

**Wittgenstein on religion and mysticism**

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- the key element in religion: **personal commitment**
- cognitivists as well as non-cognitivists interpretations of religion (i.e. whether religious claims pertain to truth-value).
- influenced by: Pascal, Schopenhauer, **Kierkegaard**, Nietzsche, **Tolstoy**

**The early Wittgenstein**

- influenced by personal experiences on the front in World War I
- a (mystical) experience of “losing oneself”
- the mystical – two godheads: the world and the subject/I
  - God as the meaning of life
  - God as how things are
- “God does not reveal himself *in* the world.” (TLP 6.432)
- Religious talk is an illuminating nonsense (on one reading).
- Analogy: Kant’s limits of knowledge make room for faith, Wittgenstein’s limit of the expressions of thought makes room for ethics, religion, the mystical.

**The later Wittgenstein**

- fideistic inclinations: religion is complementary/supplementary to reason, pre-rational (transcendental)
  - Religion is not a proto-science or competing with science.
  - God doesn’t need any proof of its existence. Religious claims aren’t in any need for rational justification.
  - Religion is about subjective commitment, opening one’s heart.
- Religion is **not** a (primitive/infantile) response to hopes and fears (Hume) or to our helplessness and the need for protection (Freud).
- Religion is an activity/praxis/language-game/form of life.
  - E.g. a praxis of liturgy, a language-game of praying, a form of life of a monk...
- Religious language is a kind of **grammar**, a system of reference, a framework. (“Theology as grammar” PI 373)
- “I am not a religious man but I cannot help seeing ‘every problem from a religious point of view.’”

**A case for non-cognitivism**

- Religious statements don’t describe any kind of empirical or transcendent reality.
- Any attempt to justify religion by evidence counts as **superstition**.
- Our attitude towards historical religious texts is (akin) to our attitude towards fiction. The point of religious talk is to present neither historical factual truths, nor truths of reason.

**A case for cognitivism**

- Religious language as grammar has factual presuppositions and factual implications.
- The view that God isn’t an entity alongside other entities in the world is in conformity with traditional religious cognitivism (e.g. in Aquinas). “God’s essence is said to guarantee his existence—what this really means is that here what is at issue is not the existence of something.”

**Selected quotations**

- What is Good is Divine too. That, strangely enough, sums up my ethics. CV 5

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- Only something supernatural can express the Supernatural. CV 5
- How should we feel if we had never heard of Christ?  
Should we feel left alone in the dark?  
Do we not feel like that only in the way a child doesn't when he knows there is someone in the room with him?  
Religious madness is madness springing from irreligiousness. CV 15
- Religion says: Do this!–Think like that! but it cannot justify this and it only need try to do so to become repugnant; since for every reason it gives, there is a cogent counter-reason. It is more convincing to say: “Think like this!–however strange it may seem.–” Or: “Won't you do this?–repugnant as it is.–” CV 34
- Christianity is not based on a historical truth, but presents us with a (historical) narrative & says: now believe! But not believe this report with the belief that is appropriate to a historical report,–but rather: believe, through thick & thin & you can do this only as the outcome of a life. *Here you have a message!–don't treat it as you would another historical message! Make a quite different place for it in your life.–There is no paradox about that!* CV 37
- Longfellow:  
In the elder days of art,  
Builders wrought with greatest care  
Each minute & unseen part,  
For the gods are everywhere.  
(This might serve as my motto.) CV 39
- A miracle is, as it were, a *gesture* which God makes. ... The only way for me to believe in a miracle in this sense would be to be *impressed* by an occurrence in this particular way. CV 51
- ‘Believing’ means, submitting to an authority. CV 52
- It isn't reasonable to be furious even at Hitler; let alone at God. CV 53
- Religion is as it were the calm sea bottom at its deepest, remaining calm, however high the waves rise on the surface.— CV 61
- The honest religious thinker is like a tightrope walker. It almost looks as though he were walking on nothing but air.  
His support is the slenderest imaginable. And yet it really is possible to walk on it. CV 84
- If Christianity is the truth, then all the philosophy about it is false. CV 89

**Assigned reading**

- L. Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, remarks about religion (CV)

**Further reading**

- H.-J. Glock, “Religion”, *A Wittgenstein Dictionary*, Blackwell, 1996.
- J. Cottingham, “Wittgenstein and Philosophy of Religion”, in: H.□J. Glock and J. Hyman (eds.), *A Companion to Wittgenstein*, Blackwell, 2017.