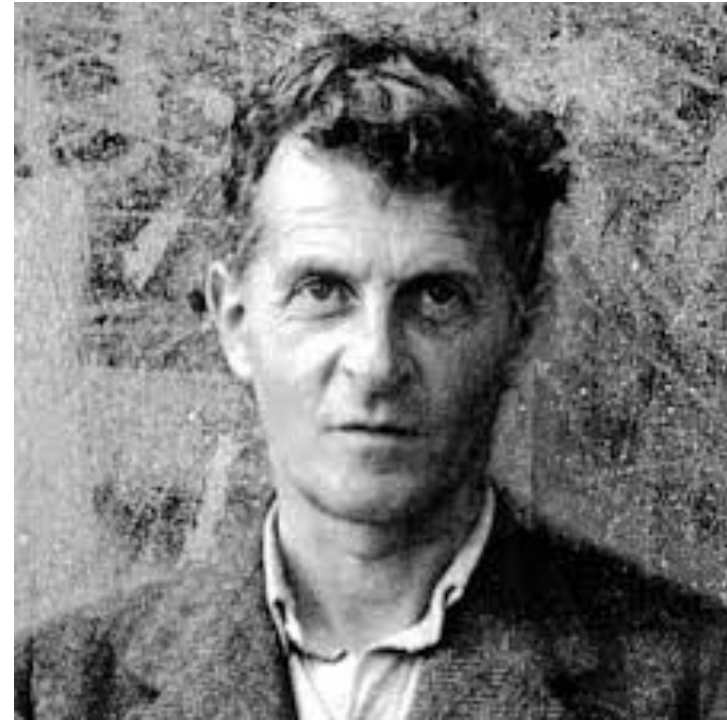


Wittgenstein and Religion

Attempts to prove the existence of God shows a misunderstanding in the nature of religion belief

This misunderstanding is grounded in seeing religion as a theory to explain the universe

Religion should instead be seen as a perspective on the world



1889 - 1951

‘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.’

- Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*

‘Actually I should like to say that in this case too 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.’

- Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*

A proof of God's existence ought really to be something by means of which one could convince oneself that God exists. But I think that what believers who have furnished such proofs 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. 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. - L.Wittgenstein, Lectures and Conversations (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), p.85)

We may look at what someone means when they say they believe in God by looking at their broader life.

We do not have to see practices as grounded in a desire

Our behaviour is not always goal driven

‘man is a ceremonial animal’

We should not assume that the belief is more fundamental than the practice

Wittgenstein is not claiming that people don't have realist belief about God. He is making a claim about the relationship between belief and practice.

'When, for example, he explains to us that the king must be killed in his prime, because the savages believe that otherwise his soul would not be kept fresh, all one can say is: where that practice and these views occur together, the practice does not spring from the view, but they are both just there.'

Perhaps we should consider coming to a religious belief as not adopting a theoretical conviction from which other changes to one's life flows.

Instead think coming to a religious belief involves these changes to one's life, including saying things such as 'I believe in God'