich "göttlich", "selig", "evangelisch", jederzeit ein "Kind Gottes" fühlt. *Nicht* "Busse", *nicht* "Gebet um Vergebung" sind Wege zu Gott: die *evangelische Praktik allein* führt zu Gott, sie *eben ist* "Gott"!... Der tiefe Instinkt dafür, wie man leben *müsse*, um sich "im Himmel" zu fühlen, um sich "ewig" zu fühlen, während man sich bei jedem andern Verhalten durchaus *nicht* "im Himmel" fühlt: dies allein ist die psychologische Realität der "Erlösung". - Ein neuer Wandel, *nicht* ein neuer Glaube...<sup>23</sup>

The religion of the 'Good News' is to be found in a state of the heart that is outside time and space, and hence is not affected by so-called *natural death*. It is an experience of completeness that overcomes terrors and fears, hopes and disappointments, and maintains a *praxis* that by itself guarantees its peace and bliss:

Der Begriff "des Menschen Sohn" ist nicht eine konkrete Person, die in die Geschichte gehört, irgend etwas Einzelnes, Einmaliges, sondern eine "ewige" Tatsächlichkeit, ein von dem Zeitbegriff erlöstes psychologisches Symbol... Das "Himmelreich" ist ein Zustand des Herzens, - nicht etwas, das "über die Erde" oder "nach dem Tode" kommt. Der ganze Begriff des natürlichen Todes *fehlt* im Evangelium: der Tod ist keine Brücke, kein

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<sup>23</sup> Op. cit. 203-206.

Übergang, er fehlt, weil einer ganz andern, bloss scheinbaren, bloss zu Zeichen nützlichen Welt zugehörig. Die "Todesstunde" ist *kein* christlicher Begriff, - die "Stunde", die Zeit, das physische Leben und seine Krisen sind gar nicht vorhanden für den Lehrer der "frohen Botschaft"... Das "Reich Gottes" ist nichts, das man erwartet; es hat kein Gestern und kein Übermorgen, es kommt nicht in "tausend Jahren", - es ist eine Erfahrung an einem Herzen; es ist überall da, es ist nirgends da...

(...)

Dieser "frohe Botschafter" starb wie er lebte... Die *Praktik* ist es, welche er der Menschheit hinterließ: sein Verhalten vor den Richtern, vor den Häschern, vor den Anklägern und aller Art Verleumdung und Hohn, - sein Verhalten am *Kreuz*. Er widersteht nicht, er verteidigt nicht sein Recht...<sup>24</sup>

Evangelical *praxis*, precisely as Tolstoy and Nietzsche present it, that of the genuine Christian, implies another way of acting: not offering resistance, not differentiating between native and foreign, not getting angry with anybody, not despising anybody, not going to court nor swearing, not moving away from the person with whom an intimate coexistence has begun, in brief, loving thy neighbour, living in the light, being already in paradise, as Jesus told the good thief. As a result it immediately becomes obvious that ecclesiastical doctrine and its conception of Christianity are an absolute misrepresentation of this 'Good News', a miserable degradation of its singularity:

man hat aus dem Gegensatz zum Evangelium die *Kirche* aufgebaut... Dass die Menschheit vor dem Gegensatz dessen auf den Knien liegt, was der Ursprung, der Sinn, das *Recht* des Evangeliums war, dass sie im Begriff "Kirche" gerade das heilig gesprochen hat, was der "frohe Botschafter" als *unter* sich, als *hinter* sich empfand - man sucht vergebens nach einer größeren Form *welthistorischer Ironie*.<sup>25</sup>

For this reason, Nietzsche personalizes and, if possible, underlines the false transvaluation carried out by Pauline and ecclesiastical Christianity to an even greater degree than Tolstoy, though, as will be shown below, this does not mean that he scorns Jesus' message and the way of life from which it arises. However, based on these texts, the vertiginous, implacable, bloodcurdling degree of accusation and the harshness of his criticism in AC also turns out to be understandable:

<sup>24</sup> Aphorisms 34 y 35, op. cit. ss. 206-207.

<sup>25</sup> Aphorism 36, op. cit. p. 208.

ich erzähle die *echte* Geschichte des Christentums. - Das Wort schon "Christentum" ist ein Mißverständnis -, im Grunde gab es nur Einen Christen, und der starb am Kreuz. Das "Evangelium" *starb* am Kreuz. Was von diesem Augenblick an "Evangelium" heisst, war bereits der Gegensatz dessen, was er gelebt: eine "*schlimme* Botschaft", ein *Dysangelium*. Es ist falsch bis zum Unsinn, wenn man in einem "Glauben", etwa im Glauben an die Erlösung durch Christus das Abzeichen des Christen sieht: bloss die christliche *Praktik*, ein Leben so wie der, der am Kreuze starb, es *lebte*, ist christlich... Heute noch ist ein *solches* Leben möglich, für *gewisse* Menschen sogar notwendig: das echte, das ursprüngliche Christentum wird zu allen Zeiten möglich sein... *Nicht* ein Glauben, sondern ein Tun, ein Vieles-*nicht*-tun vor allem, ein andres *Sein*...<sup>26</sup>

Given this, one can understand that Wittgenstein should be shocked by Nietzsche's fiery and drastic 'anti-Christian' transvaluation in AC. In a way, he already knew the positive and affirmative part of this book through his readings of Tolstoy's KDE, which strongly emphasized the '*Fluch auf das Christentum*' (*curse on Christianity*), the overwhelming series of aphorisms that like an incendiary pamphlet, attack Pauline theology, the priestly reading, the insertion of ecclesiastical power into the history of the West, its decadentism, its nihilism, its deplorable degradation of humanity. These are the words with which, on 8.12.1914, Wittgenstein, as a young soldier summarized his startled reading of the texts in the eighth volume of Nietzsche's works:

Bin stark / berührt von seiner Feindschaft // gegen das Christentum. /  
Denn auch in seinen Schriften ist etwas / Wahrheit enthalten. Gewiss, /  
das Christentum ist / der einzige *sichere* / Weg zum Glück. Aber wie, /  
wenn einer dies Glück / verschmähte? ! Könnte / es nicht besser sein  
unglück- / lich, im hoffnungslosen / Kampf gegen die äussere / Welt zu  
Grunde zu gehen? / Aber ein solches Leben / ist sinnlos. Aber warum /  
nicht ein sinnloses Leben / führen? Ist es unwürdig? / Wie verträgt es sich  
mit dem / streng solipsistischen / Standpunkt? Was muss ich / aber tun,  
das[s] mein Leben // mir nicht verloren geht? / Ich muss mir seiner immer  
/ -des Geistes immer- bewusst sein.

Nevertheless, R. Monk has lucidly written that, based on these words, 'we can see how close Wittgenstein was, in spite of his faith, to

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<sup>26</sup> Aphorism 39, op. cit. p. 211.

accepting Nietzsche's point of view.<sup>27</sup> Hence, he does not discuss the question of whether Christian doctrine is *true*, but rather, and in syntony with Nietzsche's *psychological* position, whether it offers help to confront existence, to find *meaning* in a world that otherwise could be found absurd and unbearable – in brief, if it offers a way to live, a *praxis* that *cures* the pains of a 'sick soul', as William James said and as Vicente Sanf elix has explained. In AC, there are indeed passages 'that convinced Wittgenstein that there was a certain truth in the work of Nietzsche'<sup>28</sup>. This, for example:

Bewusstseins-Zust nde, irgend ein Glauben, ein F r-wahr-halten zum Beispiel – jeder Psycholog weiss das – sind ja vollkommen gleichg ltig und f nften Ranges gegen den Werth der Instinkte: strenger geredet, der ganze Begriff gesittiger Urs chlichkeit ist falsch.<sup>29</sup>

As Monk indicated, the idea that the essence of religion resides in the *feelings* (or, as Nietzsche says, in the *instincts*) and in *praxes* rather than in beliefs would become a recurrent topic in Wittgenstein. During the First World War, Christianity was for him "*der einzige sichere Weg zum Gl ck*", though not because it promised him a blessed life in heaven, but because the figure of Jesus, just as Tolstoy and Nietzsche had taught him to interpret Him, provided an example, an attitude to follow that made life's suffering, anguish in the face of the death, bearable.

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# Wittgenstein's Religious Character

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Wittgenstein's religious thought begins with the promise of a valuable enigma that appears in certain aphorisms at the end of the *Tractatus*: the mystical is a threshold of value and sense that takes us beyond this uncaring reality. If we think about the context in which this thought came about – Wittgenstein sunk in the First World War and his life in danger – we realize the vital importance that these ideas had for Wittgenstein, even though their nature was cryptic and their number few. Yet however intense it may have been, Wittgenstein's emphasis on the inexpressible was veiled and insufficiently strong with the result that the subject was ignored by his early readers. It was moreover considered by some, including Russell himself, the uncomfortable side of the brilliant Austrian engineer. However, Wittgenstein does not slacken in his attempt to communicate something on the subject and, in Cambridge in about 1930, delivered his famous *Lecture on Ethics* in public, where he insists on his distinction between saying and showing, and alludes to experiences that would seem to be religious (such as 'feeling absolutely safe' or 'feeling guilty' – in the eyes of God) or aesthetic-religious (such as 'perceiving the world as a miracle'), and which for him are at the centre of ethics. What he said in his lecture squares with the spirit of the *Tractatus*: ethics, aesthetics and religion drink from the same source, they are all transcendental: they refer to values, not to facts, and consequently neither explains nor describes objects or events in the world, but instead shows ways of seeing the world, and therefore affects its value and meaning. Or as Wittgenstein would say a good deal later: even when religious belief is indifferent to historical facts, it permeates human life in a profound way and has a strength that scientific truths never attain.

Throughout his life, Wittgenstein maintains a certain fidelity to his initial position. I would even say that his thought on religious questions barely changed – strange in such a dynamic thinker. The emphasis on seeing the mystical, the ethical and the aesthetic as things that are

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<sup>1</sup> I'm very grateful to Vicente Sanfelix and Joan Llinares for his comments on an early version of this paper, and to Philip Daniels who translate this paper from Spanish.

transcendent, ‘beyond the world’, disappears, but the accent on not considering his propositions descriptive persists; his terms become part of normative and expressive language games, and do not attempt to communicate information about facts. They rather express and evoke attitudes and feelings, or accompany and stimulate certain practices. With this minimal conception of religious language, in the following decade, Wittgenstein would sporadically apply himself to criticizing, on the one hand, those who conceive of religion as a pre-scientific thought, and on the other, those who interpret religious language as referring to supposed facts that occurred millennia ago, or that are to occur after one’s death. Even when their intention was to defend the religious tradition to which they belonged, they only induce self-deception: they present religion as if it were rational discourse or sought to be so, as if it were a theory about what has happened and what will happen. These criticisms are to be found in his *Remarks on Frazer’s Golden Bough*; and in the classes on religious belief that he gave in Cambridge in 1938. In the first part of this paper, I describe and briefly discuss some of the broad ideas that guided Wittgenstein’s thought on religious language, particularly on what seem to be the virtues and the limits of its critical nucleus.

If religious language is a reflection of experiences and practices, then we will not really be able to understand the meaning of the terms that a believer uses unless we take into account the context of their use: the activities that the believer relates this thought to, and the images that they evoke in the believer; understanding the meaning leads us to submerge ourselves in the believer’s form of life. The second part of this paper is an exercise that seeks to apply Wittgenstein’s theory regarding religious language to his own case, in order to understand the characteristics that give rise to his particular religious character: to identify the emotions that it inspires in him, and in general the behaviour that it induces in him. This will have to be reconstructed from the little that he says in his early texts, what he wrote in the personal diaries that were published after his death, and from what we know about his life.

## **1. Religious Language**

‘How do I know that two people mean the same when each says he believes in God?’ (...) Practice gives the words their meaning. (*CV*, p. 85.)

At the end of the *Tractatus*, the mystical is pronounced inexpressible. The structure of figurative language forces any proposition that claims to

be true to represent facts, and consequently, propositions that claim to express values are condemned to nonsense, they do not represent the only thing that they would be able to represent: the states of things. In his *Lecture on Ethics*, Wittgenstein says that language can make an empirical – and consequently legitimate – use of terms like ‘good’ or ‘valuable’, but always in a relative sense. Something is good, e.g., for one’s health, or something is valuable to obtain a certain end, e.g. to build a house, but we cannot assign a meaning to that which is proclaimed good or valuable ‘in itself’, because then we are no longer referring to any quality of the object that can be discovered empirically; for this reason, Wittgenstein thinks, in this early period, that ethics, aesthetics and religion struggle against the boundaries of language to express absolute values, and systematically fail in their intent: they cannot say what they seek to express; at most, they can show what only few will be able to comprehend.

Years later, Wittgenstein stops thinking in terms of the boundaries of language and recognizes that language has functions over and above describing facts and transmitting information, language also serves to organise, command, play, invoke, promise, intimidate, etc.; and he no longer finds these functions marginal, nor derived from language’s central, descriptive function. When speaking, we do various things, so, to analyze meaning one must take account of the usage as well as the practices with which such a usage is associated. Moreover, as regards religious language, Wittgenstein thinks that it should not be thought of as language that communicates knowledge in the traditional sense. Many religious beliefs would seem to be articulating events that have occurred (such as the creation of the world in 6 days, the life of Jesus, the resurrection of Lazarus), or that will occur (such as the Final Judgement), but in spite of their appearance, Wittgenstein neither accepts that they deal with historical beliefs, nor that they tell stories, nor seek to compete with current science to provide explanations. Its function is to express attitudes, to motivating practices, to reflect vital commitments. Anyone who interprets religion as a theory is making a serious error, because seen through scientific eyes, religion is an erroneous and even an irrational conception. Yet exactly because as an error “religion would be a too big an error”, we must not accept Frazer’s interpretation. For Wittgenstein, it is in this that Frazer’s great insensitivity lies.

The believer uses religious terms not with the intention of referring to certain objects, but rather as part of his ceremonial practices, therefore to discover the meaning of these terms, it will be necessary to examine

the context of their use and relate them with a certain form of life. However, Frazer believes that archaic religion (which he calls magic) is a false belief that will collapse under its own weight when scientific conception imposes itself and Wittgenstein would say that he does not notice, that no opinion is the basis of a religious symbol. And error only corresponds to opinion (*Cf. CRD*, p.15); before being rejected as false, religion must be considered a theory (*cf. Ibid*, p.9), and it is not. We might then wonder why archaic societies have rituals if they do not seek to control anything thereby. Perhaps, Wittgenstein thinks, they have that inclination, we might even say that ‘the human being is a ceremonial animal’ (*Ibid*, p. 21); but the most correct thing would simply be to point out that this happens, that ‘such is life’. What is an error is to think – as Frazer does – that archaic man does not distinguish his religious practices from his technological and scientific tasks, however rudimentary they may be.

Another error that we can detect, knowing that religion is neither an explanatory theory nor seeks to be one, is the one made by a person who seeks historical support for religions; in the case of the Judeo-Christian tradition – the only religion that Wittgenstein really speaks about, and the only one that really interests him – we might think of those who believe that Jesus’ existence can be demonstrated, or that there are archaeological traces of certain miracles; but this – even when it can be carried out in a rigorous and serious way – would not in fact contribute to the strength of religious belief, rather, Wittgenstein thinks, it has the opposite effect: it confuses religion with superstition, and cultivates self-deception (*Cf. LCR* pp. 134–136). The idea is not to make religion *seem* rational, anyone who seeks that has not understood its meaning, the true believer accepts religion as it is: irrational, ‘pure madness’. The same criticism would be valid for those who seek to give rational arguments for believing in God: theology, in the most traditional sense, rests entirely on this basic confusion. No theoretical test could convince us of the existence of God, it is life that can lead us to faith in God:

Life can educate one to a belief in God. And experiences too are what bring this about; but I don’t mean visions and other forms of sense experience which show us the ‘existence of this being’ but e.g. sufferings of various sorts. These neither show us God in the way a sense impression shows us an object, nor do they give rise to conjectures about Him. Experiences, thoughts – life can force this concept on us. So perhaps it is similar to the concept of ‘object’. (*CV*, p. 87)

For all the above reasons, in religion, the term 'belief' does not mean the same as it does in other contexts: when people refer to themselves as Christian, it would seem that they are saying that they accept certain presumed truths, such as the existence of God or of the soul, the life and resurrection of Jesus, or the coming of the Final Judgement, and it is pertinent to ask, as in other cases, about the reasons for these beliefs; but their religious beliefs really reflect more than the acceptance of certain supposed truths, their adhesion to 'a frame of reference, and the cultivation of certain practices and images that guide their lives. More than propositional beliefs, 'beliefs that', religious beliefs are a trust, born of pain and the search for meaning, or from admiration with regard to existence or thought, or simply a product of our ceremonial instinct. Whatever their origin may be, they do not arise as certain cold wisdom, but as uncertain passion. The religious believer lives as if these beliefs were true but, unless an ignorant person, knows that their strength does not come from their rational foundations, but from their vital importance. For this reason, Wittgenstein wrote in 1937, the word 'believe' has caused 'terrible damage' to religion because if considered as belief, faith represents a challenge to reason. 'But if instead of "belief in Christ" you would say: "love of Christ", the paradox vanishes". (*MT*, p. 247)

This idea of seeing religious language as a non-descriptive language has a very long history. From very early times, it was said that God was an ineffable mystery, and many religious texts prefer to take a roundabout way of describing the indescribable: the *Scriptures* themselves speak via metaphors and parables, and very soon negative theology appears saying not what God is, but only what He is not; moreover images and even paradoxes are plentiful in the mystical Judeo-Christian tradition. It is also worth mentioning that, at the beginning of the twentieth century, in his book *Das Heilige*, Rudolf Otto offers a similar interpretation of religious language to Wittgenstein's: terms are used analogically in religion, God is spoken of as a father, or heaven as a place but, in fact, what is desired is to evoke attitudes and emotions that correspond with religious experience. In this sense, the terms are associated with images, we associate God with a father or with destiny, or with a judge, and thereby we say how we live, what images guide our life. Otto's examples are taken from religious texts of all periods and the whole of the first part of his book explores these 'irrational' aspects of religion. Although there was apparently no contact between Otto and Wittgenstein, it is no accident that both turn, whether explicitly or not, to authors for whom religion has an irreducible irrational

component, and for whom religious beliefs are not always propositional beliefs. Neither William James, Tolstoy, nor Kierkegaard conceive of religion as an explanatory theory with respect to anything, for them faith is intrinsically united with the believer's emotional life and practice, and they respect the unavoidable nucleus of mystery, even madness, that there is in religion. As we shall see in the following part of this text, these were decisive influences for Wittgenstein's religious thought.

In summary, the thesis with respect to religious language would seem to be divided into two parts, on the one hand it is stated that religious language is not figurative, it does not describe facts (past, present or future) and, on the other hand, it is stated that its meaning refers to practices and attitudes. With respect to the former, we might ask ourselves whether it is correct to think that religious language never seeks to be descriptive. It seems clear that a large proportion (if not the overwhelming majority) of believers do believe that religion speaks of real events (past, present or future). Religious people usually think that upon their deaths their souls will leave their bodies, that God created the world, and that there is a heaven and a hell. This interpretation is usual, not only in what is popularly denoted 'the third world', where it might be thought that ignorance abounds, but it is also usual in 'the first world', where in 2009 Evolutionism competed with Creationism as if they were rival scientific theories and a Head of State claimed to be in contact with God, who apparently told him whom to bomb. In another sense, Wittgenstein is very probably right and believers of this type guide their lives according to their religious values, and express feelings through their religious beliefs, the problem is that they *also* believe that their religious beliefs refer to realities that somehow can be demonstrated or be rationally argued. Thus, Wittgenstein accuses the majority of religious believers of being superstitious, which in the strict sense is not drastic (there are those who would accuse them all of being superstitious), but this transforms his criticism into a sort of normative proposal regarding the use and understanding of religious language, as this would tell us how we *should* in fact use it and interpret it, not how it *is* in fact used and interpreted.

On the other hand, I concur with his intuition that religious language – on certain chosen occasions, I am afraid – does not seek to refer to facts but rather to express a practical and vital dimension. Nonetheless, the fact that one cannot gain access to this unless one understands the form of life with which it is associated has given rise to the idea that Wittgenstein is supporting a sort of religious relativism. Only those who have certain

attitudes and share a certain form of life can really understand the meaning of the beliefs and the religious terms. There is no way then of judging the relevance, correctness or 'truth' of such beliefs from the outside. I think that there is a way for Wittgenstein to defend himself from this criticism, and it is by pleading that, in the end, it is the same practice (and, in general, form of life) that makes it possible not only to understand - but also to value – the relevance of a certain religion; I believe that D. Z. Phillips is right when he states that it is necessary to turn practice into a critical mirror. I realise that this discussion requires much finer argument than what I am offering here, but my interest is different, it is to apply this idea that religious language refers to the believer's emotional life and practice, to understanding the type of religiousness that Wittgenstein himself professed. To this I now turn.

## 2. Wittgenstein's religiousness

Christianity is not a doctrine, not, I mean, a theory about what has happened and will happen to the human soul, but a description of something that is that actually takes place in human life. (*CV*, p 28)

In his early texts, Wittgenstein speaks of an experience that he considers valuable: thinking that life makes sense, feeling protected, absolutely safe, seeing the world as a miracle. These characteristics offer a strongly positive religious experience: faith as trust. Yet we also know that his religious character has another side, a painful side, and which we know of mainly through his letters and personal diaries. This facet is dominated by guilt, the feeling of impurity and an authentic struggle against both his sexuality and against his vanity. There are moreover important changes from some texts to others. In his public texts (and even in the selection of aphorisms included in the *Notebooks 1914–1916* published by the executors), the language Wittgenstein uses to refer to ethical-religious matters is impersonal, he uses 'the mystical' or God as the equivalent of the meaning of the world or, sometimes, even destiny, while in his personal diaries his religious language is more intimate and more similar to that of the believer who prays, and often he does not speak *of* God but *with* God: he constantly and explicitly invokes Him to ask for strength when faced by the fear of death when a soldier, and decades later, he beseeches Him more infrequently and timidly, asking for strength to overcome his vanity, his resistance to surrender. This is what he wrote in 1946:

I cannot kneel to pray because it's as though my knees were stiff. I am afraid of dissolution (of my own dissolution) should I become soft. (*CV* 1946)

Additionally, in his public texts he seems to allude to a lay religiousness, so to speak, a religiousness that is not committed to any religion in particular, nor linked with traditional religious symbols, whereas his personal texts display a constant reference to Christianity and some of its symbols. Thus, and in spite of the emphasis in his published texts of seeming neutral towards religious traditions, there can be no doubt that Wittgenstein thinks about religion *from* a Christian standpoint.

To approach the complexity of Wittgenstein's religiousness, we can use three of the characteristics that he mentions in his early texts as a thread, and which, to my mind, represent the central elements of his position:

- a) Trust in there being ultimate values and meaning,
- b) astonishment before life, thought, beauty, and
- c) the question of guilt and salvation.

Let us look at these in order.

In the *Notebooks 1914–1916*, Wittgenstein's first well-known texts, and from which the material of *Tractatus* was distilled, there is a long, written note dated June 11, 1916 which reads:

What do I know about God and the purpose of life?

I know that this world exists.

That I am placed in it like my eye in its visual field.

That something about it is problematic, which we call its meaning.

That this meaning does not lie in it but outside it.

That life is the world.

That my will penetrates the world.

That my will is good or evil.

Therefore that good and evil are somehow connected with the meaning of the world.

The meaning of life, i.e. the meaning of the world, we can call God.

And connect with this the comparison of God to a father.

To pray is to think about the meaning of life.

I cannot bend the happenings of the world to my will: I am completely powerless.

I can only make myself independent of the world – and so in a certain sense master it – by renouncing any influence on happenings.

And later, on July the 8th of the same year, he writes:

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

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

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

The world is *given* me, i.e., my will enters into the world completely from outside as into something that is already there.

(As for what my will is, I don't know yet.)

That is why we have the feeling of being dependent on an alien will.

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

A little before the first series of aphorisms (May the 27<sup>th</sup>) and shortly after the last (July the 24<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>), Wittgenstein reports in what are known as his *Secret Notebooks* that 'they are being shot at' and that he is very afraid of dying. It is very probable that at this stage of the war, religious belief was born in him again or at least was intensified.<sup>2</sup> At this time, we know that he had already read William James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, which, according to what he said to Russell and later to Drury, helped him to be a better person and struggle against melancholy.<sup>3</sup> In any case, it was very probably William James who sensitized Wittgenstein to the emotional content of religious language, and also helped him to identify his own tensions.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, we also know

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<sup>2</sup> Wittgenstein was educated as a Catholic and lost his faith during puberty, apparently after conversations with one of his sisters. One of his friends said that Wittgenstein told him one day that his faith had been reborn in him after seeing a play where the main character, who was in a desperate situation, admitted to feeling 'absolutely safe'. As we will see below, this is related to this first characteristic.

<sup>3</sup> The letter to Russell is dated June 25, 1912. Years later, circa 1930, Drury commented that Wittgenstein had told him that William James' book had helped him a great deal to conquer *sorge*, in the Goethian sense. (Cf. R. Rhees, pp. 181-182).

<sup>4</sup> For more details on this relationship, see Vicente Sanf elix's paper included in the bibliography.

that, when he was soldier, he read Tolstoy's *Gospel in Brief* and said some time later that this book saved his life. He probably also read other essays by Tolstoy, or knew more of his religious thought through William James' book, in any event, the influence that both authors exercise on his religious thought is obvious, particularly Tolstoy, who writes in the Introduction to his *The Gospel in Brief*:

I consider Christianity to be neither a pure revelation nor a phase of history, but I consider it as the only doctrine that gives a meaning to life.' (Tolstoy, *GB*, p. 22)

Belief in God, then, means to believe that life has meaning. It has nothing to do with the most common belief of thinking of God as He who created the world or decreed certain laws for humans. Religious faith seems to be a 'yes' to life, a trust in its meaning and value. But for Tolstoy this acceptance brings with it certain responsibilities. If it is accepted that life has meaning, and this meaning has been revealed in the *Gospels*, then the life of the believer will be linked to the morals that derive from them. And both Wittgenstein and Tolstoy think that one of the peculiarities of this Gospel-based moral is its emphasis on purity, in distancing oneself from carnal pleasures, and in particular keeping oneself safe from sexuality. But I should like to take a small detour to better understand the relationship between the two authors and, to do so, I shall dedicate some pages to briefly sketch Tolstoy's religious thought.

From the time he was born, Tolstoy enjoyed social prestige and, during his youth, shared the values of his time: elegance, the desire for power, courage and honour. Later, he spent some time in the Caucasus, he went to war and travelled in Europe. At this time, Tolstoy witnessed two events that marked the beginning of the transformation that he would suffer throughout his life: the first was a public execution that he witnessed in a Paris square, the other was his brother's premature death, who moreover died in despair. We also know that Tolstoy granted freedom to his serfs years before this was officially enacted, and that he founded a school where he put his educational ideas into practice: to teach without paternalism, teaching only what curiosity provoked. He got married at the age of 34 and during his life had 13 children of whom only eight survived. In his first fifteen years of marriage, he published his best novels: *The Cossacks*, *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*. Subsequently, he suffered a profound crisis starting from, as he says in *A Confession*, the consciousness of death, and he became a solitary being, a writer of religious essays and

moral tales. Tolstoy distanced himself from his family, and ended his days in the winter of 1910.

In *A Confession*, written two decades before his death, Tolstoy says that in spite of having had a quite satisfactory life, without knowing why, he fell into a sort of melancholy, where everything that happened seemed of no importance, human life under the great shade of death was a useless sigh. He lost interest in his work, 'watching life in the mirror of art' no longer afforded him pleasure (Tolstoy: *C*, p 33) and he became obsessed by the question of the meaning of his life. Before this abyss, religious faith offers an answer, but an answer that forces us to deny reason and accept a certain dose of irrationality. There is no rational answer to the problem of the meaning of life, to answer this question, it is necessary to accept something that is indemonstrable: the existence of God. Tolstoy writes in his *Confession*:

... faith is a knowledge of the meaning of human life, the consequence of which is that man does not kill himself, but lives. Faith is the force of life.' (Tolstoy: *C*, p. 54.)

Now, if this faith is the force of life, then it does not consist of theological explanations that calm our anxieties; religion should not lead us to believe but rather lead us to act. For Tolstoy, the idea that faith is non-rational does not imply that having faith is to accept a set of irrational beliefs, it rather implies that we must adopt a certain attitude and a minimum theology that supports it: faith in the existence of the God of the *Gospels*, of the God of Love (*agape*) spoken of therein. Beyond the acceptance of this existence (which is indemonstrable), the rest of the answer to the meaning of life is a practical answer, it consists in living in a certain way: practising the love that the Jesus of the *Gospels* taught. And with the purpose of emphasizing this doctrine and explaining it without risking falling into pre-enlightenment thought, Tolstoy offers his own version of the *Gospels*. In it, Tolstoy criticizes the ecclesiastical institution for exalting suffering and seeking to explain the meaning of this life through a later life, when according to him, the original Gospel doctrine seeks to put an end to suffering through the practice of certain virtues. According to Tolstoy, the first evangelical commandment states, 'God wants neither sacrifice nor prayer, but peace, concord and love among you' (Tolstoy, *GB*, p. 74). The original doctrine seeks to favour the life of the spirit as the true life that nonetheless 'must be lived in the present'. And the third chapter of his version of the *Gospel* says: 'The kingdom of God is

not in time, or in place, of any kind, [...] it is within you.’ (*Ibid*, p. 62) This true life is not an external one but, on the contrary, it moves us from within, because for Tolstoy the God that Jesus preaches lies in our deepest being: God is man’s intimate spirit, or as Paul summarizes Jesus: “God is the life within man.” Neither is there any necessity to accept that Jesus is God made flesh, nor that another life exists. Detached from these dogmas, the *Gospels* contain a moral and social doctrine that leads us to build a better and more just society, or as his version of the *Gospel* says, a “temple of God; that is, the hearts of men when they love each other” (Tolstoy, *GB*, p. 174). As individual beings, we will necessarily die, and we die forever, but our life is not the same if we use to leave something to others, in serving others and thereby making a contribution to solidarity and justice reigning in the community of mankind. In this way, we will be fertile spirits and only thus will we be able to identify with the God that is within ourselves.

For Tolstoy, moreover, the test of this wisdom is none other than the attitude to death. For that reason, true faith is not that of the wealthy official or that of the bourgeois lady, but that of the people. The *muzhik* accepts privations without protest, though knowing that he will die; but the *muzhik*, unlike the nobleman, dies in peace, neither debating nor resisting death, because death is for him a natural and daily fact. This peace with which he faces death is a demonstration that his life has had meaning, and has had it because it has been an evangelical life, a life of service to others. The great nobleman, on the other hand, resists death because he feels that he has still not done that which is most important and, indeed, he has not: he has lived for himself, loving only himself, without committing himself to others beyond his own convenience. Tolstoy does not take refuge in the belief in a future life, but rather thinks that it is in this world where the God of *agape* must appear. The *Gospels* offer an attitude and a way of life that can give meaning to this naked existence and help us to accept our own death. We are part of a natural world and we live in community with others. Faith consists in accepting oneself as part of this natural world and guiding one’s life to the service of others, cultivating virtues, such as compassion, gratitude, forgiveness, and solidarity. For Tolstoy, the truth of Christianity is concentrated in this doctrine, and is illustrated in the life of the Russian peasant or poacher, who grows up in the country and cultivates or hunts, who sees the trees grow from saplings and occasionally cuts them down to, among other things, carve them into the cross for a tomb. This day-to-day awareness allows the *muzhik* to feel that he is part of a cycle

where death is a natural fact. His daily life, moreover, is always in function of service to others, continuous service at a daily level, with no need for great feats. Thus, for Tolstoy, what the Jesus of the *Gospels* has bequeathed us is not his death but his life, his emphasis on a life of service and surrender to others, a life that cultivates the spirit, disdaining the flesh, worldly wealth and, in general, the material world, being the only way to give meaning to human existence and thereby, conquering anguish in the face of death.

But, in what sense does the *Gospel* doctrine that Tolstoy proposes require religious faith? Could not somebody possibly give a central value to solidarity, humility, compassion or justice, without therefore believing in God? Tolstoy would seem to think in this respect that the *Gospel* doctrine cannot *only* be a moral doctrine; the search for these values is not motivated by either moral or utilitarian reasoning, but is rather motivated by consciousness of God within the human being. Thus, the *Gospel* answer precisely requires God as the motive that infuses in each individual the strength to establish and promote values such as humility, generosity, solidarity, justice, compassion, forgiveness and gratitude, service to others, etc., beyond utilitarian reasoning. And it is via the practice of these virtues, the virtues that summarize *Gospel agape*, that man manifests God and exists more fully outside time, in the eternal present. This is, for Tolstoy, the essence of Christianity.

But let us return to Wittgenstein. Given the context in which the thoughts of the *Notebooks* mentioned above arise (the First World War and being in the line of fire), it may be conjectured that Wittgenstein appeals to God as a sort of last hope faced by total absurdity; only God provides the possibility that his life (and possible death) have any meaning because only God would be able to integrate such events in a harmonious and organic whole.<sup>5</sup> Thus 'feeling completely safe' (come what may) can be seen as a consequence of this trust that the world and life are a whole with meaning, both ideas are related and inspire images in Wittgenstein such as that of 'being in hands of God' 'accepting his will', or the idea of seeing God as a father. But seeing life as providential, as if everything happened by God's Will, does not save us from moral commitments, we must make an effort to accept this providence, by not offering vain resistance, and struggling to

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<sup>5</sup> To understand the relationship between 'meaning of life' and 'integration in the whole', I know of no better texts than the papers by Luis Villoro included in the bibliography.

adjust our life to ‘the general form of life’. We know that Wittgenstein professes a sort of stoicism where destiny is another name for God, trying to change it is useless, for that, his ideal – according to what he says himself – ‘is a certain coolness. A temple providing a setting for the passions, without meddling with them.’ (*CV*, p. 2).

In other words, we trust that the world has meaning and that leads us to imagine that there is a way of integrating events – many of them painful and terrible – in a harmonious way. We have no idea how many of the things that we have been witness to during our lives could acquire meaning, but we trust that they do. But why trust that life has meaning, or what is the same thing in this context, that God exists? It seems to me that Wittgenstein trusts this for basically two reasons: the first is that he believes he glimpses it, what partly convinces him is a certain experience that he identifies as the manifestation of this meaning; and the second is the peculiar attraction that he feels for the Christian doctrine of salvation. Christianity offers him the redemption that he so strongly believes he needs. The former leads us to astonishment as a ‘correct perspective’ for capturing meaning, and the latter connects with the idea of guilt and redemption.

The second feature of Wittgensteinian religiousness that we have highlighted is astonishment at the existence of the world, mentioned in his conference on Ethics (Cf. *CE*, 38). We are astonished that the world exists, that it is there in a gratuitous and inexplicable way. Two aphorisms in the *Tractatus* point to this:

It is not *how* things are in the world that is mystical, but *that* it is. (*T* 6.44)

To view the world *sub specie aeterni* is to view it as a whole – a limited whole.

Feeling the world as a limited whole – it is this that is mystical. (*T* 6.45)

It is a matter of seeing the world (and therefore life) as a miracle (*CE*, 41-42), a sort of ‘sacred gesture’ (*CV*, 284, 1946), as a hierophany, to use Mircea Eliade’s term. This experience, that Wittgenstein considers central, is behind the gratitude for life, or the image of life as a gift, ideas that his texts sometimes transmit. Wittgenstein cultivates this astonishment, that for him includes no ingenuousness, but is rather a sort of primordial reaction that we need to live with profundity, but we forget because we spend our lives asleep. Moreover, Wittgenstein was a man who was very sensitive to beauty, educated and refined in the artistic

expressions of his time, and this second feature of his religiousness seeks to recover this more properly aesthetic dimension in his attitude: the yearning and cultivation of a perspective, a point of view that, on occasion, identifies with the artist's viewpoint, since 'the work of art forces us to adopt the correct perspective' (*CV*, p.4). In this way, beauty sometimes functions as a bridge towards religious feelings and images. But in addition to art,

... it seems to me too that there is a way of capturing the world *sub specie aeterni* other than through the work of the artist. Thought has such a way – so I believe – it is as though it flies above the world and leaves it as it is – observing it from above, in flight. (*CV*, p. 5)

Wittgenstein's reverential admiration extends to other things that are imbued with this hierophanic character: one can be astonished by the most ordinary things, by that which you see every day, when you see it in a certain way from the correct perspective, then that something becomes unique and magical. But what most astonishes Wittgenstein is thought and, in particular, he is astonished by his own thoughts, to which he often attributes a light that 'comes from above' (*CV*, 330, 1947). Wittgenstein feels that he is the depository of a thought that is beyond him, and to express it accurately and faithfully is, probably, what he feels to be his personal contribution to life, that whole with meaning, and therefore, as a way of celebrating and being grateful for the gift, the miracle of his life:

The joy in my thoughts (philosophical thoughts) is joy in my own strange life. Is that the joy of life? (*MT*, p. 117).

The story is told that when he returned from the First World War, he heard of the death of his friend David Pinsent and contemplated suicide. His uncle found him at the railway station, extremely upset, holding a text that was very close to what would become the *Tractatus*. In the end, he did not commit suicide; his desire to publish it probably saved his life, and this was surely not the last time that his philosophical work gave meaning to his life. Because if his philosophical work – which he liked to define as: 'to distinguish', 'to dissolve problems', 'to detect confusion', 'to take the fly out of the bottle' – acquires the capacity to give meaning to his life, it is because it is wrapped in religiousness, and, it seems to me, that it is in this sense that one would have to understand what he said to Drury: 'I am not a religious man, but I cannot help seeing every problem from a religious point of view.' (*Drury* p. 79)

To recapitulate: it seems clear that there is a relationship between the first two aspects of Wittgensteinian religiousness, on the one hand, religious faith as trust in the meaning of life allows us to see the gratuitousness of things as the object of reverential astonishment, and not, as it would be for some atheistic existentialists, as the obviousness of the absurdity of existence. Furthermore, the astonishment is not a consequence of the belief in the meaning of the world, it is rather a way of recognizing this meaning, of seeing what we are shown when we manage to adopt the correct perspective. In Tolstoy, on the other hand, this exaltation does not exist; he separates the aesthetic from the religious dimension and on the few occasions when there is religious exaltation (such as in Chapter XXII of *The Cossacks*, where Olenin has a sort of religious experience), this is bound to love, to generosity and contact with others.

Finally, I should like to pause at the third feature of what we have called the negative characteristic of Wittgensteinian religiousness and which consists of a sort of tragic dimension. In this respect, what Malcolm relates is significant: Wittgenstein feels no attraction for the idea of God as a creator, yet on the other hand, he does feel it faced by the image of the Final Judgement. According to what I have explained so far, linking God with the meaning of life, makes religion not a doctrine but a way of life, it leads to morals. But this is where the difference begins, for Tolstoy they are social morals, morals based on community values, while for Wittgenstein they would seem instead to lead to morals of a much more personal nature. Wittgenstein avoids human contact, he has few friends, he constantly seeks to be isolated and he does not seem to have much belief in human solidarity, nor to have a community vision such as that which might arise from Tolstoy's thinking. His friend Fania Pascal says that Wittgenstein fantasized about the Russia that he knew, not from his own experience, but from the texts of Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky, so we may suppose that his fantasies of community work and his idealization of the Russian worker have some relation with Tolstoy's admiration for the *muzhik*. It is also probable that Tolstoy influenced his decision to bequeath his inheritance to his family, and his desire to become a rural teacher, perhaps to apply the educational ideas of his admired Tolstoy. Nevertheless – and perhaps exactly because of his inability to fulfil these community ideals – Wittgenstein feels that he is excluded from this Tolstoyan project of collective salvation.

This relates to Wittgenstein's idea that the human being is lost and abandoned in this world: alone, wounded, lacking, and yearning for help,

comfort and salvation. The religion of meaning and astonishment are insufficient to cover this shortfall, since it arises from the yearning of the individual to be an active part of life, of this 'whole with meaning'; and it is because Man acts and seeks, that he errs and is lost. The perspective of meaning and astonishment can suddenly vanish, and then, once again, we are alone and disoriented. Moreover it is Christianity that offers Wittgenstein the road to redemption that he believes he desperately needs. And it is for this reason that almost all his comments on biblical texts refer to questions related to redemption and punishment: the Final Judgement, Jesus' resurrection as a test of his character as a redeemer, or comments on the Pauline doctrine of Predestination (which he completely fails to understand). One of the most significant aphorisms in this respect is the following:

What inclines even me to believe in Christ's Resurrection? It is as though I play with the thought. – If he did not rise from the dead, then he decomposed in the grave like any other man. *He is dead and decomposed.* In that case he is a teacher like any other and can no longer *help*; and once more we are orphaned and alone. So we have to content ourselves with wisdom and speculation. We are in a sort of hell where we can do nothing but dream, roofed in, as it were, and cut off from heaven. But if I am to be REALLY saved, – what I need is *certainty* – not wisdom, dreams or speculation – and this certainty is faith. And faith is faith in what is needed by my heart, my soul, not my speculative intelligence. For it is my soul with its passions, as it were with its flesh and blood, that has to be saved, not my abstract mind. Perhaps we can say: Only *love* can believe the Resurrection. (CV, p. 33)

It seems to me that this brings Wittgenstein closer to Kierkegaard than Tolstoy. Although he agrees with Tolstoy in thinking that religion leads to moral commitment, it is Kierkegaard who connects him to this more tragic dimension of religion. Although at times his rhetoric and reiterative style exasperated him, Wittgenstein admired and read Kierkegaard and there can be no doubt that there is a certain empathy with him. But, as with Tolstoy, let us make a very brief detour to better understand the relationship between them.

For Kierkegaard, it is consciousness of sin that brings man closer to religious faith because Christianity is above all a religion of salvation. His idea of the 'gentleman of faith' who trusts God above all and in spite of all, and who is capable of embracing the absurdity, and of standing alone when confronted by the world in order to avoid betraying his faith, and his idea

that we can refer our weakness and our sins only to God, are important references for this aspect of Wittgenstein's religiousness. He too lives his faith as a passion and as a requirement that the majority of the time he feels unable to fulfil. In general, his struggle takes place on two fronts: he rejects his sexuality because it seems to him that it makes him dirty, sometimes even finding it repugnant. Christianity's insistence on purity tortures him, he feels weak and constantly wrestles against his sexuality: 'I flee from the dirty basement of my pleasure and displeasure' (MP, p. 95). Another temptation that comes to him frequently, and where he loses, is his own vanity: "I soil everything with my vanity" (MP, p. 93). At one moment, he confesses to Drury that wounded vanity is the source of the greatest evil. Wittgenstein endures contact with most people, he has little patience and tolerance with many human characteristics, e.g. stupidity, vulgarity, arrogance, and he continually complains about the people around him. We know that he frequently sought isolation and that, for the most part, he found it in the Norwegian fjords where he wrote a good part of his work. But this sort of misanthropy, that was sometimes released against close friends (the few that still visited him or wrote to him), left a great deal of guilt in its wake, which is why he tortured himself and felt miserable: his lack of affection was obvious to him, his inability to feel and express love. He lived in some way above others, perhaps he could not avoid it, but when he realized this, he once again felt distant, very distant, from the Christian moral paradigm, 'only religion would have the power to destroy vanity and penetrate all the nooks and crannies' (CV, p. 48).<sup>6</sup>

Wittgenstein is then in a struggle against himself, he does not feel worthy of the salvation and the redemption that the Christian religion

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<sup>6</sup> Other similar elements include his dreams (of a Kafkaesque type), mentioned in his diaries. In one of them, voices scream something like, 'The debt must yet be paid' at him (MT, p.101), and in the other, he sees himself sitting in a sort of electric chair, 'like a criminal' (MT, .137). A second element is that we know that at one time he felt the need to confess a certain things that he was ashamed of. He then distributed a letter or made a verbal confession to some of his friends, and told them – according to Fania Pascal – that he has concealed the fact that he is of predominantly Jewish descent and that he lied when faced by a girl, a student of his, who accused him of mistreatment. For Wittgenstein, confessing to something amounts somehow to getting rid of it, gaining the possibility of making a fresh start, and is furthermore an act of humility, since a vain man cannot admit his weaknesses.

offers, and this makes him feel guilty and miserable and, consequently, the more in need of it; he wants to be worthy, he needs to be so, because – like Kierkegaard – he feels the immense need to be redeemed and saved (to a large extent from himself). Only religion can give him the strength to get up, to work, to try to transform his life into a part of that ‘whole with meaning’ that always threatens to disappear. Because, as we said above, the perspective can be lost and then the world is there again, but no longer as a “hierophany”, as a sacred gesture, but as an empty, barren place where ‘everything is dead’ (*MT*, p. 207).

Finally, the first and last features of his religiousness are intimately related: the meaning of life is translated into the Christian doctrine of sin and redemption, and consequently, life only has meaning and value to the degree that it conforms to this ‘system of references’; with the result that his own weakness, his inability to fulfil this model of purity and humility becomes, for Wittgenstein, a new source of guilt and suffering. Christianity offers him a redemption of which he does not feel worthy. But when he seeks to move away from these demands, the trust in meaning disappears.

Wittgenstein oscillates and his religiousness moves like a pendulum between belief and submission, distance and resistance. He sometimes thinks that it is ‘his depravities’ that prevent him from achieving faith (Cf. *MP*, p.159), but although his religiousness grows and shrinks, he never manages to break free from frame of reference that Christianity provides him with:

I may well reject the Christian solution of the problem of life (salvation, resurrection, judgment, heaven, hell) but this does not solve the problem of my life, for I am not good & not happy. I am not saved. And thus can I know what I would envision as the only acceptable image of a world order if I lived differently, lived completely differently. I can't judge that. After all, another life shifts completely different images into the foreground, necessitates completely different images (*MP*, p. 169).

In many moments of his life, Wittgenstein felt doubts about the Christian ‘system of references’, and although his disposition towards the blind submission of which Kierkegaard speaks diminished as the years went by, he never renounced a certain cultivation of his religiousness, he never stopped to take refuge and reproach himself – even though occasionally – with its images, and it is exactly for this reason that his religiousness shades his life and his writings in a fundamental way.

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*Translation from Spanish: Philip Daniels*



# “...to begin at the beginning”

## The Grammar of Doubt in Wittgenstein’s *On Certainty*

LUIGI PERISSINOTTO

### 1. *On Certainty*: a work by Wittgenstein?

Wittgenstein’s remarks published in 1969 with the title *Über Gewißheit / On Certainty*<sup>1</sup> have, ever since their appearance, attracted the attention of numerous scholars for at least the following three reasons:

1. Even though they are handwritten notations, never revised or polished by their author, they seem to have “a gratifying thematic unity and coherence” (Glock 2004: 64) that other groups of remarks do not have, to the point that, in some scholars’ opinion, they are entitled to be considered a “work” by Wittgenstein.<sup>2</sup>

2. The objective and the critical reference of these remarks seems clearly recognizable; many of them in fact make reference to and discuss in detail what George E. Moore maintained in some of his essays, in particular in *A Defence of Common Sense* (1925; republished in 1959) and

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<sup>1</sup> See Wittgenstein 1974; hereafter cited with the abbreviation *OC* followed by the section number.

<sup>2</sup> For an attempt to answer the question “What is a work by Wittgenstein?” see Schulte 2006, who seems to think that *On Certainty* can be numbered among Wittgenstein’s “works” even if it satisfies only one of the three criteria he lists. For Schulte, in fact, “[t]o find out whether a certain manuscript or typescript is to count as a ‘work’ by Wittgenstein one should try to establish whether (a) the author himself thought that the text in question formed a more or less organic whole displaying a satisfactory relation between form and content; (b) whether we as readers can detect a line of argument with theses, supporting reasons, objections, examples, etc.; (c) whether the text has undergone a certain amount of stylistic polishing and rearranging of individual remarks showing that there has been some improvement in the direction of enhanced readability and intelligibility” (Schulte 2006: 402). With respect to these three criteria, the presumably most puzzling case is precisely *On Certainty*: “In this case, criteria (a) and (c) are clearly not satisfied at all. Criterion (b), however, which requires us as readers to be able to find a line of argument, an interesting ensemble of questions, objections and replies may lead us to think very highly of this book (Schulte 2006: 403-404).

in *Proof of an External World* (1939; republished in 1959).<sup>3</sup> For many scholars, the reference to specific texts, to a specific philosopher and to an identifiable ensemble of philosophical problems has seemed to make it easier and less elusive to grasp the meaning and the implications of many of these remarks.

3. In these remarks it seems that Wittgenstein takes the measure of some clearly identifiable philosophical orientations: scepticism, relativism, foundationalism, naturalism. This may be why many philosophers, perusing the remarks of *On Certainty*, do not experience the sense of bewilderment they do, for example, in confronting the *Philosophical Investigations*. And this is also why many have not hesitated to apply to these remarks some of the most classical labels of philosophy, asking, from one time to the next (and, obviously, responding in different and often contradictory ways), whether the Wittgenstein of *On Certainty* was a foundationalist or an anti-foundationalist; a sceptic or an anti-sceptic; a relativist or an absolutist; a naturalist or an anti-naturalist. It would almost seem that in the case of *On Certainty* many interpreters found less impelling or decisive the classical metaphilosophical questions<sup>4</sup> on the relationship between Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy and his philosophical practice.

So, as we have seen, *On Certainty* has been interpreted in different ways and located in various positions in the context of Wittgenstein's philosophy. As regards its location, suffice it to recall how, recently, one scholar has gone so far as to coin the expression "the third Wittgenstein" (Moyal-Sharrock 2004) with the fundamental aim of drawing attention to

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<sup>3</sup> This is not to say that Moore is the sole point of reference of *On Certainty*; as has recently been emphasized (Kienzler 2006), another (and wrongfully underestimated) point of reference is represented by John Henry Newman and, in particular, his *Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (Newman 1890). In *On Certainty* Newman is mentioned only once, in parentheses, in §1: "If you do know that *here is a hand* [the English translation has "one hand," but Kienzler 2006: 117 note 1, proposes the translation "a hand," because the first translation "gives the wrong suggestion that Wittgenstein is thinking about numbers here"], we'll grant you all the rest. / (When one says that such and such proposition can't be proved, of course that does not mean that it can't be derived from other propositions; any proposition can be derived from other ones. But they may be no more certain than it is itself.) (On this a curious remark by H. Newman.)"

<sup>4</sup> According to Wright, for example, "it's fair to say that a *real* integration of Wittgenstein's official conception of philosophy with his own practice is something which has so far eluded even the best commentary" (Wright 2001: 439).

Wittgenstein’s work of the last years of his life, but above all to *On Certainty*, considered in this sphere to be “Wittgenstein’s third masterpiece” (Moyal-Sharrock 2004: 10, note 3); “a philosophical masterpiece comparable to the *Tractatus* and to the *Investigations*” (Stroll 2002: 125). Obviously, not everyone agrees on the idea of a “third” Wittgenstein (see, for example, Hutto 2004) or on the importance attributed to *On Certainty* in the first place, maintaining that the spirit and the theme of the remarks in that work are not so significantly different from those that can be found, for example, in the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* (Wittgenstein 1986)<sup>5</sup> or in the remarks published with the title “Cause and Effect: Intuitive Awareness” (Wittgenstein 1993).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> “For Wittgenstein [...] there is nothing genuinely propositional about his so-called hinge propositions, save their outward appearance. They are propositions in name only; even calling them such is a misnomer. They do not function as ordinary propositions at all, and hence ought properly to be classified as non-propositional; once it is exposed that they operate like grammatical rules, it becomes clear that they neither rationally fund other pieces of knowledge nor can be discovered by means of ratiocination. This is made clear by a host of remarks concerning rules even in his earlier work *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, which neatly foreshadow those presented in *On Certainty*” (Hutto 2004: 29). I remind the reader that the writings published with the title *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* date from the period between September 1937 and April 1944, with the sole exception of Appendix I to Part I that dates from 1933-1934; the remarks collected in *On Certainty*, by contrast, date from the last year and a half of Wittgenstein’s life; the last 7 are dated 27 April (1951); Wittgenstein died on April 29th.

<sup>6</sup> “[...] many of the leading themes in *On Certainty* were already anticipated in material Wittgenstein had written in 1937, shortly after he had assembled the first 188 sections of the *Investigations* (‘Cause and Effect’)” (Stern 1996: 447). It is for this reason that the remarks of *On Certainty* ought not be read—as, instead, they generally have—as a set of suggestive but inconclusive first drafts, or as a response to discussions of skepticism and G. E. Moore with Norman Malcolm” (Stern 1994: 447). Van Gennip 2003 reaches very similar conclusions: “Wittgenstein’s concern with epistemological concepts is not limited to MSS 172, 174, 175, 176 [the manuscripts that constitute the sources of *On Certainty*]: other manuscripts of the same period contain notes on related issues. Moreover, there are several earlier manuscripts that contain reflection on the same topics” (131). As we have glimpsed, there are also substantial disagreements on the role played by Moore in *On Certainty*. For some scholars Moore, for Wittgenstein, was little more than a pretext; for others, such as Malcolm 1977, he was a genuine interlocutor. The same considerations hold for the role played by the discussions about Moore with Norman Malcolm (see, in this regard, Malcolm 1984: 70-74).

Also as regards the work's internal division into parts there are significant differences of opinion. Williams 2004, for example, distinguishes the first 64 remarks<sup>7</sup> in *On Certainty*, influenced above all by Moore's 1939 essay (*Proof of an External World*) and whose predominant theme or problem is, allegedly, "Cartesian scepticism, the problem of our knowledge of the external world" (260), from the successive remarks, which are more influenced by Moore's other and earlier essay, *A Defence of Common Sense*. In this case Wittgenstein would seem to be "primarily concerned with Agrippan scepticism, the kind of scepticism that grows out of reflection on what threatens to be an infinite regress of justification" (260). For his part, Stroll 1994 (but see also Stroll 2007) maintains that in the course of *On Certainty* Wittgenstein's position changes and progresses: the certainty that he had initially thought of "in propositional terms" (Stroll 1994: 7) is later, at least from remark 204 on, increasingly conceived in nonpropositional terms.<sup>8</sup>

The—also radical—differences of opinion increase when we examine the full-fledged interpretations of *On Certainty*. Moyal-Sharrock/Brenner 2007, for example, individuate four basic interpretative orientations that they term, respectively, "the framework reading," "the transcendental reading," "the epistemic reading," and "the therapeutic reading" (7-14). But in the domain of each reading the differences and contrapositions multiply. If for Stroll 1994 in *On Certainty* Wittgenstein was a foundationalist even if of a most particular kind, and certainly "not of a traditional sort" (141), for Williams 2007 thinking to number Wittgenstein among the foundationalists is judged to be, to say the least, "a bad idea" (49). If for Boghossian 2006 the Wittgenstein of *On Certainty* was an epistemic relativist, for Coliva 2010 he was indeed an anti-foundationalist, but, *pace* Boghossian, by no means an epistemic relativist (21). If for Perissinotto 2002 it is misleading to speak, a propos of *On Certainty*, of a naturalistic tendency, by contrast both Strawson 1985 and

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<sup>7</sup> Even if Williams speaks of the first 64 remarks, we must recall that also remark 65 belongs to the same MS 172 from which remarks 1-64 are drawn; by contrast, the successive group of remarks (66-192) derive from MS 174. For a detailed description of the sources of *On Certainty* and of the editorial choices that led to its formation, see van Gennip 2003.

<sup>8</sup> Broadly speaking, Stroll 1994 maintains that "the main burden of his book [*On Certainty*] is to give a characterization of certainty that radically dissociates it from knowing, that makes it 'something animal as it were' (*OC*: §359)" (7).

Wolgast 1994 speak, even if in different senses, of the naturalism of this work.

## 2. Kant: “a scandal to philosophy”

As we know, Moore begins his 1939 essay *Proof of an External World* by quoting<sup>9</sup> a famous note to the preface of the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* in which Kant observes that

it still remains a scandal to philosophy [*ein Skandal der Philosophie*] and to human reason in general that the existence of things outside us<sup>10</sup> (from which we derive the whole material of knowledge, even for our inner sense) must be accepted merely *on faith* [*bloß auf Glauben*], and that if anyone thinks it good [*einfällt*] to doubt [*bezweifeln*] their existence, we are unable to counter his doubts by any satisfactory proof [*genugtuenden Beweis*]” (Kant 1787/2003: B xl, note).

The passage merits an analytic comment.<sup>11</sup> In any event, the concept to which I wish to draw your attention here is that of faith [*Glaube*]. What is to be understood by the terms “Glaube” and “Glauben” Kant will explain in the second major section of the *Critique*, the “Transcendental Doctrine of Method,” where he differentiates and illustrates in detail (Kant 1787/2003: A 820-831; B 848-859) the three different degrees of that which he calls “[t]he holding of a thing to be true [*as Fürwahrhalten*]”: “*opining* [*Meinen*], *believing* [*Glauben*], and *knowing* [*Wissen*]”:

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<sup>9</sup> Moore 1959: 127. In this section of my essay I adopt the classic 1929 Kemp Smith translation of the *Critique of Pure Reason* because this is the translation followed, and quoted, by Moore. A more recent translation gives—more literally—“a scandal of philosophy” rather than “a scandal to philosophy.”

<sup>10</sup> Moore maintains that “the existence of *the* things outside of us” renders better than the Kemp Smith translation (“the existence of things outside us”) the German “*das Dasein der Dinge ausser uns*” (Moore 1959: 127).

<sup>11</sup> This passage was taken up and ironically overturned by Heidegger in *Being and Time* (Heidegger 1927/1962: I, 6, §43a, p. 249): “The ‘scandal of philosophy’ is not that this proof has yet to be given, but that *such proofs are expected and attempted again and again*. [...] It is not that the proofs are inadequate, but that the kind of Being of the entity [*Dasein*] which does the proving and makes requests for proofs *has not been made definite enough*.” Strawson 1985: 24 compares the Kantian and the Heideggerian passages, including in his comparison a quote from *On Certainty* (§471: “It is so difficult to find the beginning. Or, better: it is difficult to begin at the beginning. And not try to go further back”), wishing in this way to suggest an alliance between Heidegger and Wittgenstein in the criticism of Kant.

*Opining* is such holding of a judgment as is consciously insufficient, not only objectively, but also subjectively. If our holding of the judgment be only subjectively sufficient, and is at the same time taken as being objectively insufficient, we have what is termed *believing*. Lastly, when the holding of a thing to be true is sufficient both subjectively and objectively, it is *knowledge*. The subjective sufficiency is termed *conviction* [*Überzeugung*] (for myself), the objective sufficiency is termed *certainty* [*Gewißheit*] (for everyone).

Kant does not have a great deal to say about opining. He limits himself to specifying, first, that “if [...] I have nothing but opinion, it is all merely a play of the imagination, without the least relation to truth” and, second, that there are domains, such as that of pure mathematics, from which all opinion is excluded: “it is absurd to have an opinion in pure mathematics; either we must know, or we must abstain from all acts of judgment.” He has considerably more to say about believing and about the threefold distinction between pragmatic, doctrinal, and moral belief.

As far as pragmatic belief is concerned, Kant tells us that this is a “contingent belief, which yet forms the ground for the actual employment of means to certain actions.” The example Kant gives us is very clear. Let us imagine a physician who “must do something for a patient in danger, but does not know the nature of his illness.” Like all good doctors, “[h]e observes the symptoms, and if he can find no more likely alternative, judges it to be a case of phthisis.” The point is that “even in his own estimation his belief is contingent only; another observer might perhaps come to a sounder conclusion.” Nevertheless, our doctor must take action if he wants his patient to recover, and since he sees no alternatives to his diagnosis, he has to trust in the belief (which, as we have seen, is contingent “even in his own estimation”) that this is a case of phthisis and, therefore, that he must apply all those means (medications, changes of environment, etc.) that, he believes, are suitable for curing this disease. It is obvious that pragmatic belief understood in this way is different from simple opinion—for example, from the opinion of someone who is not a doctor who nevertheless hazards a diagnosis: our doctor observes (as a doctor, i.e., as an expert) the symptoms and judges (as a doctor) that there are no more probable alternatives. But his is still a contingent belief, “theoretically insufficient,” because he cannot rule out the possibility that “another observer might perhaps come to a sounder conclusion.” Nothing

is necessary here: neither the end pursued<sup>12</sup> nor the belief that the patient has phthisis nor the belief that the means employed are the most adequate. Nevertheless, “from a practical point of view”—i.e., with respect to the need to act—we can call “belief,” and not simply opinion, this our holding what is “theoretically insufficient” to be true. Indeed, it is not easy to distinguish between a simple persuasion and a firm faith; for Kant, the wager<sup>13</sup> can be a good “touchstone” for distinguishing the one from the other: when one is confronted with a particularly demanding wager, that which appeared to be a firm faith can prove to be a simple persuasion.<sup>14</sup> This shows, among other things, that “pragmatic belief always exists in some specific degree, which, according to differences in the interests at stake, may be large or may be small.”

Kant, then, goes on to distinguish between pragmatic belief and that which he calls “doctrinal belief,”<sup>15</sup> namely, a holding to be true which is not practical but, rather, “purely theoretical” (i.e., not immediately conditioned by the need to act). The two examples of doctrinal belief Kant gives us are very different, in terms of content and importance: the belief that other worlds are inhabited, and the belief that God exists.<sup>16</sup> Neither one is a simple opinion; in both cases, in fact, “I am saying much too little if I proceed to declare that I hold it merely as an opinion.” I do not opine, but rather I hold a firm faith (“on the correctness of which I should be prepared to run great risks”) that also other worlds are

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<sup>12</sup> In this domain—the practical domain of skills—the ends pursued are not “absolutely necessary,” but rather “optional and contingent.”

<sup>13</sup> There is a passage of Wittgenstein’s in the *Lectures on Religious Belief* (Wittgenstein 1966: 57-58) that brings to mind Kant’s considerations on the wager. Here Wittgenstein refers to Christianity and wonders what relation it has with the evidence that Jesus has risen. We are faced with at least two alternatives: either we consider such evidence on the same plane as historical pieces of evidence, but then we have to conclude that Christians are “unreasonable,” because on such weak evidence (from the historical standpoint) “[t]hey base [wager?] enormous things”; or else we have to conclude that they “treat this evidence in a different way” from how a historian normally treats a piece of historical evidence (for example, Napoleon’s defeat at Waterloo). In his lectures, Wittgenstein explores the second alternative.

<sup>14</sup> Kant calls “persuasion” [*Überredung*] “the holding of it to be true,” which “has its ground only in the special character of the subject.”

<sup>15</sup> For the purposes of this essay we can omit the consideration of the third type of belief, namely, moral belief.

<sup>16</sup> To these two examples of doctrinal belief Kant adds the “doctrinal belief in the future life of the human soul.”

inhabited; just as I do not opine, but “I firmly believe in God.”<sup>17</sup> Indeed, as Kant often reminds us, from the speculative viewpoint we are not able to account for our belief in God.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, we can postulate the existence of God, i.e., of “a wise Author of the world [...], as a condition of what is indeed a contingent, but still not unimportant purpose, namely, to have guidance in the investigation of nature.”<sup>19</sup> In cases such as these, then, “while opining is doubtless too weak a term to be applicable, the term knowing is too strong.”

Now, the first part of the passage just quoted definitely holds in the case—with which we began—of the existence of the things outside us. It would unquestionably be a “scandal to philosophy” if, with regard to a case such as this, we could exhibit solely and simply an opinion, “without the least relation to truth.” What, indeed, could be more scandalous for philosophy than not having “the least relation to truth”? But—and this is the point that interests us here—the scandal would be at least equally great if we were to admit that the belief in the existence of the things outside us is only a doctrinal belief, as subjectively firm as one could wish, but nonetheless objectively ungrounded. In our case, then, knowing can never be “too strong” a term.

On this point Kant is clear and explicit. In the section of the “Transcendental Doctrine of Method” that we are considering, at a certain point he remarks that also the doctrinal belief that is firmest for us “is somewhat lacking in stability”; in fact, “we often lose hold of it, owing to

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<sup>17</sup> In the aforementioned *Lectures on Religious Belief* Wittgenstein observes, with reference to a belief in a Last Judgment: “[...] one would be reluctant to say: ‘These people rigorously hold the opinion (or view) that there is a Last Judgment.’ ‘Opinion’ sounds queer. It is for this reason that different words are used: ‘dogma,’ ‘faith.’ / We don’t talk about hypothesis, or about high probability. Nor about knowing” (Wittgenstein, 1966, 57).

<sup>18</sup> This is why, for Kant, doctrinal belief cannot be called “hypothesis” either: “Were I even to go the length of describing the merely theoretical holding of the belief as an hypothesis which I am justified in assuming, I should thereby be pledging myself to have a more adequate concept of the character of a cause of the world and of the character of another world than I am really in a position to supply.”

<sup>19</sup> It is in this sense that, in analogy with pragmatic belief, here we can speak of “belief”: “But in many cases, when we are dealing with an object about which nothing can be done by us, and in regard to which our judgment is therefore purely theoretical, we can conceive and picture to ourselves an attitude for which we regard ourselves as having sufficient grounds, while yet there is no existing means of arriving at certainty in the matter.”

the speculative difficulties which we encounter, although in the end we always inevitably return to it.” Obviously, that “we always inevitably return to it” cannot mean that we have resolved all—and once and for all—those speculative difficulties; if that were the case, belief would finally have been replaced by knowledge. The oscillation is, in this sense, constitutive of doctrinal belief. But in the case of the existence of the things outside us it is precisely this oscillating instability (which stems from our incapacity to pit “any satisfactory proof” against the doubts on the existence of the things outside us) that gives rise to scandal. In short, in this case not only opinion but also belief is “too weak” a term. This means that, at least in the case of the existence of the things outside us, we cannot be satisfied with (subjective) conviction but, rather, we must philosophically demand (objective) certainty. Indeed, there are cases—and that of the existence of God is one of them—in which “the expression of belief is, from the *objective* point of view, an expression of modesty, and yet at the same time, from a *subjective* point of view, an expression of the firmness of our confidence.” For Kant, nevertheless, modesty is not always a philosophical virtue—and most certainly not when it masks the incapacity to give a satisfactory proof, precisely where such a proof is, as it were, philosophically due.<sup>20</sup> An excess of modesty can in fact be the equivalent of the triumph of the sceptic who—with his doubts—wishes, precisely, to induce us to admit that there is never knowledge, but only and always opinion and belief.

### 3. Moore: “the first and most important problem of philosophy”

That modesty is not always a philosophical virtue is a point on which Moore agrees with Kant, and on which—he contends—philosophers (or most of them, at least) have always agreed. In *Some Main Problems of Philosophy*, for example, after stating his view that “the first and most important problem of philosophy is: To give a general description of the *whole* Universe” (Moore 1953: 1-2),<sup>21</sup> he remarks that philosophers have

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<sup>20</sup> Here Kant speaks from the viewpoint of he who has been able to give a satisfactory proof—indeed, a “rigorous proof” (Kant 1787/2003: B xl, note)—of the existence of the things outside us. In giving this proof he also demonstrated that it had to be given. In this regard, see also Moore, 1959, 127-128.

<sup>21</sup> Moore describes in greater detail “the most important and interesting thing which philosophers have tried to do [...]: To give a general description of the *whole* Universe, mentioning all the most important kinds of things which we *know* to be in it,

not been content simply to express their opinions<sup>22</sup> as to what there is or is not in the Universe, or as to what we know to be in it. They have also tried to prove their opinion to be true (23).

For example, the philosopher cannot be satisfied with expressing his opinion on the existence of God; he “must prove<sup>23</sup> either that there is a God, or that there is not, or that we do not know whether there is one or not” (24); just as he cannot be satisfied with expressing his opinion on the existence of a future life. And that which holds for God and for a future life holds also for all the other kinds of things that, for Moore, fall within the philosopher’s field of expertise: for example, “matter and space and time; and the minds of other men; and other minds, *not* the minds of men and animals” (24).<sup>24</sup> Obviously, the philosopher cannot, for that matter, be satisfied with the simple assertion that in the Universe there are, for example, material objects; he must also define what he means by material object and, therefore, what he means by the assertion that in the Universe there are material objects (24).<sup>25</sup>

All this defining, proving and refuting belongs, for Moore, “to that department of philosophy which is called Metaphysics” (25); but there is also another department that has strictly to do with “the first main problem as to general description of the Universe” (25): to wit, the department of Logic,<sup>26</sup> which is characterized by the question “How do we *know* anything at all?” or “What is knowledge?” (25-26). For Moore, such a question can be understood in the psychological sense as a question “as to what happens in your mind, when you know anything” (26); but, in another sense (that by which it belongs to the department of Logic), the question of what knowledge is refers to the “question [of]

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considering how far it is likely that there are in it important kinds of things which we do not absolutely *know* to be in it, and also considering the most important ways in which these various kinds of things are related to one other” (Moore 1953: 1).

<sup>22</sup> Here the term “opinions” can include also what Kant terms “beliefs.”

<sup>23</sup> As Moore specifies, proving a given view is equivalent to refuting all the others (Moore 1953: 24).

<sup>24</sup> As Moore emphasizes, at least in this domain the questions of definition are not “mere questions of words” and a good definition “is not only a question of clearness” (Moore 1953: 24).

<sup>25</sup> Let us recall that Moore dedicates most of *Proof of an External World* (16 pages out of 24) to clarifying the meaning of the expressions “things outside of us” and “external things” (Moore 1959: 127-150).

<sup>26</sup> Moore specifies that here Logic is to be understood “in the widest sense of the term” (Moore 1953: 26).

what is meant by saying that any proposition is *true*.”<sup>27</sup> There is, finally, a third thing that can be understood by the question “How do you know that?”. In this case too, the question is not psychological but logical: “what reason have you for believing it? or in other words, what *other* thing do you know, which *proves* this thing to be *true*?” (26).<sup>28</sup>

Now, one thing that strikes us here is that the questions of the philosopher are not at all different from the ones we pose in nonphilosophical contexts; “in ordinary life,” as Moore puts it. For example, “[o]ne of the most natural questions to ask, when anybody asserts some fact, which you are inclined to doubt, is the question: How do you know that?” (25). For example, I can be inclined to doubt what Paul just told me on the phone, namely, that today there is a railway strike: I read the newspaper carefully and there was no such news; over the past few days no one said anything to me about strikes of any kind, et cetera. In a case like this it is natural that I ask Paul how he knows about it, and that I be satisfied if he answers me, for example, that he just heard about it on the radio. Obviously, I would not accept all possible answers. If he should answer that he dreamed it the previous night, my conclusion would be that he really does not know; and this would continue to be my conclusion even if it turned out that today there really is a railway strike. Indeed, Moore remarks that

if the person answers the question in such a way as to shew that he has not learnt the fact in any one of the ways in which it is possible to acquire real knowledge, as opposed to mere belief, about facts of this sort, you will conclude that he does not really know it (25).

At least two points need to be emphasized here. The first, which will find a clear echo in *On Certainty*, is that the question “How do you know that?” arises when reasons are given that make us doubt whether an individual really knows what he claims to know. But not all the reasons for doubting are good reasons. The question of whether the reasons are “good” depends on the ways we judge to be among the possible ways to “acquire real *knowledge* of certain kinds of facts” (25). In our example,

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<sup>27</sup> “For we do not say that we *know* any proposition, for instance the proposition that matter exists, unless we mean to assert that this proposition is *true*: that it is *true* that matter exists” (Moore, 1953, 25-26).

<sup>28</sup> In more general terms: “what are the different ways in which a proposition can be proved to be true; what are the different sorts of reasons which are good reasons for believing anything [?]” (Moore, 1953, 26).

dreaming does not belong to the ways in which we can acquire real knowledge of the fact that a strike is in progress. Now, just as these ways are of a “limited number,” so are the good reasons for doubting them. As we have seen, dreaming is not, in the case of our example, one of the ways to “acquire real *knowledge*”; but, for that matter, in this case it is not among the reasons for continuing to doubt that Paul really knows that there is a railway strike either, once he has answered my question “How do you know that?” with “I just heard about it on the radio!”.

A second point regards the philosophical doubt—i.e., the question “How do you know that?”—insofar as it is posed in relation to that type of things and at that level of generality which, for Moore, fall within the philosopher’s field of expertise. For example: How do you know that an external world exists? How do you know that there are material objects? How do you know that minds exist? As we have seen, in ordinary life we usually doubt that someone knows what he claims to know when the reasons on the basis of which we customarily establish that someone knows (and not just believes) are (or seem to be) absent, weak, or insufficient. But from where in philosophy does that inclination to doubt arise which—in ordinary life—makes the question “How do you know that?” perfectly natural? By his own admission, Moore found many of the philosophers’ doubts—for example, about the reality of time—to be “*perfectly monstrous*”<sup>29</sup> (Moore 1942:14).<sup>30</sup> In saying this he wanted at least to emphasize the fact that there was no good reason for doubting—for doubting the existence of the external world, for example—and that, consequently, the question “How do you know that?” was here, to say the least, unnatural. And yet, however “perfectly monstrous” they may be, those doubts were nevertheless, for Moore, *real* doubts and, therefore, doubts that demanded an answer to the question “How do you know that?”. From this point of view, to Moore’s eyes doubt and knowledge were not by any means symmetrical. While in fact not every belief is real knowledge, all doubts are real, whether or not there are good reasons for doubting. In this manner Moore accepts without discussion the metaphysical idea that philosophical doubt be that doubt which intervenes

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<sup>29</sup> Perhaps also for Moore, as for Heidegger, even if for profoundly different reasons, the scandal in this domain was less the absence of a proof than it was, rather, that one continued to seek it and to demand it.

<sup>30</sup> Moore, in the passage quoted, refers to a proposition such as “time is unreal,” characteristic of English idealism. We note that he interprets the proposition as the result of a skeptical doubt about the reality of time.

exactly when there is no longer anything to doubt. In this sense doubt cannot but be its own reason: one doubts because one doubts. That this be so is confirmed by Kant—where, in the note on the “scandal to philosophy,” he depicts doubt as something that befalls us [*einfällt*], something that stands between the accidental and the voluntary. And yet—for Kant as for Moore—we must respond to this doubt, if we are not to give rise, philosophically, to scandal.

#### 4. Wittgenstein: learning to doubt

This is precisely Wittgenstein’s starting point—in *On Certainty*, but also in other texts: In order to doubt, is wanting to doubt sufficient? Can doubt depend on our arbitrary choice? In short, can we want or choose to doubt? Can the question “How do you know that?” always be posed? Is it, in this sense, an absolute question? Must we admit that doubt is philosophically the more rooted the less it calls upon the reasons that normally make us doubt? Is this what specifically distinguishes philosophical doubt: doubting simply because we want to doubt? But, indeed, to doubt, is wanting to doubt sufficient?

A good starting point can be a question we find in the *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*:

How does it come about that doubt is not subject to arbitrary choice [*Willkür*]? (Wittgenstein 1980: II, §343a).

To respond, Wittgenstein, in keeping with his customary philosophical method, makes a comparison—in this case, a comparison with making a mistake in calculation. Can there be something like a voluntary mistake? Sure, I can pretend, for a great variety of reasons, to have made a mistake. For example, if my nephew is learning arithmetic, to make him laugh and also encourage him I can write on the blackboard “7” after “ $2 + 2 =$ ”. So, I can pretend I have made a mistake; but—posing the question anew—can I make a mistake voluntarily? All I can do voluntarily is to put myself in the condition to make a mistake; for example, by beginning to do a particularly complex calculation late in the evening when I’m tired and unable to concentrate. In any case—and for Wittgenstein this is the essential point—” [a] person [...] can miscalculate only if he has learnt to calculate.<sup>31</sup> In this case it is indeed involuntary

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<sup>31</sup> The same holds, obviously, for pretending to make a mistake: only if I know how to calculate can I pretend to make a mistake.

[*unwillkürlich*]” (II, §343b). Now, the same holds for doubting: “[a] person can doubt only if he has learnt certain things” (II, §343b). And his doubting is, in this sense, just as involuntary as his miscalculating.

There is no question that something—indeed, many and different things—depends on our arbitrary choice. Doubting, however, is not one of them, but rather, for example, the adopting of “certain *phrases*” [*Redensarten*] (II, §342a) and of “way[s] of acting” (*Handlungweise[n]*) (II, §344), i.e., of those ways of saying and of acting in which we customarily express doubt. But the fact that someone declares he is doubting does not mean he *is* doubting; just as someone who looks closely at a chair and feels it on all sides does not always doubt that it really is a chair:

If I have doubts that this is a chair, what do I do?—I look at it and feel it on all sides, and so forth. But is this way of acting always an expression of doubt? No. If a monkey or a child were to do this it wouldn’t be. Only someone who is acquainted with such a thing as “a reason for doubt” [*Grund zum Zweifeln*] can doubt (II, §344).

Obviously, we can recognize in certain behaviours (for example, “[t]he mere act of turning an object all around and looking it over”)<sup>32</sup> that which might be called “a primitive root of doubt”; but, Wittgenstein insists, “there is doubt only when the typical antecedents and consequences of doubt are present” (II, §345). And this means that it is the manner in which the different ways of saying and acting are “embedded in human life, in all of the situations and reactions which constitute human life” (II, §16) that makes a doubt a doubt.

Now, there are many things that we learn while we are learning to doubt. I doubt whether there is any more bread in the pantry because I haven’t bought any for days. If this is the reason for my doubting, then it is sufficient that I open the pantry and check in order to confirm my doubt, or not. But the reasons that I ask for and that I give refer, precisely, to the many things I have learned. For example, I’ve learned to buy bread when there’s no more bread in the house: bread does not appear out of nowhere in the pantry. And I’ve learned this by watching and participating since I was a child in scenes of this kind: my mother who tells my father, “Buy some bread on your way home from the office”; my father who exclaims, “Today I forgot to buy bread!”; my sister who says,

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<sup>32</sup> Or in the behavior of “an ape who tears apart a cigarette” (Wittgenstein 1980: II, §344) [something we never see an intelligent dog do].

with a tone of reproach, “There’s no bread today because papa forgot to buy it”; my father who ripostes, “Look in the pantry; maybe there’s a little left over from yesterday.” No one taught me that bread doesn’t appear out of nowhere; rather, many times I was sent to buy it because everyone in the family had forgotten to do so. This is why, if now I know that I didn’t buy it, I have a good reason to doubt whether there is any bread in the pantry. And if I *did* buy it, I expect without the least hesitation to find it when I open the pantry. Indeed, it’s not that I expect to find it; I simply open the pantry and put it on the table. And if I don’t find it, I begin, perhaps, to doubt my memory (“Old age plays dirty tricks!”), but not, as it were, to doubt the bread: bread does not simply vanish. I’ve learned to doubt by learning the many things that make up my life; doubt is embedded in this life. How and from where could I possibly doubt my life? And what could “doubt my life” possibly mean?

But—one may object—all this business about the bread is obvious, and with regard to these—philosophically speaking—banalities the skeptic will raise no objection. The sceptic, too, goes out to buy bread, or sends someone to buy it for him; he complains when someone forgets to buy it; he looks in the pantry to see whether at least a half-a-loaf is left; he doesn’t continue to ask whether there really is bread while he’s eating it, or whether what he’s about to eat is really bread, or is, rather, a perfect imitation of it. But watch out for the tone, the *Stimmung*, with which the sceptic describes his and our condition, and for the conclusions he draws. As Wittgenstein remarks, the sceptic grants us that, as a rule, neither he nor we doubt, but if we don’t doubt it is because “[w]e just *can’t* investigate everything, and for that reason we are forced to rest content with assumption [*Annahme*]” (*OC*: §343). The sceptic’s tone is that of renunciation and resignation: indeed, he tells us, if we want to live, we can’t investigate everything because (think of Kant’s “pragmatic belief”) the needs and urgencies of life are opposed to such an investigation; but this does not alter—indeed, it confirms—the fact that our life is, as Descartes put it, under the sign of “hasty judgment” [*précipitation*] and of “prejudice” [*prévention*] (Descartes 1637/1998: 11).<sup>33</sup> What the sceptic

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<sup>33</sup> The two expressions appear in the formulation of the first rule of the method: “[...] never accept anything as true that I did not plainly know to be such; that is to say, carefully to avoid hasty judgment and prejudice; and to include nothing more in my judgments than what presented itself to my mind so clearly and distinctly that I had no occasion to call it in doubt” (Descartes 1637/1998: 11).

grants us is not a true concession. Hence it is useless to remind him that, as a rule, neither he nor we doubt.

But what do we renounce when we refrain from investigating everything? And, even before that, what would “investigating everything” be? The answer of the sceptic and the metaphysician to the first question seems a foregone conclusion: we renounce philosophy itself, if not reason as such—in other words, that which, for Descartes, is the fundamental philosophical intention: “to find ground of assurance, and cast aside the loose earth and sand, that I might reach the rock and the clay” (Descartes 1637/2002: 28).<sup>34</sup> Sure, the sceptic, unlike Descartes, under the sand only finds other sand; but, like Descartes, he maintains that one must dig nevertheless. It is only this digging that renders us philosophers.

And what, exactly, would “investigating everything” be? Obviously, and in the first place, it would be investigating our investigating itself. Trusting neither our judgments (whether they have been made explicit or are implicit in our action) nor the ways through which we arrived at them: this, precisely, is the motto of the philosopher. In this sense, mistrust is the philosopher’s distinctive trait—it is what makes him a philosopher. This is exactly the point to which Wittgenstein repeatedly returns in *On Certainty*: insisting that without trust there would be no investigating to investigate; no judging to judge:

Must I not begin to trust [*trauen*] somewhere? That is to say: somewhere I must begin with not-doubting; and that is not, so to speak, hasty but excusable [*vorschnell aber verzeihlich*]: it is part of judging (*OC*: §150).

Wittgenstein’s difference from the sceptic consists entirely, we might say, in the different *Stimmung* of their respective considerations: where the sceptic speaks of “being satisfied” Wittgenstein speaks of “trust.” The sceptic says: I cannot investigate everything, but I ought to; investigating everything remains an ideal that is de facto unattainable, but de jure inescapable. Wittgenstein says: it is part of our investigating that we do not investigate everything; that is, it “is part of our *method* of doubt and enquiry” [in the broadest sense of the term, which includes doubting

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<sup>34</sup> In this respect, Descartes notes, his doubt is different from that of the skeptics, “who doubt merely for the sake of doubting and put on the affectation of being perpetually undecided” (Descartes 1637/1998: 16). For what concerns us here, however, it should be noted that both the skeptic and Descartes maintain that it is the business of philosophy to “investigate everything.”

and checking whether there is bread in the pantry] to consider certain things “as absolutely solid” (*OC*: §151).

With this, *nota bene*, Wittgenstein is not surreptitiously impressing on *our* method (or on our different methods) the seal of the transcendental; the methods can in fact change; that which now for us “stands fast” (*OC*: §151), that which—in his celebrated image—belongs to the river-bed, “may shift” and “change back into a state of flux” (*OC*: §97). What, in any case, we must never forget is that “the movement of the waters on the river-bed” is one thing, while “the shift of the bed itself” is something other and different (*OC*: §97).<sup>35</sup> But Wittgenstein does not intend here to impress on every method the equally metaphysical seal of contingency either. This is clearly shown by the important §321, in which he confesses his “suspicion” of something that he had nonetheless been tempted to say, namely that “any empirical proposition can be transformed into a postulate—and then becomes a norm of description.” His suspicion stems from the observation that this is “too general” a sentence that seems to contain a “theoretically,” almost as if it meant to say that “any empirical proposition can, theoretically, be transformed...” The question Wittgenstein then poses is, precisely, “what does ‘theoretically’ mean here?”. It means, perhaps, that we can establish, before and independently of the consideration of any particular case, that any proposition can... But if this is so, isn’t Wittgenstein suggesting that here “theoretically” means nothing other than “metaphysically”?<sup>36</sup>

In *On Certainty* there are, obviously, a great many considerations and examples that revolve around these and similar questions. Consider, for example, §185. Here Wittgenstein asks how it would “strike him” if someone doubted the existence of Napoleon<sup>37</sup> and, by contrast, if someone “doubted the existence of the earth 150 years ago.” The first doubt, Wittgenstein remarks, “would strike me as ridiculous [*lächerlich*].”

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<sup>35</sup> “[T]hough—Wittgenstein specifies—there is not a sharp division of the one from the other” (*OC*: §97); and though we must not forget that “the bank of the river consists partly of hard rock, subject to no alteration or only to an imperceptible one, partly of sand, which now in one place now in another gets washed away, or deposited” (*OC*: §99).

<sup>36</sup> I remind the reader that Wittgenstein often uses the term “metaphysical” to indicate the claim to have finally discovered the “preconception [*Vorurteil*] to which reality *must* correspond” (Wittgenstein 2009: I, §131).

<sup>37</sup> A more contemporary example might be the doubt whether the moon landing actually took place or whether the whole thing was staged by the CIA.

Within that “system” which is historical investigation with its research, proofs and discoveries, the supposition that the existence of Napoleon is a “fable” (*OC*: §186) would not be taken seriously; of someone with this sort of doubt we could say that he has a particularly graphic imagination, or that he is easily convinced by extremely strange hypotheses, or that he has not yet learned what it means to study history seriously. In any case, I could always react by advising him to read a good book on French history. This first individual would be like someone who makes crude errors of calculation, but who, still and all, is calculating. The reaction in the case of the second doubt would be different. Someone with this sort of doubt seems in fact to doubt “our whole system of evidence” (*OC*: §185). Doubting the existence of the earth in this way would be like doubting that there is something like a history of the earth that is the object of investigation by geologists, archaeologists and historians. This does not mean that the belief in the existence of the earth is just one among the other historical beliefs:

The existence of the earth is rather part of the *whole picture* [of the riverbed] which forms the starting-point of belief for me” (*OC*: §209).

We could perhaps respond to the individual who has doubts about the earth that all the historical proofs and discoveries confirm that the earth already existed long before the birth of Napoleon. But in this way we would take the existence of the earth as a belief among the other historical beliefs and, consequently, its nonexistence before Napoleon as an equally historical—albeit ridiculously false—belief. Now, the point here, once again, is the following: to doubt, is it sufficient to say one doubts? In short, that which is to be asked when we are confronted with someone who doubts the existence of the earth is how this doubt manifests itself in the life of the individual who expresses it; and what can possibly be the “sense” and the “point” (Wittgenstein 1980: II, §342a). One thing we could ask this individual is what it is exactly that he opposes or what he intends to contradict. For example, it might be the case that with his doubt he does not intend to contradict any historical or geographical fact: “Of course there are fossils, archaeological finds, and so forth; the only question is, why rule out the possibility that they were formed with the earth at the moment of Napoleon’s birth; and if we cannot exclude this possibility, then all the so-called geological, archaeological and historical discoveries do not prove in the least that that the earth existed long before Napoleon’s birth.” At this point, however, we could ask him what he would accept as proof for or against the

hypothesis that the earth existed long before Napoleon’s birth. Or else, what difference—if there is one—is there between historical research from Napoleon onwards and the research before Napoleon. The conclusion to be drawn is not that such doubt is senseless in itself, but rather that, if it is not given any meaning, if it is not embedded “in the stream of thought and life” (Wittgenstein 1967: §173), it is not a doubt, even if all the ways of saying and acting by which doubt is customarily expressed are present.

This is why not doubting “is not grounded in my stupidity [*Dummheit*] or credulity [*Liechtgläubigkeit*]” (OC: §235); neither is it to be considered, in Cartesian fashion, “as something akin to hastiness [*Vorschnellheit*] or superficiality [*Oberflächlichkeit*]” (OC: §358). An individual is hasty and superficial if he believes he doubts everything simply because he declares he doubts everything. Obviously, in this context we must carefully distinguish between not doubting when there are reasons to doubt, which takes the form of an attitude that can be stigmatized, criticized or ridiculed as stupid, gullible and superficial, and that absence of doubt which is part of the game of doubting, of seeking, of giving and asking for reasons. From this point of view, §392 is highly significant:

What I need to shew is that a doubt is not necessary even when it is possible [*daß ein Zweifel nicht notwendig ist, auch wenn er möglich ist*]. That the possibility of the language-game doesn’t depend on everything being doubted that can be doubted.

What Wittgenstein is suggesting here is that, even if we can imagine a doubt that would render unsure that which we customarily do with a certainty that knows no doubts and hesitations, this does not mean that the possibility of our game depends on the fact that this doubt has been removed together with any other possible doubt. As Wittgenstein had already written in the *Philosophical Investigations*, we do not doubt simply “because it is possible for us to *imagine* a doubt” (Wittgenstein 2009: I, §84b). The example in a Humean vein is illuminating here:

I can easily imagine someone always doubting before he opened his front door whether an abyss did not yawn behind it, and making sure about it before he went through the door (and he might on some occasion prove to be right)—but for all that, I do not doubt in such a case (Wittgenstein 2009: I, §84b).

But is it not stupid not to doubt when a doubt can be imagined? Shouldn't I commit myself, if I am reasonable, to stopping up all the cracks preventively (Wittgenstein 2009: I, §84a)? Or, on the contrary, isn't it stupid and unreasonable to doubt only because a doubt can be imagined? Well, for Wittgenstein, the certainty with which every day and several times a day I open my front door surely does not depend on the fact that up to now no abyss has yawned behind it, since the individual who every day, before opening the door, is assailed by this doubt has not met with any abysses either; neither does my certainty depend on the fact of my having data and information the doubting individual does not possess. For example, it does not depend on the fact that only I know that my house is not located in an earthquake area or that the firm that built it is highly reputable. The doubt we have imagined is not of this type: that doubt does not depend on a lack of data, information, and so forth. And yet—one might insist—how can you be sure that behind the door you are about to open there is not an abyss? We know the sceptic's reaction: nothing gives us this certainty, but *if we want to live, we have to silence our doubt*. But we also know Wittgenstein's reaction: *that not-doubting is part of our life*—one of its inner traits. The life of the individual who opens his front door each time with wary caution would be *another* life, not a more reasonable life. This is why, even if it can of course occur that the individual who doubts every day before opening his front door may just once (alas!) be right, this does not mean that we ought to consider the certainty with which every day and several times a day we open our front doors to be hasty and stupid.

These remarks refer to a theme that runs through *On Certainty* from beginning to end. Take, for example, §425. Here Wittgenstein considers the following case:

May not the thing that I recognize with complete certainty as the tree that I have seen here my whole life long—may this not be disclosed as something different? (*OC*: §425a).

However strange and implausible, a circumstance of this kind can be imagined. For example, I can imagine I discover that the fir tree in the garden of the house across the street was only the imitation of a fir tree—an imitation so perfect that it had deceived me for all these years. Well, once I've discovered this, should I come to the conclusion that for all these years it would have been more correct if I had said "I believe it is a tree" instead of "I know (I do not merely surmise) that that's a tree"? Or

even that it would always and in any case be more correct and reasonable to say “I believe that...”? Wittgenstein’s answer is that, in the circumstances described, it would be misleading to say “I believe it is a tree,” just as it would be misleading for me to say “I believe my name is Luigi,” instead of “my name is Luigi.” On things like these—that my name is Luigi or that across the street there is a tree (and not its perfect imitation)—it is right to say that “I cannot be making a *mistake*,” even if “that does not mean that I am infallible about it” (*OC*: §425b).

In this manner what our attention is drawn to is the different use of the modal verb “can” or of its negation. In many uses and contexts “can” (or “can’t”) means something like “experience teaches that...” or “We [...] haven’t as a rule...” This is the sense—which Wittgenstein usually calls “physical”—that “cannot” has, for example, in the statement “An iron nail can’t scratch glass,” which, in fact, can very well be replaced by the statement “[E]xperience teaches that an iron nail *doesn’t* scratch glass” (Wittgenstein 1969: 49). This means that, as experience teaches, it is false that an iron nail scratches glass. This use of “can” must not, however, be confused with the use that Wittgenstein calls “grammatical”, as can be found in statements such as “I can’t feel his pain” (49) or “You can’t count through the whole series of cardinal numbers” (54). These statements, in fact, are not “about human frailty, but about a convention which we have made” (54).<sup>38</sup> In this sense “I can’t feel his pain” is not to be assimilated to or compared with a statement such as “[I]t is impossible for a human being to swim across the Atlantic,” but rather with a statement such as “[T]here is no goal in an endurance race” (54). For a statement such as “I can’t *know* [but only conjecture] whether the other person has pain” (54) the right simile seems therefore to be not “[t]hat of a road that is physically impassable,” but rather that “of the non-existence of a road” (Wittgenstein 1967: §356b). Or, as Wittgenstein remarked in the context of the *Blue Book* examined above, in stating “I can’t *know* [but only conjecture] whether the other person has pain,” “you did not state that knowing was a goal which you could not reach, [...] rather, there is no goal in this game” (Wittgenstein 1969: 54).

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<sup>38</sup> Here the term “convention” can be misleading if it draws too much attention to the dimension of choice or of decision. What Wittgenstein wants to insist on here is that a proposition such as “I can’t feel his pain” serves to circumscribe our concept of pain and not to express a metaphysical discovery regarding its essence. In short, that I cannot feel his pain is not a metaphysical impossibility; that is, an impossibility like the physical but much stronger.

Returning to our case of the proper name, we can observe how the notion of infallibility is a physical notion. From this point of view, experience teaches us that we are not infallible, which is to say that, on some occasions and in certain circumstances, we actually make a mistake about our own name.<sup>39</sup> But when Wittgenstein affirms that “this too is right: I cannot be making a *mistake* about it [my name]” (*OC*: §425), what he wants to remind us of is our concept of proper name and the manner in which it is embedded in our life, in the various things we do with and in relation to our name: we introduce ourselves to others; we answer when someone calls us by name; we look around if we hear someone say our name; we celebrate our name day, and so forth. What is superficial or hasty in all of this? Is, perhaps, our life hasty and superficial?

Let us insist on this point that Wittgenstein had already analyzed in his remarks of 1937, “Cause and Effect: Intuitive Awareness.” Here Wittgenstein had discussed this Cartesian-like statement: “Anyone who doesn’t doubt is simply overlooking the possibility that things might be otherwise!” (Wittgenstein 1993: 387). Not-doubting is always a hasty and superficial—even if pragmatically inevitable—forgetting that what is thus could also be not so. But to what possibility is he referring here? The point is that we can forget something that is a possible move in the game we are actually playing. In the game of chess we can forget to checkmate, not to make a straight flush. Wittgenstein illustrates the point with two examples. The first is an example of Gospel flavour since it brings to mind the parable of the labourers sent into the vineyard (*Matthew* 20, 1-16): the man who gives for one hour of work the same pay that he gives for ten hours is not necessarily forgetting the possibility that the pay be proportionate to the hours actually worked. In fact, we can imagine that this possibility is not part of the game considered here. This is what makes it exactly *this specific* game. The possibility that the pay be proportionate to the hours worked is, here, neither forgotten nor denied, because for this game it is not even a possibility.

The second example regards the ancient Egyptian style of painting.<sup>40</sup> If we compare the habitual perspectival representations of

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<sup>39</sup> For example, I can discover at a certain point that at the public records office I was registered with a name different from the one by which I’ve always been called. I know of at least two such cases from personal experience. There is also a pathological dimension or aspect of the problem that I can only hint at here.

<sup>40</sup> The example of the Egyptian style of painting is also to be found in the second part of the *Philosophical Investigations*: “Compare a concept with a style of painting. For

persons to what we find in ancient Egyptian painting we feel that the former are correct and the latter not, because our experience tells us that persons are nothing like the way we see them in Egyptian painting. Wittgenstein makes his riposte to such an observation with a question that serves to throw his interlocutor off: “Who says I want people on paper to look the way they do in reality?” (387). To understand the sense of Wittgenstein’s riposte let us attempt to compare these four cases: an ancient Egyptian painting, a painting by Paolo Uccello, a cubist painting by Pablo Picasso, and the sketch of an art student who is learning to draw in perspective. In the second case (the painting by Paolo Uccello) we can say that the artist’s representation is fully in perspective; in the third and in the fourth we could affirm that the representation is not in perspective either because the rules of perspective have not been applied correctly (the student’s sketch) or because they have been deliberately violated or neglected. But what are we to say about the ancient Egyptian painting? Perhaps that it lacks perspective? To lack it, perspective would have had to have been contemplated at least as a possibility. In short, the Egyptian style does not lack perspective just as a plane surface does not lack depth or an endurance race does not lack a goal.

There is a connection between this complex of considerations and the manner in which Wittgenstein confronts sceptical doubt in the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*. See, for example, the way in which he deals with the hypothesis of a “deceiver [...] who is supremely powerful and supremely sly and who is always deliberately deceiving me” (Descartes 1641/1998: 64). Well, Wittgenstein responds to the Cartesian hypothesis with what appears to be a witticism: “Is no demon deceiving us at present? Well, if he is, it doesn’t matter. What the eye doesn’t see the heart doesn’t grieve over [*Was ich nicht weiß, macht mich nicht heiß*]” (Wittgenstein 1978: III, §78). The deceit must find room in the calculation as one of its possibilities. And therefore to those who maintain that there may be a non-game in our game because there can be “abysses [*Abgründe*] now that we do not see,” we can respond that “[t]he abysses in a calculus are not there if I don’t see them!” (III, §78).

Wittgenstein’s attitude can be better illustrated with reference to one of the many examples of his imaginary anthropology. Let us imagine, then, a tribe whose members only calculate orally in the decimal system, so that,

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is even our style of painting arbitrary? Can we choose one at pleasure? (The Egyptian, for instance.) Or is it just a matter of pretty and ugly?” (Wittgenstein 2009: II, xii).

without realizing it, they make many mistakes, since they repeat or omit many digits. A traveller records these calculations with a tape recorder and then teaches the natives to do written calculation, showing them how many mistakes they made when they limited themselves to calculating orally. Well, Wittgenstein wonders, “[w]ould these people now have to admit that they had not really calculated before? That they had merely been groping about, whereas now they walk?” (III, §81). The answer is that nothing forces them to admit this, even if, obviously, nothing keeps them from beginning to view their previous calculations with the same attitude as the traveller. To the traveller who is trying to get them to admit that, as long as they only calculated orally, theirs was not calculation but only a semblance of calculation, they might object that things actually went better before, since writing is only “dead stuff” that limits their intuition; or they might rebut that spirit cannot be captured with a machine; or that, if the tape recorder demonstrates that they repeated a digit, “well, that will have been right.” And if the traveller should remark that experience teaches that “‘mechanical’ means of calculating” are more reliable than our memory so that, if we use them, we are “smoother,” they could very well ask him why in the world they should rely on experience, or how are they to know that the machine is more reliable than memory. And as far as “smoothness” is concerned, why in the world should that be our ideal? Why must our ideal be “to have everything wrapped in cellophane”? (III, §81).

But, we might wonder in our turn, what shall we say if the tribe—convinced by the traveller and his tape recorder—abandons its old way of calculating? At least in this case wouldn’t we have to admit that the old way of calculating was, in the judgment of the tribe itself, an irregular and capricious way of calculating? As a matter of fact, what we could say is that this tribe now calculates in the same way as the traveller does and that, like the traveller, it now rejects its ancient mode of calculation as irregular and capricious. Tribe and traveller now calculate in the same way; for example, that which is a mistake for one is now a mistake for the others as well. But this by no means shows that the previous way of calculating was not a calculation, or was only an incomplete and rudimentary calculation; a quasi-calculation, so to speak. That which can be said is that this tribe has now banished such calculation and that this banishment is part of (delimits) their present calculating.

The lesson we can draw from this example (which is also, for its part, a good example of Wittgenstein’s philosophical method) had already been anticipated by Wittgenstein himself, a few paragraphs earlier, in

relation to another, perhaps even more difficult, example. Let us imagine a game that

is such that whoever begins can always win by a particular simple trick. But this has not been realized;—so it is a game. Now someone draws our attention to it;—and it stops being a game (III, §77).

What would our (sceptical or metaphysical) philosopher say at this point? That, revealing the trick, we discover that what we have been playing was not a game at all (it seemed to be a game, but actually wasn't) and that therefore, and properly speaking, up to now we have not been playing. But Wittgenstein's philosophical method stems precisely from the rejection of this conclusion: if it stops being a game, it is not because we have discovered that it wasn't a game; *simply* we no longer play it. And by no longer playing it we show something not about the essence of the game, but about our life and about the place that games and playing occupy in it.<sup>41</sup>

I want to say: “and it stops being a game” [*und es hört auf ein Spiel sein*]—not: “and we now see that it wasn't a game” [*und wir sehen nun, daß kein Spiel war*] (III, §77).

It is here that the sceptic's doubt finds its limit and its checkmate. What often occurs or what we can easily imagine to occur is that a game ceases to be a game. But that it ceases to be a game does not mean that what we had been playing was not in fact a game: that game *was* a game. And if someone were to persist in saying that in this way we must admit the very thing that drove us to abandon that “game” in the first place, i.e., that a tricked game is still a game, Wittgenstein would react by simply observing that in this game “whoever began” always won: *So ist es*, “That's how it is” (Wittgenstein 1993: 387).

With this formula, *nota bene*, Wittgenstein is not predicating a sort of resigned relativism, so to speak. Here it is a question, rather, of recognizing that also this game was (even if it now no longer is) part of human life—one of its manifestations. That this is no longer so neither renders it a non-game nor grounds or justifies the game we are playing now. The claim to ground our game by making non-games of all the other games is only, once again, an illusion.

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<sup>41</sup> For example, once the trick has been discovered someone could react this way: “What a great game! And so relaxing! Everyone has the certainty that, when it's their turn to begin, they'll win.”

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