

Words, Facts and God¹

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A traveller from a far country has the obligation to entertain his hosts with tales of strange customs and mythical monsters, heroes and spells. The country of which I am to tell you today is a very strange one indeed. I do not know if President de Gaulle ever became acquainted with English philosophy during his stay in England, but certainly it would entirely justify his claim that England does not, today, at least, belong to Europe. Perhaps, however, as a middleman of ideas, I shall be permitted here to enter the intellectual Common Market; fortunately there are no tariffs on ideas, though as we all know only too well, there are more serious barriers to communication, cultural, existential, confessional—and linguistic.

It is the strangest of paradoxes that the philosopher who was perhaps more influential than any other in giving modern English philosophy its character and stance was an Austrian, Ludwig Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein was more utterly dedicated to philosophy than anyone I have ever met; and I think the main benefit I gathered from his lectures, most of which I did not understand when I heard them as an undergraduate at Cambridge in the academic year 1946-7, was the encounter with a living example of philosophical depth and integrity, a standard of seriousness, by which I could, and can now, measure my own deficiencies. It is, I believe, important to remember that he was a kind of philosophical 'primitive,' a Douanier Rousseau of philosophy, who came to philosophy by way of engineering and the mathematical logic of Frege and Russell. Like all young Austrians of his time, no doubt, he had read Schopenhauer and been deeply impressed by him; but his acquaintance with the great philosophers of the past was extremely fragmentary. In what follows I shall try to indicate certain features of his thought, with particular reference to the problems it sets for metaphysical theology. My purpose is not historical scholarship, or even interpretation, but an attempt to raise certain problems in our thinking about God, in the hope that these may be of interest even to

¹The substance of a paper read before the University on St Thomas's day 1963, at the Albertinum, Nijmegen. I have deliberately retained the style of an address to a Continental audience, since this itself is part of the communication I should wish to make *here*.

those not engaged in the disputes of an off-shore island.

In the Preface to the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Wittgenstein says:

Thus the aim of the book is to set a limit to thought, or rather—not to thought, but to the expression of thoughts; for in order to be able to set a limit to thought, we should have to find both sides of the limit thinkable (i.e., we should have to be able to think what cannot be thought). It will therefore only be in language that the limit can be set, and what lies on the other side of the limit will simply be nonsense.

This notion of a limit, *Grenze*, to thought and language is fundamental to Wittgenstein's views in the *Tractatus*. It should be noticed that he fully recognizes the strangeness of the attempt to draw a limit, a boundary, round what can be said or thought. For in order to draw a boundary round something, we must be able to stand *outside* it; now since we are here proposing to draw a limit to thought by drawing a limit to language, what we say will be nonsense, *Unsinn*, since we are trying to be simultaneously inside and outside language. At the end of the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein says:

My proposition serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical (*unsinnig*), when he has used them—as steps—to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it). He must transcend these propositions, and then he will see the world aright. What we cannot speak about we must consign to silence. *Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen.*

Thus Wittgenstein's efforts are directed to showing the *internal* structure of language in such a way that once we have seen it we realize the limitation which this structure imposes on our speech and thought. In doing so he necessarily has to use language in a way which on his own theory must be called nonsensical; but once we have *seen* what it is he is trying to say, we can forget about these 'nonsensical' statements and henceforth confine ourselves to meaningful utterance, not be misled by the superficial grammar and logic of our language into supposing that we can step over the true boundaries of language and talk about simply anything. We seem to be able to talk about all sorts of things—about logic, ethics, the beautiful, God; once we have seen what our language is really like then we shall realize that most of what we say is nonsense, though not necessarily unimportant nonsense; because much of what we talk about nonsensically, although it cannot really be said, can be

seen, for it shows itself, *sich zeigt*. The most important of these things which can 'show' themselves, become apparent or manifest, is the logic of our language; and once this has been seen, then it will be seen that, for example, God too belongs to this large realm of what Wittgenstein calls 'the mystical', *das Mystische*, what can be seen but cannot be said.

The limit, *Grenze*, then, of what can be said marks off what can be said from what can (only) be seen, what shows itself, *sich zeigt*. We may now try to see more closely how Wittgenstein thought of this limit. He says (5.6 s.):

The limits of my language mean the limits of my world. Logic pervades the world: the limits of the world are also its limits . . . We cannot think what we cannot think; so what we cannot think we cannot say either . . . The world is *my* world: this is manifest (*das zeigt sich*) in the fact that the limits of language (of that language which I alone understand) mean the limits of *my* world . . . I am my world. (The microcosm). There is no such thing as the subject that thinks, *das denkende, vorstellende Subjekt* . . . The subject does not belong to the world: rather it is a limit of the world. Where *in* the world is a metaphysical subject to be perceived (*merken*)? You will say that this is exactly like the case of the eye and the visual field. But really you do *not* see the eye. And nothing *in the visual field* allows you to infer that it is seen by an eye.

This is a particularly interesting example. Wittgenstein uses it primarily to show that the eye is not in its own visual field, nor the 'I' in its 'world'. But we may extend his use of it and point out that the eye is not *outside* its visual field either, at least in the sense in which inside and outside are found within the visual field. I mean that with our eyes we can *see* tea inside a cup and the cup outside the tea; but we cannot 'see' with our eyes the way in which the eye is not inside the visual field. The limit of the visual field cannot be represented by a visual boundary. The boundary between inside and outside *within* the visual field is not the same kind of boundary as the boundary between what is inside and outside the visual field. That is to say: (1) we cannot make a picture of the visual field but only a picture *within* the visual field; (2) the negation represented by a boundary within the visual field is not the same as the negation expressing the boundary between what is within the visual field and what is outside it: this latter negation cannot be 'represented', we cannot make a picture of it. I believe that it is important to recognize these two sorts of negation, which we may perhaps call horizontal and vertical negation. The limit, *Grenze*, of language, which separates what

can from what cannot be said, is in this terminology a vertical negation.

We must now try to see what Wittgenstein meant by 'world'. The *Tractatus* begins:

The world is all that is the case. The world is the totality of facts, not of things. The world is determined by the facts, and by their being all the facts. For the totality of facts determines what is the case, and also what is not the case. The facts in logical space are the world. The world divides into facts.

The notion of logical space may be explained in three steps. The first step is to point out that for Wittgenstein space is thought of as capable of being represented in a system of co-ordinates. In its simplest terms, the notion is that if, for example all space were in the plane of a blackboard, then any configuration on this blackboard could be uniquely determined by reference to a set of co-ordinates. We think the configuration through the co-ordinates; and if all space were exhausted by the plane of the blackboard, then we could not think any configuration except through these co-ordinates. Any point *not* on the plane of the blackboard would not be thinkable, would not belong to the world defined by the system of co-ordinates. We cannot think a spatial fact unless we think spatially.

The second step in explaining the notion of logical space is to notice that in the geometrical space we considered in our first step, relationships of similarity hold; that is, one configuration can be the picture, *Bild*, of another configuration. If geometrical space can be thought through with reference to a co-ordinate system, then any given configuration must be capable of being repeated at a different location in the co-ordinate system; the *generality* of the co-ordinate system consists in the possibility of comparison. For a co-ordinate system is a means of expressing comparison numerically. It is this picturing relationship, *abbildende Beziehung*, which obsessed Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*, and which he used as the model for his picture theory of language. If we stretch our imaginations by considering the relationships between figures on different planes, as is done in projective geometry, we may better understand Wittgenstein's obsession; and we may extend the idea of projective relationships still further, as Wittgenstein did, when we consider the relationship between the music played by an orchestra, the groove on the gramophone record, and the marks on the musical score, or again electronic transformations (what do we 'see' when we use an electron microscope?): all these possess an 'inner similarity' to each other, by which each can serve as the 'picture' of the

other, each being related to the other by a law of projection, within a logic of depiction, *Logik der Abbildung*.

And this brings us to the third and most important step in our explanation of 'logical space'. For the possibility of *comparison* which we found to be implicit in our thinking of geometrical space implies also the possibility of *correct* and *incorrect* picturing of one configuration by another. For one figure to be capable of picturing another, it is not sufficient that each should be capable of being repeated at a different location; comparison implies the possibility of being *unlike* as well as being *like*. We can only call one figure a picture of another if it is capable of *not* being a picture of it. Thus logical space necessarily includes the possibility of *negation*, the negation I have called 'horizontal'; logical space is what has been called by a Finnish commentator on the *Tractatus* a 'Yes-No' space.

For Wittgenstein the notion of logical space is not merely a metaphorical one, as though geometrical space were merely a kind of illustration which could be forgotten after it had served its purpose. On the contrary, geometrical space is an *instance* of logical space. Every geometrical picture is *also* a logical picture; but there are logical pictures which are not geometrical pictures. A sentence, for instance, is such a logical picture, which is not at the same time a geometrical picture; when properly analysed, a sentence must reveal in its physical structure the combination of objects in the world which constitutes a fact; for the sentence itself is a fact, *Tatsache*, which is a non-geometrical projection of the physical fact, isomorphic with it. Thus any properly analysed proposition merely pictures the fact in logical space which it refers to; if it is a true proposition it pictures a positive fact, if it is a false proposition it pictures a negative fact, in both cases at the same place in logical space. We cannot think any fact unless we think logically.

The important point for our purposes here is that the laws of logical structure themselves, the projective relationship, cannot be pictured: they can only be instanced. The musical score, for example, is only another embodiment of the projective relationship which holds between the symphony played by an orchestra and the groove on the gramophone record.

It will of course be understood that the account I have given here of Wittgenstein's views in the *Tractatus* is a highly simplified one, but I hope I have given some slight indication of their power and elegance. If the relationship between words and facts is the kind of picturing

relationship which we often vaguely take it to be—and Wittgenstein's theory is only a rigorous, logically systematized statement of our vague idea—then his views about what can be said and what, while it cannot be said, can at best become manifest, are impregnable; and theology vanishes into the ineffable. As he himself said, 'God does not show himself *in* the world.'

We may now turn to a brief examination of St Thomas's account of negation, so far as this is relevant to our talk about God. It may be said in general that this account depends upon an insight into the con-naturality between the human mind and the physical world, the world of Nature and natures. St Thomas seems to envisage two sorts of negation, one which discriminates essences from each other, such that anything of a definite kind is *not* of another kind; and a second negation which discriminates existences from each other, such that individuals even within a distinct kind are discriminated from one another by being different subsistents. Corresponding to these two modes according to which variety and distinction are manifested in the world of Nature, there are two modes of intelligent apprehension of variety, called by St Thomas *abstractio* and *separatio*. In either case, the intrinsic distinctness of things, whether natures or individual beings, provides the permanent ground of our insight into their distinction. We can negate because *things* are distinct, because they are *not* each other.

Thus *unum*, the concrete unity of each thing, is the intellectual negation of multifariousness which identifies the given being as a self-identity. This identification is presupposed in any statement we may make; we may say that to Wittgenstein's points in logical space, his logical indivisibles, there correspond in St Thomas's thought the intrinsic unities of *substances*. St Thomas's metaphysics may be regarded as an examination of the presuppositions of our language, at least of our subject-predicate language. The logic of our language is a revelation of the logic, the intelligibility, of Being. It is this intuition into the intelligibility of Being which explains the pervasive influence on St Thomas of Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*. Existence has a logic, a *structure* of intelligibility, which can be 'shown' in a demonstration, *epideixis* (compare Wittgenstein's ineffable *Sich-zeigen*); and the fundamental principle which governs this 'analytic' demonstration, *resolutio*, is the principle of unity, of non-contradiction. For Aristotle and St Thomas the demonstrative syllogism can reveal the inner structure of intelligibility of Being. The logic of Being is ont-ology.

Two points should be borne in mind here, first as regards what we

may call *essential* negation, corresponding to the differentiation of essences, and secondly as regards *existential* negation, corresponding to the differentiation of existents. It seems that for St Thomas essential differentiation is not found on one level but establishes a hierarchy of grades or levels of being, from inanimate matter upwards. And as regards existential differentiation, it is true that in the world of corporeal nature, individual existents are differentiated from each other by their bodily shape and size. The existence of an individual existent reveals its uniqueness through its physical, bodily, quantitative differentiation; but this does not exclude the possibility that in some other, non-physical world, existents may be differentiated from each other simply by being distinct existences, e.g., for St Thomas, the angels.

In his striking book, *Der Gott der neuzeitlichen Metaphysik*, Walter Schulz describes as characteristic of the medieval idea of God its formulation by St Anselm in *comparative* terms. God is thus supreme only in the sense that he occupies the summit of a hierarchy, and thus is still contained within a totality, and thus analogically related to lower levels of the hierarchy. In a very familiar and very characteristic passage, the *Quarta Via*, St Thomas seems to provide clear evidence of the correctness of this estimate. He seems to be comparing God as maximum within the *magis* and *minus* of being, good, truth and so on to fire in hot things, and so seems to be suggesting that the transcendence of God is merely a supremacy depending upon a universal immanence. The remarkable thing here is that he refers to Bk II (∞) of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, where a maximum of degree, like that of fire causing heat in bodies made up of the elements, is contrasted with something which transcends degree, like the sun causing heat in this nether world, *aliquid amplius quam calidissimum*, as St Thomas puts it in his commentary on the passage. What we have to see is that for St Thomas the transcendence of God is defined ultimately by *existential* negation. God is the maximum not merely essentially but existentially; St Thomas always finds it convenient to use the Platonist terminology of transcendence but always with the explicit or implicit proviso that it must be interpreted in his own existentialist sense. I realize of course that this interpretation of St Thomas would need detailed justification; but let me simply say here that for St Thomas God is not only the supreme case of a perfection immanent in finite things. he is the existentially separate cause of the immanence itself, he is both sun and fire.

The importance of this conclusion for our present enquiry is that it offers a way of thinking limits from *outside* the limits. The feature which

Wittgenstein has in common with most modern thinkers from Nicholas of Cusa to Heidegger is to think limits from *within*, as it were to describe a circle round oneself. What is characteristic of St Thomas's approach is that it locates man and his thought within the unlimited without at the same time limiting the unlimited by making it merely a supreme case, a maximum, in a Platonist sense. But of course our difficulty is that we too are 'modern', we would prefer our thought to be located in the unlimited not by way of our human nature but by way of our experience of our own finitude, whether this is defined in Wittgenstein's terms or Heidegger's. One embarrassment this involves us in is that when we attempt to define our limitations from within, theism and atheism differ only by a hairsbreadth: the *docta ignorantia* may be sustained either by a pure faith or by a Dionysian affirmation of Life or simply a humanist agnosticism—this latter course is usual in England. The resolute acceptance of one's own finitude can be made to seem the highest wisdom; and any attempt to place this finitude from without, to apply an external measure to it, can be presented as a childish mistake about the nature of our limitation, a hangover from the days of the closed cosmos.

We seem to be faced with a dilemma. *Either* we affirm a God who, although he is not merely supreme among beings, yet confronts us as an Infinite to which we ascend by way of the world, a world which has now become alien to us or from which we have become alienated, by our very act of knowing about it—an objectified world. Or we resort to *das Mystische*, the God behind my shoulder, the Shadow, who is indistinguishable from a Nothing: a nameless Void.

Now it may seem that Wittgenstein's later views offer us a way out of this dilemma, though the cure may seem worse than the disease. It is certain that Wittgenstein was his own severest critic, and that the *Philosophical Investigations* are a radical re-thinking of many of the problems of the *Tractatus*; common to both is a passionate concern for the problem of meaning, in such a way that all philosophical problems need to be seen as aspects of the central problem of meaning, even if they then appear to be merely pseudo-problems, mistakes and muddles of meaning.

In general we may say that the basis of Wittgenstein's later views is the awareness of meaning as a common and public world, since language has a bearer, the community or tribe, and thus is active as a form of the life of that community; a language, he says, is a form of life, a *Lebensform*. Hence language and meaning are as various as life: the

profound error of all previous philosophers, and especially the author of the *Tractatus*, was to assume that a unique and uniquely general relationship obtained between language and reality; the picturing relationship is the clearest instance of such a uniquely general relationship. The most satisfactory model for language is the games we play. There is no uniquely absolute essence 'Game,' but we play or can recognize others playing games of indefinite variety, from the child playing by himself to team games to chess. Consider the multiplicity of language-games in the following examples (I, 23):

Giving orders, and obeying them—describing the appearance of an object, or giving its measurements—constructing an object from a description (a drawing)—reporting an event—speculating about an event—forming and testing a hypothesis—presenting the results of an experiment in tables and diagrams—making up a story; and reading it—play-acting—singing catches—guessing riddles—making a joke; telling it—solving a problem in practical arithmetic—translating from one language into another—asking, thanking, cursing, greeting, praying.

And he comments: 'It is interesting to compare the multiplicity of the tools in language and of the way they are used, the multiplicity of kinds of word and sentence, with what logicians have said about the structure of language.'

The reference to 'tools' will not have escaped attention. The special importance of this comparison, as also of the conception of language-games, is that language, in all its multiplicity, no longer confronts the world: it is no longer what Wittgenstein called in the *Tractatus* 'the great mirror'. If chess is conceivable without chess-men, language is inconceivable outside a world of things and actions. The standard metre in Paris, for example, is part of our language of measurement; and it is an especially interesting part because precisely owing to its role as a means of representation it appears to possess a kind of necessary existence. 'What looks, he says, as though it had to exist is part of the language.'

If the whole picture-theory of language collapses in this way (what is wrong with it is precisely that it fails to allow for the variety of different ways in which we can *apply* pictures), the old notions of negation and limit collapse with it. About negation he says:

Negation: a 'mental activity'. Negate something and observe what you are doing. Do you perhaps inwardly shake your head? And if you do—is this process more deserving of our interest than, say, that

of writing a sign of negation in a sentence? Do you now know the *essence* of negation? (I, 457).

We have here a very characteristic pattern of the *Investigations*: a polemic against the linking of 'essence' and 'mental activity', using a kind of shock-technique of examples which force out into the open vague images and pictures which so often exercise a hidden domination over our thinking. 'My aim, he says, is to teach you to pass from a piece of disguised nonsense to something that is patent nonsense' (I, 464). 'Essence is expressed by grammar' (I, 371), i.e., by the pattern of use of a word in a community. He goes on:

We should like to say: The sign of negation is our occasion for doing something—possibly something very complicated. But what? That is not said. It is as if it only needed to be hinted at; as if we already knew. (I, 549). Negation, one might say, is a gesture, *Gebärde*, of exclusion, of rejection. But such a gesture is used in a great variety of cases! (I, 550).

Here is a clue to what Wittgenstein is alluding to. Consider, for instance, the *great variety* of cases in which one shakes one's head, not just 'inwardly' but in the ordinary public way, refusing a request, for instance, or expressing doubt or qualification. Or consider again what Wittgenstein points out: that if our normal way of expressing negation were by the gesture of shaking our heads, a double negation would not be an affirmation but only perhaps a strengthened negation. We must be on our guard against the temptation to reject examples like these because they are more 'crude' and more 'primitive' than the sophisticated games we have learnt to play, relying perhaps on some pure essence of negation which we find in the textbooks of logic. By the criterion of human intelligibility, of the meaning which is embodied in the human life of a community, the 'pure' negation is only one member of a large family, a member which has its special uses, e.g., in mathematics, but not in others. If we want to know what we 'mean' by negation, all we have to do is to look at the variety of different ways in which we use our different signs and gestures of negation. 'Nothing is hidden', as Wittgenstein says. Our trouble only starts when we ask, 'What is negation?', and start scratching our heads. For surely something unique must correspond to this word 'not' which we find everywhere? It must be something in our heads, or something deep in things. And we must answer, 'The picture of something in our heads—or in our minds—the picture of something deep, is quite a useful picture, in certain circumstances; but the real question is the *application* of the picture; and we

can only learn the proper application of the picture by examining our *use* (*Gebrauch*) of the sentences in which the sign occurs, the *Praxis* of the language; and this use is very various.'

Similarly the notion of boundary or limit (*Grenze*). I quote:

To say, 'This combination of words makes no sense,' excludes it from the sphere of language and thereby bounds the domain of language. But when one draws a boundary it may be for various kinds of reason. If I surround an area with a fence or a line or otherwise, the purpose may be to prevent someone getting in or out; but it may also be a part of a game and the players be supposed, say, to jump over the boundary; or it may shew where the property of one man ends and that of another man begins; and so on. So if I draw a boundary line that is not yet to say what I am drawing it for. (I, 499). So the notion we found in the *Tractatus* of a unique boundary or limit separating sense from nonsense also vanishes: it is part of the old metaphysical search for a unique essence of language. There is, for example, a perfectly good use for nonsense in certain songs; an *Alleluia*, for instance, despite its Hebrew etymology, is really used by us as significant nonsense—Wittgenstein insists that there is a closer relationship between a sentence and a musical theme than we ordinarily like to think. Or take again the 'Ha! Ha!' which is probably still being used in cheap English books to indicate the sound made by someone laughing; is it a word, and then a nonsense word, or is it not a word at all but a sort of musical notation? We don't know what to say; there isn't a clear boundary.

Yet another metaphysical concept to be dissolved by this new style of philosophizing is the concept of the self, the subject, the I. We have seen that in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein regarded the subject as the limit of the world, separated from it by what I called vertical negation. Now, by way of an analysis of the conceptual grammar of psychological words—thinking, intending, expecting, pain and so on—Wittgenstein shows that the feeling of the privacy of the self depends on yet another of those pictures which have their real application but whose application is restricted. As we have seen already, what 'goes on inside my head' is such a picture, the picture of 'processes in the head'. The language of the privacy of the self is one kind of language-game which has to be learned just like any other kind of language-game; that is to say, our privacy is dependent upon the common public world of language-games embodied in the life of the community. We cannot be more private to ourselves than the common life of language will let us;

every 'exploration of our depths' is an extension of the possibility of *other* people's privacy. 'Depth' is a picture the application of which we have to learn; to 'explore our depths' is to enlarge the language-game of depth, something we see going on in novels or poetry, say. We have to learn to say 'I', and some people, mental defectives, never learn it. 'Nothing is hidden', even the techniques of language for hiding ourselves from each other, e.g., lying. Do we suspect the baby in its cot of only *pretending* to smile at us? (This is perhaps the point at which to observe that a very common reaction to meeting Wittgenstein's kind of thinking for the first time is to be made very angry—'What is he going on about? Does he really . . . ' He asks himself in the *Investigations*: 'What is your aim in philosophy?' His answer is: 'To show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle' (I, 309).

One thing should at least be clear by now; and that is that together with 'pure' logic, 'pure' essence, 'pure' negation, absolute limits and the absolute self, God too has vanished from the scene: or more accurately, he only appears as part of the picture of pure logic, the absolute self and so on. God is indeed mentioned four or five times in the *Investigations*, but the role he plays there is only as a 'metaphysical' guarantee of a mistake about the meaning of meaning. He is not even the nameless Void: he is only the memory of a feeling of a void which arose from a confusion about language, like the memory of a pain we once had long ago. The realm of *das Mystische* has vanished. 'Nothing is hidden'.

And our dilemma vanishes too. The compulsion we seemed to have, that we should be able to sense God's transcendence from within an experience of our own finitude, has been shown to rest upon the misapplication of a picture. But unfortunately the other horn of our dilemma, the God who seems to be irrelevant because it is merely a cosmic world which he transcends, is no more readily acceptable now that we have been shown the way out of the fly-bottle of the Absolute. For the finitude which is presented to us in the *Investigations* is no longer opposed to any sort of transcendence; it is merely one aspect of the Indefinite, the indefinite variety of human life. Not even agnosticism is significant any longer: nothing is hidden.²

What are we to say now? This is of course a real question, not just a rhetorical one. I hope no one is expecting me to produce a solution from up my sleeve. What I shall offer here are only observations on a problem, not a solution of it.

²I need hardly say that I am only concerned with what seem to be the consequences of Wittgenstein's published writings, not with his personal convictions.

First as regards my interpretation of the late Wittgenstein. This would almost certainly be challenged by many English philosophers. They would say: 'You have absurdly falsified the picture by presenting Wittgenstein outside his own proper context, just as though he were a Continental philosopher. His philosophy is a method of philosophizing, without doctrinal implications; it is a therapy, a technique. You would not expect swimming or riding a bicycle to be theistic or agnostic; why are you upset when philosophizing turns out to be neither too?' To which my answer is that if philosophy becomes nothing more than a method, if it ceases to be its function to make substantive statements at all, then my interpretation is already justified: just this aseptic methodological professionalism constitutes an existential stance. Certainly the method can be applied to all sorts of language-games, including religious ones—Wittgenstein has a parenthetical note which says simply 'Theology as grammar' (I, 373), and a good deal of well-meaning discussion goes on in England today about the 'grammar of religious language'. But the point is that at best this method of philosophizing is a technique for analysing *other people's* convictions; even one's own convictions have to be put into something like phenomenological brackets, here the invisible inverted commas which this technique of linguistic philosophy must always sketch in the air, since it constitutes itself as philosophy, and differentiates itself from sociology or natural science, by seeing all things *sub specie verbi*, which is as it were its act of self-generation. On this view philosophy may help to clarify one's convictions, but never to state, utter and declare them; it could clarify the grounds for the convictions one already has, but never itself supply the grounds (cf. I, 121). This impartial neutrality is indeed very like swimming; but swimming does not teach one to put one's feet on the ground. A philosophy which defines itself methodologically severs its ontological roots; it becomes either parasitic on constructive philosophy or merely trivial. Mr Peter Winch, in an excellent book on the significance of Wittgenstein's later philosophy for social studies, makes my point for me admirably in a remark about the task of philosophy as 'uncommitted enquiry':

In performing this task the philosopher will in particular be alert to deflate the pretensions of any form of enquiry to enshrine the essence of intelligibility as such, to possess the key to reality. For connected with the realization that intelligibility takes many and varied forms is the realization that reality has no key. (*The Idea of a Social Science*, p. 102).

Secondly, isn't the whole theory an enormous mistake? Doesn't it rest on a fundamental error? We must be very cautious about an objection like this; philosophies are not like scientific theories which are at least *supposed* to be easily falsifiable. If the philosophical error is a *fundamental* one, then it ceases in a way to be just an error: plain errors are superficial. But isn't the starting-point of the whole view wrongly chosen? Philosophy, we must reply, doesn't choose a starting-point arbitrarily: the philosophical starting-point is the vanishing-point of a perspective, the tonic of a key. Everything in our experience may go to show that *there*, where I am not yet but trying to reach, is the only point from which my experience falls into an order, a harmony. If the public world of human behaviour in language shows itself to Wittgenstein as a perspective defining a point of origin, then this is something important about the way things are: if we can, to some extent, think Wittgenstein's thoughts, then those thoughts are thinkable. It would be childish to say that the point of origin was wrongly chosen, unless we could indicate a perspective with its point of origin which *included* the perspective of the *Investigations*. As regards God, for instance, it is important that he is philosophically problematic, not merely as 'object' but as vanishing-point of a perspective (note that we are hovering round a *picture*, the picture of 'perspective'); it tells us something about God that we can to some extent recreate a perspective which is neutral in respect to him. Any perspective of our own which did not allow for this neutral perspective, say by merely disqualifying it as 'bad will', would be misleading over-simplification. We need a negative theology which not only allows for God's presence-in-absence in the world of Nature but also for his presence-in-absence in the world of human history.

Thirdly, is there any way of indicating this wider, more inclusive perspective? As a Christian, a Catholic and a disciple of St Thomas, I believe that it must be *possible* to do so, not in 1963 perhaps, but perhaps in 2000. I have some suggestions. I am constantly struck by what seems to me a kinship (a 'family-relationship') between Wittgenstein and Heidegger, say the Heidegger who writes about Hölderlin's 'dichterisch wohnet der Mensch auf der Erde'. Heidegger claims to disclose a more 'original', *ursprünglich*, bond between man and language than the use of linguistic tools: language is the event of truth which manifests the sacred transcendence of the 'Earth', that is, 'Being', *Sein*, in the forms of the gods. I do not think that Heidegger's transcendence or his gods can satisfy the theist: his gods are too much like the faces we see

in the clouds, and his transcendence too much like an Indefinite than an Infinite. But I am sure that the original genesis of meaning as constituting a human essence is an important clue: *the nativity of the word*, which is a very traditional notion. And we may find analysis as well as intuition of this notion in Continental writers like Merleau-Ponty, Caruso and Buytendijk. We may try to use this paradigm to grasp in an analogical unity the variety of ways of life and language-games studied by social anthropologists; and there is no doubt that Wittgenstein is methodologically valuable for students of primitive religion. We may wish to try to do all this in the properly theological perspective of the *Deus absconditus*, the God of the *mysterion*, whose transcendence is revealed in *history*, and made concrete in a *personal* revelation of the Father in the incarnate Son, and re-presented in the linguistic community of the Church. But these are only suggestions: the gaps are obvious.

Dr Robinson's Book¹

HERBERT McCABE, O.P.

Dr Robinson has written an important book about God, Christ, the nature of religion and morality. He does not claim to be a professional theologian; it is not, as he says, his academic field, but the book will nevertheless be of great interest to theologians as well as to the general reader, and it deserves a more discriminating reception than it has so far received in the press. Those of us in particular who are grateful to the Bishop for his work in his own field of New Testament scholarship will want to pay him the compliment of treating his book seriously and critically.

The book suffers a good deal from the author's lack of acquaintance with the history of theology. Thus he can open Chapter Two with the astonishing statement: 'Traditional Christian theology has been based upon the proofs for the existence of God.' This is, of course, flatly untrue. Traditional theology has always been based on faith in the Word

¹*Honest to God*, by John A. T. Robinson, Bishop of Woolwich; S.C.M. Press; 5s.