Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers

Volume 18 | Issue 4

Article 4

10-1-2001

Normativity and Reference in a Wittgensteinian Philosophy of Religion

M. Jamie Ferreira

Follow this and additional works at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy>

Recommended Citation

Ferreira, M. Jamie (2001) "Normativity and Reference in a Wittgensteinian Philosophy of Religion," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*: Vol. 18 : Iss. 4 , Article 4.

DOI: 10.5840/faithphil200118439

Available at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol18/iss4/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers by an authorized editor of ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange.

NORMATIVITY AND REFERENCE IN A WITTGENSTEINIAN PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

M. Jamie Ferreira

It is a common objection that Wittgenstein fails to reflect accurately what religious believers are doing—that is, that he is offering prescription, rather than description. Because this misgiving seriously jeopardizes the possibility of a Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion, I focus in this article on the issues of description, reference, and normativity in Wittgenstein's account of religion. My defense of a Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion examines the source of normativity and the implications of the norm of "absoluteness" for the possibility of rational justification.

In its presentation of currents in 20th century philosophy of religion, *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion* (1997) includes an essay on "Wittgensteinianism."¹ Its author, John Hyman, suggesting that the "best introduction to Wittgensteinianism is Wittgenstein," separates his treatments of the early and later Wittgenstein, and finally offers the following assessment: "Is Wittgenstein's account of religious belief convincing? I doubt it."² The main problem seems to stem from what Hyman calls "one of the fundamental themes of Wittgenstein's later philosophy"—namely, "that the concepts we use cannot be justified by reference to reality."³ As Hyman rephrases it: "Grammar itself is *arbitrary*, i.e., not accountable to any reality." Presumably, what is behind Hyman's objection is that at least in the case of religious belief Wittgenstein fails to reflect accurately what religious believers are doing. It is a common objection that Wittgenstein is offering prescription, rather than description. Because these misgivings about the possibility of a Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion continue to have a prominent place in the literature, I want to focus in what follows on the issues of description, reference, and normativity in Wittgenstein's account of religious belief. I need to begin, however, by asking in a formal way what it is a philosophy of religion ought to be doing.

I. The Preliminary Question

What kind of **philosophy** is philosophy of **religion**? The formal answer is that it is a kind of philosophical thinking which can retain its integrity as philosophy at the same time as it does justice to religious traditions. The question is answered **descriptively** for us by recounting the ways in which what we count as philosophy (or philosophical traditions)

can do justice to what we count as religion (or religious traditions). Just as there is more than one philosophical approach, so there may be more than one kind of philosophy of religion. Even if we were to consider philosophy as the single enterprise of clear thinking and analysis, with the objectives of determining reference and truth, there are different approaches to these goals—some possibilities include philosophical approaches which go under the names hermeneutical, phenomenological, analytic, deconstructive, or existentialist. Our list cannot include any philosophical approaches which fail to remain philosophical when they analyze religion, nor can it include any philosophical approaches which do not actually engage with what we count as religion; the first would issue in ‘a caricature of philosophy of religion’ and the second would issue in ‘philosophy of a caricature of religion.’ In this respect our descriptive list is already a **normative** one.

Don’t we, however, have to know what religion is before we can see what kind of philosophical thinking illuminates it philosophically? And isn’t that precisely what philosophy of religion is supposed to reveal? This is precisely the same kind of circle involved in all our coming to understand anything. Coming to understand is never an all-or-nothing matter; we can only pick out phenomena if we approach experience theory-laden (with at least some minimal level of theoretical framework), but our initial framework does not necessarily remain unchanged as we deepen our acquaintance with the phenomena. Understanding just is dialectical (as Comte made clear) or hermeneutical. The kind of philosophical approach we need in order to study any phenomenon is first and foremost the kind of philosophical approach which looks to see what that phenomenon says and shows of itself. In this sense a phenomenological approach is not one among many choices, but a fundamental dimension of any philosophy which attempts to be philosophy of anything, biology or religion. The importance of this level of phenomenological analysis is highlighted in Wittgenstein’s advice—“One cannot guess how a word functions. One has to *look at* its use and learn from that.”⁴ Wittgenstein’s directive not to guess, but to **look at use**, as well as his philosophical sensitivity to differences, mark his philosophical approach as one which strikingly reminds us that we cannot tell a priori what kind of grammar informs a given discourse and warns us against imposing alien grammars.

There are two putative attempts to do philosophy of religion which ultimately undermine themselves. First, a philosophical approach to religion which assumes that all realities have the same grammar (namely, the one most easily applied to the most common kinds of reality we experience) will issue in a ‘philosophy of superficially observed religious phenomena.’ Such accounts prematurely close off the possibility of philosophy of religion, refusing to let religious traditions say and show what they are.⁵

A second putative attempt to do philosophy of religion fails in the opposite way. Any attempt to address philosophically a reality which is already affirmed as not amenable to philosophical analysis or universal conceptualization will undermine itself. For example, if we take the view that religion is not a cultural or spiritual product but something which breaks through into culture, an irruptive revelation which cannot be universally conceptualized, and that, by definition, the philosophical enterprise

(human philosophical concepts) cannot do justice to a transcendent reality which breaks into human culture, there can be no philosophy of religion.⁶ A study of religion which demands that a response to the unconditional be itself unconditioned undermines itself. Philosophy is co-opted by this view of the religious as unconditional revelation. Moreover, such a view fails to appreciate that revelation, as Aquinas reminds us, is always received according to the mode of the receiver. It does not make sense to say that a reality to which we respond could in principle be studied independently of our response—we have no other access. Insofar as religion is seen as an unconditional, absolute revelation breaking into human consciousness, a revelation to which our concepts cannot apply, there cannot be philosophy of religion. In sum, certain philosophical approaches do not admit of philosophy of religion, and certain views of religion do not admit of philosophy of religion.

II. Some Qualifications

First, religion is the originary phenomenon for philosophy of religion. Even Hegel recognized that philosophy cannot create religion; it can at most analyze and unfold it. But this only means that if there were no religion, there could be no philosophy of religion. Philosophy of religion must, in addition, be done 'on the basis of religion,' in the sense that one must take religion *in situ*, in its own context, on its own terms. One must, in that sense, go 'inside.' However, for some people the paradigms of being 'inside' are Aquinas and Anselm. I suggest, however, that there is a way of treating religion on its own terms which does not require an acceptance of faith commitments. A hermeneutical and contextualized appreciation of religion's self-understanding seems possible without actually making the commitment of faith; the illuminating value of such an account is increased to the extent that it describes at least some important historical religious traditions.

Secondly, it is important to note that the contrast between philosophy done inside a set of assumptions and philosophy which thematizes and problematises these assumptions can only be useful if we have already addressed the question of what (and whether the same thing) is being assumed. The determination of whether someone is working within certain framework assumptions or putting them in question assumes they we know what these assumptions consist in, what they mean, what they refer to. That is, issues of meaning and reference logically precede the determination of whether someone is working internally or externally. If we simply assume that one group does not put the 'being' or 'reality' of God in question and the other does, as if what they hold or question is obviously the same, we prejudice our chances of appreciating what is being assumed—that is, what the 'being' or 'reality' of God amounts to. Questions of language (meaning and reference) are logically first.

Because the philosophy in a philosophy of religion must do justice to both itself and religion, philosophy of religion should not let its appreciation of the multivalence of language lead to the abandonment of concerns with reference and truth. For many people that concern with reference and truth is expressed in terms of 'ontology,' 'reality,' or the 'being of God.'

The goal seems clear: philosophy of religion must be non-reductive (must maintain the irreducibility of the religious) at the same time as it does not abandon the relevance of questions of reference and truth. However, the means to that goal are not obvious.

My own way of phrasing the goal is as follows: a philosophy of religion which does justice to both philosophy and religion is only possible if one's philosophical approach involves both a genuine description and a genuine openness to the infinite, the unconditional, the 'more' (whether construed as excess or gift). On the one hand, only a commitment to description can preclude foisting an alien grammar on religious discourse: we need to appreciate what religious people say and do, as well as appreciate their saying in a nuanced way, which does not impose a common grammar on everything. Not everything that looks like description is; not everything that has the form of an indicative is one. On the other hand, only those philosophical approaches which problematize closure and determinability and decidability can even be candidates for philosophy of religion. (However, an emphasis on undecidability should not preclude the decidability which expresses itself in responsibility for the other—e.g., in terms of moral responsibility or conscience.) The philosophy in philosophy of religion must affirm our existence as dynamic loci of reflective embodied becoming, and our consequent fallibility and the corrigibility of our claims, without translating these limits into the scepticism of a reified noumenal world beyond appearance. While the attack on closure and totalization is also found in thinkers like Kierkegaard, Levinas, and Derrida,⁷ I turn to Wittgenstein's thought for further elaboration, since his methodology starkly highlights both the role of description and the non-sceptical limits of determinability.⁸ Moreover, like Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein offers resources for understanding religious belief in terms of imaginative reconceptualization, which seems to me an important way of doing justice to the debate over cognitive vs. non-cognitive accounts. Finally, I suggest that Wittgenstein's approach is consonant with religious thinkers as different from each other as Aquinas and Kierkegaard.

III. The Problem of Description

There is no question but that description must play an important role in philosophy of religion: the philosophy in philosophy of religion has to be one which looks at the discourse and practice concerning religious reality in order to appreciate its distinctive character, to obtain clarity about what religion says and shows of itself. Because Wittgenstein's philosophical approach places description front and center, I want to develop further the ways in which an account of religion can be faithful to Wittgenstein's commitments and to religion's commitments at the same time. (Since Wittgenstein limits himself to Christian religion, it would be more precise to say that I want to develop the ways in which Wittgenstein's account of Christian religion is faithful to Christian religion.)

Precisely the descriptive aim which I am suggesting makes Wittgenstein's approach potentially useful for philosophy of religion has, however, been the target of criticism. For Wittgenstein, as we all know, "Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can

in the end only describe it" (PI, §124). Michael Dummett is typical of those who see this as too limited a goal for philosophy. Dummett writes:

We all stand, or should stand, in the shadow of Wittgenstein, in the same way that much earlier generations once stood in the shadow of Kant;...Some things in his philosophy, however, I cannot see any reason for accepting: one is the belief that philosophy, as such, must never criticize but only describe.⁹

On Dummett's view, philosophy must assess or evaluate, not merely describe—that is, Wittgensteinian philosophy does not go far enough; it ought to do more than describe.

On the other hand, it is also a common complaint that Wittgenstein's account of religion goes too far, by going beyond the description to which he should limit himself. On such a view, Wittgenstein's lectures on religious belief do not "reflect his commitment to description" because they include criticisms which are inconsistent with his commitment to description.¹⁰ For example, they contain a criticism of a (type of) believer (O'Hara) who appeals to rational justification for religious belief; this is taken by some to reveal that Wittgenstein's concern is "not to investigate the use of religious concepts among believers like O'Hara, but to propose his own theory of the logic of religious belief and to denounce other interpretations as 'mistaken' and as 'superstition.'"¹¹

Thus, the objection to Wittgenstein's understanding of description in relation to philosophy of religion takes three main forms. He is sometimes accused of having no normative standard independent of actual usage—the standard just repeats or echoes actual usage, and so cannot be used to evaluate any usage. At other times the concern is that Wittgenstein does have a normative understanding, but it is either one whose basis is never made explicit or it is one which (whatever the norms) is inconsistent with his commitment to description.

Any judgment of the relevance or usefulness of Wittgenstein's approach to religion depends on coming to terms with what it means to say that the task of philosophy lies in description. D.Z. Phillips has repeatedly addressed himself to this issue, but his response has not, I think, been adequately appreciated; the charge that a Wittgensteinian account precludes critical evaluation of religious claims continues to dog any attempt to provide a Wittgensteinian account of religion which is not fideistic. Therefore, I want to do two things. First, I want to build on Phillips's work in showing the critical potential of Wittgenstein's descriptive methodology for religion¹²; this involves appreciating the transformative goal of Wittgenstein's philosophy. Second, I want to show *how* Wittgenstein's evaluations of certain understandings of religion are not inconsistent with his commitment to description, but are derived from that commitment.

IV. Transformative Description

Phillips has reminded us of Wittgenstein's philosophical ideal: "I ought to be no more than a mirror in which my reader can see his own thinking

with all its deformities so that helped in this way, he can put it right."¹³ It seems clear that, for Wittgenstein, philosophy has a goal, and the goal is a clarity which transforms us or helps us to "put it right." He notes the philosopher's intention to transform when he tells us that a philosopher says "'Look at things like this!'...[although] that doesn't ensure that people will look at things like that" (CV, 61 [1947]). When Wittgenstein refers to the "results of philosophy" as a valuable "discovery" (PI, §119), he is echoing his earlier desideratum of "a change in our style of thinking" (LC, 28), often a very radical change.

This goal-oriented mirroring is accomplished through description. Wittgenstein insists that "We must do away with all *explanation*, and description alone must take its place....[Philosophical] problems are solved, not by giving new information, but by arranging what we have always known" (PI, §109). But description itself is not easy to describe.¹⁴ What description involves must be inferred from Wittgenstein's other formulations of the task and goal of philosophy. For example, philosophy is a "battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language" (PI, §109)—that is, a battle against the goings-astray which are occasioned by the homogeneous appearance of language. But it is technically a battle within philosophy, not a battle waged by philosophers against other people's confusions; it is a battle against bewitched ways of doing philosophy, including philosophy in religion. According to Wittgenstein, "the work of the philosopher consists in assembling reminders together for a particular purpose (PI, §127)—for him or herself as much as for anyone else.

Wittgenstein wants to cause a change—the kind of change that happens when one sees that one was under an illusion and no longer needs to hold to a certain idea or perspective. His is a transformative philosophy meant to dispel illusions (which explains his praise of Kierkegaard¹⁵). He wants us to look hard at Christianity, because it is often hard to see what is right in front of us (CV, 39 [1940]); indeed, "looking intently is difficult. And it's possible to look intently without seeing anything" (CV, 74 [1948]). He urges us to "look and say what it's really like—but you must see something that throws new light on the facts" (CV, 39 [1941]). Seeing what is there may require a change in how **we** look at it. If in fact we are under any illusion about what we are looking at, we will need to be helped to see it differently (but we won't be being helped to see something other than it). In sum, Wittgenstein's philosophical method is transforming, but not reforming.

Two questions arise here. How can description inaugurate change in the practitioner? And how can the philosophical describer intend such change without also intending to revise the practice at issue? To answer these questions is to locate Wittgenstein's source of critical normativity.

V. The Source of Normativity

Wittgenstein does have a normative understanding of what constitutes the religious dimension of religious belief; he is obviously guided by some normative standard when he makes assessments like the following: "if this is religious belief, then it's all superstition" because "whatever believing in

God may be, it can't be believing in something we can test, or find means of testing" (LC, 59-60); "Religious faith and superstition are quite different. One of them results from *fear* and is a sort of false science. The other is a trusting" (CV, 72 [1948]).

That he did not want to go beyond description is clear from his own conclusion that it would be arrogant of him to try to tell religious believers what they should do—his job is only to describe what implications ("consequences" or "conventions") believers draw from the techniques they use (LC, 71-2). Does he keep to this, or does his critique of certain views as "superstition" rather than "religious faith" reveal an imported standard of normativity? Does he end up, *malgré lui*, imposing an alien grammar on religious belief?

The crucial question is how Wittgenstein's normative understanding is authorized. I suggest that Wittgenstein works *self-consciously* from a normative understanding derived from his description of what he sees as at stake for religious believers on their own terms. Wittgenstein's description is a peculiar sort. If we simply count noses we will not be doing description in the way Wittgenstein intends. What Wittgenstein is advocating is a description of the **norms** generated in practice. (Perhaps we could correlate this with the contrast he makes in his lectures on aesthetics between describing a variety of lines and color patches and describing the expression on a face [LC, 34-35].) In other words, he calls for a **description of the prescription** within the practice—and this might entail a challenge to certain self-descriptions given by practitioners. Philosophy in religion looks at how the words are being used, since "practice gives the words their sense."¹⁶ Philosophy in religion looks at use to determine content—to determine what is meant and how reference is being made. It looks at how theological claims function for the people who affirm them; therefore, it doesn't limit itself to examination of theological utterances in the abstract, but sees them in their practical context. Description amounts to description of grammar¹⁷: "Essence is expressed by grammar" (PI, §371); "Grammar tells what kind of object anything is. (Theology as grammar)" (PI, §373). But already we see that description is a complex activity because the claim that "everything lies open to view" (PI, §126) must be seen in tandem with Wittgenstein's claim that we must distinguish between superficial and depth grammar: "A main source of our failure to understand is that we do not command a clear view of the use of our words.—Our grammar is lacking in this sort of perspicuity. A perspicuous representation produces just that understanding which consists in 'seeing connexions'" (PI, §122). Description is not simply empirical generalization. The determination of the depth grammar of a discourse is only able to be made through description of what is observed, but it is a determination of the **deep** structures, the **norms** embedded within a given discourse.

Wittgenstein allows the possibility that someone who uses a particular grammar overall (in general) can make mistakes in particular instances, as well as that people can be confused about aspects of their own practice. Philosophy ought to mirror practices so as to reveal any confusions which may exist (they don't necessarily exist) in the accounts even participants give. In other words, philosophy cannot be limited to reporting whatever

any religious believer says about him or herself—this is not what philosophy in general does, so it cannot be what philosophy of religion does. In this sense, questions of meaning, truth, and successful reference must remain in play. The change in our perspective results from the way the practices are mirrored, highlighting things for us in such a way that implications are brought home and incongruities show up. As Phillips explains: by looking (but only by looking) at some of the things people do can we criticize other things they do.¹⁸ Wittgenstein suggests some forms of (and sources of) confusion, and this should instigate some change in our perspective, but he does not try to revise or reform the practice of religious belief. As Phillips reminds us, clarification of grammar is not reforming—it is not turning religious belief into something else, but revealing what it says and shows of itself.

Although clarification of grammar can be transforming, it is not reforming. Wittgenstein is, in effect, challenging the simplistic dichotomy between description and prescription. Description can lead to change in how we see something, but as long as the change is guided by what is revealed as internal to what we are looking at, it will not require a revision of what we are looking at. Wittgenstein is not intending to revise the practice of (Christian) religion; he is not recommending ways to reform it. He is, he says, hoping to help us to see certain aspects of it from a fresh perspective. But we must still be taking (Christian) religion on its own terms, rather than revising it. Although we might say that transforming our view of X or transforming us in the way we see X (which Wittgenstein does call for when confusions need to be addressed) amounts to revising our view of X, this is not the same thing as revising X (which Wittgenstein does not call for). It is this latter lack of revisionary intent which is referred to in his much-contested claim that “philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can in the end only describe it...It leaves everything as it is” (PI, §124).

Wittgenstein repeatedly appeals to Christian teaching: “Remember that the Christian religion does not consist in saying a lot of prayers, in fact we are commanded just the opposite. If you and I are to live religious lives, it must not just be that we talk a lot about religion, but that in some ways our lives are different.”¹⁹ In the comment I noted earlier, he describes a norm he *observed*: “If I even vaguely remember what I was taught about God, I might say” that believing in God cannot be believing in something we can test. A similar description of a norm is expressed in the following comment: “But I think that what *believers* who have furnished such proofs [for the existence of God] have wanted to do is to give their ‘belief’ an intellectual analysis and foundation, although they themselves would never have come to believe as a result of such proofs” (CV, 85). He reports that he finds believers making a practical appeal to retrospective (rather than prospective)²⁰ justification. He is describing what he (looking closely at them) thinks believers are wanting or trying to do: their speaking about “proofs” is examined in the light of their additional behavior. He is not prescribing goals for them or telling them what they should want; he is describing their goals as they appear in their practice. Prescription is not part of his descriptive approach; it is what description reveals.²¹

A similar description of a norm is found in his lectures on religious belief, where he concludes that "They [religious believers] don't treat this as a matter of reasonability" (LC, 58). He is drawing a conclusion from his observation of religious believers.²² Now it looks like this conclusion is contradicted by the behavior of the personage, Fr. O'Hara, who is criticized by Wittgenstein precisely for treating it as a "matter of reasonability." Why doesn't Wittgenstein think that O'Hara's treatment of religious belief undermines his claim that "they don't treat this as a matter of reasonability"? Who is the *they* who don't treat it as a matter of reasonability? How could Wittgenstein still be describing if he criticizes a practitioner? If we consider this example in the light of other examples of description of norms, we do not need to see Wittgenstein as being simply dogmatic and/or inconsistent.

It is possible to understand Wittgenstein in one of two ways, either of which allows him to be consistently describing the norms he sees in place in (Christian) religion. Wittgenstein may be describing two norms, one of which he takes to be a more generally held norm than Fr. O'Hara's norm, and which authorizes criticism of Fr. O'Hara's appeal to rational justification; in this case, he is observing that *they* (the majority of practitioners) don't treat it as reasonable in order to criticize the exceptional cases in which some (a minority of practitioners) do. We could, of course, ask why one norm is better than the other. What Wittgenstein is more likely doing, however, is describing a norm to which all religious believers hold, even O'Hara, and describing how O'Hara's behavior belies his own claims to be treating religious belief in terms of rational justification.

Strictly speaking, Wittgenstein does not limit himself to describing the implications believers draw from their explicit commitments. He describes their commitments; in addition, either he describes the conclusions they draw or he actually draws out the implications that are ingredient in their commitments. Wittgenstein appeals to a description of norms in place and then to descriptions of either the implications drawn by believers or the unrecognized implications of their commitments. But the important thing is that his normative understanding is derived ultimately from description of religious commitments. There is no suggestion that believers ought to have certain commitments, but that in fact they do, even though they sometimes act in ways which are in tension with them.

Thus, Wittgenstein is not recommending how religious believers should treat their religious beliefs, but observing how *they* do (that is, they follow in general a grammar which precludes the decisive relevance of counter-evidence) in order to criticize them on the occasions when they suggest that they are relying on evidence for their beliefs. It is only from some of the things believers do that we can tell whether or not they ought to do other things. In other words, I am arguing that although Wittgenstein clearly does make a normative judgment when he decides not to take Fr. O'Hara's self-understanding as normative of religion, it is not a judgment imported from outside, so to speak—it is a judgment which he sees as lying deeply within religion, even within O'Hara's religion.

Of course, if Wittgenstein is going to truly limit himself to description of religion's self-admitted commitments, he would have to forego any nega-

tive evaluation of O'Hara's religiousness if (but only if) O'Hara failed to be committed to something which precluded his purported reliance on rational justification for religious belief. Wittgenstein's case depends on O'Hara's sharing with other religious believers something which implies that he too is committed to not treating religious belief as a matter of reasonability. And Wittgenstein discovers this in Christian theology.

IV. *The Norm of ABSOLUTENESS*

I want to argue that Wittgenstein's early understanding of religion highlights for us what he finds in Christian theology which authorizes him to criticize practitioners, like Fr. O'Hara, who make natural theology a foundation of religious belief (or who treat historical information as supportive of religious belief). His sense that **absoluteness** is a distinctive characteristic of what is "higher," hence distinctive of religion, accounts for his attention to that dimension in the examples he considers later on. The theology of the Christian religion seems to Wittgenstein to confirm that religious propositions set a task—they direct us to treat the world under the perspective of the absolute, the unconditional.

In the case of his criticism of O'Hara, Wittgenstein is making the judgment that a commitment to absoluteness is taken to be normative in Christian religion, including in O'Hara's understanding of religion, and that this commitment is at odds with one technique O'Hara uses. Wittgenstein writes: "But I would ridicule it not by saying it is based on insufficient reasons. I would say: here is a man who is cheating himself. You can say: this man is ridiculous because he believes, and bases it on weak reasons" (LC, 59). Some things O'Hara does are evaluated in the light of other things O'Hara does. Wittgenstein assumes that this commitment to absoluteness is non-negotiable, since O'Hara himself is theological committed to the view that God is *sui generis*, not an object like others; thus O'Hara's reliance on reasons creates a confusion on his own terms. Moreover, O'Hara himself refuses to take negative evidence into account in the usual ways; thus O'Hara's appeal to reasons or arguments does not indicate an actual reliance on them.

It is appropriate to ask here: how central to Wittgenstein's thought is this understanding of religion's own norm of absoluteness? Is it something we need to bring in in order to make him consistent rather than something stressed in his own writings? And even if we find it present, is it a continuing presence, informing his later work?

The clearest formulation of absoluteness as normative in religion is found in the early "Lecture on Ethics" (1929). The central distinction he draws is between judgments of absolute value and judgments of relative value. The "absolute sense" applies to judgments concerning the "good," the "valuable," the "really important," the "meaning of life," and the "right" way of living.²³ He treats these ethical terms as interchangeable both with "aesthetics" and with "religion." The notions of an absolutely right road or an absolute good are extended to religion in Wittgenstein's parallel example of absolute safety and absolute trust; such references to religious absoluteness are, he says, a misuse of language which only seem

meaningful because we assume they are analogous to relative safety or relative trust (which involve counter-factual conditions I can enumerate or identify). But the inexhaustibility and indeterminacy which are constitutive of the religious absoluteness make it a paradoxical claim. Wittgenstein boldly uses the word "paradox" to describe the attempt to ascribe absolute value to what is in fact contingent, the felt need to go outside the world on the basis of what is in the world: "It is the paradox that an experience, a fact, should seem to have supernatural value" (PO, 43). On the contrary, "no state of affairs has, in itself, what I would like to call the coercive power of an absolute judge" (PO, 40).

Wittgenstein includes himself among those who "are still tempted to use such expressions as 'absolute good,' and 'absolute value'" (PO, 40). He describes his own experiences in order to make those listening to his lecture "recall the same or similar experiences"—experiences like feeling "wonder at the existence of the world" or feeling absolutely safe or absolutely guilty. He writes that these experiences "seem to those who have experienced them, *for instance to me*, to have in some sense an intrinsic, absolute value" even though it is "nonsense to say they have absolute value" (PO, 43, *italics mine*). To repeat, "It is the paradox that an experience, a fact, should seem to have supernatural value." "Seeing the world as a miracle" (PO, 43) is such a paradoxical experience. We cannot express what we want to express, for we want to go beyond the world, beyond significant language—and Wittgenstein concludes that "my whole tendency and I believe the tendency of all men who ever tried to write or talk Ethics or Religion was to run against the boundaries of language" (PO, 44). What "springs from the desire to say something about the ultimate meaning of life, the absolute good, the absolute valuable, can be no science," although he "deeply" respects the tendency this documents.

This echoes his remarks at the end of the *Tractatus* (1921). Most pertinent are the following: "If there is any value that does have value, it must lie outside the whole sphere of what happens and is the case"; "Ethics is transcendental" because "propositions can express nothing that is higher"; "*How* things are in the world is a matter of complete indifference for what is higher. God does not reveal himself *in* the world"; "It is not *how* things are in the world that is mystical, but *that* it exists. To view the world *sub specie aeterni* is to view it as a whole—a limited whole...it is this that is mystical."²⁴

It might be thought that this appeal to absoluteness is one of the early commitments that Wittgenstein leaves behind. But even as late as the years between 1946 and 1950, he expresses an understanding of religion as an absolute perspective on the world. He notes that "only religion would have the power to destroy vanity and penetrate all the nooks and crannies" (CV, 48 [1946]). He indicates the requirement of absoluteness inherent in the grammar when he suggests that religious belief is not supposed to be a question of degree: he understands how someone could say "I never believed in God before," but he cannot understand what it would mean to say "I never really believed in Him before." (CV, 53 [1946]). Moreover, "If someone who believes in God looks round and asks 'Where does everything I see come from?', 'Where does all this come from?', he is

not craving for a (causal) explanation; and his question gets its point from being the expression of a certain craving. He is, namely, expressing an attitude to all explanations" (CV, 85 [1950]).

The notion of absoluteness which characterizes religion or God is found most markedly in the early writings, but it remains an important one for Wittgenstein. M. C'O. Drury emphasizes the importance of the lecture on ethics to Wittgenstein's thought in general when he concludes: "I am only wishing to maintain that alongside of these specific interests there is to be found an ethical demand, if we are to understand the implications of his work to their full extent. It is this watching brief *in the interests of the absolute* that gives a depth to his work that I do not find in those who have followed after him or tried to simplify the complexity of his thought."²⁵

The idea of the absolute may seem to call to mind the dogmatic appeal to determinacy which informed the *Tractatus*. This may be what lies behind Churchill's comment that in Wittgenstein's criticisms of O'Hara there is a resurgence of "modified versions of the *Tractatus*'s systematic differentiation between religious discourse and other forms of language."²⁶ However, the notion of the absolute perspective on the world does not need to be omitted from Wittgenstein's later account of religion because it does not necessarily embody any of the *Tractatus*'s philosophical purism, dogmatism, and requirements of determinacy; treating everything under the light of eternity does not conflict with the mind-set which sees vagueness and fuzzy edges as an integral dimension of human existence. Thus, it is possible to see Wittgenstein's later comments on religion as informed by this same early understanding of the higher, the transcendental, the paradoxical, as paradigmatically religious, and hence possible to see this norm at the heart of his critique of certain understandings of religion (like Fr. O'Hara's).

But it has to be an **observed** norm, because only the observation of such a norm can authorize Wittgenstein's various challenges to certain believer's own self-descriptions. On my reading, his normative standard is not a priori—it is not available to him before his experiences of religiousness. Wittgenstein is not proposing that there be a commitment to absoluteness in religion, but rather clarifying the commitment which he sees to be already there in religion. Thus Wittgenstein's source of normativity is found within religion itself, not brought in from outside religion. It is a posteriori in the sense that it is a description he makes on the basis of his data—the data being the religious practice, including its norm of absoluteness. But his normative standard is prior to any particular judgment he makes about a given element of a given religious practice.

Both the *Tractatus* and the "Lecture on Ethics" (as well as material in the notebooks)²⁷ show that Wittgenstein sees himself to be describing the common structure informing religious aspirations. This common structure is not a matter of essence, but rather a grasp of a family resemblance commonality (one based on similarity or connections) revealed by looking closely at a variety of religious expressions. Such a grasp of some structural commonality is not a priori—it does not come prior to his experience of religion in practice. It is a posteriori—derived from experiences of religious piety (including, as we saw earlier, his own).²⁸ Yet it is prior in that it

stands as normative before examination of particular instances which may then be evaluated according to it.

V. The Implication of Absoluteness for the Relevance of Rational Justification

On Wittgenstein's account, the first implication of a commitment to absoluteness is that it precludes prospective justification of belief in God. One cannot speak of God as an object, with the grammar appropriate to ordinary objects. Wittgenstein explicitly takes the possibility "that the existence of God can be proved by natural reason" to negate the absoluteness necessary; allowing such a proof would mean that one thinks of God "as another being like myself, outside myself, only infinitely more powerful," the kind of being Wittgenstein would feel it a "duty" to "defy."²⁹ To suggest that a commitment to God must itself be preceded and justified by a belief in God already assumes the use of the grammar which religion's dimension of absoluteness has distanced itself from. The depth of a commitment to absoluteness is what provides the leverage for evaluating negatively the kind of enterprise in which Fr. O'Hara engages—reasons, proofs for the existence of God.³⁰

That Wittgenstein is not importing a normative standard into religion is revealed in the comment I cited earlier: "But I think that what *believers* who have furnished such proofs [for the existence of God] have wanted to do is to give their 'belief' an intellectual analysis and foundation, although they themselves would never have come to believe as a result of such proofs" (CV, 85). Here he is accurately describing the way in which Aquinas, for example, draws out the implications of a commitment to absoluteness. For Aquinas, faith seeks understanding, but faith is primary; reason can issue in "preambles" to faith, but those preambles to faith are a far cry from the "articles of faith" in which the Triune, loving God of Christian faith is revealed. The conclusions of the five ways are not religious in any strict sense; Question 1 precedes Question 2 (which includes the five ways) for a reason—its sets the whole thing in the context of faith seeking understanding.³¹ The relation of reason to faith, for Aquinas, is a retrospective one, not a prospective one: reason is used within the faith only in terms of elaborating the articles of faith and defending them from philosophical attack. In other words, Wittgenstein's account of religious normativity is supported to the extent that O'Hara's own acceptance of the *sui generis* nature of God and his practical refusal to let his reasoning be undermined coincide with the implications of the norm of absoluteness—implications which are drawn by Aquinas. The norm which Wittgenstein judges to be in tension with O'Hara's appeal to rational justification is precisely the norm to which Aquinas adheres.

Wittgenstein also implies that a Kierkegaardian account of the relation between faith and history accurately draws out an implication of absoluteness. After a reference to Kierkegaard about scripture Wittgenstein writes: "God has *four* people recount the life of his incarnate Son, in each case differently and with inconsistencies—but might we not say: It is important that this narrative should not be more than quite averagely historically plausible *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 and the *spirit* may receive its due. I.e., what you are supposed to see cannot be communicated even by the best and most accurate historian; and *therefore* a mediocre account suffices, is even to be preferred. For that too can tell you what you are supposed to be told. The Spirit puts what is essential, essential for your life, into these words. The point is precisely that you are only SUPPOSED to see clearly what appears clearly even in *this representation*" (CV, 31-32 [1937]).³² His other remarks on the topic are clearly in the spirit of Kierkegaard: e.g., when he writes that "Christianity is not based on a historical truth; rather, it offers us a (historical) narrative and says: now believe! But not, believe this narrative with the belief appropriate to a historical narrative, rather: believe, through thick and thin, which you can only do as a result of a life. *Here you have a narrative, don't take the same attitude toward it as you take to other historical narratives! Make a quite different place in your life for it.*" (CV, 32 [1937]) His conclusion is that "A believer's relation to these narratives is *neither* the relation to historical truth (probability), *nor yet* that to a theory consisting of 'truths of reason'. There is such a thing." (CV, 32 [1937]). The phrase "There is such a thing" indicates that he does not see himself to be prescribing that there be or not be such a thing, but describing the occurrence of such treatment.

Wittgenstein is not prescribing this grammar, but observing elements of it deeply embedded within the practice of religion. In some cases the grammar is analyzed in ways that might so shock some believers that they can only find Wittgenstein's account to be illegitimately prescriptive rather than descriptive. For example, this happens when he points out the grammatical dimension in what may seem to be empirical claims: "The way you use the word 'God' does not show *whom* you mean—but, rather, what you mean." (CV, 50 [1946]); "God's essence is supposed to guarantee his existence—what this really means is that what is here at issue is not the existence of something." (CV, 82 [1949]). This latter claim, however, sounds like the drawing out of an implication with which Aquinas would agree. In any case, Wittgenstein anticipates the dissonance his grammatical investigation may cause: "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 actually takes place in human life. For 'consciousness of sin' is a real event and so are despair and salvation through faith. Those who speak of such things (Bunyan for instance) are simply describing what has happened to them, *whatever gloss anyone may want to put on it.*" (CV, 28 [1937] emphasis mine).

He also describes Christian grammar as one which requires that religious beliefs be treated as both practical and passionate:

I believe that one of the things Christianity says is that sound doctrines are all useless. That you have to change your *life*. (Or the *direction* of your life.) It says that wisdom is all cold; and that you can no more use it for setting your life to rights than you can forge iron when it is *cold*. The point is that a sound doctrine need not *take hold* of you; you can follow it as you would a doctor's prescription.—But here you need something to move you and turn you in a new direc-

tion. (I.e., this is how I understand it.) Once you have been turned round, you must *stay* turned round. Wisdom is passionless. But faith by contrast is what Kierkegaard calls a passion. (CV, 53 [1946]).³³

His apparently prescriptive comment—"So if you want to stay within the religious sphere you must *struggle*" (CV, 86 [1950])—is an implication of the practical passion which is appropriate to seeing the world "*sub specie aeterni*." In the end, Wittgenstein is wanting to transform us, not by revising religious practice, but by highlighting the implications of the norm of absoluteness.

VI. A Further Implication of Absoluteness

It is time to consider a possible objection. One might agree that Wittgenstein's description of the norm of absoluteness found within O'Hara's religion (expressed both in his account of the *sui generis* nature of God and his practical refusal in principle to let his reasoning be undermined) is inconsistent with O'Hara's ostensible practice of relying on reasons, and thus gives Wittgenstein warrant for his criticism of an appeal to rational justification. But one might still wonder whether the commitment to absoluteness isn't precisely the dimension of religion which precludes the relevance of Wittgenstein's general account of reference to religious practice. A large number of Wittgenstein's reminders in *On Certainty* are devoted to making us re-examine the question of 'agreement with reality'—namely, our deep tendency to ask "But does it certainly agree with reality, with the facts?" (OC, #191).³⁴ When what we are looking for is some sort of link between our judgments and a reality independent of what our practices reveal as what we take to be true, when we try to tether our practices to some absolute yet determinate hitching-post, we are, he says, "going round in a circle." The very "idea of 'agreement with reality'" is problematical if we want to mean more than successful reference through our grammar, if we want to know that it is "really right" to rely on the evidence of our senses or memory (OC, ##215, 201); the "very thing that is in question is what 'tallying' [with the facts] is here" (OC, #199). Is a Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion possible, given Wittgenstein's strictures on the kind of reference we can make?

John Hyman argues in a recent contribution that it is not. He writes: "it was one of the fundamental themes of Wittgenstein's later philosophy that the concepts we use cannot be justified by reference to reality...So, if Wittgenstein is right, religious beliefs are not *true* or *false*, and they are not *reasonable* or *unreasonable* either ...[and they are] equally immune from falsification and from verification."³⁵ Hyman thus illustrates the view that a believer's commitment to absoluteness requires the believer to claim that the referent of religious belief must transcend all human practices, such that we would say that it would exist even if there were no humans or no world. The possibility of getting it 'really' right (or wrong) seems to be essential to religious believers. God as Creator transcends creation, so the attempt to refer to the Creator of all must succeed in referring to a reality in such a way that it gets it right in an **absolute** sense. It might seem then

that the same commitment to absoluteness which precludes talking about God with a grammar common to objects in the world also requires the believer to demand a 'Correlate' to "God" of precisely the sort that Wittgenstein says we cannot have in other cases. The religious believer might agree that human practices like banking and coronations (and maybe even art and morality) cannot be checked against an independent reality (they create the reality they refer to), but the same cannot be allowed for the reality which is the source of all human experience.

No doubt some believers would argue that it is not enough to allow that the grammar of God-talk includes the rules of treating the reference to God as a reference to something independent of all human practices (i.e., the grammar is a grammar of transcendent reference). They might still want to say that somehow the attempt to refer to the Creator of all must succeed in referring to a reality in such a way that it gets it right in an absolute sense. It is not enough to say that one can get it wrong by failing to follow the grammar implied in the practice—some believers want to maintain a possibility of reference to something outside of human practice which could fail in an absolute sense, could fail because the grammar might not get it right, might not correspond to something to which it could have corresponded.³⁶ Believers might agree that there is no need for an absolute correlate to the referent in banking because banking is not a practice concerned with the absolute, whereas in the case of religion there must be a gap between the reference we make and the reference we want to make.

To such a claim, Wittgenstein's response in his lectures on religious belief is applicable: "the mere fact that someone says they believe on evidence" does not decide the matter (LC, 60). It is necessary to see how they treat their beliefs in the face of troubling challenges; it is necessary to see what else they do, what commitments they hold as well. One could construe Wittgenstein's analysis of the reference we are able to make as one way of drawing out the implication of a commitment to absoluteness. The commitment to absoluteness does not require the determination of an absolute Correlate to "God"; in fact it seems to imply the inapplicability of any demand for an absolute Correlate. Absoluteness implies that one cannot speak of God as if there is unconditioned or immediate revelation. Revelation is always mediated through human practice. Religious attempts to speak of God more directly, even immediately, amount to attempts to step outside the world, to speak from a point of view other than that available to human beings. Although we can *imaginatively* take up such a position, we should remember that it is one we cannot express. The demand for a Correlate goes against the recognition that we cannot speak of the source of all things as if it were one of those things. The very transcendence we desire to speak of undermines the possibility of speaking of such a Correlate.

The demand to go beyond the reference which we can succeed in making by using the grammar of religious discourse expresses the imaginative assumption of a point outside the world at which we can stand to appreciate the gap between the reference we make and the reference we want to make. We speak in the way we have to in order to understand our (human) experience. That is all we can understand. The philosophical

demand for a Correlate (whether from a religious believer or non-believer) localizes the referent, opposes it to the reality we experience. That is, although the commitment to absoluteness might seem to express itself in the need to put the reality of God outside all human practice, as if we could refer in a way other than through the grammar of religious discourse, the attempt to do so can be seen as a refusal to affirm our finitude, our lack of a point outside the world.

Wittgenstein's comment that he "cannot help seeing every problem from a religious point of view"³⁷ may be understood as affirming the sense in which he sees religion to be at heart a matter of absoluteness. I think it is plausible to argue that he maintains this early appreciation of absoluteness when he goes on in the lectures on religion to criticize ways of attempting to be religious which put techniques of conditionality in tension with the evident grammar of unconditionality and absoluteness.

Wittgenstein's later references to 'language-games' do not rule out his continuing to see religion in terms of absolute value. In neither the *Tractatus* nor the "Lecture on Ethics" nor the lectures on religion does Wittgenstein speak of religious belief as a "language game." So it is reading the *Investigations* back into the lectures inappropriately to see religion as a language game among others, comparable to language games like telling jokes or giving orders (PI, §23). If anything, religion involves many different language-games. In other words, Wittgenstein's account of religion, though often related to his discussions of different kinds of discourse, is better understood in terms of an absolute perspective on the world, or absolute value, than in terms of a language-game among others.

VII. Paradox—"Seeing-as"

The Wittgensteinian notion of 'seeing-as' can be developed in ways which support seeing religious language in terms of paradox,³⁸ and this allows me to follow through on a Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion's orientation to the absolute. The *Tractatus* and the "Lecture on Ethics" both present a view of religion (ethics, aesthetics) as an all-encompassing perspective on life—a way of putting everything "sub specie aeterni," a mode of treating everything under the rubric of absoluteness or ultimacy. The grammar of relation to the absolute is not a grammar in competition with any other grammar—it is all-encompassing or it is nothing. As we saw, the "Lecture on Ethics" made clear that our attempts to speak about absolute value are paradoxical; we find there a description of the religious impulse, which results in paradoxical language—an impulse which can no more be satisfied or completed, then it can be stifled. Moreover, Wittgenstein's repeated claim that the "urge to thrust against the limits of language" yields "nonsense" is explicitly connected by him to Kierkegaard when he writes that "Kierkegaard, too, recognized this thrust and even described it in much the same way (as a thrust against paradox)."³⁹

Still another way in which Wittgenstein's account seems to capture the impulse toward the absolute which marks a Kierkegaardian grammar of faith is found in his *Tractarian* references to how the ethical, the mystical, the religious, the sense of the world, the higher—all lie "outside the world"

(6.421).⁴⁰ Wittgenstein's phrasing calls to mind a passage in Kierkegaard's journals:

Faith is quite correctly 'the point outside the world' which therefore also moves the whole world. It is easy to perceive that what bursts forth through a negation of all points in the world is the point outside the world. ...Consider the absurd. The negation of all concepts forces one outside the world, to the absurd—and here is faith.⁴¹

The "point outside the world" is, for Kierkegaard, "the absurd"; for Wittgenstein such a perspective "will simply be nonsense." Kierkegaard commends faith, while locating it at the point of the "negation of all concepts"; Wittgenstein respects faith because what is most valuable can only be expressed in terms which are best understood as attempts to express what he calls "paradox."

Admittedly, Kierkegaard elaborates the appeal to paradox in a way that Wittgenstein does not, distinguishing between the paradox(es) of subjectivity and the intensified paradox of Christian religious faith.⁴² Although one could argue that there is no qualitative difference between paradoxes—paradox is a threshold concept, all or nothing—still Kierkegaard points to an important way in which the intensified Christian paradox is qualitatively different from paradoxes within immanence—the transcendent revelation which breaks into immanence is the "absolutely different" in a way which does not apply to ordinary paradox. The seeming contradiction within ordinary paradox is a function of knowing both sides to be in opposition, which implies knowing both sides well enough to see that opposition. The intensified paradox differs from ordinary paradox because there is no determinate, knowable, context of opposition. Wittgenstein does not go into detail, but one can construe the Wittgensteinian paradox of seeing the "absolute" in the relative as parallel to the intensified paradox of which Kierkegaard speaks.

Wittgenstein's early notion of paradox carries over into his later concern in the *Investigations* with the notion of the "dawning of an aspect" or "noticing an aspect." The "dawning of an aspect" is a paradoxical experience; it is the surprising experience of having what one describes as a new perception even while one acknowledges that nothing has changed in what is being observed.⁴³ What one sees is different but what is seen has not changed.⁴⁴ One can understand religious conversion in these terms⁴⁵; the paradoxical dawning of an aspect is a hyperbolic moment in a religious seeing-as. In fact, his description of the "dawning of an aspect" bears strong echoes of the way Wittgenstein earlier described the paradoxical activity of trying to ascribe absolute value to things which are in fact contingent.

But Wittgenstein is also concerned to note that the continuous seeing of an aspect retains that paradoxicality.⁴⁶ His reference in the "Lecture on Ethics" to "seeing the world as a miracle" (PO, 43) nicely parallels his earlier reference to "seeing [one's] life as a work of art created by God" (CV, 4 [1930]), and both of these illustrate what it is to see an expression on a face rather than merely lines and color patches (LC, 34-35). Even in these cases

of continuous religious 'seeing-as' there is a paradox which, as Stephen Mulhall phrases it, "consists in the sense that the object perceived had changed in some way, even though none of its properties had altered."⁴⁷ Moreover, Mulhall's reference to the felt need to respond with an *Ausserung* seems to suggest a way of understanding the other person (imagining that felt need) without depriving the seeing-as of its paradoxicality. Cora Diamond has suggested a parallel possibility on the basis of the "slight oddness" in Wittgenstein's formulation at the end of the *Tractatus* that "Anyone who understands me recognizes [my propositions] as nonsensical"—namely, the possibility of understanding the person who utters the nonsense. She explains that although we cannot understand *what* someone *says* who attempts to show what 'what cannot be said' shows, Wittgenstein allows that we can understand *someone* who attempts to say what 'what cannot be said' shows.⁴⁸ We do this when we engage in "a kind of imaginative activity, an exercise of the capacity to enter into the taking of nonsense for sense, of the capacity to share imaginatively the inclination to think that one is thinking something in it."⁴⁹

In the end, there is reason to say that Wittgenstein's appeal to absoluteness, with its concomitant paradoxical indeterminacy, accurately describes a wide spectrum of religious positions. It accurately describes the norm informing Aquinas's conclusion that even "revelation does not tell us what God is, and thus joins us to him as to an unknown," as well as its paradoxical hope—"nevertheless it helps us to know him better."⁵⁰ It also accurately describes Johannes Climacus's ethical appreciation of our relation to the divine:

Whether it is a word, a sentence, a book, a man, a society, whatever it is, as soon as it is supposed to be a boundary, so that the boundary itself is not dialectical, it is superstition and narrow-mindedness. In a human being there is always a desire, at once comfortable and concerned, to have something really firm and fixed that can exclude the dialectical, but this is cowardliness and fraudulence toward the divine.⁵¹

University of Virginia

NOTES

1. "Wittgensteinianism," in *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, eds. P. Quinn and C. Taliferro (Blackwell: 1997), pp. 150-57.
2. "Wittgensteinianism," p. 150.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 154.
4. *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1968), §340 (hereafter PI, §). Wittgenstein writes in the lecture on aesthetics that "the main mistake made by philosophers of the present generation, including Moore...is that when language is looked at, what is looked at is a form of words and not the use made of the form of words" (*Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology, and Religious Belief*, ed. Cyril Barrett

[Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972] p. 2) (hereafter LC).

5. E.g., positivist accounts of religion.
6. E.g., Barth.
7. Philosophical discussions of religion which we find in Derrida, for example, parallel Wittgenstein's construal of religion as a matter of absolute-ness. Similarly, Levinas's turn from ontology to ethics is not a turn away from philosophy of religion, but a particular approach to it, an approach which announces the inadequacy of conceptualizations of divine reality. He does so by construing religion as the 'glory of a long desire', a desire for the Infinite, in which Divine Absence and Presence mutually inform each other. Construing divine reality under the mode of Trace attempts to leave ontological predication behind on the grounds of its inadequacy.
8. I am deeply indebted to Fergus Kerr's *Theology After Wittgenstein* (1986) (London: SPCK, 1997) and to Ingolf Dalferth's "Wittgenstein: The Theological Reception," in *Religion and Wittgenstein's Legacy*, eds. D.Z. Phillips and Timothy Tessin (London: Macmillan and New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001). My debt to D. Z. Phillips is even greater, though I have no assurance that he will like the direction I take.
9. Dummett, *The Logical Basis of Metaphysics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. xi, cited by Robert Fogelin, "Wittgenstein's Critique of Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 36.
10. John Churchill, "Wittgenstein's Lectures on Religious Belief," Part 2, *Sophia*, Vol. 20, no. 3, October 1981, p. 136.
11. Churchill, p. 136. Churchill takes Wittgenstein's remark "If I wished to say anything more [than to "characterize" the conclusions the believer herself wants to draw] I was merely being philosophically arrogant" (LC, pp. 71-72) to be "demurral and retraction" of an illegitimate critical activity Wittgenstein confesses to falling into. I take it to be a genuine hypothetical—if I had wished to say anything more, I would have transgressed my own aim—BUT I did not wish to (and did not) say more.
12. I refer mainly to the following works by Phillips: "Religion in Wittgenstein's Mirror (in *Wittgenstein: Centenary Essays*, ed. A. Phillips Griffith [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990]), "On Giving Practice Its Due—A Reply" (*Religious Studies* 31 [1995]).
13. Phillips, "Religion in Wittgenstein's Mirror," p.135, citing *Culture and Value*, ed. G.H. von Wright, tr. Peter Winch (Oxford, 1980), p.18.
14. Wittgenstein suggests that "the concept of 'seeing' makes a tangled impression," and goes on to exclaim "now look at all that can be meant by 'description of what is seen.'...There is not [only] *one genuine* proper case of such description" (PI, p. 200).
15. "Kierkegaard was by far the most profound thinker of the last century" ("Some Notes on Conversations with Wittgenstein," M. C'O. Drury, in *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, ed. Rush Rhees [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984], p. 87).
16. *Culture and Value*, p. 82 (hereafter in parenthesis in the text, CV).
17. "Our investigation is therefore a grammatical one. Such an investigation sheds light on our problem by clearing misunderstandings away. Misunderstandings concerning the use of words, caused, among other things, by certain analogies between the forms of expression in different regions of language" (PI, §90).
18. Phillips, "Religion in Wittgenstein's Mirror," p. 142.
19. "Some Notes...", M. C'O. Drury, in *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, ed. Rhees, p. 94.

20. David Burrell makes this distinction in "Religious Belief and Rationality," in *Rationality and Religious Belief*, ed. C. F. Delaney (Notre Dame, 1979), p. 107.

21. Dalferth writes: "All Wittgenstein can do is refer to what he has learnt about the use of 'God'. Here we hit upon the hidden normative agenda of Wittgenstein's descriptive approach. He assumes...a normative knowledge of how the pictures of a given religion as used in a proper or improper way. So either we regard this as Wittgenstein's private view, restrict his public contributions to what has been called its 'critical potential,' i.e., to his criticism of misuses and misunderstandings of religious language, and deny that he in any sense wanted to delineate a foundation of a new understanding of religion.' Or we take Wittgenstein's normative view of the Christian religion as *an integral part of his descriptive approach*" ("Wittgenstein: The Theological Reception," p. 24, italics mine).

22. There will be cases where the norm is apparent in the behavior of religious believers, and cases where it will be apparent in the theological commitments informing the practice.

23. In *Philosophical Occasions, 1912-1951*, eds. James Klagge and Alfred Nordmann (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), p. 38 (hereafter PO, #).

24. *Tractatus-Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D.F. Pears & B. F. McGuiness (London: Routledge, 1961): ##6.41, 6.421, 6.42, 6.432, 6.44, 6.45.

25. "Some Notes..." in *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, ed. Rhees, p. 84, italics mine.

26. Churchill, p. 36.

27. E.g., "The meaning of life, i.e., the meaning of the world, we can call God"; "To believe in a God means to see that life has a meaning" (*Notebooks 1914-16*, 2nd ed. ed. G. H. von Wright & G.E.M. Anscombe, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979], pp. 73-74e).

28. See above, p. 13 for his formulations.

29. "Conversations with Wittgenstein," M. C'O. Drury, in *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, ed. Rhees, pp. 107-8.

30. Wittgenstein is reported to have rejected the need for "philosophical justification for Christian beliefs, as if some sort of proof was needed"; rather, "The symbolisms of Catholicism are wonderful beyond words. But any attempt to make it into a philosophical system is offensive" ("Conversations with Wittgenstein," M. C'O. Drury, in *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, ed. Rhees, p. 102).

31. *Summa Theologiae*, I, Q.1-2.

32. "Queer as it sounds: The historical account in the Gospels might, historically speaking be demonstrably false and yet belief would lose nothing by this: not, however, because it concerns universal truths of reason! Rather, because historical proof (the historical proof-game) is irrelevant to belief. This message (the Gospels) is seized on by men believingly (i.e., lovingly). That is the certainty characterizing this particular acceptance-as-true, not something else" (CV, 32 [1937]). Since this is the position held by Johannes Climacus, I take Wittgenstein's parenthetical remark "(I am not sure how far all this is exactly in the spirit of Kierkegaard) to emphasize either "sure" or "exactly" or "Kierkegaard."

33. "It strikes me that a religious belief could only be something like a passionate commitment to a system of reference. Hence, although it's *belief*, it's really a way of living, or a way of assessing life. It's passionately seizing hold of this interpretation. Instruction in a religious faith, therefore, would have to take the form of a portrayal, a description, of that system of reference, while at the same time being an appeal to conscience. And this combination would

have to result in the pupil himself, of his own accord, passionately taking hold of the system of reference. It would be as though someone were first to let me see the hopelessness of my situation and then show me the means of rescue until, of my own accord, or not at any rate led to it by my *instructor*, I ran to it and grasped it." (CV, 64 [1947]).

34. Wittgenstein explicitly applies his considerations to the case of teaching a child to believe in God or that none exists, so that it can "produce apparently telling grounds for the one or the other" (*On Certainty*, eds. G.E.M. Anscombe & G.H. von Wright [New York: Harper & Row, 1969], #107).

35. "Wittgensteinianism," in *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, p. 154.

36. Wittgenstein expresses this temptation as follows: "The great difficulty here is not to represent the matter as if there were something one couldn't do. As if there really were an object, from which I derive its description, but I were unable to shew it to anyone" (PI, §374). He allows that we can use a picture as long as we "investigate how the *application* of the picture goes."

37. "Some Notes....," by M. O'C. Drury, in *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, ed. Rhees, p. 79.

38. It is possible, I think, to construe metaphor and analogy ultimately in terms of paradox.

39. "Notes on Talks with Wittgenstein," Friedrich Waismann, *The Philosophical Review* (1965), pp. 12-13.

40. I have developed this in more detail in my "The Point Outside the World: Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein on Nonsense, Paradox, and Religion," *Religious Studies* 30 (1994).

41. Soeren Kierkegaard's *Journals and Papers*, Vol. 3, eds. Howard V. Hong & Edna H. Hong (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975), #2803, p. 236. Moreover, the sensitivity to absoluteness is also reminiscent of many of Kierkegaard's refusals to speak of a determinate Correlate: e.g., when he or his pseudonyms suggest that "God himself is this: *how* one involves oneself with Him...In respect to God, the *how* is *what*" (*Journals*, Vol. 2, # 1405, p. 123) or that "God is this—that everything is possible" because "the being of God means that everything is possible, ... [conversely] that everything is possible means the being of God" (*The Sickness Unto Death*, eds. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980], p. 40).

42. I refer here to the Climacus writings, *Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*.

43. PI, pp. 195-96.

44. I am indebted to Stephen Mulhall's excellent discussion in *On Being in the World: Wittgenstein and Heidegger on Seeing Aspects* (London: Routledge, 1990), Chaps. 1-2, 5; his phrasing is perfect: although "nothing different is seen," we "are rightly inclined to say that what is seen is different" (p. 32).

45. As I do in my *Transforming Vision*. (Oxford University Press, 1991).

46. For more on this see my "Between Ontology and Ethics: Wittgenstein on Religious Imagination," *Biblioteca dell' Archivio di Filosofia* (1995).

47. Mulhall, p. 29.

48. Cora Diamond, "Ethics, Imagination and the Method of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*," in *Weiner Reihe: Theman der Philosophie*, Band 5, eds. Richard Heinrich & Helmuth Vetter (Vienna: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1900).

49. Diamond, p. 68.

50. *Summa Theologiae*, I, Qu. 12, a. 13.

51. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, eds. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 35n.