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LATER THOUGHTS ON RELIGION

Just as Wittgenstein's later philosophy sought to undermine central features of the atomistic worldview, so his mature thought on religion differs markedly from that presented in the *Tractatus* and the *Notebooks*. This difference largely flows from Wittgenstein's changed view of the nature of language. From the perspective of the *Tractatus*, the senselessness of religious discourse was due to its inability to satisfy the criteria of meaning dictated by the picture theory, criteria which entail that the only acceptable form of language is that of the natural sciences. Language legitimately functions only when referring to (possible or actual) factual situations within the world: religion misuses language when it tries to describe what is beyond the world. We must then resist talking about what is unsayable. In the face of this Tractarian onslaught, one defence of theology might be to show how religious discourse, notwithstanding these difficulties, does function successfully to describe super-empirical realities, how it overcomes positivistic challenges to its cognitivity. But when Wittgenstein changes his mind about the nature of religious utterance it is not that kind of apologetic task that he ascribes himself.

As shown in Chapter 1, part of the purpose of Wittgenstein's later work – and principally of the *Philosophical Investigations* – is to counter his earlier contention that language functions in a uniform manner. Now conceived as a family resemblance concept, language is seen to be an infinitely extendable *collection* of linguistic practices with no essence and no 'general form'. No longer given a monopoly of legitimacy, scientific discourse is just one language among many, and, as a consequence, religious discourse is not to be judged by the former's standards. The task of the later work is not to adjudicate the worth of each linguistic practice, not to rank them in value, but rather to *note the distinctive character* of each. When Wittgenstein turns his mind to matters of religion, then, his project is not that of critiquing its claim to meaningfulness. It is, rather, to elucidate the character – the specific *grammar* – of religious belief. This is achieved by careful attention to the way that religious language works in

practice, a programme of enquiry exhibited in the three principal – yet fragmentary – sources for our understanding of Wittgenstein's later thought on religion: *Culture and Value*, a collection of diverse and aphoristic passages on, *inter alia*, art, music and religion; *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*, which comprise thoughts on the nature of magic and primitive religion; and 'Lectures on Religious Belief', containing his thoughts on God and the Last Judgement. We will take each in turn.

3.1 CONFESSIONS OF FAITH IN *CULTURE AND VALUE*

There is something of a confessional character to Wittgenstein's early thoughts on religion. He talks in a personal manner about what he 'knows' concerning God and the meaning of life, for example. Such feelings are less present in the later work, though there are some surprising passages in *Culture and Value* which appear very much to be confessions of faith, or, at the very least, *gestures* in the direction of religious belief. Most spectacular of such thoughts is perhaps this striking meditation on the resurrection of Christ:

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. (CV 33)

A number of significant points are here condensed. The first thing of note is the emphasis – encountered time and again in Wittgenstein's later thoughts on religion – that religion is a realm of *passion* rather than of intellect. Religion springs, not from the head, not from speculative enquiries, but from our emotional lives, from the passions. 'Wisdom is cold and to that extent stupid. (Faith on the other hand is a passion.)' (CV 56).¹ But what we also see in this passage is a desperate longing for salvation, coupled with the conviction that the resurrection is essential for this. This would suggest that Wittgenstein held the resurrection to be of the utmost importance, and yet at other places this emphatic statement is denied. So whereas traditional Christians would hold it crucial that Jesus, as a matter of historical fact, rose from the dead, Wittgenstein denies this.

Hence, Drury records a conversation in which he expressed to Wittgenstein his feeling that the Old Testament was no more than a collection of Hebrew folklore, the historical accuracy of which was of no significance, but that the New Testament ‘lost its significance if it wasn’t an account of what really happened’. Wittgenstein’s response:

For me too the Old Testament is a collection of Hebrew folklore – yes, I would use that expression. But the New Testament doesn’t have to be proved to be true by historians either. It would make no difference if there had never been a historical person as Jesus is portrayed in the Gospels.²

Similarly, in *Culture and Value* he maintains that ‘the historical accounts in the Gospels might, historically speaking, be demonstrably false and yet belief would lose nothing by this’ (CV 32).³

Wittgenstein would not, of course, be alone in holding this to be the case. Many other thinkers have stressed the great chasm between the ‘Jesus of history’ (about whom little can be known) and the ‘Christ of faith’, the focus of Christian belief but who may have only the slightest of connections with any historical person.⁴ Wittgenstein’s own reason for divorcing Christianity from history is so that he can focus upon the peculiar character of religious belief. Hence:

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 do only as the result of a life. *Here you have a narrative, don’t take the same attitude to it as you take to other historical narratives! Make a quite different place in your life for it.* (CV 32)

Wittgenstein’s fundamental point here is that a wholly different attitude is adopted by the believer to the Christian narrative than to other historical narratives. These latter will be held dispassionately and tentatively: new evidence might alter (or indeed falsify) what we had previously thought to have occurred. Contrariwise, the Christian narrative will not be held tentatively by the believer, by that person who believes ‘through thick and thin’. Nor indeed will it be the focus of dispassionate assent, as though one might say, ‘This man Jesus was born of a virgin, and rose from the dead having removed our burden of sin; nevertheless, I am unmoved by it all.’ No, the Gospel narrative will occupy a pivotal space in the believer’s life, informing and regulating the life and actions of that person in a way no typical historical narrative could.

We can already detect here that Wittgenstein’s mature account of religion is going to diverge quite sharply from an orthodox view. Religion

is not going to be connected with any speculative beliefs, nor in any straightforward way with historical occurrences. One way we can approach Wittgenstein's alternative position is by briefly returning to his thoughts on the resurrection. Recall his striking comment that if Christ did not rise from the dead then we are 'orphaned and alone'. A prominent theme in *Culture and Value*, it appears also when Wittgenstein asks:

What would it feel like not to have heard of Christ?

Should we feel left alone in the dark?

Do we escape such a feeling simply in the way a child escapes it when he knows there is someone in the room with him? (CV 13)

The connection here between Christ's absence and the fears of a child in a darkened room, the fears of being orphaned, may bring to mind the notion, found principally in Freud, that religion represents something like a childish state; that religious belief is the outcome of a frantic recognition that our earthly parents cannot protect us from the dangers of life; and that belief in God is thus the result of the unconscious desire to be protected, just as we were when tiny babes in our cots (recall the 'absolute safety' of the 'Lecture on Ethics'). So perhaps Wittgenstein's version of Christianity is a consciously infantile religion; a religion based not on historical enquiry nor on intellectual questing but only on wish-fulfilling fantasies.

Certainly there is a sense in which Wittgenstein sees religion as offering some sort of compensation for the ills of life. Witness:

A man is capable of infinite torment . . . , and so too he can stand in need of infinite help.

The Christian religion is only for the man who needs infinite help, solely, that is, for the man who experiences infinite torment . . .

The Christian faith – as I see it – is a man's refuge in this *ultimate* torment. (CV 45–6)

This might remind one of Karl Marx's diagnosis of religion: in the midst of sufferings, helpless human beings take refuge in the illusions of religion, 'the heart of a heartless world'. In some instances, of course, one might well want to say that a man who did resort to religion because of the torments he experienced in life was lacking in both realism and maturity. But when Wittgenstein speaks of religion as a refuge he may have something more laudable in mind than merely the 'sigh of an oppressed creature'. His account suggests rather a *mode of orientation* in which a person perceives their life in a particular way, in a fashion comparable to the way in which the stoic adjustment of the *Notebooks* enabled an individual to 'live happily' in the world.

Though these thoughts are not elaborated in any substantial manner in *Culture and Value*, what we can extrapolate thus far is that Wittgenstein sees religion as a way of living, a way of acting, rather than a theoretical account of the world.

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.) (CV 53)

One might think this plainly mistaken. After all, the history of Christianity has been one of frequent bickering and confrontation over precisely the issue of 'sound doctrines' (think about the *homoousios/homoiousios* debate, or the ramifications of the *filioque* controversy). On the other hand, Wittgenstein's contention that Christianity is essentially non-doctrinal is not intended as a comment on the history of the religion. Rather, he feels that if you penetrate to its heart, if you pay attention to its character, the *prima facie* impression that Christianity offers through its doctrines a theoretical account of the universe and of super-empirical realities proves to be false.

Here a word needs to be said about the method implicitly involved in this technique of showing religion to be something other than a theoretical system. It is a method used also in the *Philosophical Investigations* when Wittgenstein seeks to uncover what he sees as metaphysical confusions, and takes the form of an appeal to *usage*, characterised as the 'depth grammar' of a word or sentence:

In the use of words one might distinguish 'surface grammar' from 'depth grammar'. What immediately impresses itself upon us about the use of a word is the way it is used in the construction of the sentence, the part of its use – one might say – that can be taken in by the ear. – And now compare the depth grammar, say of the word 'to mean', with what its surface grammar would lead us to suspect. No wonder we find it difficult to know our way about. (PI §664)

Applied to the interpretation of religion, attention to depth grammar – to the use of religious expressions – reveals that religious utterance does not function as a description of supernatural entities in a fashion analogous to science's description of *natural* entities. We saw earlier how a similar conclusion was reached regarding the apparently historical narratives of the Gospels. When we attend to the role that stories of Jesus play in the life of a believer it becomes apparent that such stories are not history, but might rather be 'rules of life . . . dressed up in pictures' (CV 29).

Some further examples of this technique will serve also to elucidate aspects of Wittgenstein's account of religion. First, one of Wittgenstein's preoccupations in *Culture and Value* is with the doctrine of predestination, the contentious idea that God chose from all eternity those who were to be

saved and those who were to be damned. Wittgenstein is less than favorable towards the doctrine, feeling it to be 'ugly nonsense, irreligiousness' (CV 32). For our purposes, however, the important thing to be gleaned is Wittgenstein's thought that the dynamics of predestination, the role played by this belief in the life of the faithful, shows it to be something far less intellectual than a cool prediction of future events:

Predestination: It is only permissible to write like this out of the most dreadful suffering – and then it means something quite different. But for the same reason it is not permissible for someone to assert it as a truth, unless he himself says it in torment. – It simply isn't a theory. – Or, to put it another way: If this is truth, it is not the truth that seems at first sight to be expressed by these words. It's less a theory than a sigh, or a cry. (CV 30)

So what is expressed 'at first sight' by the doctrine of predestination is a kind of hypothesis concerning the will of God, the ultimate destiny of individuals, and so on. Greater reflection, however, reveals talk of predestination to be something altogether different: an experience born of torment, and a means of adjustment to that suffering. A genuinely religious expression of predestination would then be akin to a tortured acceptance of fate.⁵

And it is not predestination alone which is revealed to be something other than a theory or a description. For Wittgenstein it is wrong to think that religious assertions, or religious questions, have a straightforwardly fact-stating or fact-demanding character:

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)

Traditionally, such questions have led many theologians and philosophers to attribute 'all this' to the existence of God. Proponents of the cosmological proof, such as Aquinas and Leibniz, starting from the question 'Why is there something rather than nothing?', sought to show that only by positing the existence of a deity could one understand why anything at all exists. I may, for example, be puzzled as to why I exist, and may then seek to find a reason for why I am here, appealing perhaps to the prior existence of my parents and the natural laws permitting procreation to occur. But this is not a sufficient explanation, for what of the existence of my parents, and their parents before them? And whence those laws allowing procreation? The original question can only be satisfied by the recognition that there is a God, a being whose existence is not attributable

to anything else, and who stands both as the first cause of the universe and as the author of its natural laws.

Well, that argument is not indubitable.⁶ But Wittgenstein's concern is not with how successfully it explains the universe. He is, rather, stressing how the original question is *not* the request for an answer. It does, indeed, *look* somewhat akin to a request for information. If I come to my desk and find there a mass of paperwork to be completed, I might demand 'Where did all this come from?', and here I will be searching for an answer, searching for someone to blame. But although the self-same words are used when the religious believer looks around the world, there is a huge difference in the *tone* of what has been uttered. And thus attention to depth grammar reveals the question to be not a demand for an answer but rather an *expression of wonder*. By extension, Wittgenstein would appear to be saying that religious doctrines and assertions should not be conceived as though they were either attempts to describe a supernatural realm or else explanations of the mundane world. Rather, they are expressive in character: predestination is a 'sigh'; talk of a creation is an expression of wonder at the beauty of the world; and so on.

It is for this reason that Wittgenstein wants to say that the exact formulation of the beliefs themselves is relatively unimportant ('sound doctrines are useless'). The emphasis now moves to the role played in a person's life by those beliefs:

Actually I should like to say that . . . the *words* you utter or what you think as you utter them are not what matters, so much as the difference they make at various points in your life. How do I know that two people mean the same when each says he believes in God? And just the same goes for belief in the Trinity. A theology which insists on the use of *certain particular* words and phrases, and outlaws others, does not make anything clearer (Karl Barth). It gesticulates with words, as one might say, because it wants to say something and does not know how to express it. *Practice* gives the words their sense. (CV 85)

Here, then, religious expressions cease to be assessed in terms of their status as 'super-descriptions' or hypotheses with some probability of success. And the emphasis falls not on some supernatural being but on the nature of human beings themselves. The meaning of a religious expression is not its referent, but its use – in a person's life. Hence the significance of this remark:

The way you use the word 'God' does not show *whom* you mean – but, rather, what you mean. (CV 50)

Note that Wittgenstein does not emphasise the 'what' in 'what you mean', as though the word 'God' might refer to something (only not something

personal). No, we do not understand statements about God as if they were quasi-biographical statements. God is not a name, and 'God created the world' is not logically akin to 'Aneurin Bevan created the National Health Service.' The clue to understanding how religious expressions actually *do* function, is, perhaps, this remark:

If I, who do not believe that somewhere or other there are human-superhuman beings which we might call gods – if I say 'I fear the wrath of the gods,' then this shows that with these words I can mean something or express a feeling that need not be connected with that belief. (RFGB 8)

This remark comes from Wittgenstein's *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*, a set of notes which also manifest the concerns we have just discerned within *Culture and Value*; namely, the attempt to understand the distinctive character of religion and, in particular, to show that there is nothing theoretical, nothing hypothetical, about it. Indeed, it is in his comments on Frazer that Wittgenstein's later view of religious belief and practice is most clearly articulated, and to these we should now turn.

3.2 HOMOEOPATHIC MAGIC

The *Remarks on Frazer* are crucial for an understanding of Wittgenstein's account of religion, and we will have cause to return to them later. For our present purposes, the remarks are valuable inasmuch as they illustrate Wittgenstein's censure of a pervasive view of the nature of religious belief and ritual, one which sees religion as an attempt both to explain the world and to manipulate the course of nature. Wittgenstein's criticism is directed against the theories of Sir James Frazer, as presented in his masterly work *The Golden Bough*, first published in 1890. Frazer is concerned with the origin and nature of the ritual phenomena to be found in primitive cultures. Why is it, for example, that in times of severe drought members of such cultures may be seen sprinkling droplets of water on to the parched earth? Or again, what is happening when we see someone pushing pins into a small image of a hated person? *The Golden Bough* seeks answers to such questions.

Frazer's methodology is based on the idea that in order to understand why ritual actions occur we need to think ourselves into the heads of primitive ritualists and then determine what they are trying to achieve by these ceremonies. This imaginative leap results in a picture of the primitive as a helpless being in a hostile world. Untouched by science, untouched by all the advances in the understanding of the natural world that we in the civilised West have secured, the primitive finds himself lost in a world which he can neither understand nor control. And coupled with

that dreadful impotence, the primitive needs to achieve certain things just to stay alive. He requires food, shelter, protection against enemies; he needs to control those natural forces which threaten his very existence. Out of necessity, then, out of the desperate need to understand his world, the primitive becomes a philosopher, and elaborates a theory of the workings of nature. This theory is *magic*.

As a theory, magic – humanity's first philosophy of life – is a system of natural law, principally consisting of two laws which describe how things in the world affect one another. The first of these laws Frazer calls the Law of Similarity (or the Law of Homoeopathy). It states, simply, that *like produces like*, or that an effect resembles its cause. The second law, the Law of Contagion (or Contiguity), asserts that *things which have once been in contact with each other continue to act on each other, even at a distance, after the physical contact has been severed*. Armed with these two laws, the primitive philosopher can begin to understand the workings of nature. And more importantly, the theory of magic grounds and makes possible a particular way of acting, and gives the primitive an opportunity to manipulate nature to his own advantage.

When the theoretical law of homoeopathy is put into practice it produces *homoeopathic magic*. Here, the magician attempts to achieve an end by imitating what is desired. So if the magician wishes to harm his enemy, he will make a small effigy of the hated person and proceed to damage or destroy it. Because 'like produces like', the injuries inflicted on the effigy will be correspondingly felt in the enemy who is so represented:

For example, when an Ojebway Indian desires to work evil on any one, he makes a little wooden image of his enemy and runs a needle into its head or heart, or shoots an arrow into it, believing that wherever the needle pierces or the arrow strikes the image, his foe will the same instant be seized with a sharp pain in the corresponding part of his body; but if he intends to kill the person outright, he burns or buries the puppet.⁷

While such an example may serve to reinforce a perception of magic as a dark and destructive activity, it is not so that it is always used for nefarious purposes. Just as magic arises so that nature can be controlled and made advantageous to humans, so it is often applied as a benevolently utilitarian mechanism. For instance, homoeopathic magic is frequently used in an attempt to counteract the effects of a drought. Rain is made by imitation, by sprinkling water on the ground, or even by mimicking the full effects of a storm:

In a village near Dorpat in Russia, when rain was much wanted, three men used to climb up the fir-trees of an old sacred grove. One of them drummed with a hammer

on a kettle or small cask to imitate thunder; the second knocked two fire-brands together and made the sparks fly, to imitate lightning; and the third, who was called 'the rain-maker,' had a bunch of twigs with which he sprinkled water from a vessel on all sides.⁸

Such, then, is the character of homoeopathic magic: desired events are to be produced by imitative acts.

The nature of *contagious magic* can be illustrated by the example of another method used to harm people. Here the magician gathers together either some cuttings of his enemy's hair, or nail clippings, or clothing, and burns them. These items were once in contact with the man, and their continued sympathy with him will result in his real death: as they burn so too will he be destroyed.

Though the goals aimed at by magic are perfectly reasonable, it suffers from one fatal flaw: it is absolutely futile. However many times the magician burns effigies of his foes, however much water is poured from the tops of trees, the enemies will remain and the drought continue. Magic is thus barren, an 'abortive art', a *mistake*. And of course, this mistake is ultimately detected, and with its detection the despairing sense of helplessness returns. But a new theory emerges: what controls the course of nature is not a system of laws to be bent to one's own needs, but rather certain superhuman beings – gods – to whom must be offered prayers and sacrifices as acts of appeasement and persuasion. With regard to rain-making, then, instead of imitating rain, the ritualists will resort to other methods, imploring the gods with prayer or, as in this charming example, playing on their emotions:

In times of drought the Guanches of Teneriffe led their sheep to sacred ground, and there they separated the lambs from their dams, that their plaintive bleating might touch the heart of the god.⁹

Thus moved by the pathetic sound, divine tears would fall from the sky.

Born out of the recognised futility of magic, religion too must suffer the same fate as its predecessor. Prayers work no better than spells, and the gods are ultimately seen to be superfluous to the workings of nature. But into the space vacated by both magic and religion moves a philosophy of life which successfully explains the workings of nature, allowing human beings both to predict and to manipulate its course effectively. What has emerged is *science*, 'a golden key that opens many locks in the treasury of nature'.¹⁰ Each of these three philosophies – magic, religion, science – has sought the same end (the explanation and manipulation of nature) but only science has proved effective. As for the adherents of magic and religion, Frazer writes that 'their errors were not wilful extravagances or

the ravings of insanity, but simply hypotheses, justifiable as such at the time when they were propounded, but which a fuller experience has proved to be inadequate'.¹¹

Frazer's anthropology of religion is a version of *intellectualism*, a theory characterised by two claims: first, that magic and religion arise as attempted explanations of the world; and second, that magical and religious rituals function as *instrumental* activities, by means of which ritualists attempt to achieve desired goals. Such an interpretation is not limited to an elucidation of primitive phenomena only, for in contemporary philosophy of religion Christian beliefs are also read in an intellectualist light. Theism is seen to be one (and perhaps the best) possible way of explaining the existence of the universe and/or the beauty and designedness of the world, while prayer is portrayed as efficacious in intent. Frazer would share that diagnosis, all the while seeing even the 'higher' theistic religions as essentially erroneous in character.

Wittgenstein's response to intellectualism is uncompromisingly negative, discerning in Frazer a 'narrowness of spiritual life' (RFGB 5), a narrowness which results in a total misconception of the nature of ritual:

Frazer's account of the magical and religious notions of men is unsatisfactory: it makes these notions appear as *mistakes*.

Was Augustine mistaken, then, when he called on God on every page of the *Confessions*?

Well – one might say – if he was not mistaken, then the Buddhist holy-man, or some other, whose religion expresses quite different notions, surely was. But *none* of them was making a mistake except where he was putting forward a theory. (RFGB 1)

The accusation levelled against Frazer can be put in terms of surface and depth grammar. Inclined to interpret everything as a form of science, Frazer sees religious expressions of belief as constituting hypotheses or theories, and religious practices as utilitarian actions aiming at the achievement of concrete, empirical ends. Seen in such a manner, the conclusion must inevitably be that magic and religion are erroneous: ritual actions fail to influence the course of nature because their theoretical basis is radically defective. For Wittgenstein, however, this conclusion is purely a matter of presentation: 'There is a mistake only if magic is presented as science' (RFGB 4). If we move away from a surface view of ritual and attend instead to its depth grammar we will find in magic, he maintains, something other than a primitive attempt at science.

Suspensions that the intellectualist account might be faulty arise when we consider the role rituals play in a society. For Frazer this role is

straightforwardly utilitarian: the rituals do for the primitive what our technological actions do for us, but while we effectively employ reliable techniques to achieve our ends, the primitive has to cope with the frustration resulting from the failures of his futile methods. Wittgenstein finds this view facile, pointing to the fact that if the primitives were as impotent as Frazer maintains they would barely survive at all. In fact, they do possess considerable skills:

The same savage who, apparently in order to kill his enemy, sticks his knife through a picture of him, really does build his hut of wood and cuts his arrow with skill and not in effigy. (RFGB 4)

This cuts to the bone of Frazer's theory, for if Frazer is correct, we should expect to see the primitive building in effigy. The primitive would construct a miniature hut and then look about to see whether a lifeseize one has magically appeared. But of course no such thing happens, and the thought then arises that magic might not be quasi-science at all; that there are perhaps two kinds of activity which we can see manifested in a culture. Hence Wittgenstein's suggestion that

one might begin a book on anthropology in this way: When we watch the life and behaviour of men all over the earth we see that apart from what we might call animal activities, taking food &c., &c., men also carry out actions that bear a peculiar character and might be called ritualistic.

But then it is nonsense if we go on to say that the characteristic feature of *these* actions is that they spring from wrong ideas about the physics of things. (This is what Frazer does when he says magic is really false physics, or as the case may be, false medicine, technology, &c.) (RFGB 7)

Once these two spheres of action have been separated, we can proceed to a description of magic which sees it as something other than the now-bankrupt ancestor of science.

Consider first what Wittgenstein has to say about homoeopathic magic. His criticism of the intellectualist interpretation takes the form of the simple observation that *we kiss pictures of loved ones*. This example serves two purposes. First, it links the actions of people in exotic cultures with an action commonly performed by people in the West, thus showing 'our kinship to those savages' (RFGB 10), and thereby making magic appear less alien to us. And second, it suggests a rationale for the primitive rite:

Burning in effigy. Kissing the picture of a loved one. This is obviously *not* based on a belief that it will have a definite effect on the object which the picture represents. It aims at some satisfaction and it achieves it. Or rather, it does not *aim* at anything; we act in this way and then feel satisfied. (RFGB 4)

If I am away from the woman I love, I may carry a photograph of her with me. And when I feel the pain of her absence I may kiss that photograph, that image of her. But in kissing her image, I do not believe that she will feel the touch of my lips on her face. That kiss is simply an expression of my love. And if my love affair turns sour, if the woman hurts me, then I may tear her photograph to pieces, or burn it. But that would not be an attempt to kill her. In burning the photograph I would be expressing my anger and frustration. And there are all sorts of cases where such homoeopathic actions are performed and with no instrumental motive. During the Second World War, allied servicemen took to throwing darts at a picture of Adolf Hitler pinned to a dartboard. Yet this was no assassination attempt; it was not regarded as an easy or even possible way of winning the war. The soldiers were showing their anger, expressing their hatred for the enemy.

The implication of Wittgenstein's reflections on homoeopathic magic seems clear. If our own personal-ritual actions can be interpreted as expressive actions, might this not also be true of primitive magic? Magic in a primitive culture is not a crude form of science, and it is not simply a mistake. It is somehow expressive. The magician who crafts an image of his foe is engaged in an act, not of homicide, but of *catharsis*; an act whereby keenly-felt, sometimes hidden (and often dark) emotions are manifested. The cathartic account of ritual lays its emphasis on how we as human beings have within us certain passions, hopes and feelings which need occasionally to be let out. Ritual functions as just such an emotional safety-valve, enabling us to bring those emotions out in the open, to bring to expression our desires and wishes, both individual and collective. This theme emerges in Wittgenstein's consideration of rain-making ceremonies:

I read, amongst many similar examples, of a rain-king in Africa to whom the people pray for rain *when the rainy season comes*. But surely this means that they do not actually think he can make rain, otherwise they would do it in the dry periods in which the land is 'a parched and arid desert'. For if we do assume that it was stupidity that once led the people to institute this office of Rain King, still they obviously knew from experience that the rains begin in March, and it would have been the Rain King's duty to perform in other periods of the year. (RFGB 12)

If it is the case that the rain-maker is consulted only when the rains are due to begin, only when the dark clouds are amassing on the horizon, and not in times of drought, then it surely makes sense to say that the intellectualist case is wrong. Instead of an attempt to bring rain, the ceremony serves as a *celebration* of the coming of rain; a celebration of the fact that the crops will not wither in the earth and die, that the streams

will not dry up. And continuing the theme, Wittgenstein writes, 'towards morning, when the sun is about to rise, people celebrate rites of the coming of day, but not at night, for then they simply burn lamps' (RFGB 12). Here the idea is the same as in the rain-making example: magic serves to mark the cycles of nature, not to manipulate them.

Although this expressive interpretation of homoeopathic magic and of rain-making ceremonies does have a *prima facie* plausibility, it has to be said that as a general account of magic it is inadequate. Frazer, for example, documents the case of an Abyssinian king, the Alfai, who is held to be able to cast down rain, and 'if he disappoints the people's expectation and a great drought arises in the land, the Alfai is stoned to death'.¹² This suggests strongly that the ritualists do believe that the king has it within his powers to make rain, and that they are therefore not purely expressing hopes or fears. Otherwise, why would they be disappointed if he failed to make the skies open? So this is something of a stumbling block for the expressive thesis. While it does provide some effective rebuttals of gratuitous instrumentalism (placing flowers on a grave, for example, is not intended to gratify the sense of smell believed still to be possessed by the dead man), expressivism fails fully to engage with the seriousness with which ritual is undertaken in primitive society.

So there is certainly a sense in which expressivism can be said to distort the character of some ritual actions. Wittgenstein's account is, however, not straightforwardly of an expressivist nature.¹³ While he does stress that primitive magic need not be instrumental in character, at times he eschews expressivism altogether, suggesting instead that ritual does indeed aim at concrete results. Just two examples:

People at one time thought it useful to kill a man, sacrifice him to the god of fertility, in order to produce good crops. (WLA 33)

When a man laughs too much in our company (or at least in mine), I half-involuntarily compress my lips, as if I believed I could thereby keep his closed.¹⁴

Such remarks, although advocating instrumentalism in these particular cases, should not be read as a capitulation to Frazer. Indeed, the second of these comments functions as a trenchant criticism of one principal contention of intellectualism, namely that rituals are dependent upon prior beliefs and are the product of reason or of thought. For Frazer, remember, magic and religion are, first and foremost, *theories*, from which ritual practices flow. Wittgenstein rejects that entirely: 'the practice does not spring from the view' (RFGB 2). No theorising is necessary before we tear to pieces pictures of those we hate, for there is something natural – something 'involuntary' – about ritual actions; actions which are not the

product of thought but which spring spontaneously from human beings. Hence, in the picture-kissing example, we can let the emphasis fall, not on its apparently expressivist content, but rather on Wittgenstein's striking comment that 'we *act* in this way and then feel satisfied'. Here, it is action, not thought, that is primary. Again:

When I am furious about something, I sometimes beat the ground or a tree with my walking-stick. But I certainly do not believe that the ground is to blame or that my beating can help anything. 'I am venting my anger'. And all rites are of this kind. Such actions may be called Instinct-actions.¹⁵

Wittgenstein's account of ritual is here reminiscent of R. R. Marett's striking suggestion that 'religion is something not so much thought out as danced out',¹⁶ so that religion owes more to action than to reasoning. Indeed, Frazer's view that a person might *reason* his way to a belief in the effectiveness of effigy-burning does seem somewhat strained, in a way that the instinctual account is not. We are, before our reason is brought into play, instinctively drawn to ways of thinking which have a kind of magic about them. Hence the power of G. K. Chesterton's fairy-tale example: 'Pluck this flower and a princess will die in a castle beyond the sea'.¹⁷ It is quite obviously false (even insane) to think that a princess' death could result from plucking a flower. And yet, just for a second, that impossibility 'seems also inevitable'.¹⁸ Similarly, we know that burning an effigy could never harm a real person, but we may none the less instinctively and pre-rationally be drawn to an acceptance (and a fear) of the efficacy of such an act. But to repeat: such thoughts are neither reasoned nor reasonable, but are part of our disposition as human beings, and arise from what Chesterton called 'very deep things in our nature'.¹⁹ When the question arises as to the cause of such strange and disconcerting thoughts and actions, then, Wittgenstein's answer is, quite simply, 'human life is like that' (RFGB 3).

3.3 LESSONS FROM THE LAST JUDGEMENT

The central elements of Wittgenstein's later view of religion as we find it in *Culture and Value* and in the *Remarks on Frazer* are, first, that religious belief is discontinuous with science and should not be evaluated in scientific terms. Wittgenstein's central criticism of Frazer is that he insists on presenting magic as a form of science and then condemning magic as barren because it is not successful in fulfilling the scientific task. Second, religion is not to be regarded as emerging from a rational contemplation of the world, nor does it function as a super-empirical explanation of the world. Religion is not grounded in ratiocination, but is,

rather, something like a way of responding to the world, a mode of orientation, or a way of living in the world.

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. (CV 64)

Ideas such as these are further pursued in the 'Lectures on Religious Belief', delivered in 1938. One should be aware that these are not Wittgenstein's own writings, but are, rather, notes taken by students attending his lectures. There is, however, little doubt that they accurately convey the nature of Wittgenstein's thinking on the matters addressed.

In these lectures, Wittgenstein is once again keen to explore and lay bare the distinctive grammar of religious discourse. He is concerned with the peculiarity of the ideas and language we find in religion. 'In a religious discourse we use such expressions as: "I believe that so and so will happen," and use them differently to the way in which we use them in science' (LC 57). If we think of scientific uses of language as being those in which words function as names, with sentences serving to depict facts, the discrepancy between the religious and the scientific will mean that the words and sentences used in religion will not have a straightforwardly object-naming, fact-depicting character. And indeed, this is what Wittgenstein stresses when he reflects on the meaning of 'God', seeking clarification in the manner in which this word is taught to us in our childhood.

The word 'God' is amongst the earliest learnt – pictures and catechisms, etc. But not the same consequences as with pictures of aunts. I wasn't shown [that which the picture pictured]. (LC 59)

One may complain of a particular portrait that it has failed to capture the likeness of a person. Here one might say, 'The nose is all wrong: I barely recognise him in this picture.' But it would be bizarre if someone were to complain that an artist had failed accurately to represent the nose of God. A picture of God can in no sense be seen as a portrait. And this is not simply because, in the absence of the sitting subject, the artist has had to imagine what God looks like. (Compare: 'This is how I imagine King Arthur to have looked.') Wittgenstein says:

Take 'God created man'. Pictures of Michelangelo showing the creation of the world. In general, there is nothing which explains the meanings of words as well as a picture, and I take it that Michelangelo was as good as anyone can be and did his best, and here is the picture of the Deity creating Adam.

If we ever saw this, we certainly wouldn't think this the Deity. The picture has to be used in an entirely different way if we are to call the man in that queer blanket 'God', and so on . . . I could show Moore the pictures of a tropical plant. There is a technique of comparison between picture and plant. If I showed him the picture of Michelangelo and said: 'Of course, I can't show you the real thing, only the picture' . . . The absurdity is, I've never taught him the technique of using this picture. (LC 63)

When Wittgenstein thus seeks a 'technique' for employing pictures of God (and, by extension, for the word 'God' itself), the implication is that it is crucially wrong to think that 'God' is the name of some person, in the way either that 'Tony Blair' is the name of a person or that 'The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom' is the title of a person. Believing in God is not akin to believing in the Loch Ness Monster, or the Abominable Snowman.

If expressions of theistic faith (such as 'God created the world' or 'God's omniscient eye watches over all') do not function as descriptions or putative statements of fact, then what is their function? The musings in both *Culture and Value* and the *Remarks on Frazer* suggest one possibility: that talk of God is in some manner expressive of feelings, attitudes and emotions. In the 'Lectures on Religious Belief', a different (yet related) suggestion emerges, and is one we can approach by looking at Wittgenstein's thoughts on belief in the Last Judgement.

Wittgenstein's concern is with the character of such a belief and with what divides the believer and the non-believer here. On this second matter, one might be tempted to say that the difference is straightforward: one man thinks that after death he will be judged, while the other denies that such a judgement will occur. Wittgenstein, on the other hand, wants to stress that something very different is the case. The difference between the man who believes in the Last Judgement and the man who does not is not like the difference between two people, one of whom believes the Conservative Party will win the next general election and the other of whom does not.

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

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

If some said: 'Wittgenstein, do you believe in this?' I'd say: 'No.' 'Do you contradict the man?' I'd say: 'No.' (LC 53)

On first glance, this might appear somewhat peculiar. Surely the non-believer *does* contradict the believer. But this would be the case only if

belief in a Last Judgement was some kind of bizarre prediction. And Wittgenstein is adamant that this is not so:

Suppose, for instance, we knew people who foresaw the future; make forecasts for years and years ahead; and they described some sort of a Judgement Day. Queerly enough, even if there were such a thing, and even if it were more convincing than I have described, belief in this happening wouldn't be at all a religious belief. (LC 56)

If the belief were a prediction, then it would be quite laughable. After all, where is the evidence that such a thing will occur? A person might be converted having dreamt of such a judgement, but this would never be seen as evidence elsewhere, in science, say, or in a law court. But the fact that dreams may have an influence on a person's acceptance of religious belief arouses Wittgenstein's suspicions as to its distinctive character. The method of obtaining belief is so bizarre and the beliefs themselves so peculiar that they cannot plausibly be conceived as anything like scientific hypotheses.

You might say: 'For a blunder, that's too big.' If you suddenly wrote numbers down on the blackboard, and then said: 'Now, I'm going to add,' and then said: '2 and 21 is 13,' etc. I'd say: 'This is no blunder.' (LC 61-2)

This might likewise apply to the phenomenon of effigy-burning, apparently in order to kill an enemy: 'For a blunder, that's too big.'

Here, then, the religious belief is seen to be something other than a belief in what, at a future date, might happen, and by the same token the theist and the atheist are not engaged in a disagreement over facts:

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

It isn't a question of my being anywhere near him, but on an entirely different plane, which you could express by saying: 'You mean something altogether different, Wittgenstein.' (LC 53)

What, then, is 'altogether different' about the character of religious beliefs, and in what does the difference between believer and non-believer lie if such beliefs do not serve as descriptions of supernatural realities, or as distant predictions, or the like?

Answers to these questions are found by considering the role played in the believer's life by the idea of the Last Judgement and the attendant notion of punishment. Attention to this (psychological) function serves,

Wittgenstein maintains, to sap our instinctive feeling that the atheist must be contradicting the believer:

Suppose you had two people, and one of them, when he had to decide which course to take, thought of retribution, and the other did not. One person might, for instance, be inclined to take everything that happened to him as a reward or punishment, and another person doesn't think of this at all.

If he is ill, he may think: 'What have I done to deserve this?' This is one way of thinking of retribution. Another way is, he thinks in a general way whenever he is ashamed of himself: 'This will be punished.'

Take two people, one of whom talks of his behaviour and of what happens to him in terms of retribution, the other one does not. These people think entirely differently. Yet, so far, you can't say they believe different things. (LC 54–5)

The belief in a Last Judgement, in future divine retribution, is what Wittgenstein calls a 'picture', something which is constantly before the believer's mind, entering his deliberations when he is tempted towards wrongdoing. 'Whenever he does anything, this is before his mind' (LC 53). The religious belief has, then, a central, action-determining role for the believer, 'regulating for all in his life' (LC 54).

If religious belief is described in this fashion, it would then be absurd were an atheist to reject religious belief on the grounds that the objects of religion could not be shown to exist, or that the prospect of a final reckoning was implausible. The atheist's response is entirely different from the response of the sceptic towards the occurrence of, say, extra-terrestrial abductions, where one might properly say, 'Your evidence is precarious, your witnesses unsound.' The case of the atheist runs on an entirely different track:

Suppose someone is ill and he says: 'This is a punishment,' and I say: 'If I'm ill, I don't think of punishment at all.' If you say: 'Do you believe the opposite?' – you can call it believing the opposite, but it is entirely different from what we would normally call believing the opposite.

I think differently, in a different way. I say different things to myself. I have different pictures.

It is this way: if someone said: 'Wittgenstein, you don't take illness as punishment, so what do you believe?' – I'd say: 'I don't have any thoughts of punishment.' (LC 55)

Atheism is simply then the absence of religious thoughts ('I have no thoughts of God'). It is not a contradiction of belief. Just as Wittgenstein says that religions containing quite different notions do not contradict one another except where they put forward theories (cf. RFGB 1), so religion and atheism should not be understood as rival theories. They seem more like different *ways of thinking* than different *systems of thought*.

A number of significant consequences flow from the characterisation of religion as a collection of regulating pictures. For a start, understanding a religious belief now becomes a matter of appreciating how it dictates or informs the actions of the faithful. The process of understanding is not then what it is commonly taken to be: namely, understanding the nature of the apparent referents of belief, or understanding what would be the case if the belief were true. To take an example, one characteristic feature of theistic faith is the belief in divine omniscience, and there are many scriptural passages which attest to the centrality of this idea ('Thou knowest when I sit down and when I rise up'²⁰). One investigation into the idea of divine omniscience might centre upon whether it is possible, or what it would mean, for a being to be all knowing, and what might flow from that state of affairs. We might uncover worrying difficulties: if an omniscient being can know all that is yet to happen, does this mean that human beings have no control over their future actions and are thus not genuinely free? For Wittgenstein, however, the pursuit of such an enquiry would be evidence of a misunderstanding of religious notions. What it means to believe in the all-seeing eye of God is to adopt a particular way of acting, or a particular mode of living, constantly hosting the thought that one's sins will ultimately be found out. The belief in divine omniscience is thus the entertainment of an admonishing picture, and to understand it is to appreciate its role in the believer's life. Understanding is emphatically not achieved via an investigation into the ontology of some metaphysical being. For Wittgenstein, such an investigation would be amusingly misplaced: 'I meant: what conclusions are you going to draw? etc. Are eyebrows going to be talked of, in connection with the Eye of God?' (LC 71). God is no Big Brother, and the exercise of divine omniscience is in no manner comparable to the activities of an ever-present and prying secret police.

The example of omniscience brings to the fore the decidedly *moral* character of religious beliefs as they are conceived by Wittgenstein. The status of the Last Judgement as a morally regulative picture – as an aid to good conduct – is clear, and Wittgenstein also lays great stress on how the word 'God' is intimately tied to morality:

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. One said, had to say, that one *believed* in the existence, and if one did not believe, this was regarded as something bad. Normally if I did not believe in the existence of something no one would think there was anything wrong in this. (LC 59)

If a person ceases to believe in ghosts, then those continuing to hold that such spirits do actually exist will think that person to have made a mistake

about the number of beings inhabiting our world. But if someone abandons her belief in God, and leaves the church in which she formerly worshipped, those remaining in the congregation may think her, not mistaken, but *depraved*. Here, then, we really do have an

extraordinary use of the word 'believe'. One talks of believing and at the same time one doesn't use 'believe' as one does ordinarily. You might say (in the normal use): 'You only believe – oh well . . .' Here it is used entirely differently. (LC 59–60)

The language of religion causes much perplexity because its belief-statements do not function as 'normal' beliefs, but are instead the linguistic component of a particular mode of living and cannot meaningfully be divorced from its context of conduct.

What we find in the 'Lectures on Religious Belief', then, is a moral interpretation of religion. In tune with his remark that although religion is belief, 'it is really a way of living', the contention seems to be that a religion is only apparently (only in its surface grammar) a set of quasi-theoretical statements (concerning God, the destiny of the individual, the meaning and end of history, and so on). For it is, in fact, an aid to conduct, a collection of pictures which serve to reinforce a distinctive morality, 'rules of life . . . dressed up in pictures' (CV 29).

If Wittgenstein's account of religion does run along these lines, then he can be seen to be articulating a fairly familiar style of thinking about religion, one which can (more explicitly) be seen in R. B. Braithwaite's classic paper, 'An Empiricist's View of the Nature of Religious Belief'. Braithwaite's acceptance of the verification principle entailed for him that religious discourse could not be of a cognitive nature. Instead, religious utterance serves a moral purpose, expressing and recommending a commitment to a particular way of life. Once analysed, religious statements can thus be revealed as disguised *moral* statements. So, for example, the Christian's statement that God is love is nothing other than the believer declaring 'his intention to follow an agapeistic way of life'.²¹ A religion, for Braithwaite, is a collection of (fictional) stories with a psychological-cum-moral function. 'It is', he says, 'an empirical psychological fact that many people find it easier to resolve upon and to carry through a course of action which is contrary to their natural inclinations if this policy is associated in their mind with certain stories.'²² So Christianity, for example, consists of the entertainment of certain stories – say of God creating the world, Jesus blessing children, the Sermon on the Mount, and so on – which spur the believer to good life conduct.²³

It is easy to see where the similarities lie between Braithwaite's non-cognitive theory and Wittgenstein's later view of religion. In both

instances it seems the emphasis is shifted from the apparently putatively factual nature of religious assertions on to the psychological/moral function of beliefs conceived as morally admonishing pictures. And yet to assimilate the positions of Braithwaite and Wittgenstein would result in a distortion of the latter's account. Braithwaite's view, as we have seen, is that religious pictures can entirely be reduced to ethical statements. And indeed, as the purpose of religious belief is purely to promote and bolster a particular mode of conduct, then that belief can make no claim to exclusivity: another belief or another mode of encouragement might do just as well. Such contentions would be firmly repudiated by Wittgenstein. First, he wants to say that religious expressions cannot be reduced, cannot be translated into non-religious language, cannot be given a straightforward 'cash-value'. This comes over clearly in the following exchange with Casimir Lewy, one of the students attending Wittgenstein's lectures:

Suppose someone, before going to China, when he might never see me again, said to me: 'We might see one another after death' – would I necessarily say that I don't understand him? I might say [want to say] simply, 'Yes. I *understand* him entirely.'

Lewy: In this case, you might only mean that he expressed a certain attitude.

I would say 'No, it isn't the same as saying "I'm very fond of you"' – and it may not be the same as saying anything else. It says what it says. Why should you be able to substitute anything else?

Suppose I say: 'The man used a picture.' (LC 70–1)

So religious pictures are non-reducible. As a result, other ideas, or other expressions, cannot do just as well:

Of certain pictures we say that they might just as well be replaced by another – e.g. we could, under certain circumstances, have one projection of an ellipse drawn instead of another.

[He *may* say]: 'I would have been prepared to use another picture, it would have had the same effect . . .'

The whole *weight* may be in the picture. (LC 71–2)

If we play a game of chess, we will (unless we are particularly finicky) care little about the exact size and shape of the chess-men we play with. One carving of a rook could do just as well as another. But in matters of religion *the whole weight may be in the picture*. Here it will make a difference if a belief changes or (over the course of time) is lost. And this is not because religious belief expresses a certain attitude towards things, nor is it that the belief is an interpretation of events (as though belief in the Last Judgement were a queer interpretation of things). On the contrary, the belief *determines* the way the believer sees the world, so

much so that we can say that the believer and the non-believer inhabit *different worlds*.

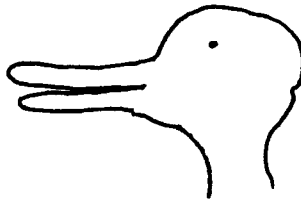
This idea can be elaborated further by reference to two other aspects of Wittgenstein's thought, one from the early period and one from the later phase. Recall first the notion of 'living happily' as this emerges in the *Notebooks* and *Tractatus*. If the recommended manner of stoic acceptance is achieved, then it is not simply that the happy man reacts to the world in a manner different from that of the unhappy man. No, the effect of living happily is that

it becomes an altogether different world. It must, so to speak, wax and wane as a whole.

The world of the happy man is a different one from that of the unhappy man. (TLP 6.43)

In one sense, of course, the happy man and the unhappy man do *not* inhabit different worlds, for the world in which they reside is, physically, the same world. On the other hand, if someone looks at the world and sees it looking back with a happy face, then their world is very different from that of the person at whom the world scowls. Wittgenstein's point here is that being schooled in certain modes of thought and living (and indeed being schooled in religious concepts and the religious life) enables one to see a different world, to detect possibilities and patterns of meaning which would otherwise be closed to us.²⁴

This brings us to the second connected aspect of Wittgenstein's thought, his celebrated discussion of 'seeing an aspect'.²⁵ As presented in the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein's thoughts concern the nature of puzzle-pictures, such as the famous 'duck-rabbit':



One person may see this picture only as a rabbit, and another only as a duck. Of course, these two people *are* looking at the same picture (there is no dispute over that), but none the less there is a sense in which what each sees is different, since a duck is different from a rabbit. The point at issue is what pattern each discerns in the picture in front of them: the one person discerns a rabbit, the other a duck. Normally, a person could be brought to see both aspects of the picture, though it may be the case that

someone will only be able to see it as a duck. Perhaps they have never seen a rabbit before, so that the rabbit's characteristic shape is unknown to them, or perhaps they are so held by the duck image that they fail to see anything else. The duck will not give way to the rabbit. In this case, we might speak of 'aspect-blindness', an inability to discern alternative patterns in an image. It is, Wittgenstein says, '*akin* to the lack of a "musical ear"' (PI p. 214).

The question might now arise as to whether religious belief can be understood as a species of seeing-as. Certainly we might say that the believer will see in the world patterns of meaning undetected by the atheist; she will see the world as the creation of God, will see in history a divine plan, and so on. (Think back to Wordsworth's perception of nature, how he detects 'a spirit in the woods'. Wordsworth's world is different from that of one who feels no spirit, and different possibilities emerge for each.) If religion is thus envisaged, can the atheist legitimately be accused of aspect-blindness due to his failure to see such divine patterns? Perhaps. But then the non-believer might well level the same charge against the believer, for failing to see the atheistic implications of the real suffering and absurdity characterising human life. Here we find ourselves back at the central problem of the 'Lectures on Religious Belief', namely the nature of the disagreement between believer and atheist, and in the context of 'seeing-as' this disagreement would be analogous to that of two people seeing very different things when confronted with a puzzle-picture.

Regardless of the rights and wrongs of thinking of religious belief in terms of 'seeing-as', these thoughts return us to the idea – present also in Wittgenstein's earlier philosophy of the mystical – that there is a notable connection between religion and *aesthetics*. If religious experience is somehow like aesthetic experience, for both are concerned with ways and manners of *seeing*, then it may be fruitful to think about cases of aesthetic disagreement, in order to clarify the difference between the believer and the atheist. People are often tempted to say that aesthetic disagreement consists solely of personal preferences, and Wittgenstein himself does seem to offer a contribution to that notion:

[Lewy: If my landlady says a picture is lovely and I say it is hideous, we don't contradict one another.]

In a sense . . . you do contradict one another. She dusts it carefully, looks at it often, etc. You want to throw it in the fire . . . Suppose the landlady says: 'This is hideous', and you say: 'This is lovely' – all right, that's that. (LC 11)

If one was to say that differences in aesthetic taste were simply a matter of personal preference, of responding emotively to a particular painting or

piece of music, and that religious belief was in the manner of aesthetic taste, the implication would be that the believer and the atheist simply differed in their personal views/tastes and that was all there was to it. Religion might here be described as one particular emotional response to the facts.

On the other hand, aesthetic disagreements are not generally left at satisfaction with divergent personal opinions. If someone says that the *Ode to Joy* is the raucous work of a musical imbecile, one who appreciates Beethoven will not leave the matter hanging there. He will try to convince the other person. He will do this, not by giving new information (as though this were a factual dispute), but by listening to the piece again, perhaps in different surroundings, pointing out and emphasising certain features.²⁶ We can see how this connects with the attempts one might make in order to get someone to see both aspects of the duck-rabbit picture. Thought of in this manner, there could well be legitimate attempts to alter a person's religious or non-religious view, though these would not, of course, take the form of offering intellectual 'proofs':

Perhaps one could 'convince someone that God exists' by means of a certain kind of upbringing, by shaping his life in such and such a way. (CV 85)

It is fitting that this remark should stress just how much conversion to a religious point of view is the product of something other than intellectual engagement, for Wittgenstein's concern throughout his later thoughts on religion is with the pre-reflective, emotional roots of faith. And if it were then complained that ' "Wittgenstein is trying to undermine reason", . . . this wouldn't be false. This is actually where such questions rise' (LC 64).

Those looking for a systematic treatment of religion in the later writings of Wittgenstein will be disappointed. There is no comprehensive philosophy of religion here. What we have rather are what Iris Murdoch has fittingly called 'exasperating hints',²⁷ a collection of observations and reminders about the character of religious belief and its role in the lives of the faithful. All this chapter has attempted to do is to pursue some of these thoughts and their ramifications. This will not have produced a fully coherent account of religion, but we do none the less find a unifying theme in the three sources we have considered here. This theme is that the temptation to construe religious beliefs as hypotheses, theories about metaphysical entities, the workings of the world, the ultimate destiny of history and of the individual, and so on, is fundamentally in error. This emerges clearly in Wittgenstein's savage criticisms of intellectualism, where the object of his ire is Frazer's contention that religion, like science, arises out of ratiocination, and, again like science, functions both as an

attempted explanation of the course of nature and as the theoretical foundation for a mode of effective action. His alternative ideas – for example, that ritual is rooted in spontaneous emotional actions, that religion functions as a set of life-determining pictures, and that it is something like ‘a passionate commitment to a system of reference’ – remain indeed tantalising hints. When we turn to the works of those we may call neo-Wittgensteinian philosophers of religion, we find what is perhaps a more complete account of what Wittgenstein was hinting at.

NOTES

1. The contrast between cold wisdom and passionate faith is frequently encountered in the pages of *Culture and Value*. Hence: ‘Wisdom is passionless. But faith by contrast is what Kierkegaard calls a *passion*’ (CV 53); ‘“Wisdom is grey.” Life on the other hand and religion are full of colour’ (CV 62).
2. Wittgenstein, quoted in M. O’C. Drury, ‘Conversations with Wittgenstein’, in Rhees (ed.), *Recollections of Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 101.
3. Wittgenstein proceeds to say that ‘historical proof (the historical proof-game) is irrelevant to belief. This message (the Gospels) is seized on by men believingly (i.e. lovingly)’ (CV 32). It is worth noting that Wittgenstein is here writing (quite self-consciously) in the spirit of Kierkegaard, whom he described as ‘by far the most profound thinker of the last century’ (quoted in M. O’C. Drury, ‘Some Notes on Conversations with Wittgenstein’, in Rhees (ed.), *Recollections of Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 87). Both in *Philosophical Fragments* and in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Kierkegaard attempts to counter the notion that Christianity could be objectively justified, either by philosophical speculation (by, say, proving that God existed) or by historical research. Rejecting both of these, Kierkegaard claims that far from being provable (or even justifiable), Christianity by its very nature rests upon an uncertainty. Indeed, it rests on a paradox, the manifestation of the eternal in the temporal. Faced with such an absurdity, a person must simply make a *decision*, must take a ‘leap’ into the unknown. Such a procedure divorces religious belief from rational considerations: it becomes less of an intellectual affair and more an affair of the heart, a product of emotion, or longing.
4. On this matter, see Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1981).
5. For discussions of Wittgenstein’s thoughts on predestination, see Cyril Barrett, *Wittgenstein on Ethics and Religious Belief* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), pp. 219–26; and Rush Rhees, ‘Election and Judgement’, in D. Z. Phillips (ed.), *Rush Rhees on Religion and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 238–55.
6. For criticisms of the cosmological argument, see David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), Part IX; J. L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), pp. 81–92; and Bertrand Russell, ‘The Existence of God’, in *Why I am not a Christian* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1967), pp. 133–53.
7. J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (abridged edition) (London: Macmillan, 1922), p. 13.
8. J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (first edition) (London: Macmillan, 1890), vol. I, p. 13.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 19–20.
10. Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (abridged edition), p. 712.

11. Ibid., p. 264.
12. Ibid., p. 107.
13. For an argument against the expressivist interpretation of the *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*, see Brian R. Clack, *Wittgenstein, Frazer and Religion* (London: Macmillan, 1999), especially pp. 21–50, 129–34.
14. Wittgenstein, 'Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough', in C. G. Luckhardt (ed.), *Wittgenstein: Sources and Perspectives* (Hassocks: The Harvester Press, 1979), p. 73. (The version of the *Remarks on Frazer* in Luckhardt's collection contains a number of comments omitted from the Brynmill Press edition, of which the quoted remark is one.)
15. Ibid., p. 72.
16. R. R. Marett, *The Threshold of Religion* (London: Methuen, 1929), p. xxxi.
17. G. K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1930), p. 121.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Psalms 139:2, Revised Standard Version.
21. R. B. Braithwaite, 'An Empiricist's View of the Nature of Religious Belief', in Mitchell (ed.), *The Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 81.
22. Ibid., p. 86.
23. R. G. Collingwood's theory of magic exhibits some of the same characteristics as Braithwaite's account of the function of religious stories. For Collingwood, magic is not, *pace* Frazer, the attempt to achieve some concrete end. Rather, it is conceived as a kind of dynamo that is good for the morale of the community, its rituals serving to promote and bolster solidarity and perseverance in the face of adversity. (See Collingwood, *The Principles of Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), pp. 57–77.)
24. In his book *God, Jesus and Belief* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), Stewart Sutherland elaborates a comparable account of religion, maintaining that the language of theism preserves and makes possible a particular view of the world (the view *sub specie aeternitatis*), a view which cannot be attained apart from the use of that language.
25. See PI pp. 193–214.
26. See John Wisdom, 'Gods', in *Philosophy and Psychoanalysis* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953), pp. 154–61.
27. Iris Murdoch, quoted by Kai Nielsen in *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p. 45.