

SIMPLE OBJECTS OF COMPARISON FOR COMPLEX GRAMMARS: AN ALTERNATIVE STRAND IN WITTGENSTEIN'S LATER REMARKS ON RELIGION

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ABSTRACT: The predominant interpretation of Wittgenstein's later remarks on religion takes him to hold that all religious utterances are non-scientific, and to hold that the way to show that religious utterances are non-scientific is to identify and characterise the grammatical rules governing their use. This paper claims that though this does capture one strand of Wittgenstein's later thought on religion, there is an alternative strand of that thought which is quite different and more nuanced. In this alternative strand Wittgenstein stresses that religious utterances and beliefs can come in both scientific and non-scientific varieties. More than that, he claims that the grammar of religious utterances, and the logic of religious beliefs, is often complex – in that individual utterances and beliefs will often be mixed between, indeterminate between, or fluid between being scientific and being non-scientific. This complexity means that it will often be unhelpful to try to pin down one particular grammar or logic for a given utterance or belief. Wittgenstein therefore suggests a new method of grammatical and logical investigation, which is less likely to distort complex grammars or logics by being overly simplistic or rigid. This method is to use simple examples of utterances and beliefs as objects of comparison, so as to illuminate the different aspects of the more complex actual utterances and beliefs under examination. This alternative strand in Wittgenstein's later remarks on religion is a manifestation of a broader strand of Wittgenstein's later thought as a whole, which was first described by Friedrich Waismann, and later developed by Gordon Baker and Oskari Kuusela. The paper concludes by providing examples of religious beliefs which are logically mixed, indeterminate, and fluid, and showing how simple objects of comparison can be used to illuminate them.

1. INTRODUCTION

Wittgenstein's later remarks on religion have engendered extensive exegesis and analysis. There is, however, a wide consensus on Wittgenstein's position, which is shared by most of his critics and supporters alike. This predominant interpretation has two main aspects: firstly, it takes Wittgenstein to hold that all religious utterances are grammatically non-scientific¹; and secondly, it takes him to hold that the way to show that religious utterances are non-scientific is to identify and characterise the grammatical rules governing their use.

In section §2 I describe this predominant interpretation in more detail, and agree that it does indeed represent a strand of Wittgenstein's later thought on religion. I then go on to claim, however, that there exists an alternative strand of Wittgenstein's later thought on religion which is quite different to the one captured by the predominant interpretation. This alternative strand of Wittgenstein's later thought on religion is a particular manifestation of a broader alternative strand of Wittgenstein's later thought as a whole. I therefore spend section §3 setting out my understanding of this broader strand, and go on, in section §4, to show how it is manifested in Wittgenstein's

¹ It should be noted that 'scientific', in this context, refers not just to the nature of the *natural* sciences, but much more broadly, to the whole range of the empirical, rational, informational, and theoretical games. This is in-keeping with Wittgenstein's use of the term (after all, the German word '*Wissenschaft*', has a significantly broader sense than the English word 'science'). The terms 'scientific' and 'non-scientific' will be used throughout this paper in this broad sense; and their meanings should become clearer as the paper progresses.

remarks on religion. Finally, in section §5, I illustrate what I take to be the value of this alternative strand of Wittgenstein's thought on religion.

2. THE PREDOMINANT INTERPRETATION OF WITTGENSTEIN'S LATER REMARKS ON RELIGION

The first aspect of the predominant interpretation of Wittgenstein's later understanding of religion is the one that is most noticeable when reading the secondary literature². In it Wittgenstein is taken to hold religion and science to be two completely separate language-games, understood to be necessarily non-overlapping regions of language and life. According to this view both science and religion are grammatically uniform, in that all scientific utterances are taken to be speculative hypotheses, grounded in the investigation of the empirical world, and rationally justified by their explanatory power; and all religious utterances are taken to be something like expressions of attitudes which form a way of living and of judging life.

The second aspect of this interpretation is not always explicitly stated. Wittgenstein is taken to hold that the method of discovering the true nature of particular religious utterances is that of identifying and characterising the rules that govern their use; and that by becoming aware of the rules of their use, religious utterances will be seen to be dissimilar to parallel scientific utterances, despite superficial similarities of form.

Michael Kober exemplifies both aspects of the predominant interpretation: "Crudely speaking, the Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Investigations* holds that what an expression or a sentence means can be explained by listing rules that govern [its] use... It is the task of philosophy, firstly, to make us aware of the actual usage of expressions and sentences, and secondly, to make us aware that *prima facie* similar, analogous or parallel applications of particular expressions in different language games may produce different usage and meaning... Wittgenstein points out... the difference between making a (scientific) claim and expressing an attitude... [and] stresses... that a religious belief or faith 'is not a scientific belief, has nothing to do with scientific convictions' "³.

It is not difficult to see how this interpretation of Wittgenstein became so prevalent. After all, it is – in both of its aspects – well-grounded in a fair number of Wittgenstein's own remarks⁴. It is undeniable, therefore, that the predominant interpretation does indeed capture a strand of Wittgenstein's later thought on religion.

However, it is one of the aims of this paper to show that there is an alternative strand of Wittgenstein's later thought on religion. In it Wittgenstein neither insists that all religious utterances are non-scientific, nor uses the method of identifying and characterising the grammatical rules governing particular religious utterances.

This alternative strand of Wittgenstein's later thought on religion is one particular manifestation of a broader strand of Wittgenstein's later thought as a whole. The first to note this broader strand was Friedrich Waismann, in his early presentation of Wittgenstein's thought, *The Principles of Linguistic Philosophy*⁵. It resurfaced in Gordon Baker's later essays, which were much influenced by Waismann's writings⁶. And most recently, it has been further described by Oskari Kuusela, who was a student of Baker's⁷. Because the reading of Wittgenstein advocated by

² See, for example, Barrett (1991:167), Clack (1999:65&109), and Schönbaumsfeld (2007:173).

³ Kober (2006:100-2).

⁴ Grounding the first aspect, see, for example, CV:98, and LRB:57; and grounding the second aspect, see, for example, BT:§90:313 (a general methodological remark), and Z:717 (a remark on religion specifically). See the bibliography for expansions of the abbreviations that I use for the titles of Wittgenstein's books.

⁵ Waismann (1997); see especially chap. 4.

⁶ These are collected in Baker (2004); see especially chaps. 1, 9, & 13.

⁷ In Kuusela (2008); see especially secs. 3.3-3.7.

Waismann, later Baker, and Kuusela, is not mainstream, I shall refer to the strand that it captures as an *alternative* strand of Wittgenstein's later thought. I shall introduce the alternative strand of Wittgenstein's later thought on religion by first setting out my understanding of the broader alternative strand of which it is a part.

3. AN ALTERNATIVE STRAND OF WITTGENSTEIN'S LATER THOUGHT AS A WHOLE

This alternative strand of Wittgenstein's later thought has two aspects⁸. Firstly, it stresses the existence of sentences which are grammatically various, of utterances which are grammatically mixed and indeterminate, and of sequences of utterances which are grammatically fluid. Secondly, it suggests that the best way to obtain a clear view of such mixed, indeterminate, and fluid grammars, is to put forward grammatically simple objects of comparison which will illuminate the various features of the complex grammars in question. I shall discuss these two aspects in turn.

I take the grammar of an utterance to be constituted by the rules for its use. These rules govern the utterance's combinatorial possibilities, what it implies, what it is implied by, and the like⁹. Therefore, for example, if there is a difference between the things implied by two utterances, they will not count as having the same grammars. Given this, I shall begin by explaining what I mean by grammatical variety, mixedness, indeterminacy, and fluidity:

- a. Variety (antonym: uniformity). A sentence is grammatically *various* if different utterances of the sentence have different grammars¹⁰. The belief *that p* is logically various if the sentence *p* is grammatically various.
- b. Mixedness (antonym: purity). Given a grammatically various sentence, and two utterances of that sentence which each have different grammars, a third utterance of the same sentence will have a grammar that is a *mixture* of the grammars of the first two, if it has some grammatical characteristics that are unique to the first and some grammatical characteristics that are unique to the second. A person's belief *that p* is logically mixed if their utterance of *p* would be grammatically mixed.¹¹
- c. Indeterminacy (antonym: determinacy). Given a grammatically various sentence, and two utterances of that sentence which each have different grammars, a third utterance of the same sentence will have a grammar that is *indeterminate* between the grammars of the first two, if it has only grammatical characteristics which are common to the grammars of both, and none which are unique to either – making it possible for it to come to have either grammar. A person's belief *that p* is logically indeterminate if their utterance of *p* would be grammatically indeterminate.
- d. Fluidity (antonym: stability). The logic of a belief is *fluid* if there is a change in its logic over time. If a person's belief *that p* is logically fluid, then the sentence *p* will be grammatically various, and the believer's utterances of the sentence *p* would have different grammars at

⁸ By 'Wittgenstein's later thought' I do not mean to refer to *Philosophical Investigations* alone, but rather, to everything that can be found in his later notebooks, and in student notes of his lectures and conversations. Therefore, though some of the remarks that I quote in order to demonstrate the existence of an alternative strand in Wittgenstein's later thought will be from the *Investigations*, many others will be from elsewhere in the *Nachlass*.

⁹ Sentences and utterances have *grammars*, whereas beliefs have *logics*. Grammar and logic are closely related, and the qualities just mentioned – combinatorial possibilities, implications, etc – are also the kinds of thing which I take to be constitutive of the logic of a belief.

¹⁰ I will, therefore, talk of 'the grammatical varieties of a sentence', meaning the variety of grammars that different utterances of the sentence have.

¹¹ I will ignore the fact that this characterisation seems to be open to 'grue'-like problems, and rely on the fact that we usually have a good idea of which grammars are the pure ones and which are the mixed.

different times. It could then be said that the sequence of the believer's utterances of the sentence p ¹² would be grammatically fluid.

Sometimes two utterances have such different grammars that they belong to two distinct grammatical categories. Not all cases of grammatical variety, mixedness, indeterminacy, and fluidity are cross-categorical, but some are. A few examples of some very general – mutually exclusive – categories of utterance are: statements of hypotheses, statements of rules, and expressions of attitudes. Thus a sentence would be grammatically various if, say, one utterance of the sentence were the statement of an hypothesis, while another were the statement of a rule, and perhaps yet another the expression of an attitude. An utterance would be grammatically mixed if, say, some of the rules governing its use were those specifically appropriate to hypotheses, and others were those specifically appropriate to expressions of attitudes. An utterance would be grammatically indeterminate if, say, the rules governing its use were only ones common to the stating of hypotheses and the expression of attitudes, thereby not yet having enough further rules governing its use to place it in one of those categories specifically. And the sequence of a believer's utterances of a given sentence would be grammatically fluid if, say, the earliest utterance were grammatically indeterminate between being the statement of an hypothesis and being the statement of a rule of language-use, while a later utterance were determinately the statement of an hypothesis, each utterance of the sequence being another expression of a single logically fluid belief¹³.

There is nothing particularly novel or surprising in the idea that Wittgenstein's later thought stresses grammatical variety. After all, the whole point of the discussion in PI:§§65-7, in which Wittgenstein introduces the notion of 'family-resemblance', is precisely to deal with the variety of the grammars of expressions such as 'game' and 'number'. This thrust of Wittgenstein's later thought – to shatter illusions of grammatical uniformity and highlight grammatical variety – is well expressed in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Psychology*:

"What I give is the morphology of the use of an expression... In philosophy one feels *forced* to look at a concept in a certain way... You thought that there was one possibility, or only two at most. But I made you think of others. Furthermore, I made you see that it was absurd to expect the concept to conform to those narrow possibilities. Thus your mental cramp is relieved, and you are free to look around the field of use of the expression and to describe the different kinds of uses of it."¹⁴

Thus, for Wittgenstein, it is "absurd" to think that a given expression is always used in one way, or that a given concept subsumes only one uniform kind of thing. As Wittgenstein said in the *Blue Book*:

"A word has the meaning someone has given to it. / There are words with several clearly defined meanings. It is easy to tabulate these meanings. And there are words of which one might say: They are used in a thousand different ways which gradually merge into one another. No wonder that we can't tabulate strict rules for their use." (BBB:28)

In 1933 Wittgenstein remarked that "[n]othing would be more astounding, than if 'good' had the same meaning always, considering the ways we learn it" (WL:5/1/1933) – and this is equally true of many other words. Since the grammar of a word is internally related to the grammars of the utterances which include it, it therefore makes sense that Wittgenstein's sensitivity to the variety of meanings had by so many words, would bring along with it a recognition of the grammatical variety of many sentences as well.

Now, though Wittgenstein's advocacy of grammatical variety is widely recognised, his advocacy of the other three grammatical qualities characterised above – mixedness, indeterminacy, and fluidity – is far less commonly taken account of. This is strange, given that these three grammatical qualities are bound up with variety. Variety is their progenitor, for the mixedness, indeterminacy, or fluidity

¹² That is, the chronologically ordered series of the believer's various utterances of the sentence p at different times.

¹³ I grant that there may be a hazy line between cases in which there is a single logically fluid belief, and cases in which there are two distinct beliefs one of which replaces the other.

¹⁴ Malcolm (2001:43).

of a given utterance or sequence of utterances, will be *between* the different grammatical varieties of the relevant sentence. Furthermore, the fact that these grammatical qualities receive less attention than variety, in discussions of Wittgenstein's views of language, is even more surprising given that they are discussed prominently in *Philosophical Investigations* (even if not always referred to by the words I have used):

"[I]n philosophy we often *compare* the use of words with games, calculi with fixed rules, but cannot say that someone who is using language *must* be playing such a game... / All this, however, can appear in the right light only when one has attained greater clarity about... what may mislead us (and did mislead me) into thinking that if anyone utters a sentence and *means* or *understands* it, he is operating a calculus according to definite rules... / Doesn't the analogy between language and games throw light here? We can easily imagine people amusing themselves in a field by playing with a ball like this: starting various existing games, but playing several without finishing them, and in between throwing the ball aimlessly into the air, chasing one another with the ball, throwing it at one another for a joke, and so on. And now someone says: The whole time they are playing a ball-game and therefore are following definite rules at every throw. / And is there not also the case where we play, and make up the rules as we go along? And there is even one where we alter them – as we go along." (PI:§§81&83)

Wittgenstein begins with the insight that when people use language they are not necessarily playing a "game... with fixed rules"¹⁵. This is an eschewal of the position that "if anyone utters a sentence and *means* or *understands* it, he is operating a calculus according to definite rules". Wittgenstein thinks that games and play can provide an illuminating analogy for language and language-use. Sometimes language-use is analogous to playing official football matches or basketball games. In these cases a definite single game is being played, and it is clear which game it is and what rules govern the play (though the rules do not, *per impossible*, cover every conceivable circumstance). But Wittgenstein points out that language-use is not only analogous to the playing of such formal and regimented games, but also sometimes to the way in which people play-around with a ball in the park: they may begin by simply throwing the ball about, then move on to play a particular game, then another, or they may be undecided between games, or any combination of the above and similar things. Wittgenstein's analogy may be expanded as follows: we could imagine people playing with a ball in such a way that (a) the rules governing their play are a mix of rules from a number of different games (though each individual rule involved in governing their play is from a particular game, some are from one particular game, and some are from another); (b) their play is objectively indeterminate between a number of different games (there are not yet enough individual rules governing their play – or the individual rules they have are not yet sufficiently fleshed out – for there to be an answer to the question of which of a number of possible games they are playing); (c) the rules governing their play are fluid (some of the individual rules involved in governing their play change over time, or rules are added or taken away). Thus it is a key insight of this strand of Wittgenstein's thought that we often mix together rules from incompatible language-games, and often hover indeterminately between, or move fluidly between, different language-games.

Now, the qualities of mixedness, indeterminacy, and fluidity come in degrees. For example, an utterance may be indeterminate between a number of very different grammatical categories, or between the different grammars of two closely-related utterances. If the grammar of an utterance – or sequence of utterances of a sentence – is *highly* mixed, indeterminate, or fluid, it will be unintelligible; whereas if those qualities are instantiated within bounds, language-users will get on fine as long as the conversation does not home-in specifically on the area of mixedness, indeterminacy, or fluidity.

Wittgenstein says that if we were to draw a colour-coded diagram of the actual use of a word, then "as it were the different colours [would] flow into one another without sharp boundaries... If we look at the actual use of a word, what we see is something constantly fluctuating"

¹⁵ In his discussion of our language-use often not having a fixed and definite grammar, Wittgenstein sometimes talks about words, and sometimes about sentences or utterances. What he says of each applies to the other, because – as I said above – the grammars of words are internally related to those of the sentences or utterances which include them.

(PG:76-7). Regarding a particular case of a person's use of a certain word, he says: "[W]e'll be able to describe his actual behaviour as 'fluctuating between several meanings' " (BT:\$58:199). And he contrasts his later with his earlier view of language-use by asking: "[W]asn't it a mistake of mine (for that's what it strikes me as now) to assume that whoever uses language always plays a *particular game*?" (BT:\$58:198). That is, we should not assume that a language-user is playing one particular language-game with a given utterance, because its grammar might well be mixed or indeterminate; and we should not assume that he is playing one particular game with a given sequence of utterances of a sentence, because its grammar might well be fluid.

This, then, is the first aspect of the alternative strand in Wittgenstein's later thought: his stress on the existence of grammatical variety, mixedness, indeterminacy, and fluidity.

The second aspect of the alternative strand of Wittgenstein's later thought is his method for providing clarifying surveys of the grammars of grammatically various sentences, grammatically mixed and indeterminate utterances, and grammatically fluid sequences of utterances of a given sentence. This method involves putting forward a range of simple examples of utterances of the relevant grammatically various sentence, each with a different grammar. These examples can be taken from real life or made up, as long as they are simple, that is, as long as they are grammatically pure and determinate. Along with each of the simple examples, some remarks should be made about their respective grammars. This range of examples – along with the grammatical observation accompanying each of them – provides a survey of the grammar of the grammatically various sentence. If one then wants to clarify the grammar of a particular utterance of that sentence – which may be grammatically mixed or indeterminate – then one holds up the range of examples as objects of comparison, against the utterance being investigated, so that the different simple examples can illuminate different aspects of the actual utterance's more complex grammar. In using this method one need make no actual claims about the grammar of the utterance under investigation. Rather, one simply holds up the examples against the complex utterance in question, so as to prompt one's interlocutor into seeing a particular aspect of the grammar of that utterance which he may not have noticed before, may have overlooked, or may have forgotten. A good philosopher will know which aspects of the utterance under investigation need illumination. This illumination will happen through either the similarity or difference between the examples and the utterance in question: if an example seems to resonate with the utterance, then the grammatical characteristic which that example embodies will be seen to be at least an aspect of the utterance's complex grammar; whereas if it there seems to be a dissonance between the example and the utterance, then the grammatical characteristic which that example embodies will be seen to be less of an aspect of the utterance's complex grammar than was perhaps previously thought. One can similarly use this method to illuminate the grammar of a sequence of utterances of a given sentence which may be grammatically fluid. One holds up a range of simple examples against the sequence to see whether utterances from different parts of the sequence have similarities or differences to different members of the range of simple examples.

Using simple objects of comparison provides grammatical clarity by highlighting the different grammatical aspects of grammatically complex utterances and sequences of utterances, and by doing so without making rigid – and therefore often distorting – claims about what the grammar in question purely, determinately, and stably is. This method stands in contrast with that of trying to clarify grammar by identifying and characterising *the* grammatical rules governing a given utterance or sequence of utterances, or *the* relevant grammatical category to which they belong. Given the first aspect of the alternative strand of Wittgenstein's thought, this contrast makes sense. For if you assume that all utterances are grammatically pure and determinate, and that all sequences of utterances of a given sentence are grammatically stable, then you can set about identifying and characterising the grammatical rules that govern them, or stating the grammatical categories under which they fall. However, depending on what aspects of an utterance's grammar interest us, grammatical mixedness can make it difficult or impossible to make a helpful grammatical

categorisation of a given utterance, as it might have characteristics from a number of different categories. Similarly, grammatical indeterminacy can make it impossible to make a helpful grammatical categorisation of a given utterance, for it might hover between the categories which interest us. And again, depending on our interests, grammatical fluidity could also make it impossible to make a helpful grammatical categorisation of a sequence of utterances of a given sentence, for the members of the sequence could fall under a number of different categories. If all these qualities are found to be combined in various ways then the job of pinning down ‘the actual rules’ which constitute the grammar of a given utterance or sequence of utterances, or of pinning down ‘the actual category’ under which they fall, will often misrepresent the complex reality by distorting oversimplification.

Wittgenstein briefly discusses the method of objects of comparison towards the end of the methodological sequence in the *Philosophical Investigations*:

“130. Our clear and simple language-games are not preliminary studies for a future regimentation of language... Rather, the language-games stand there as *objects of comparison* which, through similarities and dissimilarities, are meant to throw light on features of our language. / 131. For we can avoid injustice¹⁶ or vacuity in our assertions only by presenting the model as what it is, as an object of comparison – as a sort of yardstick; not as a preconception to which reality *must* correspond. (The dogmatism into which we fall so easily in doing philosophy).” (PI:§§130-1)¹⁷

When analysing utterances, philosophers often seem to assume that grammar is always uniform, pure, determinate, and stable. As a result they often find themselves in the position of dogmatically trying to force various, mixed, indeterminate, and fluid grammars into moulds which are simply too small or too rigid to take them. In order to succeed in getting unfixed and indefinite grammars into these fixed and definite moulds, the philosopher must resort to ‘pruning’ the initial grammatical reality – whether consciously or not – neatening it up by ‘cutting off’ the bits that do not fit¹⁸. This pruning fails to do justice to the complexity of the grammar being described, and the resulting analysis ends up being vacuous because the data have been adjusted to the desired result. When a grammatical reality is various, mixed, indeterminate, and fluid, trying to identify a single set of rules which govern it, or to identify the single grammatical category to which it belongs, is bound to be distorting. Wittgenstein, therefore, suggests that instead of trying to force an unfixed and indefinite grammar into a fixed and definite mould, we should use objects of comparison with fixed and definite grammars as objects of comparison, to be compared with the more complex reality. They can illuminate that reality, without our having to dogmatically claim that they fully capture it.

In the above passage Wittgenstein speaks of using “clear and simple language-games” as objects of comparison. In other passages, however, he talks more broadly of examples, archetypes, or ideals, as the kinds of thing which are able to act as objects of comparison¹⁹. Because grammatical mixedness, indeterminacy, and fluidity, occur between the different grammatical varieties of the relevant sentence, the simple examples used to illuminate complex grammars will be grammatically pure and determinate examples of each of the relevant grammatical varieties of the sentence. Sometimes Wittgenstein calls these examples, ‘centres of reference’, which he glosses as “simple cases & others grouped round this” (WPCR:47). At other times he calls them ‘centres of variation’²⁰ – for if the objects of comparison are well-chosen, they will act as loci around which the mixed, indeterminate, and fluid grammars of actual language-use will vary, and which will allow for a clear survey of those many possible variations. Wittgenstein describes the method of simple objects of comparison in more detail in *Philosophical Grammar*:

¹⁶ Translation amended.

¹⁷ For an interesting example of Wittgenstein putting this kind of method into practice – though without using the words that I have used to describe it – see LFM:17-22.

¹⁸ If the philosopher is consciously engaged in constructing idealised concepts or languages, that is another matter – but often this kind of pruning goes on even when the project is taken to be purely descriptive.

¹⁹ See, for example, MS:220:85, CV:21, and CV:30.

²⁰ See, for example, MS:152:17.

“If we look at the actual use of a word, what we see is something constantly fluctuating. / In our investigations we set over against this fluctuation something more fixed, just as one paints a stationary picture of the constantly altering face of the landscape. / When we study language we *envisage* it as a game with fixed rules. We compare it with, and measure it against, a game of that kind. / If for our purposes we wish to regulate the use of a word by definite rules, then alongside its fluctuating use we set up a different use by codifying one of its characteristic aspects.” (PG:77)

As I have said, this strand of Wittgenstein’s thought has been highlighted by Waismann, later Baker, and Kuusela. I take my own exposition to be a part of that tradition, though my understanding of this strand of Wittgenstein’s thought is not identical to any one of theirs. There are three ways in which my exposition is, perhaps, distinctive: firstly, I have insisted that the Waismann-Baker-Kuusela reading of Wittgenstein captures only one strand of Wittgenstein’s later thought, and that this strand exists alongside – and sometimes even mixed-up with – a more dogmatic strand²¹ into which Wittgenstein would sometimes lapse²²; secondly, by introducing the four terms – ‘variety’, ‘mixedness’, ‘indeterminacy’, and ‘fluidity’ – I have begun to map out the terrain of this important family of grammatical qualities; and thirdly, I have sought to explain how the development of the method of objects of comparison is motivated by Wittgenstein’s recognition of the existence grammatical variety, mixedness, indeterminacy, and fluidity of grammar.

I should note that although I have described Wittgenstein’s method only as applied to clarifying the grammars of sentences, utterances, and sequences of utterances, nonetheless simple examples of beliefs can just as easily be used as objects of comparison to illuminate logically various, mixed, indeterminate, and fluid beliefs. Wittgenstein himself uses the method in both kinds of case, and almost everything that can be said of its use with sentences and utterances can be applied – with suitable minor amendments – to its use with beliefs, and vice versa. Therefore, from now on, I will move more freely between examples of utterances and examples of beliefs.

4. AN ALTERNATIVE STRAND IN WITTFENSTEIN’S LATER REMARKS ON RELIGION

Having sketched what I take to be an alternative strand of Wittgenstein’s later thought as a whole, I will now try to show how it is manifested specifically in some of his later remarks on religion.

The first aspect of the predominant interpretation of Wittgenstein’s later understanding of religion is that he takes the class of religious utterances to be uniformly non-scientific. Though there can be grammatical variety within the realm of the non-scientific²³, the denial that there can be religious utterances which play the science-game puts a significant limit on the field of grammatical variety

²¹ Many of Wittgenstein’s later remarks fall clearly into one or other of the two strands that I have described. There are, however, remarks or passages which seem to be mixed, indeterminate, or fluid between the two strands. Thus my neat descriptions of these two strands can themselves be thought of as simple examples to be used as objects of comparison: to be held up against Wittgenstein’s often complex remarks, so that they may illuminate those remarks by either their similarities or differences to them. Some of his remarks will be just like one or other simple object, whereas others will contain aspects of both in varying degrees, or will hover, or move, between them. It thus turns out that Wittgenstein’s observations about variety, mixedness, indeterminacy, and fluidity, and his method of using simple objects of comparison to provide survivals of complex realities, can illuminate things other than grammars – in this case, a philosopher’s writings.

²² Rather than sitting comfortably together, these two strands are in tension. In this regard it is worth keeping in mind that Wittgenstein himself recognised that he did not always live up to the radical nature of his new method: “I myself still find my way of philosophizing new, & it keeps striking me so afresh, & that is why I have to repeat myself so often... For me [the repetitions] are necessary” (CV:3).

²³ For example, Wittgenstein discusses expressive utterances, and grammatical statements, to name just two very different kinds of non-scientific utterance.

for religious sentences and utterances. However, contrary to the predominant interpretation there is a strong strand in Wittgenstein's later remarks on religion which stresses the variety of the grammars of religious utterances – particularly focussing on the existence of religious utterances of both scientific and non-scientific kinds. The first organised treatment that Wittgenstein gave to the grammar of religion in his later period – namely, in his 1933 lectures – provides us with a good example of this stress on variety. GE Moore recorded Wittgenstein to have said²⁴:

"I have always wanted to say something about grammar of ethical expressions, or e.g. of 'God'. /... / Now: use of such a word as 'God'. / It has been used in many different ways: e.g. sometimes for something very like a human being – a physical body. / Cf. 'soul' which has sometimes been described as something 'gaseous'. / But others haven't meant by 'soul' anything like this. /... / If I restricted use of 'soul' to such phrases as 'His soul is at rest' or 'His soul is easily stirred', you might say I'm denying that there is any soul: but you may *mean* by 'Men have souls'. simply that such propositions are true: /... / When a man worships idols / (1) One possibility is that he believes idol is alive & will help him. / Then man must have forgotten that he made it: but this *can* happen. / (2) In millions of cases, this will not happen, but e.g. / (a) God *dwells* in the statue. / But what does '*dwells*' mean? / By asking what he would say, & what he wouldn't, you can get at how he uses the word. / Haeckel said 'God is a gaseous vertebra[te]', meaning that that's what people meant. / This is like saying 'Soul is a gaseous human being'; & answer is *sometimes* people so use this word, but sometimes not at all. /... / There are many controversies about meaning of 'God', which could be settled by saying 'I'm not using the word in such a sense as that you can say - - -' " (WL:5/1/1933)

In this passage Wittgenstein discusses the words 'God', 'soul', and 'idol', and sentences which include them. In each case his point is the same – namely, to remind us that the given word or sentence can have a variety of different meanings. The first statement that he makes in his first organised discussion of religious topics in his later period is to say that the word 'God' "has been used in many different ways". He reiterates this when he says that "There are many controversies about meaning of 'God', which could be settled by saying 'I'm not using the word in such a sense as that you can say - - -' ". The point of both of these statements is to make clear that the word 'God' does not have a uniform grammar – and the same would apply to sentences which include the word 'God'. He makes the same point with regard to the word 'soul': " 'soul' which has sometimes been described as something 'gaseous'. But others haven't meant by 'soul' anything like this". Again, his point is to remind us of the variety of ways in which the word is used, and the variety of roles that the belief 'that people have souls' may play. His response to the claim that the "Soul is a gaseous human being" could almost be taken to be *the* paradigmatic form of Wittgenstein's grammatical remarks in this alternative strand of his thought: "*sometimes* people so use this word, but sometimes not at all". That is, Wittgenstein accepts that words such as 'God' and 'soul' are often used 'scientifically' (broadly speaking) as names referring to entities in the world about which we may theorise; but he tries to remind us that they are not *only* used like that. Wittgenstein's acknowledgment that it is possible for religious beliefs and utterances to be scientific as well as non-scientific is made even clearer a little later in the same lecture, when he says of a certain kind of religiosity: "[T]his *need* not be religion of that kind which takes religious statements *scientifically*" (WL:5/1/1933) – it *need* not, but it *could* be²⁵.

It is important to note that in these remarks Wittgenstein does not say only that there can be both scientific and non-scientific religious utterances. More than that, he says that individual religious sentences can have both scientific and non-scientific varieties. For example, one utterance of the sentence 'People have souls' can be grammatically scientific, whereas another utterance of the very same sentence can be grammatically non-scientific.

²⁴ Moore's notes are by far the fullest which we have of these lectures, but they were written in incomplete sentences, and I have left these as Moore wrote them.

²⁵ Again, it should be kept in mind that Wittgenstein uses the word 'scientific' in a broader sense than it usually has, to include the whole range of the empirical, rational, informational, and theoretical games.

In an earlier lecture in the same course Wittgenstein made some side-remarks about the immortality of the soul. He said: “[Oliver] Lodge²⁶ & Kierkegaard don’t mean the same by ‘immortality of soul’ ” (WL:2/3/1933) – because Lodge’s belief was integrally bound up with “pseudo-experiments, &... scientific statements” (WL:2/3/1933), whereas there were no scientific considerations at all involved in Kierkegaard’s belief. Thus both Lodge and Kierkegaard might utter the sentence ‘I believe that the soul is immortal’, but each man’s utterance would have a very different grammar. Wittgenstein went on to observe that this difference often goes unnoticed: the word ‘soul’ “is one of [the] cases where a word is used in two entirely different senses without people realising it” (WL:2/3/1933). This observation is important because it is often the failure to notice that a given sentence has a variety of possible grammars, which allows for the flourishing of grammatical mixedness, indeterminacy, and fluidity between the unnoticed varieties.

In Wittgenstein’s 1933 lectures, therefore, we find the necessary foundations for recognising grammatical mixedness, indeterminacy, and fluidity between the varieties of religious utterances that he had noted. As it happens, Wittgenstein does not, in many places, go on to explicitly discuss mixedness, indeterminacy, and fluidity, in connection with religion. One of the few places that he does do so, however, is in the Lectures on Religious Belief, where Wittgenstein acknowledges that religious beliefs can be indeterminate. He imagines a tribe regarding whose beliefs “we wouldn’t know for our life whether to call them religious beliefs or scientific beliefs” (LRB:58) – and I take it that he means that we wouldn’t know because in actual fact they are objectively indeterminate between those logical categories²⁷. I do not know of any other direct statements of Wittgenstein’s about mixedness, indeterminacy, and fluidity, in the context of religious utterances and beliefs. However the fact that he considers the grammars of certain religious utterances or sequences of utterances of a given sentence, to be mixed, indeterminate, and fluid, is indicated by the fact that he tries to illuminate their grammars using the method of simple objects of comparison – for this is the method of grammatical clarification which he developed precisely for dealing with various, mixed, indeterminate, and fluid grammars. And indeed we will now see that such simplified objects of comparison are his stock-in-trade in many of his discussions of the grammars of religious beliefs and utterances.

There are many examples of Wittgenstein using the method of objects of comparison to clarify the grammars of religious utterances, rather than the method of trying to identify and characterise the grammatical rules that govern them or the grammatical categories into which they fall. It is ironic, however, that examples of the former are sometimes misidentified as poor attempts at the latter. Let’s look at a well-known passage from Wittgenstein’s Lectures on Religious Belief, in which he discusses empirical evidence and the holding of religious beliefs:

“I have a moderate education, as all of you have, and therefore know what is meant by insufficient evidence for a forecast. Suppose someone dreamt of the Last Judgement, and said he now knew what it would be like. Suppose someone said: ‘This is poor evidence.’ I would say: ‘If you want to compare it with the evidence for it’s raining to-morrow it is no evidence at all.’ He may make it sound as if by stretching the point you may call it evidence. But it may be more than ridiculous as evidence. But now, would I be prepared to say: ‘You are basing your belief on extremely slender evidence, to put it mildly.’ Why should I regard this dream as evidence -- measuring its validity as though I were measuring the validity of the evidence for meteorological events? / If you compare it with anything in Science which we call evidence, you can’t credit that anyone could soberly argue: ‘Well, I had this dream ... therefore ... Last Judgement’. You might say: ‘For a blunder, that’s too big.’ ” (LRB:61-2)

In this passage Wittgenstein describes someone who, having dreamt of the Last Judgement, comes to believe in it, and to say such things as ‘I know what the Last Judgement will be like’. Cora Diamond criticises this discussion, saying: “Wittgenstein’s treatment of the issues here is somewhat

²⁶ Sir Oliver Lodge (1851-1940), a British physicist, who was also a committed spiritualist.

²⁷ In this remark Wittgenstein seems to take religion and science to be mutually exclusive. This could be an example of the mixedness of the two strands.

strained... This seems to be an unfortunately unrealistic example... [P]eople who make claims about the Last Judgement either don't make them on the basis of dreams, or, if they did, would be likely to claim that the dream itself was in some way recognizable as divinely inspired. In other words, their claim would be more complex, and (while it might not involve anything it would be reasonable to regard as even poor evidence) the obviousness of the claim that we were confronted by something which wasn't even trying to be reasonable would be somewhat less... Wittgenstein oversimplifies the issue..."²⁸. Diamond takes Wittgenstein to be trying to realistically describe an example which captures the complexity of an actual religious claim, and then condemns him for failing because his example is overly simplistic. Granting that Wittgenstein's example is indeed unrealistically simple, it might be more reasonable, therefore, to take it to be part of the alternative strand of Wittgenstein's later thought, in which his stated method is to put forward simple examples as illuminating objects of comparison for actual grammar.

How might Wittgenstein's example be used as a simple object of comparison? Well, we might be faced with an utterance about the Last Judgment, regarding whose grammar we are confused and would like clarity. This might be something like the claim made by the person imagined by Diamond, who described the Last Judgement based on a dream, but who tried to buttress the reliability of his dream by claiming that it had signs of being Divinely inspired. It is unclear whether this person's claim about the Last Judgement is involved in a scientific evidence-game or not. Now, Wittgenstein has provided us with a simple example of a claim about the Last Judgement which is unmistakably *not* involved in a science-game: it is too far removed from anything that might be considered good science to be confused for an attempt at being a scientific hypothesis. Next we must provide a supplementary simple example of a claim about the Last Judgement which obviously *is* part of a scientific evidence-game. Then we can hold up both of these simple examples – each of which purely and determinately exemplifies a different grammatical category – against the claim whose grammar confuses us, and examine in which ways that claim is similar to, and in which ways different from, each of the examples. We may find that it is far more similar to one of the examples than the other, or alternatively we may find that it shares important aspects of both examples, or that it could come to be like each example but is not yet like either. That is, by allowing the examples to 'bring out' similarities and differences in the utterance under investigation, we can come to see whether its grammar is pure and determinate, mixed, or indeterminate.

Perhaps it will help if I bring an example in which Wittgenstein explicitly puts forward two different simple examples, which work together as opposed objects of comparison, in the way that I have just described. The example comes from the 1933 lectures from which I have already quoted:

"If parents believe that they have an answer to prayer, then in a sense they *have* an answer from God. /... / The son of these parents began to have doubts as follows. He wanted to go to a theatre. Parents told him to pray. He prayed & got 'Yes'; they prayed & got 'No'. He was wrong to doubt on this ground: or rather his religion was merely scientific. / If you interpret your experience on this basis, it is *possible* that different people should get different answers. / Such difficulties *can* be solved by 'We didn't pray in the right way'. / Disagreement of 2 answers can quite properly produce a *religious* conflict; but this *need* not be religion of that kind which takes religious statements *scientifically* (as the son did). /... / Different religions are as man says *beforehand* / if 'Yes' does lead* to bad plays*, I shall give up praying; but it never does. / if it does, it must be sent me by God for some particular purpose." (WL:5/1/1933²⁹)

As is often the case with Wittgenstein, this is a very dense passage, and it does not follow a single, linear thought. However, by picking out and ordering its various threads, we can extract from it two opposed simple objects of comparison. On the one hand, Wittgenstein describes a boy who gives up believing in a God who guides us in prayer ("the son... began to have doubts as follows"), either (a) because he seemed to be given guidance opposed to that which his parents received in their prayers on the same matter ("He prayed & got 'Yes'; they prayed & got 'No' "), or (b) because the guidance

²⁸ Diamond (2005:110-1).

²⁹ An asterisk by a word indicates that – due to Moore's difficult handwriting – the reading is likely but not certain.

he received seems to be somehow inappropriate (“if ‘Yes’ does lead* to bad plays*, I shall give up praying”). And on the other hand, Wittgenstein describes a believer who, regardless of the results of his prayers, does not give up his belief in a God who guides us in prayer, for if (a) the guidance seems to conflict with the guidance that someone else receives, he will say that perhaps one of them did not pray in the right spirit (“Such difficulties *can* be solved by ‘We didn’t pray the right way’ ”), and if (b) the guidance seems to be inappropriate, he will say that perhaps God sent him such apparently inappropriate guidance for a special reason unknown to him (“it must be sent me by God for some particular purpose”). In these two descriptions Wittgenstein has provided us with two very different examples of possible relationships to prayer, and two very different examples of possible beliefs in a God who guides us in prayer. Namely, one almost caricatured example of a belief in prayer which seems to be a thesis which is constantly subjected to testing and held open to possible falsification by experience; and another, in which the person is clearly not open to any form of falsification of their belief at all, for whatever happens, they always have a way of understanding and assimilating it within their belief system³⁰. In short, he has described two varieties of belief in a God who guides us in prayer: one which is logically scientific and the other which is non-scientific. Having put forward such simple – pure and determinate – versions of both a scientific and a non-scientific form of belief in prayer, we can now set these examples up against an actual person’s complex life with prayer, and their reactions to the different upshots of their prayers. The similarities and differences between the two simple examples and the actual person’s beliefs and practices, will help to clarify the logic of the belief in question: whether it is logically scientific or non-scientific, or whether it is mixed, indeterminate, or fluid between the two.

If the grammar of a religious utterance or sequence of utterances of a sentence – or the logic of a religious belief – is mixed, indeterminate, or fluid, then well-chosen simple examples can provide us with a clarifying surview, in the sense that they will collectively ‘summarise’ the various aspects of the unfixed and indefinite grammar or logic under investigation. In a conversation about God, with Rush Rhees, Wittgenstein provides a good analogy:

“In describing our picture of God we may speak of it as being made up of parts of a picture of a human being together with other things which have no resemblance to any part of a human being. You might start the description of a curve by taking drawings of familiar curves: a circle, an ellipse, a parabola, a hyperbola. Then describe it by saying: ‘You see here it is part of a parabola, there then it is part of a circle, here it is a straight line which goes into part of a spiral, etc.’ And the curve you described might then have an equation entirely unlike any of the familiar curves.” (Rhees 2001:413)

The grammars or logics of mixed, indeterminate, and fluid utterances, sequences of utterances, and beliefs, can be seen as – in a sense – “made up of” the various features exemplified by the purified examples. Each of the simple examples is a distillation of one aspect – a moment – of the more complex belief or utterance.

In this section I have presented evidence that the alternative strand of Wittgenstein’s later thought as a whole – highlighted by Waismann, later Baker, and Kuusela – is manifested in some of Wittgenstein’s later remarks on religion. I hope that this goes part of the way towards showing that Wittgenstein’s remarks on religion are often more nuanced, interesting, and reasonable than the predominant interpretation makes them out to be. Simultaneously, by showing that this alternative strand is manifested in an area of Wittgenstein’s thought in which it has not hitherto been noticed, I hope thereby to have strengthened the wider plausibility of the Waismann-Baker-Kuusela interpretation of Wittgenstein, as a fruitful way to understand at least some of what Wittgenstein was doing in his grammatical investigations.

³⁰ In a different context Wittgenstein says: “[T]hese statements were not scientific statements, not corrected by experience” (PO:440).

5. MIXEDNESS, INDETERMINACY, AND FLUIDITY, IN RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

In this final section I will give some brief examples of variety, mixedness, indeterminacy, and fluidity in religious beliefs, and show how the use of simple objects of comparison can help to illuminate them.

I will begin by describing the belief of an imaginary person regarding petitionary prayer, in a way that I hope will be recognisably realistic:

As a child, this believer was brought up to pray – but he gave it up in adolescence, as he gradually came to realise that he didn't really believe most of the things that were said at church, and his interest dwindled. Later, however, in a period of great difficulty and distress, he found himself praying again. He found that not only did the praying itself bring him much comfort, but that some of the things for which he had been praying, came about. He started to pray again, regularly, asking God for guidance, help, strength, and for his various needs and desires. When he prays for a certain thing, he feels more optimistic of obtaining it than he would if he had not prayed for it. He was taken aback when he heard about a double-blind experiment being conducted across a number of hospitals, in which one group of heart-bypass patients were prayed for, and one group were not – but he found himself suspecting that those patients who were (unbeknown to them) prayed for, would probably have a better recovery rate. When it turned out that there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups, he was a little surprised, but not too perturbed. When things for which he prays do not come about he is disappointed, but if he were asked why he still continues to pray, he would say things like: 'Perhaps I did not pray in the right spirit'; 'Perhaps God *has* answered my prayer, but in a way than I do not understand'; or, 'Perhaps God knew that what I was praying for was not good for me, so He denied my prayer for my own good'. Nonetheless, praying for something still tends to make him expect it to happen. He often prays for other people – for their health, and for their material and spiritual wellbeing – and whether or not they know that he has done so, he feels that he has thereby done something to help them.

I can imagine someone who is not religious talking to this believer about prayer. At first this non-religious person may think that he has a pretty good grasp of what the believer believes. But with the addition of each extra detail I can imagine him getting more and more baffled. There seems to be no one logical category into which this belief clearly falls, which captures the role that it plays in the believer's life. And I think that this is a common phenomenon amongst religious beliefs³¹.

The logic of the above person's belief in petitionary prayer may be somewhat baffling, but we can use Wittgenstein's method of simple objects of comparison in order to get clearer about it. To do so we must construct two simple examples of different varieties of belief in the efficacy of petitionary prayer. On the one hand we can imagine a believer for whom petitionary prayer is a practical means to help him attain his ends. He believes his prayers make it more likely that he will get the things he prays for, and he believes this because he has found that his prayers have tended to work in the past: he has attained many more of his ends since he started praying than he did with similar ends beforehand. If asked what his reaction would be if his prayers stopped being effective, he would reply that though he thinks it unlikely that that would happen, if it did happen for a sufficient period of time then he would give up his belief in the power of such prayers. This is a logically pure and determinate example of a scientific belief in petitionary prayer, in that it is testable, and both grounded in, and held open to falsification by, empirical evidence. On the other hand, we can imagine a believer with a very different kind of belief in petitionary prayer. Fairly frequently the things for which he prays do not come about, and though he regrets that this is so, this does not at all weaken his belief in petitionary prayer's efficacy. He believes that every worthy prayer is answered, but that sometimes it might be answered in a way that is hidden to the petitioner, or

³¹ At least amongst the religious beliefs of the average 'man in the pew', if not amongst those of theologians and philosophers of religion.

even in a way that the petitioner wouldn't ever recognise as an answer to his petition. Because of this, he believes in the power of petitionary prayer, but admits that praying does not make it any more likely that the thing which is prayed for will come about in any normal sense. This is a logically pure and determinate example of a non-scientific belief in petitionary prayer, in that it can be held entirely independently of any of the believer's empirical, theoretical, or scientific beliefs.

In order to clarify the complex realistic belief described at the beginning of this section, we can compare it to these two logically pure and determinate examples of scientific and non-scientific varieties of belief in petitionary prayer. When we do so we find that the complex realistic belief has some characteristics which are similar to the example of the scientific form of the belief, and other characteristics which are similar to the example of the non-scientific form of the belief. For instance, the realistic believer thinks that praying makes it more likely that what he prays for will come about (which is similar to the simple example of the scientific belief); but he seems to be able to accommodate any apparent non-fulfilment of his prayer within his belief system (which is similar to the simple example of the non-scientific belief). This bifurcation is true of other characteristics of the realistic belief as well. Thus, we can conclude that the realistic belief is mixed between being logically scientific and logically non-scientific.

Having looked at a logically mixed belief, let's now look at a logically indeterminate one. Imagine someone who believes in God, and who makes petitionary prayers, but does so very seldom – only when he is in dire need. For example, when his daughter had been severely injured in a car crash, he prayed that she would pull through, and she did. He has only made a small number of such prayers, and the few things he has prayed for have always come about – at least to some degree or other, sometimes sooner and sometimes later. He strongly believes in the efficacy of such prayers – but he has never given much thought to the nature of this efficacy, or to what exactly he expects when he prays for something. Because he has neither experienced any of his prayers being obviously unanswered, nor thought about how he would react if this were to happen, nothing has yet forced him to lean either towards the falsifiable or unfalsifiable form of the belief.

If we hold up our two simple examples of belief in the efficacy of petitionary prayer – the scientific and the non-scientific – against this particular belief, we will find that this belief hovers indeterminately between them. It is neither more similar to the scientific nor to the non-scientific example, but could – for example – come to be more similar to either, depending on how the believer reacted to the apparent failure of some of his prayers, or when confronted with certain probing questions. It is not that we merely do not know to which simple example this belief is more similar, but rather, that it – objectively – is neither more similar to one than to the other. It can be seen, therefore, that this belief is indeterminate between being logically scientific and logically non-scientific.

Let's look next at a fluid belief. Consider a person who believes in the efficacy of petitionary prayer in a scientific manner: he has not given much thought to his beliefs about prayer, but he considers prayer to be one of the means by which to achieve the things he would like to achieve, and when he prays he tends to expect what he has prayed for. At some point he is confronted by the apparent failure of a number of his prayers – prayers which he had thought worthy, and for things which are very important to him. This profoundly shakes his confidence in his beliefs about prayer, and he finds himself doubting the power of prayer, and even doubting many of his other religious beliefs. In his confusion and doubt he decides to turn to God in a desperate last-ditch effort, and he prays for God's light and for His guidance through these doubts. During this prayer and his ensuing contemplation, he comes to believe that it was rather immature of him to think of prayer simply as a way of getting whatever one wants. He comes to think that rather than giving up his belief in the efficacy of prayer, he should deepen his understanding of what it is for a prayer to be answered: perhaps a prayer should be considered answered if it brings about a change in the petitioner; or perhaps a prayer should be considered answered even if that answer was a refusal of the granting of

the petition. The crisis brought about by the apparent falsification of his belief prompts the believer to develop a form of his original belief which seems no longer to be falsifiable at all.

In this case, the believer has not given up his belief in the efficacy of prayer – rather, the nature of his belief has evolved. It begins with more points of similarity to the simple example of the scientific belief, and it comes to have more points of similarity to the simple example of the non-scientific belief. The believer himself considers this to be one belief which became deeper, rather than two distinct beliefs. Thus, we can say that his belief was logically fluid between being scientific and being non-scientific.

Rush Rhees once said that one of the great difficulties of religious belief is “the trouble *understanding* what is said in religion, or in religious doctrine”³². I think he meant that before one even reaches the difficult stage of being able to assess whether a given religious belief is rational or not, one often gets stuck at the stage of simply not understanding the belief that one would like to assess, of not being able to grasp what exactly it is meant to be a belief in. Wittgenstein is possibly thinking of something like this problem when he says: “If Mr. Lewy is religious and says he believes in a Judgement Day, I won’t even know whether to say I understand him or not” (LRB:58). One of the causes of this difficulty in understanding religious beliefs – though only one – is failure to take account of their logical variety, mixedness, indeterminacy, and fluidity. Once we recognise that these qualities may be at the root of our incomprehension, we can use Wittgenstein’s method of simple objects of comparison to help separate out the different aspects of the beliefs that we find confusing – and only then will we be in a position to assess them properly.³³

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³² Rhees (1997:146).

³³ I would like to thank Rachel Bayefsky, David Citron, David Egan, Peter Hacker, Elisha Mallard, Adrian Moore, and Stephen Mulhall for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper (though I should note that some of them still disagree with much of what I have said). I would also like to thank Thomas Baldwin for permission to quote from GE Moore’s manuscript notes of Wittgenstein’s lectures, Brian Rogers and David Stern for checking my transcriptions, and Swansea University for permission to quote from Rush Rhees’ manuscript notes of his conversations with Wittgenstein. Lastly, I would like to thank the Arts and Humanities Research Council (www.ahrc.co.uk) for funding the doctoral research on which this article is based.

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