

## **The ‘Possible’ Role of the Imagination in Philosophy and Theology**

This paper will examine Ludwig Wittgenstein’s (1889–1951) idea that philosophy is a matter of the will more than of the intellect. This means that much of what we battle, in philosophy, is the propensity of so many to deceive themselves. It also entails that what, in effect, is to be offered as a cure is a therapeutic practice that, in its persuasive aspect, facilitates a gestalt-shift in which the imagination plays a central role. For, from the point of view of the person caught in self-deception, there is no reason to change; any reason must come from a partly different world-picture. Such a person must be persuaded to accept a different way of seeing things in the particular circumstances. Of course, this will appear artificial to the person and he will experience stumbling and hesitation as he lives in what, to him, is a more or less ‘foreign’ way. However, it will, perhaps, not be long before living in such a manner becomes second nature to him so that he would have brought an appropriate quality of smoothness in his relation to the particular sector of reality. Hence, such a position would mean that a good number of obstacles and problems within philosophy are related to the manner in which we want to see things or, rather, to the manner in which we refuse to countenance otherwise.

This paper will also attempt to show that, even within the arena of natural theology, while arguments, reasons, evidence, and the like, that are brought forward certainly do not lack pertinence, normally, one’s belief in the existence of God is not, in reality, arrived at by deductive inference.

The suggestion is that, whereas one world-picture may be seen to comprehend a wider range of experience better, and to a fuller degree, than another, one’s ‘decision’ plays a certain role in one’s philosophical conversion; a person can refuse to occupy herself with reality under a given conception and make such a vision her own.

As is well known, for Wittgenstein, achievement in philosophy, lies in striving to renounce to certain temptations to be beguiled by certain pictures in our superficial use of language. In this respect, the image of philosophy Wittgenstein developed was a clinical one. He held that there was a strong analogy between techniques of eliminating philosophical confusions and those of treating an illness. To a great extent, his philosophizing is a matter of fighting against certain unhealthy habits of thought that permeate the intellectual culture of a period, certain mythologies that infect a culture. These misleading pictures are merely passed over in silence in most of our practices, for they do not trouble us in practical life, when language is in *use*. Where they do cause problems is when language is idling and used theoretically by philosophers or by the

philosopher within each one of us (and, most notably, by the scientist). *Then*, somewhat inevitably, one is dragged down by misunderstandings. One could here think of a scientist who is tempted to see ‘thinking’ as being constituted by the firing of a number of neurones in a given sector of the cerebral cortex and goes on to carry out an investigation where he tells the subject to think more slowly to see what changes ensue in the patterns of neural firing. The problem, of course is whether such instructions *make any sense at all* within the context of the investigation; it is whether such a figurative representation of the concept – picturing thinking as similar to a physical process – is misconceived. Thus, treatment would mean changing the ways of thought and of life of the community or the individual. The therapy consists in activities like rearranging what is familiar, re-ordering in order to dissolve particular confusions,<sup>1</sup> making patterns or aspects visible,<sup>2</sup> and gaining acceptance for an alternative picture:<sup>3</sup> “[o]ur investigation tried to remove this bias, which forces us to think that the facts *must* conform to certain pictures embedded in our language”.<sup>4</sup>

Wittgenstein maintains that propositions describing a world-picture can be described as a kind of mythology.<sup>5</sup> Such propositions and practices, usages, taboos and rituals, therefore, would manifest the views and convictions that characterize the form of life lived by a cultural community. They might contain traditions about the origins of the community and the genesis of the world; they might contain perspectives on seasonal and biological events, sanctions of political and cultural structures, exhortations to a particular type of religious belief, and all that underlies the life of a community. Such a world-picture guides the behaviour and the decisions of those who hold it; it serves as a basis,<sup>6</sup> or a point of departure,<sup>7</sup> of a way of looking at the world. Hence, the concept of ‘world-picture’ is used largely to describe the intuitive or practical dimension of the community’s customs and institutions, or of one’s life, customs, routine, and decisions, rather than the discursive dimension that has been worked out rationally. Once again, one cannot explain everything: at one point there is always that which is taken on trust, since, as Wittgenstein avers, “I really want to say that a language-game is only possible if one trusts something

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<sup>1</sup> See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. Translated by G. E. M. Anscombe. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967, §132.

<sup>2</sup> See *Ibid.*, §129.

<sup>3</sup> See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Wittgenstein’s Lectures on Philosophical Psychology 1946-1947*. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1988, 43, 168, 285.

<sup>4</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Blue and Brown Books*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1969, 43.

<sup>5</sup> See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*. Translated by Denis Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe. Edited by G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977, §95.

<sup>6</sup> See *Ibid.*, §167.

<sup>7</sup> See *Ibid.*, §205.

(I did not say ‘Can trust something’).<sup>8</sup> For the certainties one has cannot be tested for within the practice itself, but can only be *shown* in one’s way of doing things; within the practice, one works with such certainties without doubting them.<sup>9</sup>

Within this world-picture one can speak of determining the truth, or of coming to know some fact. As it were, the *Weltbild* functions as a ‘logical receptacle’ that enables, within its frame of reference, disputes about truth and knowledge. Here, one sees that “[g]iving grounds, however justifying the evidence, comes to an end; – but the end is not certain propositions’ striking us immediately as true, i.e. it is not a kind of *seeing* on our part; it is our *acting*, which lies at the bottom of the language-game”.<sup>10</sup> The end is not an ungrounded proposition: it is an ungrounded way of acting.<sup>11</sup> At the basis of the world-picture lies not knowledge but *praxis*: “My life shews that I know or am certain that there is a chair over there ... - I tell a friend e.g. ‘take that chair over there’, ... etc. etc.”.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, when giving grounds comes to an end, what remains is the following: “If someone asked us ‘but is that *true*?’ we might say ‘yes’ to him; and if he demanded grounds we might say ‘I can’t give you grounds, but if you learn more you too will think the same’”.<sup>13</sup> For one must begin to trust somewhere, that is to say: one must begin with not-doubting. And that is not, so to speak, hasty but excusable: it is part of judging.<sup>14</sup>

At this point, “[o]ne wants to say ‘*All* my experiences shew that it is so’. But do they do that? For that proposition to which they point itself belongs to a particular interpretation of them. ‘That I regard this proposition as certainly true also characterizes my interpretation of experience’”.<sup>15</sup> Or rather, it forms the way I see reality. For, experiences do not teach fundamental certainties. Rather they constitute just the ways in which one sees these experiences. One, as it were, swallows such certainties whilst one is learning various language activities. One can say that a world-picture is a form of imagining and experiencing the world that is assimilated as one’s second nature.

In this light, the problem against which philosophy perennially militates is *what one is tempted to say* and it can arise precisely because of unhealthy habits of thought and of ways of life in which we are enmeshed and that engender prejudices:

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<sup>8</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*. Translated by Denis Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe. Edited by G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977, §509.

<sup>9</sup> See *Ibid.*, §147.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, §204.

<sup>11</sup> See *Ibid.*, §110.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, §7.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, §205.

<sup>14</sup> See *Ibid.*, §150.

<sup>15</sup> See *Ibid.*, §145.

Human beings are profoundly enmeshed in philosophical – i.e. grammatical – confusions. They cannot be freed without first being extricated from the extraordinary variety of associations which hold them prisoner. You have as it were to reconstitute their entire language. – But this language grew up as it did because human beings had – and have – the tendency to think in this way. So you can only succeed in extricating people who live in an instinctive rebellion against language; you cannot help those whose entire instinct is to live in the herd which has created this language as its own proper mode of expression.<sup>16</sup>

In doing conceptual analysis, it is important to note what it could mean to “live in an instinctive rebellion against language”. It is *not* that the philosopher stands outside language, examining it as a workman would examine his tools, as it were; language is not a skill that I may choose to use for such-and-such a purpose. Even if language does not have the kind of unity that belongs to a calculus, and one sees that language-games *are* different, language is the element within which we have our life and we cannot go outside it to tinker with it. Within language one can, however, stand outside of, say, the regime of mathematics, distancing oneself from that community in order to see what the temptations that mathematical language brings with it are. Of course one would be doing so, not as a mathematician, but as a philosopher. To be a philosopher, one must be amazingly sensitive to misleading modes of expression, sincere with oneself and courageous in one’s thinking and acting. One must, above all, shun superficiality:

[... ]In doing philosophy you have got to be ready *constantly* to change the direction in which you are moving. At some point you see that there must be something wrong with the whole way you have been tackling the difficulty. You have to be able to give up those central notions which have seemed to be what you must keep if you are to think at all.<sup>17</sup>

The way out is to effect a reorientation of one’s way of thinking; one must aim at a conversion to a partially new world-picture. The way forward is the persuasion of the individual to replace entrenched yet inadequate habits of thought by the possibility of other conceptions or pictures of the reality in question.

This means that, in doing philosophy, one must overcome resistance of one’s will; what makes something difficult to grasp may well be how one wants to see it.<sup>18</sup> For, a world-picture must be accepted; it cannot be forced or coerced: “*I believe ... am sure, by reason of what has been said to me, of what I have read, and of my experience. To have*

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<sup>16</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Big Typescript: Manuscript 213*, 423, as quoted in Anthony Kenny, “Wittgenstein on the Nature of Philosophy,” in *The Legacy of Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), 51.

<sup>17</sup> Rush Rhees, “Postscript,” in *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, ed. Rush Rhees (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 208.

<sup>18</sup> See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*. Translated by Peter Winch. Edited by G. H. von Wright in collaboration with H. Nyman. Revised edition of the text by A. Pichler. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1998, 29, 30.

doubts about it would seem to be madness – of course, this is also in agreement with other people, but *I* agree with them”.<sup>19</sup> One may always persist in refusing to see an aspect even if it is drawn to one’s attention: the “[d]ifficulty of philosophy [is] not the intellectual difficulty of the sciences, but the difficulty of a change of attitude. Resistances of the will to be overcome”.<sup>20</sup>

What makes the object hard to understand [is] the antithesis between understanding the object and what most people *want* to see. Because of this precisely what is most obvious may be what is most difficult to understand. It is not a difficulty for the intellect but one for the will that has to be overcome.<sup>21</sup>

This transformation of one’s way of seeing things may be extremely difficult even for someone who is highly intelligent. One can, for instance imagine how difficult it would be for someone to convince Gottlob Frege to drop his conviction that the possibility of objective knowledge in mathematics is grounded on number-concepts standing for abstract entities given directly to our reason. For this seems to form an axis for his thinking, something unshakeable or undoubtable that forms part of his intellectual *identity*.

With respect to religious belief, the scenario is rather similar. For, it is important to note that, even here, many of one’s beliefs are not, in reality, arrived at by deductive inference or argument, and are not in *deed* supported by any reasons in one’s life. In the case of natural knowledge of God, for example,

it isn’t that one beholds the night sky, notes that it is grand, and concludes that ... God exists. It is rather that, upon the perception of the night sky, ... these beliefs just arise within us. They are occasioned by the circumstances; they are not conclusions from them.<sup>22</sup>

In this sense, once again, one’s ‘certainties’ are manifested in, and shape one’s perception, the way one sees things. They form and they manifest one’s starting points for thought, the receptacle within which one thinks and acts. They are not accepted on the evidential basis of other beliefs, although, of course, one would cite various other

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<sup>19</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*. Translated by Denis Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe. Edited by G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977, §281.

<sup>20</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Big Typescript: Manuscript 213*, 406, as quoted in Gordon P. Baker, "Wittgenstein's Method and Psychoanalysis," in *Wittgenstein's Method: Neglected Aspects*, ed. Katherine J. Morris (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 206.

<sup>21</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*. Translated by Peter Winch. Edited by G. H. von Wright in collaboration with H. Nyman. Revised edition of the text by A. Pichler. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1998, 25.

<sup>22</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 175. I am, however, more ready than Plantinga to say that one’s belief in God’s existence might not, in effect, have the role of a basic belief in one’s life and that, in that case, arguments and grounds can be in *deed* given for such beliefs.

propositions in defence of one's beliefs if another were to challenge them. However, if the latter were to continue to push, in the end, one would simply have to reply that 'one has to see it'. Certainly, experiences of a certain sort are often intimately involved in the formation of one's belief in God; also one may see that specific beliefs comprehend a given situation or phenomenon better. However, typically such beliefs are not accepted *as conclusions* by way of some argument from experience. It is rather that the experience normally constitutes the *occasion* for the acceptance of the beliefs in question. It is interesting, here, that arguments, reasons, evidence, and the like, that are brought forward in natural theology, are created by believers who place themselves in the shoes of those who *want to understand*; they would not normally speak as though it might, after all, turn out that there is no god, but only investigate God's existence in terms of wanting to offer justifications or grounds for those for whom it is not a certainty in their lives, or even in order to explore better the relevance of God's existence in their own lives.<sup>23</sup> However, even if such justifications or grounds could turn out to be actually useful in someone's coming to see that God exists, it is evident that what normally happens is that some situation or event convinces him or her to see things differently.

What is so pertinent here is that such occasions manifest that the case of conversion is not solely a matter of ratiocination, it is also – and in the case of a belief, or an unbelief, in the existence of God this is typically the case, since belief, or unbelief in God is characteristically a commitment that shows itself in many of the agent's doings and sayings – a matter of 'transcending' one's world-picture where one is persuaded and also decides to see things *thus*, under such-and-such a conception: he or she decides to make *these* connections between elements of reality. For, as has been seen, our way of looking at, and acting within, reality is not merely a matter of one's passively receiving stimuli and responding automatically. One's practical intellect is shaped in a certain way and this is shown in what one sees as pertinent, the way one speaks, and so on. Thus, certain certainties in one's life are in *deed* not doubted and remain open to so little serious questioning that they serve as hinges around which one's dealings with reality revolve. One would have assimilated them into one's way of life. I want to recall here that

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<sup>23</sup> It is obvious that I am, here, departing from Wittgenstein's attitude towards the possibility of natural theology, which he notoriously detested. It is well known that Wittgenstein held that one should not attempt to smoothen all language-games with the same form of rationality; he strongly felt that some such language-games should be left 'jagged' and respected as being such. However, the extent to which such a position is a personal one or part of his philosophy is not clear at all (see Gertrude Elizabeth Margaret Anscombe, "The Question of Linguistic Idealism," in *From Parmenides to Wittgenstein: Collected Philosophical Papers, I* [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981], 122-124).

Wittgenstein gives some telling examples of such assimilation manifested as one's second nature that are pertinent to this matter:

Isn't this altogether like the way one can instruct a child to believe in a God, or that none exists, and it will accordingly be able to produce apparently telling grounds for the one or the other?<sup>24</sup>

However, we can ask: May someone have telling grounds for believing that the earth has only existed for a short time, say since his own birth? – Suppose he had always been told that, – would he have any good reason to doubt it? Men have believed that they could make rain; why should not a king be brought up in the belief that the world began with him? And if Moore and this king were to meet and discuss, could Moore really prove his belief to be the right one? I do not say that Moore could not convert the king to his view, but it would be a conversion of a special kind; the king would be brought to look at the world in a different way.<sup>25</sup>

What is somewhat startling is Wittgenstein's insistence that getting someone else to share one's certainty is closer to inviting her to occupy herself with a particular conception or aspect than presenting demonstrative evidence to justify a hypothesis.

One also notes that, while 'propositions' of one's world-picture cannot be imposed against one's will, it *is* possible to work – albeit hesitantly – within an alien conception or world-picture and make sense of problems, moves, strategies and solutions within it. This is interesting because it signals the freedom that marks our human ways of imagining, thinking, judging, and living and the requirement, incumbent upon us, of being imaginative, reflective, and critical within the midst of one's way of thinking and living. Such scrutiny is essential because it may well bring up hitherto unnoticed defects such as parochialism, bad prejudice<sup>26</sup> and self-deception.

Wittgenstein's point is that, while 'decision' plays a certain role in one's conversion, one's coming to belief in God, like one's adoption of a change in one's world-picture, is not a decision taken once and for all; one can assimilate a change in the way one looks at, and acts within, a situation only through repeated, persistent effort. Notwithstanding this, the thrust of his method is that one can, to some extent, determine the aspect under which one sees some situation, or under which one occupies oneself unhesitatingly with a certain piece of reality.

Now, it is not that there is no 'truth' or 'falsity'. It is, rather, that a person can refuse to see something under a given aspect. She would have refused to occupy herself

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<sup>24</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*. Translated by Denis Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe. Edited by G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977, §107.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, §92.

<sup>26</sup> Note that a key point of this paper is that prejudice is not necessarily a bad thing; rather, it is also a condition for understanding (see also John McDowell, *Mind and World* [Cambridge/MA: Harvard University Press, 1994], 81).

with the situation under a given conception and make such a vision her own. In all this, it is not that the persuasion or sharing of one's world-picture is completely irrational and subjective. One gives reasons; only, one ends up with such reasons as say themselves; one ends up with the element in which one's arguments have their very life. Also, one is not saying that there is nothing objective about one's world-view. Wittgenstein continues *On Certainty* §92 by noting:

Remember that one is sometimes convinced of the *correctness* of a view by its *simplicity* or *symmetry*, i.e., these are what induce one to go over to this point of view. One then simply says something like: 'That's how it must be.'

This remark is interesting and important for one may well suspect that what has been said – that when one is dealing with a change in world-picture, one does give reasons even if it may well be that, at one point, one will have to invite or persuade the person to see the situation in *this* way rather than in *another* manner – entails some kind of fideism. Now, this is *not* the case. For, although one might firmly hold that one cannot be making a mistake about such-and-such, one may indeed, sometimes – rightly or wrongly – believe that one was not competent to judge.<sup>27</sup> And this legitimate though, at the instance of admission, abstract critique of one's belief is contemplated further for Wittgenstein asserts that “[i]f that always or often were to happen, that would indeed completely change the character of the language-game”.<sup>28</sup> Now this shows the way forward in terms that manifest that such persuasion is not fideistic for, indeed even if, on the one hand, our concepts are certainly moulded by our linguistic practices, on the other hand, “it is always by favour of Nature that one knows something”.<sup>29</sup> I do want to stress that even if such a sequence of events, when one realizes that one was wrong where one could not contemplate being wrong, may occur albeit rarely, this does not exculpate the entire human business of assertion and denial from being within the space of reasons. For all our judgments and all challenges to such judgments always take place within the sphere of what is thinkable. At the same time, however, that one *knows* something is not guaranteed by the language-game: what is *thought* is open to criticism; indeed, a second world-picture may be seen to comprehend a wider range of experience better than the

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<sup>27</sup> See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*. Translated by Denis Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe. Edited by G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977, §645.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, §646.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, §505. I am, here, grateful to Gertrude Elizabeth Margaret Anscombe, "The Question of Linguistic Idealism," in *From Parmenides to Wittgenstein: Collected Philosophical Papers, I* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981), 133.



first.<sup>30</sup> The relation between what is thought and the provocations of reality will always be tentative but – while it does not break out of the sphere of thinkable content – it rests on features of the world that are independent of what is thought. Hence the standing obligation to be willing to refashion concepts and conceptions if that is what experience recommends. The inherent human vocation is to strive towards the network of rational linkages and justifications that comprehends experience better, and to a fuller degree.

Of course, in the religious arena, there are some certainties whose role is untouchable if one is to remain within the particular religion. Nevertheless, there surely are also bad prejudices. The imagination – and the knowledge of the process of the transmission of tradition – can play a vital role here in the necessary critical reflection. Indeed, it is highly interesting that what has been said above for philosophy, and for natural theism, can also be said for theology.

However, the imagination does not have a merely critical role. Since a world-picture is a form of imagining and experiencing the world that is assimilated as one's second nature, where our imagination has a role in our coping with, shaping, and ultimately transforming the concrete world, it is highly significant that works of art and verbal expressions, which *embody* that which they depict or signify, are such an important arena for theology. Indeed, this significance does not only hold for efforts of 'high' creativity – as it obviously does – but also for the daily and the ordinary. For, just as one may note the difference between saying, on the one hand, of someone 'He behaves well' and, on the other hand, 'He made a great impression on me'<sup>31</sup> – and such an experience, though objective, may not always *live* for the person, just as the portrait of a dear friend may not always 'smile' for one while one is seeing it<sup>32</sup> –, one notes a difference between one who lives life rather aimlessly and superficially and another who, as it were, imagines things with God.<sup>33</sup> And here, just as it would be vastly reductive to claim that, for

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<sup>30</sup> I feel justified in making this assertion by Anscombe's remarks: "Talking about these matters I once asked Wittgenstein whether, if he had a friend who went in for witch-doctoring, he would want to stop him. He thought about this for a little and said "Yes, but I don't know why" (Gertrude Elizabeth Margaret Anscombe, "The Question of Linguistic Idealism," in *From Parmenides to Wittgenstein: Collected Philosophical Papers, I* [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981], 125). Later, in the same article, Anscombe exclaims, on Wittgensteinian grounds: "But won't the persuasion be right or wrong, an intellectual disaster or intellectual enlightenment?" (Ibid., 131).

<sup>31</sup> See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*. Edited by Cyril Barrett. *Compiled from notes taken by Yorick Smythies, Rush Rhees and James Taylor*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978, 8.

<sup>32</sup> See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. Translated by G. E. M. Anscombe. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967, 205.

<sup>33</sup> This phrase is to be found in William F. Lynch (*Christ and Prometheus: A New Image of the Secular* [Indiana: Notre Dame, 1970], 23). It is highly significant, here, that at the outset of his commentary on *The Sentences of Peter Lombard* (q. 1, a. 5), no less a theologian than Thomas Aquinas inquires into whether the method of theology should be *artificialis*; that is, into whether theology needs a *poietic* or skilful

example, the theological significance of a Gothic Cathedral lies only in the correctness of its style,<sup>34</sup> it is important and significant to note that, in this regard, it is not merely the content of the situation that is of importance. What is clearly also central is the aesthetic experience that makes a great impression and invites one into a different way of awareness. This is another way of saying that a religious certainty, and particularly, the way in which it is lived in a crucial moment of the community's history, or expressed by a great saint, embodies its meaning so that it is irreducible and inexhaustible. Hence, on the one hand, it says itself: a great formulation of a religious certainty, or a great expression of faith – just like an artistic object – is unique and the feeling is that the slightest alteration within it or attempt to translate it into another form would rupture its meaning. On the other hand, however, in understanding such a certainty, one must explore the way in which it relates to its context and it is possible to say a great deal about this; indeed, this is an inexhaustible task since one discovers ever richer connections of meaning and significance within the *life* of those for whom it is a certainty. In a certain sense, the tie-ups with the certainty's surroundings can encompass the whole of life and these tie-ups need to be explored if one is to come to a better understanding of the meaning of the certainty itself and a greater appreciation of its unique irreducibility.

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dimension. The rather surprising reply is a resounding 'yes'. For he insists that faith is based on 'a narrative of signs' and that, in this light 'metaphorical, symbolical and parabolical' approaches are not only acceptable, and not merely helpful but, indeed, necessary. As always it is intriguing to go through some of the objections and his replies in order to appreciate the context of the contrary view that he intends to undermine. In the second objection, the objector notes that, whereas the method of a science should be proportioned to the science itself – and theology is one to the greatest degree, and therefore the method of theology should also be unified to the greatest degree – nevertheless the theological method does not appear at all unified since it proceeds sometimes by making threats, sometimes by giving precepts, and sometimes by other methods. He pushes this further in the subsequent objection where the point is that, since theology as distinct from, say, poetry – which is said by the objector to contain the least amount of truth –, is a science to the greatest degree, it therefore should avoid the metaphorical dimension of poetry. The argument here is that poetry suffers from a defect of rational truth and, therefore, such a dimension or model is not fit for theology. His counter-arguments are, once again, an eye-opener. In response, he invites the second objector to see that theology addresses different publics. Where it is a matter of overcoming error (which does not constitute the whole of theology, he stresses), there it is clear arguments that are necessary: one must be prepared to give reasons (and, therefore, arguments) in order to satisfy all who ask for the reason of the faith that one has (see 1 Pt 3, 15; Thomas also quotes Titus 1, 9 to the same effect). However, he continues, theology is also involved in the contemplation of truth, and it is there that one needs a *modus symbolicus* that is not merely argumentative (Aquinas stresses this point further, in the body of the article, by noting that there are four levels of meaning in scripture: historical, moral, allegorical and anagogical). In response to the third objector, he notes that theology also seeks to explore that which is beyond our reason, and therefore a symbolic method is common to both theology and poetry ("*theologia autem est de his quae sunt supra rationem; et ideo modus symbolicus utrique communis est, cum neutra rationi proportionetur*"). I am grateful to Michael Paul Gallagher, "Retrieving Imagination in Theology," in *The Critical Spirit: Theology at the Crossroads of Faith and Culture*, ed. Andrew Pierce and Geraldine Smyth (Dublin: The Columba Press, 2003), 200-207, for highlighting these passages.

<sup>34</sup> See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*. Edited by Cyril Barrett. *Compiled from notes taken by Yorick Smythies, Rush Rhees and James Taylor*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978, 8.

In this somewhat startling light, the final invitation to the writer and the reader hearkens both to critical reflection on one's traditions and prejudices, and to a sense of deep amazement, and readiness to investigate, reverently, elements in our life that say themselves, and that provoke the arising of philosophical and theological questions in the first place.

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