Putnam on Wittgenstein and Religious Language

Wisdom is cold, and to that extent stupid. (Faith on the other hand is a passion.) It might also be said: Wisdom merely conceals *life from you. (Wisdom is like cold grey ash, covering up the glowing embers.)*

(Wittgenstein, *CV* p. 53 1947).

In *Renewing Philosophy*, Hilary Putnam included an extended and respectful meditation on Ludwig Wittgenstein's lectures on religious belief. As is well known, these lectures were not written by Wittgenstein, but are transcriptions, mainly by Yorick Smythies, perhaps with the assistance of other students who attended his discussions. Nevertheless there is no doubt that they represent an aspect of Wittgenstein's thought, and alongside other evidence, they must be taken as indicating at least one important part of it. So in this paper I want to offer some observations both about Wittgenstein's lectures and some of their context in Wittgenstein's other writings, particularly *Culture and Value*, and indeed the writings of others. But I also want to venture some remarks about Putnam's sensitive and interesting reaction to them.

I

There is a difficulty at the outset in identifying just what the lectures are about. It is natural to say that they are about religious belief—but one of the questions is going to be whether 'belief' is exactly the right word. We might substitute 'religious conviction'—but one of the questions may be whether religious practices can properly, and even at their best, coexist with doubt and uncertainty (as Putnam mentions, Kierkegaard was one of Wittgenstein's inspirations, but also someone who thought that a religious way of life could and should include elements of doubt and uncertainty). Religious metaphors, or the

use of religious pictures and imaginings, also suggest themselves as the topic, but here too there is a danger of shoehorning the phenomena into a predetermined shape.

Perhaps the most neutral, if cumbersome, description of the topic might be religious frames of mind. One advantage of the plural is that it insulates us from the outset against the danger of presupposing that there is any such thing as *the* religious frame of mind. Perhaps there are many, with only a family resemblance between them. Perhaps in the case of some or many religious and magical ceremonies, the state of mind of the officiant is typically quite different from that of the recipient. And perhaps the state of some religious persons is best characterized not in terms of a frame of mind, but in terms of an oscillation or succession of different frames of mind. We thus characterize the enquiry while leaving it open at the outset how to relate these frames of mind and the language in which they are voiced, to more familiar psychological and logical categories of belief and expression

Any account of *the* religious state of mind may simply disguise a normative agenda suggesting that while a *truly* religious state of mind has to be this or that, but unhappily people substitute something different and inferior. People advocate positions of this sort in order to distinguish the plane on which *real* religion is found from that of facsimiles, such as mere sectarianism, lip-service, superstition, or idolatry. Wittgenstein certainly wants to strike this note: his contempt for superstition as a substitute or distortion of truly religious frames of mind is quite clear. His example of a superstitious person is one Father O'Hara, and Wittgenstein's contempt is evident. He thinks that people who try to show that religious belief is a kind of glorified science, or that it stands up in the light of ordinary canons of confirmation or verification, are 'ludicrous' or 'ridiculous' or 'cheating

themselves'. The whole point is going to be that we are dealing with something special. This is so even when it looks as if the religious believer is talking about ordinary historical events:

> Queer as it sounds: The historical accounts in the Gospels might, historically speaking, be demonstrably false and yet belief would lose nothing by this: *not* however because it concerns 'universal truths of reason'! Rather because historical proof (the historical proof-game) is irrelevant to belief. This message (the Gospels) is seized on by men believingly (i.e. lovingly). *That* is the certainty characterizing this particular acceptance-as-true, not something else.
>
> A believer's relation to these narratives is *neither* the relation to historical truth (probability), *nor yet* that to a theory consisting of 'truths of reason'. There is such a thing. —(we have quite different attitudes even to different species of what we call fiction!). (Wittgenstein *CV*, p. 32, 1937).

But before we leave frames of mind in possession of the territory, we might want to flag another curious aspect of Wittgenstein's discussion. This is that it is fundamentally individualistic (I might have said solipsistic almost). The inquiry is into the state or states of mind of the single individual wrestling with themes of redemption, salvation, sin, judgment, and so on. It is striking how far this is from, say, a social anthropological discussion of religion. Here, for example, is Durkheim:

> A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.

The social aspect of religious practices are scarcely visible in Wittgenstein. His idea of religion is simply that of one man wrestling with his own soul. But although I consider this a grave weakness, it is not one that actually matters very much to the philosophical thread I want to pursue. I mention it only to register a problem.

II

Wittgenstein begins his discussion with a story:

> An Austrian general said to someone: “I shall think of you after my death, if that should be possible”. We can imagine one group who would find this ludicrous, another who wouldn't....
>
> Suppose that someone believed in the Last Judgment, and I don't, does this mean that I believe the opposite of him, just that there won't be such a thing? I would say: “not at all, or not always”.
>
> Suppose I say that the body will rot, and another says “No. Particles will rejoin in a thousand years, and there will be a Resurrection of you”. If someone said: “Wittgenstein, do you believe in this?” I'd say: “No.” “Do you contradict the man?” I'd say: “No”....
>
> Suppose someone were a believer and said: “I believe in a Last Judgment,” and I said; “Well, I'm not so sure. Possibly”. You would say that there is an enormous gulf between us. If he said “There is a German aeroplane overhead”, and I said “ Possibly I'm not so sure” you'd say we were fairly near.
>
> It isn't a question of my being near him, but on an entirely different plane, which you can express by saying: “You mean something altogether different, Wittgenstein”. (*LAPR,* p. 53)
>
> The difference might not show up at all in any explanation of meaning.

These paragraphs introduce a recurring theme in the lectures, which Putnam unerringly highlights. The first is that the relation between the person advancing this expression of a religious frame of mind and the person who rejects the expression is not one of simple contradiction. It is unlike a case in which a person advances an ordinary belief, and an objector dissents or disagrees. On the other hand, neither is it a simple matter of difference of meaning. It may in some subtle sense be *like* a difference of meaning, but it is also unlike it. Later on, Wittgenstein says:

> If you ask me whether or not I believe in a Judgment Day, in the sense in which religious people have belief in it, I wouldn't say:” No. I don't believe there will be such a thing.” It would seem to me utterly crazy to say this.

> And then I give an explanation: " I don't believe in ....", but then the religious person never believes what I describe.
>
> I can't say. I can't contradict that person.
>
> In one sense, I understand all he says - the English words "God", "separate", etc. I understand. I could say: "I don't believe in this" and this would be true, meaning I haven't got these thoughts or anything that hangs together with them. But not that I could contradict the thing. (*LAPR*, p. 55)

Putnam emphasizes in his discussion that this is not illuminated by casual talk of 'incommensurability', which is clearly right, and which I shall not discuss further.

But Putnam also argues that it is not illuminated by talk of non-cognitivism, and here I think there is room for puzzlement. He cites the later interchange:

> Suppose someone, before going to China, when he might never see me again, said to me: "We might see one another after death"—would I necessarily say that I don't understand him? I might say [want to say] simply, "Yes, I *understand* him entirely"
>
> *Lewy*: "In this case you might only mean that he expressed a certain attitude"
>
> I would say "No, it isn't the same as saying 'I'm very fond of you'"—and it may not be the same as saying anything else. It says what it says. Why should you be able to substitute anything else?
>
> Suppose I say: "The man used a picture". (*LAPR*, p. 71)

Putnam takes Wittgenstein to be pointing out that there is a perfectly ordinary notion of expressing an attitude, and that

> what he is doing is contrasting the kind of metaphysical emphasis that non-cognitivists (either about religious language or about ethical language) want to put on the notion of expressing an attitude with the ordinary unemphasized use of that notion…Wittgenstein is refusing to say that language is "used to express an attitude" when there is no possibility of replacing the language in question by an explicit expression of the so-called attitude.

, Putnam continues, his reason for this will be refusal to turn the distinction between 'saying something because that is, quite literally, what one means to say, and saying something to express an attitude, into a *metaphysical* distinction'.

My puzzle with this diagnosis is firstly that I do not recognize the implied assimilation of saying something to express an attitude and saying something that is not quite literally what one means to say. If I choose my words carefully and mean what I say when I insist that Gordon Brown is pig-headed, don't I thereby express an attitude? I could also say, indeed, that I dislike Gordon Brown's inflexibility of mind, but it is not at all clear that this is a better or more accurate or revealing way of saying what I wanted to say, or as if I somewhat missed what I wanted to say the first time around. I should say that I very seldom choose to convey an attitude by using a sentence that sounds like a self-description. I do it more by careful choice of words, but often by intonation and gesture (as Wittgenstein often emphasizes).

Be that as it may, Wittgenstein's rejoinder to Lewy still remains puzzling. It implies that a use of language cannot be said to express an attitude unless it can be substituted by a first-person avowal of some kind (for it would be imposing yet more theory to say that 'I'm very fond of you' is a simply a *description* of oneself). But it is not at all clear either that this is true, nor that Wittgenstein has any right to say that it is true. To take the second point first, it was Wittgenstein who wrote in connection with other minds: 'my attitude towards him is an attitude towards a soul. I am not of the opinion that he has a soul'. (*PI* p. 178). To think of another person as a person is here placed in the domain of attitude, not that of opinion or theory or doctrine. But it will not be an attitude that has a simple three-word expression. It will be one that comes out everywhere and in all the

innumerably different things that make up a stream of life. Naturalness of English expression has nothing to do with it: indeed, if a context ever arose in which some reassurance was appropriate it would be much more natural and much easier to say 'I think you are a person' than 'I…you' For what exactly could fill in the ellipsis? Any verb that I can think of would be either inadequate or embarrassing, as in the theological-sounding 'I respond to you as to a "thou"' and similar mawkishness. Yet all the same, we are said to be in the domain of attitude.

Furthermore Wittgenstein was often preoccupied with states of mind that we find difficult to achieve and difficult to express: understanding a piece of music or architecture, for example. An expression of how you feel about Schubert, say, might require a great deal of gesture or facial expression. You will have to search for words, and are very likely discontent with any you find. Wordsworth, for example, required hundreds of poems to express how he felt about nature, and it would be a highly revisionist, or crass, literary critic who thinks he could have got the same effect by writing in three words "I love nature". Wittgenstein talks about this too:

> There is a lot to be learned from Tolstoy's bad theorizing about how a work of art conveys 'a feeling'. —You could really call it, not exactly the expression of a feeling but at least an expression of feeling, or a felt expression. And you could say too that in so far as people understand it they 'resonate' in harmony with it, respond to it. You might say: the work of art does not aim to convey *something else*, just itself. Just as, when I pay someone a visit, I don't just want to make him have feelings of such and such a sort; what I mainly want is to visit him, though of course I should like to be well received too. (*CV*, p.58, 1947).

The echo of 'it says what it says' is unmistakable. But Wordsworth's feeling for nature is unmistakable as well, and it is no mistake to say that the poems express it.

If I describe, say, someone who has received a disappointment as having reacted modestly or courageously, then I say something about their way of taking what they were told—the posture of their mind, their demeanour or attitude. But there is no implication that they would have been prepared to describe themselves as having felt modest or courageous—indeed in the first case they had better not do so.

The rebuttal of Lewy is even more strange in the context in which it is situated. Wittgenstein is evidently trying to describe more adequately a religious frame of mind. Now he himself cites what are naturally (without any metaphysics) described as attitudes and feelings in the course of doing this. At various times, especially in *Culture and Value* he talks of despair, consciousness of sin, love, sorrow, hope, and the two that eventually commend themselves to Putnam, trust and compassion (Putnam, p. 157). Wittgenstein writes that 'it is my soul with its passions, as it were with its flesh and blood, that has to be saved, not my abstract mind. Perhaps we can say: Only *love* can believe the Resurrection. Or: it is *love* that believes the Resurrection' (*CV*, p. 33, 1937). So he has very little right to jib at words like 'passion' , 'attitude', or 'feeling'. These are his own words.

So I think that Casimir Lewy (my revered old teacher) could reasonably have felt aggrieved, and for yet another reason. 'It says what it says. Why should you be able to substitute anything else?' sounds nice and plain. No tricksy reinterpretations; no rubbing off the bloom. Or, as just described in the context of works of art, no substitutions, nothing that would 'do just as well' in order to work as the work of art works. But now consider a sentence such as 'the Virgin Mary bore a child'. Does it say what it says? It appears to record an historical event. But Wittgenstein has told us that it doesn't: that

even historical disproof of any such event (and after all, don't we have that, in everything that is known about mammalian reproduction?) will not stop people saying it. This is why the lectures have a subject matter: why the saying, as used by the person in the religious frame of mind, needs some additional words, an explanation or interpretation or a 'perspicuous representation' of what is going on. Otherwise we might with just as much right say that when the Christian says 'the virgin Mary bore a child', and the historian or biologist says that no such event ever happened, then each 'says what they say' —in which case, each contradicts the other. But it is the fact that this is not so that sets the lectures in motion.

Talk of any kind of language needing interpretation may raise danger signals, for it was Wittgenstein who taught philosophers the marvellous lesson not to look for meanings as if behind every word or picture there stands 'something else'—a private mental device for mapping the words or picture onto the world. But of course that lesson does nothing to undermine ordinary, everyday (we might say, unmetaphysical) activities of interpretation. If we say that religious frames of mind need interpretation, we need not be saying anything more than that we would like to know how 'the Virgin Mary bore a child' can be said with passion and feeling and a sense of grave importance, but without any historical intent or responsibility. How can the historical words, in the past sense, be used so irresponsibly? The problem may not be difficult: it may be that we could simply go along with Richard Braithwaite, and think that the historical sounding declamations are in effect fairy stories, told in order to beef up our behaviour, to sprinkle magic dust on our intentions to live good, 'agapeistic', lives (*ERB*, p. 85). Or, it may be no harder than understanding how Romeo can say that Juliet is the sun, and that the sun is 93 million

miles away, without inferring that Juliet is 93 million miles away. But there should be something to be said, in each case.

II

> A religious symbol does not rest on any *opinion*. And error belongs only with opinion. One would like to say: This is what took place here; laugh, if you can.

It is illuminating to compare Wittgenstein's *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough* with R.G. Collingwood's reaction to the same work and others like it (it is often illuminating to compare these two).

Writing of a previous generation of anthropologists, which included Sir Edward Tylor, James Frazer and Claude Lévy-Bruhl, R.G. Collingwood salutes their real achievements in uncovering magical practices across the world, but then talks of what happened when they tried to explain what magic is for:

> The direction in which they looked for an answer to this question was determined by the prevailing influence of a positivistic philosophy which ignored man's emotional nature and reduced everything in human experience to terms of intellect, and further ignored every kind of intellectual activity except those which, according to the same philosophy, went to the making of natural science…the difference is that the scientist actually possesses scientific knowledge, and consequently his attempts to control nature are successful: the magician possesses none, and therefore his attempts fail. (Collingwood, *PA*, p. 58)

Collingwood has nothing but contempt for this "explanation" of the function of magic, although perhaps reserving even greater contempt for Freud's theory, in *Totem and Taboo*, that magicians suffer from a neurosis which enables them to believe that things come about merely because they want them to, or because they think of them as happening. Collingwood curtly refutes Freud by noticing that worldwide magic requires special *practices* and *techniques*, themselves shrouded with mysteries and a heightened sense of

drama. No shaman or priest thinks he can bring about what he wants just by wishing for it.

Pointing out the kinship between magical practices and artistic activities like dancing, singing, drawing, or modelling, Collingwood interprets magical practices as a species of what he has called art as craft: art produced for an external end. The end is the arousing and control of emotion: with magic emotions are 'focused and crystallized, consolidated into effective agents in practical life'. He summarizes his view thus:

> Magical activity is a kind of dynamo supplying the mechanism of practical life with the emotional current that drives it. Hence magic is a necessity for every sort and condition of man, and is actually found in every healthy society. A society which thinks, as our own thinks, that it has outlived the need of magic, is either mistaken in that opinion or else it is a dying society, perishing for lack of interest in its own maintenance. (*PA*, p. 69)

Collingwood has a far more Durkheimian sense than Wittgenstein that the point of religion, together with its mysteries and contradictions and heightened dramas of the 'sacred' or untouchable is the cementing and management of social emotions. By contrast, at least at one point in his life, Wittgenstein was implacably hostile to ritual: 'Everything ritualistic (everything that, as it were, smacks of the high priest) must be strictly avoided because it immediately turns rotten' (*CV*, p. 8, 1930).

The other difference between Collingwood and Wittgenstein might be that for the former magical art is not 'art proper'. It is art as craft, which means art at the service of a predetermined end. For Wittgenstein on the other hand the religious way of life 'stands on its own feet'. It says what it says. It is not 'for' the arousal or control of emotion any more than my visit to a friend is 'for' the arousal or control of emotion (although presumably it sometimes may be). In Wittgenstein the symbol or representation, which for Collingwood provides the emotional

current of practical life, has no external end or purpose behind the activities in which it is used. It is not 'for' furthering the stream of life, but is part of the stream of life.

However, put thus starkly, the difference between them sounds greater than it is. The previous section showed how closely Wittgenstein's discussion of religious frames of mind ties them to passions, feelings, emotions, and attitudes (let us face it: how could any grown-up discussion of the matter not do so?). Furthermore these emotions and the rest are not alien to us, even when we no longer participate in the practices:

> When Frazer is telling the story of the King of the Wood at Nemi, he does this in a tone which shows that something strange and terrible is happening here. And that is the answer to the question 'why is this happening?': because it is terrible. In other words, what strikes us in this course of events as terrible, impressive, horrible, tragic etc., anything but trivial and insignificant, *that* is what gave birth to them.

Conversely Collingwood, who was far more ready than Wittgenstein to declare himself a religious person, shows in many ways a more concrete, focused respect for religious practice as an end in itself, than any that is evinced by Wittgenstein's rather abstract and emotional gestures. After describing in sympathetic detail the simple, musical, pious, dignified, gracious, rooted, lives of the monks he had stayed with on the island of Santorini, Collingwood ends with a wonderful rhetorical flourish:

> In this way the traveller who began by thinking the men of Santorini ignorant, unenlightened, and superstitious may possibly, unless he is very careful, find within his mind a court sitting wherein the men of Santorini rise up in judgment against his own world and against the protestantism, and secularism, and utilitarianism of which he is so proud; and as judge in that court he may find himself obliged to take their part against his own world; so that if, later on, his own world should accuse him of not worshipping the –isms that it worships, and of corrupting its young men by imparting to them his heresy, he would have to admit that that accusation was just. (Collingwood, *EPP*, p. 149)

I cannot see that Collingwood is less able to attribute an intrinsic value to a way of life or stream of life infused with religious practice, than Wittgenstein. Indeed his sympathy with ritual and his understanding of the social value of such practice, suggests the reverse.

III

I want to return from these excursions into the nature of religious living to a more pointed philosophical moral, or at least, one that concerns me more. In part II I quoted Putnam as hospitable to what we might call a domestic use of the term 'attitude' but warning severely against making something 'metaphysical' of it. And I think it is clear that what he means is its use by 'non-cognitivists' to contrast with belief, as part of a package that includes the 'metaphysical' contrast, or what he later called a dichotomy, between fact and value. So expressivists, of whom I am proud to number myself, are seen not as trying to deflate metaphysics, as our patron saint, David Hume, saw himself as doing, or as desperate to keep it away from subjects it has infected for millenia, including religion and ethics, but as ourselves in the grip of a metaphysics of our own.

I find myself slightly baffled by this charge, since my own endeavours in connection with ethics have always seemed to me to be as anti-metaphysical as anything could well be. Roughly, when I started writing, the scene as I saw it was that sides had been taken on a variety of territories, where everyone thought that expressivists 'had to' say one kind of thing, and others ('realists') could say other kinds of thing. And which of these things you said defined your 'metaethics', and put you in one camp or another. But it seemed to me then, and still seems to me now, that none of the pivots on which these debates were supposed to turn was of any use in defining a debate. The character whom I somewhat ineptly called the 'quasi-realist' was a dramatization of this thought. Starting off from a position in the sentimentalist or 'attitude' camp, he finds himself gradually able to explain and to justify the vocabularies supposedly

definitive of realism. In other words, I find myself able to say, justify saying, and indeed revel in saying such things as this: there are duties; it is true that there are duties, and a fact that there are; they are mind-independent; we know what many of them are, although we may not yet know what others of them are; we could have been wrong about what they are, but fortunately we are very often not. And similarly for obligations, reasons, or values.

This is not the place to rehearse or defend the various things that enable an expressivist to end up saying these things with a good conscience. The process includes a description of the things we could not do without propositional expression, and hence the pressure to substitute the language we have for any primitive language of ejaculations or commands or announcings of intent. It include an 'internalist' parsing of mind independency or counterfactual claims, an account of what knowledge claims are that means that expressivism need not labour under the infamous label of non-cognitivism, and finally the deployment of a deflationist view of truth—a view that incidentally has the same shape as expressivism in the account it gives of the utility of the truth predicate, and that was itself of course a central doctrine of Wittgenstein's.

The things this journey enables me to say were supposed to be the private property of 'moral realists'. But in my view, it is the people who think that these things do define an -ism, who put a 'metaphysical' gloss on these remarks. By approaching them with a certain picture in mind, they muddy the waters, as they have done since Plato. The picture they have in mind is that in order to say these things you have to conceive of duties or the others as elements in our environment, queer elements or things to be encountered or 'intuited' or 'tracked'. I do not say that this is a coherent picture, any more than the picture of God as having a personality is coherent. But I do say it is to be resisted, and I have tried to resist it, or as Wittgenstein would have said, to combat it. And in this I also stand foursquare with Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein thought that in

order to get an *übersichtliche Darstellung* of ethics, for instance, you do not rest content with 'ethical facts': in many places, indeed in all the places in which he approaches the topic, he insists that 'the good is outside the space of facts' (*CV* p. 3.). I do not go so far as that. But as I read him, it is not that you must not say, as I do say, that it is a fact that you have a duty to your children, for instance. There is a proposition here, and where there is a proposition the language of truth and fact can attach itself perfectly naturally. Rather, the point is that this is only where you end up; it is not *itself* the key to a perspicuous account or understanding of what goes on that you should end up here. The way to do that according to Wittgenstein is to think about how we learned words, and about the word 'good', he says:

> A child generally applies a word like 'good' first to food. One thing that is immensely important in teaching is exaggerated gestures and facial expressions. The word is taught as a substitute for a facial expression or a gesture. The gestures, tones of voice etc., in this case are expressions of approval. What *makes* the word an interjection of approval? It is the game it appears in, not the form of words. (1966, p. 2, 1938).

In fact the very beginning of *LAPR* is devoted to Wittgenstein distancing himself from those such as Moore who think that because 'beautiful' and 'good' are adjectives, they must function as other adjectives do. This is one place that Wittgenstein wheels out his celebrated comparison of language to a tool chest (*LAPR*, pp. 1–2). Of course aesthetics and ethics grow out of using words just as 'interjections of approval', in ways that give the quasi-realist work to do. But they never leave their ancestry behind: the child remains the father of the man.

Wittgenstein thought, as for that matter did Hume, that in grown-up aesthetic judgment it is what you discriminate and notice that counts. Appreciation does not

consist in just saying 'hooray!' at the right moments. And even what we call 'taking delight' in things is complex: not so much expressed in the faces we make as in whether we return to things again and again—the opposite of discontent, disgust, or discomfort. The lectures on aesthetics explore the way the delight or discontent is not an effect separable from its 'cause', but an element inside the experience of the object. You cannot get the delight you take in a sonnet by playing a round of golf. All this is surely right and true. And in both aesthetics and ethics there is the possibility that Putnam also stresses of increased discrimination and understanding, insight and delicacy. But it is a question of taking delight or not, all the same. And what is the harm in calling that a way of feeling, and improvement in it an education in feeling?

Putnam believes that our values cast their shades of pink over what would otherwise be Quine's pale grey lore, itself a blending of the white of convention and the black of fact. With Wittgenstein in mind we might see it like this: the human activity that we call describing the facts is never free of currents in our stream of life that swirl or tumble according to our values. I am not sure whether I believe that. But suppose it were true. For comparison we might imagine a 'hyper-religious' society, in which the picture of the last Judgment, or of life after death or God as having a personality, is always in peoples' minds. It might dictate their interests, and play a role in determining what they notice, what implications they draw from what they notice, and the exits into action that these implications engender. It might complicate mutual understanding, interpretation or translation if, as they bring their slightly different pictures to bear, there is some divergence between the interpretations of experience, the inferential paths, and the resulting actions that one or another member of this society offers.

It might make be difficult for these hyper-religious people to perceive the omnipresent colouring their pictorial habits bring with them, or to understand others who do not colour the world the same way, or to accept the contingencies responsible for them colouring as they do, and perhaps in this respect they resemble some of us. The question for Putnam is whether Wittgenstein would have to say that in this society there is no use for the kind of investigation his lecture illustrates. Would it indicate that there is no distinction between being in the grip of a picture, for instance, and describing a fact? It is difficult to see why it should. Our imaginings certainly stir our emotions and actions; indeed *all* mental states have an exit into expression and action, and Wittgenstein was the first to insist. But it did not lead him to say that the tool-box of language contained only a hammer, nor to suppose that only metaphysical prejudice leads us to notice the patchwork that makes up our language and therefore our minds. It is surely not metaphysics that leads us to want to understand ourselves well enough so that things that might appear puzzling become clear.

IV

Not all the mental descriptions we offer about each other, and therefore about ourselves, describe beliefs. Someone using a metaphor or advancing a picture does not necessarily believe anything, although they may be on the way to doing so. The metaphor or picture is supposed to act as a kind of invitation or signpost. It is a stimulus to the imagination and hence is often a route to belief and action. But in religious contexts, the route may not lead to actual belief (Hume talks of the 'somewhat unaccountable' state of mind of the religious observer), although deploying a picture or even bare imaginings can certainly

lead to actions. Involved in the mysteries of magic and religion people are frequently at a loss, bewildered, have their minds in a whirl, are beset by fears, imaginings, distractions and prejudice; they may be unable to come to an opinion, but also unable to admit that, for they will know to say that faith is a virtue, and the magic depends upon suspension of thought. People may be vacillating and irresolute, and we may describe their states of mind by saying that we do not know where they stand. Western and Middle-Eastern monotheistic religions, with their mysteries, paradoxes, contradictions and analogies are particularly adapted to such states: mystery and confusion are part of the package.

Hume played off the issue brilliantly by having two, rather than one, religious apologists in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. One is the proponent of the Divine Architect—the anthropomorphic, humanoid God of Abraham and Isaac; the other is the Leibnizian proponent of the God of the philosophers, perfect and therefore immutable, atemporal, eternal, unknowable. The one flirts with idolatry, and the other with mysticism, and by the end of the *Dialogues* each of them has, with complete justice, accused the other of propounding something absolutely useless, no better than atheism. Religious practice—magical practice—could not survive by bringing either of these pictures into focus by itself. It has to revolve or oscillate, and the fact that it finds no stable stopping point is its lifeblood: 'Behold I show you a mystery'. At the risk of appearing to belittle the awful majesty of the issue, I can't resist thinking that Lewis Carrol captures this side of it perfectly. When Alice hears the nonsense poem Jabberwocky she confesses: "Somehow it seems to fill my head with ideas—only I don't exactly know what they are."

After Durkheim and Collingwood, I do not think we should 'combat' people who need to get their heads in a whirl. It is not 'stupid', as contemporary militant atheists think, to invest symbols and rituals with importance. The rituals and practices are things people do, and like other things human beings do, have to be applauded or condemned at the bar of ethics. If we side with Collingwood we would say that the balance sheet is on the whole quite favourable. If we side with Hume, we would say that it is not. One side stresses dignity and quiet piety, the sense of awe, the trust and hope and social emotions that make for life going well; the other side stresses the abjection and sense of sin, the fears and terrors, the sectarianism, the fossilizations of dogma, the accusations of heresy and the horrors of theocracy. The one side hears Bach; the other hears car bombs and the madness of crowds. We all have a 'particle of the dove, mingled in with the wolf and the serpent', and our religious practices are likely to be no better nor worse than we ourselves are.

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