

## ON MUCKING AROUND ABOUT GOD: SOME METHODOLOGICAL ANIMADVERSIONS

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### I

There is confusion and perhaps even incoherence not only in the philosophical and theological accounts of religion, but in certain central strands of first-order religious discourse itself. Not only the talk about God but first-order God-talk itself, it is at least plausible to argue, is in certain fundamental respects incoherent.

While there is a strong temptation in thinking about religion to think this, could it really be the case that religious talk generally or religion or, at the very least, Judaism or Christianity, actually is incoherent? If we take Wittgenstein seriously this could not be possible. For him what is given are the forms of life and the forms of language are the forms of life. He reminds us that ordinary language is all right as it is; it does not need any philosophical subliming. Our task as philosophers, Wittgenstein would have it, is to give a perspicuous representation of that language. We must come, if we would dispel philosophical perplexity, to command a clear view of the language in question where it is actually at work. Our philosophical accounts of a particular domain of discourse may be confused, but it makes no sense to say that a whole domain of discourse is itself confused. In certain moods and when we speculate in certain ways we slip into perplexities about a whole domain of discourse, though when we are in such perplexities we usually do not see these perplexities as being about a domain of discourse. We do not see them as confusions about the *workings* of our language, though that is in reality what they are. But once we see them as such confusions and command a sufficiently clear view of our language in that domain for our philosophical perplexities to wither away, the philosopher's task is completed. The only proper task for a philosopher, Wittgenstein argues, is clearly to display the structure of the language area that perplexes us philosophically — or at least to characterize it with sufficient clarity such that our philosophical obsessions are dispelled. But this is all that can be done. There can be no question of criticizing the perplexing area of discourse itself. What we need to recognize is that the forms of language, which are also the forms of life, are the philosopher's *given*. It makes no sense, Wittgensteinians claim, to say that they are incoherent or to claim that they are irrational

or somehow mistaken or incorrect or inadequate to capture the complexity of life. We are, rather, limited to displaying their structure.

Such a Wittgensteinian conception of philosophical activity is aptly summarized by Alice Ambrose:

“... What a mathematician is inclined to say about the objectivity ... of mathematical facts, is not a philosophy of mathematics, but something for philosophical *treatment*. The philosopher’s treatment of questions is like the treatment of an illness” (p. 91). This statement, although appearing rather late in Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*, orients the reader interested in what distinguishes Wittgenstein’s conception of philosophical activity from the traditional conception. The traditional philosopher considers himself to be solving problems, whereas, according to Wittgenstein, there are no problems, in any usual sense, to solve. There are only linguistic obsessions to be removed. Obsessions transmute into problems “misunderstandings concerning the use of words, caused, among other things, by certain analogies between the forms of expression in different regions of language” (p. 43). The result is dissatisfaction with our ordinary language, as if our way of speaking “does not describe the facts as they really are” (p. 122). But nothing is gained, and no practical advantage is even desired of a philosophical re-description (p. 122). Language as used by the metaphysician “goes on holiday” (p. 19). Nonetheless, this use is a symptom of a deep disquietude. The therapy for this disquietude (the technique for “solving” philosophical problems) is according to Wittgenstein to “command a *clear view* of the use of our words” (p. 49), whereupon the problems should dissolve, “*completely disappear*” (p. 51). Not solution, but dissolution, is the aim; and not to reform language, but to describe it, and in so doing to “bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use” (p. 48).<sup>1</sup>

Philosophical perplexities arise when “language goes on a holiday,” when we fail to command a clear view of our language and develop, in reflecting about certain deeply embedded concepts in our language, confused metaphysical conceptions of these concepts – concepts which display themselves in the working of our language. The philosopher, who knows what he is about, destroys such a house of cards by clearly displaying the functions of our actual language at the point where philosophical perplexities arise. When that is done, the perplexity, like a neurotic obsession, will, or at least should, dissolve, for what seemed like a profound problem will now be seen to be a muddle arising from a failure to understand the workings of our language.

## II

For approximately a decade after the publication of Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), this striking conception of philosophy captivated many (mostly younger) philosophers already influenced by analytical philosophy and repelled a considerable number of the older generation of philosophers trained in

a very different tradition. Indeed the repulsion, like the reaction to Richard Rorty today, was not just, or sometimes at all, intellectually based but came, quite understandably, from an arousal of their anxieties. By now, this Wittgensteinian metaphilosophical message does little more than provoke a yawn from most philosophers, though there are a few philosophers, deeply influenced by Wittgenstein, who in their philosophical practice, though less and less in their programmatic statements, continue to operate with such a conception of what proper philosophical activity comes to. (Richard Rorty, in a rather qualified way, has done something to reverse this trend.)<sup>2</sup>

Both in reacting against it and operating with it, philosophers of religion have been deeply influenced by this Wittgensteinian conception. Philosophers whom I have dubbed, perhaps tendentiously, Wittgensteinian Fideists have, at least in practice, accepted it, while other philosophers, often indignantly, have rejected it as evasive and utterly wrongheaded.

It is, I believe, more difficult than most of the parties to this dispute have realized to sort out what is at issue here. Wittgenstein Fideism is very easy to parody. They are those chaps who advert to the fact that there are various language-games, including religious language-games, and that they all are in order just as they are. There can, these chaps believe, be no legitimate question about the coherence of these language-games. It is enough to note that a language-game, including a religious language-game, is played. Some, of course, play religious language-games and some don't; but there can be no legitimate dispute about whether playing or not playing is the more reasonable activity or whether one is or is not justified in engaging in such activities.

However, while it is easy and indeed even tempting to go ironical about such a position and to ridicule and lampoon it, it is not so evident that there may not be a reading of it which teaches something very deep and important indeed. I continue to feel ambivalent about Wittgensteinian Fideism feeling both (a) that there is plainly something very unsatisfactory about it and (b) that it touches something deep about religion and, more generally, about forms of life and "groundless believing" that our overly rationalistic philosophical attitudes obscure from us.<sup>3</sup>

I want to see if I can run some of this to the ground. Let me start by returning again to the beginning of this essay. If this Wittgensteinian conception of philosophical activity is correct, it does not make sense to make the statements I made in the very first two sentences of this essay. To ask, "Could religious talk or Christianity be incoherent or unintelligible?" would be like asking "What is the tone of pitch?" But Wittgenstein notwithstanding, it does not seem to me that such a question concerning religion or Christianity is a senseless one or that my first two statements are senseless. I am, in fact, not unsurprisingly, strongly inclined to believe that they are true. More generally, I am not so confident that such a Wittgensteinian conception of philosophical activity will serve so well in the philosophy of religion, though I am, of course, aware that certain eminent analytical practitioners of the philosophy of religion have conceived of their task at least in part in this way.

I want to try here to show that such putative statements as “the Christian concept of God is incoherent” are themselves intelligible by (a) giving grounds for asserting that they are true and (b) by showing what would count against their truth. If I can establish this, I shall have most certainly shown that such a statement is intelligible. If such a statement is *intelligible* (though perhaps false) the conception of what it is to do the philosophy of religion set forth by such distinguished philosophers of religion as D.Z. Phillips, John Hick, William Alston and Ninian Smart will not do. Such ways of going about things will then be seen to be but a first step. Moreover, if such a general statement concerning the philosophy of religion can be expanded to other domains the very conception of philosophical activity set forth by Wittgenstein will have been shown to be inadequate. (Even without that generalization, it will to some degree have been shown to be inadequate if such a conception of philosophical activity is not adequate to thinking about God and religion.)

### III

Let us start by asking: What evidence can be given for the truth of the claim that the Christian concept of God is incoherent? I think the following will give us some evidence. Christians and Jews say, “God made the heavens and the earth.” Compare that sentence with “Fred made bread and soup.” And forget here, at least for the nonce, the sense (perhaps the analogical sense) “made” is to have in the first sentence or what, if anything, it could mean to say that something was made out of nothing. Perhaps it is like making a tune out of nothing? What I want to ask is *what* is “God” supposed to stand for in such a sentence and how is the referent of that term to be identified? If “Fred made bread and soup” was used in some determinate linguistic environment, we would know how to identify “Fred” and we would readily enough, if we are practiced speakers of English, know what *kind* of reality “Fred” referred to, even if we did not know who Fred was, and we would, in such a circumstance, understand what it would be like to be extra-linguistically taught, say by ostentive teaching, who and what “Fred” referred to. He could readily, in many circumstances, be pointed out in a crowd: “That chap there with the big ears and dark glasses is Fred.” We know what it would be like to point him out and distinguish him from some other chaps. It is a term whose referent is teachable both extra-linguistically by pointing and intra-linguistically by definite descriptions.

Now “God” and “Fred” are very different. For whatever may be the case in certain primitive religions or whatever might have been the case in the early days of Judaism and Christianity, it is plainly the case in developed forms of Judeo-Christianity that there is no pointing to or any other extra-linguistic teaching of the referent of “God.” In this respect, at least, “God” is not at all like “Fred.” Can we teach what “God” refers to intra-linguistically by definite descriptions? Jews and Christians say that God is “the maker of the heavens and earth,” “the

being, transcendent to the world, upon whom all other beings depend and who depends on no one or no thing,” “the being of infinite love to whom all things are owed,” “the heavenly father of us all,” “the infinite sustainer of the universe” and the like.

It is fair enough to say that we understand *something* of these phrases. They are not plain gibberish as is “the color infinite transcendence,” “the procrastination eats expectations” or “the fiddler plays down.” Even such phrases could, of course, be *given* sense, but just as they stand they do not have sense in the corpus of English. They are not like the unproblematic definite descriptions that could be applied to Fred: “The director of the Glenbow,” “the chap with the rusting Volvo,” “the man who is married to Shirley,” “the lad who graduated first in his class at Winston Churchill High in 1962.” But, while the alleged definite descriptions associated with God are not gibberish as is “the fiddler plays brown,” they are also not unproblematic like the above definite descriptions associated with Fred. With them we could point out what we are talking about. The Glenbow could be readily enough identified in certain circumstances and “director” could be taught by a variety of ostensive and linguistic techniques. But while we could point to, for someone who did not understand, someone making soup, there is no comparable pointing to – or indeed any pointing to at all – someone making the heavens and the earth. Indeed someone who thought there just might be would surely show by that she did not understand religious discourse. Still, if someone is puzzled about what “God” refers to, they are going to be equally puzzled about what it is we are talking about when we speak of “the maker of the heavens and the earth.” And similar things obtain for the other alleged definite descriptions associated with “God.” They are, to put it minimally, not unproblematic in the way the definite descriptions associated with Fred are.

Surely, for Christians, Jews and Moslems, God is an Ultimate Mystery, that ultimate mystery that believers believe answers to their deepest needs. But, that notwithstanding, *what* is it they are referring to or talking about when they use the word “God” or the phrase “the Ultimate Mystery?” If they cannot say at all, why should we, who are not Christians or Jews, believe they are talking about anything at all or saying anything coherent when they say things like “God is my saviour in whom I stand in need?” And why should they think their term “God” stands for or answers to anything at all, when they use it in their religious discourses, if they have no idea of what it is they are talking about when they use the term “God?”

#### IV

What seems at least radically unsatisfactory about Wittgensteinian Fideism is its refusal to face this question. Perhaps, in some way I do not see, this is the wrong question to ask and “the question” should be disposed of as we would dispose of “a question” which purported to ask what kind of non-natural property

does “good” signify? But that the above question about God is such a pseudo-question would have to be shown. It looks, at least, as if that God-question is a significant question and indeed an absolutely central question to ask in thinking about religion. To put it in what I think is a minimal way, at least it needs to be shown how that question rests on a mistake, if indeed it does rest on a mistake. The burden of proof cuts against the Wittgensteinian here. It is not enough to say God-talk is in order as it is and Jewish or Christian belief cannot be at all vulnerable to disbelief because people can play Christian and Jewish language-games. It would appear at least to be the case that if no account at all can be given of *what* or *who* we are talking about in speaking of God that belief in God is incoherent and that, if this is our situation after all, the Jewish and Christian religions, as well as other religions invoking such a conception, are incoherent and should not be belief-systems and ways of life to which we should subscribe.

## V

Wittgensteinians aside, it could be argued, and in some circles no doubt it would be argued, that my way of arguing has too many affinities with a by now thoroughly discredited logical positivism. Talking in the way I do would not only make nonsense or a mishmash out of religion and theology, it would, as well, in effect, turn a good bit of firmly entrenched natural science into such nonsense or such a mishmash. Molecular biology, for example, is not debarred from explaining biological phenomena in physical-chemical terms because the relevant chemical processes are unobservable apart from the biological processes they explain. But molecular biology is surely not properly described as nonsense or pseudo-science. Logical positivists, even less than post-positivist analytical philosophers, would not even dream of rejecting molecular biology or dream of claiming that such a perfectly in place science needed de-mythologizing or rational reconstruction in order to count as genuine science. But why then isn't what is good for the goose good for the gander? If molecular biology, when so logically structured, can pass muster why can't theology, if it is so logically structured? Isn't a refusal to take God-talk as being on a par in this respect with molecular biology-talk pure secular prejudice against religion? Isn't the *ideology* of the atheists or secular humanists showing?

This would be fair enough to say if there were this logical parallel, but there isn't and *here* an old fashion logical positivist argument is perfectly in place. The relevant physical-chemical processes are unobservable but they are only *contingently* unobservable because we cannot now observe them, have no coherent conception of what it would be like to observe them or no provision is made for observing them even in the theory. But there is no *logical* ban on the very possibility of their being observed as there is in the case of God-talk.<sup>4</sup> Anything that could possibly be observed would not be the God of developed Christian and Jewish religious discourse, but no such *logical* ban is made on the physical processes of

molecular biology or on any other domain of natural science. And that makes all the difference in the world. It makes the difference, that is, between terms having an empirical sense or not.

## VI

Suppose someone says that since “God” does not refer to an empirical reality, of course it does not make *empirical* sense. It makes, instead, *metaphysical* sense. But what that means is, to put it minimally, anything but clear. Perhaps “God” is like “2” for people who go Platonistic about numbers and talk portentously of mathematical objects. But that is just bad metaphysics, for people who are troubled by nominalism. Nominalism and Platonism take in each other’s dirty linen. We need numbers to do physics and a lot of rather interesting and uninteresting things as well. But that does not mean we need to reify 2 into some kind of queer object. We have these mathematical conceptions we repeatedly use, and indeed some of them may be indispensable to us in all sorts of practical ways, but that is no reason to ramify our ontology so that a physical object ceases to be a pleonasm.

I think such a response is a perfectly plausible way of being tough-minded. But suppose it strikes someone instead as being bloody-minded and dogmatic. So let us allow mathematical objects read Platonistically for the nonce. There is some kind of *sui generis* mathematical reality. Numbers are eternal. And let us also assume the same thing about logic. So we can, given these assumptions, no longer say that a physical object is a pleonasm or that there are no eternal objects. But surely this does not take us to a metaphysical reality; such a conception has not yet been given sense. We can, and should, say, given these assumptions, that we cannot say the concept of God is incoherent because it is incoherent to speak of eternal realities. But God is also said to be an *infinite* individual, an infinite person, transcendent to the world. Acknowledging that there are eternal realities such as numbers gives us no purchase on this. We still do not understand what we are supposed to mean when we speak of an “infinite person” or “an infinite *individual* transcendent to the world.”

Suppose it were in turn replied that we do get some sense of that here for in knowing that numbers are eternal we know, by a few more manipulations, that  $2 + 2 = 4$  would be true even if there were no world and this gives us some sense of what it is for something to be transcendent to the world. (This assumes, of course, that we know what mathematical truth is and that notion, more than common sense realizes, is problematic. But we are assuming here, counterfactually, that it is not.) Even if there were no universe,  $2 + 2 = 4$  would still be true. This gives us a sense of something being independent of the world or being non-dependent on the world and this in turn gives us some sense of what it is to be transcendent of the world.

I think, to get started that way, shows how mistaken it is to Platonistically reify numbers, but, as I said, I am, for the nonce, allowing such reifications. So we

have a sense of transcendence that is equivalent to eternity. It is not incoherent to say God's existence is necessary (i.e. eternal) in the way numbers are necessary, and that God does not depend on the world, also in the way numbers do not depend on the world, is also evident. If there is a God, he has those features. God could no more be created or constructed than 2 could be created or constructed.

So, after all, "God is transcendent to the world" need not be incoherent. Moreover, since God is a mystery – indeed an ultimate mystery – it is not supposed to be a crystal clear conception but still – and this is what is crucial – it is also not an incoherent one either.

Such a conception of transcendence probably does not give the believer all that he wants in the notion of transcendence. Still, it is not implausible to say that it gives him some inkling here. So let us ride with that. But the transcendence (eternity) of numbers gives us no sense of what it would be like for an *individual* to be transcendent (eternal) except to say, unhelpfully, that individuals are transcendent *just like* numbers are. Tokens are eternal just like types are. But that sounds, at least, like nonsense, for, allowing Platonism, *types* are just what *must* be eternal (transcendent) but no sense has been given as to how a token, an individual, can be eternal. Indeed, by contrast with a type, it is just the sort of thing that cannot be eternal.

We also have no understanding of how an individual can be infinite. We understand that there are an infinite number of natural numbers, but we do not understand what it is to speak of an infinite individual or an infinite person. Moreover, even assuming the reality of Platonic entities, we do not understand what it means to say a person is transcendent to the world or that a person, or indeed that anything else, made the world. Our understanding of the eternity of numbers gives us no foothold here.

Suppose we are told, as theologians have repeatedly told us, that predicates applied to God do not have the same sense as the predicates applied to created beings or other realities. That is fair enough. "Running" in "Charlie is running" and in "Charlie's nose is running" do not have the same sense and yet both could be expressive of perfectly true propositions for all of that. But with "running" here we have a clear analogy. We cannot, if we are to convey anything coherent, have a complete equivocity as in "He slaughtered the bull" and "The pope issued a papal bull." But no plausible analogy has been made between "individual," as used in "infinite individual," "eternal individual," "individual transcendent to the world" and "individual" as used in talk about human beings or, for that matter, German Shepherds.

## VII

I have made a lot about how we do not understand what "God" refers to. We do not, where "God" is construed non-anthropomorphically, understand *what* or *who*



God refers to. We cannot identify God extra-linguistically. There is nothing like ostensive teaching here and we cannot identify God intra-linguistically either, for the alleged definite descriptions are just as puzzling as is the term "God." Puzzled about what we are talking about in speaking of God we will be equally puzzled about what we are talking about in speaking of "the infinite other who made the world."

However, some might say that this just reflects a stubborn belief on my part that there can be nothing but physical realities and that all I have shown by such maneuvers is that God is an *utterly different kind* of reality than a physical reality. It was anticipating this sort of objection that I allowed in – much against my intuitions on these matters – Platonic entities. But I also showed in the previous section these realities are also not good models for what Divine Reality (if such there be) would be like. Someone, particularly someone of Wittgensteinian persuasion, or someone who had read a lot of John Wisdom, might say that this only shows the *kind* of reality that God is *sui generis*. What it is must be shown on its own terms.

To so argue is an evasion. It has the classical difficulties of the *via negativa*. If we can only say what God or anything else is *not* and if we cannot at all say *positively* what He is, then we in reality do not know what He is, for there are myriads of things and even considerable numbers of *kinds* or *types* of things that anything is not. If I ask you to believe in somorlo – to trust somorlo – but cannot ostensively teach you what "somorlo" refers to or introduce you to "somorlo" by definite descriptions but can only say that somorlo is not this or that, you are still in the dark about what somorlo is.

We know clearly enough what *kind* of reality "Fred" refers to and we have some sense of what kind of reality "2" refers to, if we want to talk about "2" in these referential terms at all. We can at least conceptually identify "2" but we can only conceptually identify "God" by using terms which are at least as perplexing as "God" is.

There are terms used in the hard sciences which we cannot ostensively teach either. My talk of there being no logical ban on the possibility of their being observed is, it might be argued, not the point anymore than is the positivist's point about verifiability *in principle*, where counterfactuals have to do all the work. If we say "All sentient life will be destroyed forever" is verifiable in principle, we must be saying something like this: though all life has been destroyed forever, yet if there were to be some life, as in reality there can't be, if this proposition is true, that life could observe that all sentient life had been destroyed forever. But then some semi-sentient life would be observing that there was no sentient life at all. These remarks, to put it minimally, are not unproblematic.

Are the relevant counterfactuals about God similarly problematic? I say that anything that could be observed could not be the God of advanced Judeo-Christianity. (Homeric gods are another matter.) That remark, if you will, is what Wittgenstein would call a grammatical remark. There is no *similar* ban on observing the fundamental entities of molecular biology. Similarly, we haven't the remotest idea of how

to observe the fundamental particles of physics. Indeed, we suspect that they cannot be observed and this also goes with being a non-instrumentalist in the philosophy of science and thinking that they are part of the furniture of the universe (something very different from “the maker of the universe”). But this does not rule out the counterfactual “If we were in a very different position and had radically different instruments – instruments of a radically different kind than we have now – then perhaps we would be able to observe them.” This seems at least to be a harmless counterfactual, quite unlike the one about all sentient life and, contrasting it with the God counterfactual, we can also see that the God counterfactual is very different and indeed very much more problematical. We say of God: anything that could possibly be observed would not be God, but if we were to observe God, though indeed we do not even know what it would be like to do so, He would look like thus and so. This is, to put it mildly, a very problematic counterfactual, while the fundamental particles counterfactual is not at all so problematic. After all, we understand why there is a logical ban on seeing the Platonic entity (the type) 2 while we have just seen a token 2. And indeed there are plenty of them around to be seen. But if a neutrino is part of the furniture of the universe, just like a grain of sand only very, very, very much smaller, then there can be no *logical* ban on its being observed. But God, like the Platonic entity 2, is the kind of entity that in principle cannot be observed.

This much the *via negativa* can establish. God is not on a continuum – either one way or the other – with a grain of sand. There is a coherent logical ban on observing God and if it makes no sense to speak of directly observing or experiencing God, it makes no sense to speak of indirectly observing God either. We must, to say anything intelligible, have a non-vacuous contrast here.

## VIII

I have been concerned, running against the Wittgensteinian stream and a number of other streams as well, to show that certain central strands of first-order Christian-Jewish-Islamic religious discourse are incoherent. Minimally, I have tried to give good reasons for believing that the proposition “the Christian concept of God is incoherent” is sufficient to refute Wittgenstein conceptions of religion or at least Wittgensteinian Fideism and to show, not only that it is intelligible, but that it may very possibly also be true. This is to change the agenda of the philosophy of religion from its present agenda back to something more like the agenda of the days of positivism and of ordinary language philosophy, where it was not assumed that religious discourse was coherent. Where this assumption is not made, the central arguments in the philosophy of religion turn not on whether God’s existence could in some way be proven but rather the stress is on the question of whether God-talk of the appropriate sort is or is not coherent. J.L. Mackie to the contrary notwithstanding, this is where I think the questions in the philosophy of religion should be returned. This is the point from which it should start.

Notwithstanding what I have said and the cogency of my arguments (if indeed they are cogent), it is certainly possible for someone to wonder if the central strands of a whole domain of discourse could actually be incoherent. Second-order talk about the discourse might be incoherent but not, it is natural to say, the first-order discourse itself. But to deny this does not seem at all counter-intuitive to me. When we read the Icelandic Sagas, *Egal's Saga* or *Najl's Saga*, for example, and we come across a conception of fate, we may well find it incoherent or, even more extremely, when we read accounts of the cosmology of High Land New Guinea – what their culture heroes do and the like – we recognize that such talk is incoherent. (I do not want to say that the line between what is incoherent and what is just outrageously false is always a sharp one. The Sagas talk of certain people being shape-changers. Is this a false belief or an incoherent one?) Similarly (*pace* Winch) we can come to see that Evans-Pritchard was right: it just isn't the case that the witchcraft accounts of the Azande are not in fact true, they *couldn't* be. Given such recognition about certain central discourses of other tribes, why should rather parallel discourses in our tribe be so exempt? It is counter-intuitive and deeply ethnocentric to think that they should be.

I have also been concerned here to show that Wittgensteinian concerns of what good philosophical methodology or activity should look like have not well served us in the philosophy of religion. And I suspect similar things should be said for political and social philosophy, the philosophy of the social sciences and the “non-foundational” parts of moral philosophy. (Perhaps they are the only parts which should continue to exist?)

## IX

All of that notwithstanding, it is still the case that Wittgenstein – particularly the Wittgenstein of *On Certainty* – touched something very deep indeed about the nature and extent of our groundless believing and about the necessity and propriety of it. He, as Richard Rorty has cottoned on to, has given us, strikingly, without a lot of longwinded pedantary, good reasons for setting aside the standard questions of metaphysically-based and epistemologically-based philosophy. He has shown us how we can neither find nor do we need to find some kind of philosophical foundationalism (even an “anti-foundationalist foundationalism,” if you will) to set aside the standard epistemological and metaphysical questions: questions about solipsism, the external world, anti-realism and the like. He shows us how there can be no genuine question about whether “the sun will come up tomorrow,” “whether there are other minds,” “whether there is an external world,” “whether time is real,” “whether there are numbers,” “whether any memory beliefs are reliable” and the like. With a thorough understanding of Wittgenstein, we will no longer have the strange urge to ask those “questions.” These are not questions to be solved but “questions” which his philosophical therapy, or a philosophical therapy like it, will dissolve. And similar things can be said, I have argued, for extending his

method for general skepticism to skepticism about morality.<sup>5</sup> We are as rightly justified in believing that it is wrong to torture little children just for the fun of it as we are in believing that the sun will come up tomorrow or that we have bodily organs. But Wittgenstein generalizes from a onesided diet, his philosophical therapy will not work so well for “Is there a God?,” “Do we have souls?,” “Is communism superior to capitalism?,” “Is active euthanasia ever justified?” and the like. The achieving a clear command of how a language-game works will not dissolve our perplexities or tell us what we should think about these matters.

## NOTES

1. Alice Ambrose, “Review of Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* SV, No. 1 (1954), 111.
2. Richard Rorty, *The Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), pp. 19-36.
3. Kai Nielsen, “On the Rationality of Groundless Believing,” *Idealistic Studies* XI, No. 3 (September 1981), 217-229.
4. Kai Nielsen, “The Intelligibility of God-talk,” *Religious Studies* 6 (1970).
5. Kai Nielsen, “On Needing a Moral Memory,” *Metaphilosophy* 25, No. 3 (September, 1983), 277–306.