religions

MDPI

Article

The Point of Wittgenstein's Religious Point of View

Camilla Kronqvist

Department of Humanities, Åbo Akademi University, 20500 Turku, Finland; camilla.kronqvist@abo.fi

Abstract

It has become commonplace to mention that Wittgenstein's philosophy has an ethical point, and to consider how this contributes to his conception of philosophical method. Less attention has been given to how his admission to not being able to "help seeing every problem from a religious point of view" permeates his understanding of philosophy. Although there are ways in which the ethical and religious dimensions of Wittgenstein's thought intersect, most notably in the way he illuminates absolute uses of ethical language by turning to religious experience in the "Lecture on Ethics", I argue that the religious elements of his thought cannot be reduced to considering the ethical questions it raises. In the first part, I consider what it might mean to speak about, first, the point and, then, the ethical point of a practice, and how this shows in the importance, rather than the purpose, of what we see ourselves as doing. I then turn to the religious point of view and suggest that although it appears from a point, as it were, out of time, it should not be considered to reside outside of space. Rather, it involves a way of placing myself within the midst of my life, and considering my surrounding context, from a position from which I am able to think of myself as absolutely safe.

Keywords: Wittgenstein; philosophy of religion; religious experience; absolute safety; ethical language

check for updates

Academic Editor: Sebastian Sunday Grève

Received: 22 August 2025
Revised: 11 October 2025
Accepted: 14 October 2025
Published: 20 October 2025

Citation: Kronqvist, Camilla. 2025. The Point of Wittgenstein's Religious Point of View. *Religions* 16: 1324. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16101324

Copyright: © 2025 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

1. Introduction

It has become commonplace to mention that Wittgenstein's philosophy has an ethical point, and to consider how this contributes to his conception of philosophical method.[1] Less recent attention has been given to his own admission that he could not "help seeing every problem from a religious point of view" (Drury 2018, p. 151) and how that realization could be seen as permeating his understanding of the task of philosophy.[2] Turning to that question, I will suggest that there are important ways in which the ethical and religious dimensions of Wittgenstein's thought seem to intersect, most notably in the way he turns to religious experience to illuminate absolute uses of ethical language in the "Lecture on Ethics" (*LE*) (Wittgenstein 1993). Yet, I will argue that accounting for the religious elements of his thought cannot be reduced to a consideration of the ethical questions his philosophy raises. These religious elements also throw a different light on his early remarks about the intertwinement of ethics and aesthetics.

As in the case of exploring and developing the ethical themes that seem intrinsic to Wittgenstein's philosophy, there are few passages that address this issue directly. The passages one may cite in support of a view on the "ethical point" of Wittgenstein's philosophy, as opposed to his "religious point of view" may, therefore, easily become a matter of contestation. Some of the passages I will call upon to make a distinction between the ethical and the religious, as well as the moral, may therefore as well have been used to point

to overarching similarities in what one may call a moral-existential or ethical-existential dimension of Wittgenstein's thought (cf. Backström et al. 2019). Rather than presenting a reading of Wittgenstein, my discussion should therefore be taken as a reading *with* Wittgenstein, trying to bring into view some distinctions I have increasingly come to see as instructive for the purposes I specify (cf. Wittgenstein 2009, §127). It is in those ways no attempt to establish that these are distinctions that we will always profit from making. If they are useful, they need to show themselves to be so in relation to the specific problem we are addressing.

To this aim, in the second part, I consider what it might mean to speak about, first, the point and then the ethical point of a practice, and how this shows in the importance, rather than the purpose, of what we see ourselves as doing. On the way there, I also make a distinction between the ethical and the moral, to distinguish the ethical point of a practice from the regulative norms of the practice, i.e., the point of a game versus the rules of the game. I then, in the third part, turn to the religious point of view and suggest that although it appears from a point, as it were, out of time, it should not be considered to reside outside of space. This, I suggest, intimates what the early Wittgenstein sees as characteristic of an aesthetic judgement. Rather, imagining such a vantage point involves a way of placing myself within the midst of my life, and considering my surrounding context, from a position in which I am able to think of myself, in line with Wittgenstein's example from *LE*, as absolutely safe. Understanding this way of positioning myself, I suggest, is not possible from a perspective that solely relies on surveying how I ethically evaluate my relationships with others. It may, however, offer necessary support for upholding my understanding of life as good.

2. An Ethical Point

The ethical point of Wittgenstein's philosophy is mostly taken to extend to all of his writings by present commentators (see, e.g., Agam-Segal and Dain 2019, p. 2). Yet, Wittgenstein only makes explicit reference to this aspect of his work when he in a letter to the publisher Ludwig von Ficker after the publication of *Tractatus* writes that the "point of the book is ethical" (Monk 1990, p. 178). If we, however, take the commentators *ad notam* and think of the ethical or moral aspect of his thought as relating to how he conceived philosophical problems and the methods he saw fit to dissolve them (Agam-Segal and Dain 2019, p. 2; Christensen 2024, pp. 1–2; De Mesel and Kuusela 2019, p. 1), a broader approach to both his earlier and later thought appears necessary to address what he at various points saw as important in philosophy. This includes how the ethical point of an activity can be illuminated from the point of view of his thinking as a whole. . .

I will, therefore, approach what considering this ethical point of *Tractatus* may include and how it is continued and developed in his later philosophy in a backward manner. Beginning with his remark in *Philosophical Investigations* (*PI*) that a game "has not only rules but also a point" (Wittgenstein 2009, §564)[3], I will address what it means to see or fail to see the point of a practice. To clarify this, I turn to one of the first language games Wittgenstein presents in *PI*. Only thereafter will I consider in what respect, and even more in what contexts, we may think of this game as having an ethical point, and the continuities and discontinuities this reveals in Wittgenstein's thinking about ethics.

The example I will explore is the language "meant to serve for communication between a builder A and an assistant B" (Wittgenstein 2009, §2). Wittgenstein introduces this language game to examine the limits of the Augustinian picture of language, which sets up his discussion in the first paragraph of the work. It reads in short as follows:

> A is building with building stones: there are blocks, pillars, slabs and beams.
> B has to pass him the stones and to do so in the order in which A needs them.

> For this purpose they make use of a language consisting of the words "block", "pillar", "slab", "beam". A calls them out; B brings the stone which he has learnt to bring at such-and-such a call. (Wittgenstein 2009, §2)

Incidentally, the example of the builders is one of the examples that receives more extensive treatment by Wittgenstein in *PI*, extending far into the rule-following considerations. It is given as an example of a use of language "for which the description given by Augustine [presented in *PI* §1] is right" (Wittgenstein 2009, §1). This is a language in which words are used as names for objects, to "express", as Augustine says, a person's "wishes" (Wittgenstein 2009, §1). In the case of the builders, these are the wishes of builder A for B to bring A the necessary building stones. In some ways, it is surprising how little attention this aspect of Augustine's example has attracted, compared to the criticism of the role of ostensive definitions in language learning that is mostly attributed to Augustine (cf. Wittgenstein 2009, §6).

A reason for this is probably another aspect of the example that has perplexed its commentators. Wittgenstein's suggestion at the end of §2 that we "Conceive of this as a complete primitive language" (Wittgenstein 2009, §2) has generated considerable discussion about what is involved in following such an injunction. It has also raised questions as to whether Wittgenstein really meant that we could imagine this to be a complete language? (See Rhees' early criticism of the example (Rhees 1960), and Hertzberg (2012) for a more recent comment.) Yet, it should be noted that at the beginning of §3 Wittgenstein adds to the description of Augustine, providing "a system of communication" that "not everything that we call language is this system." (Wittgenstein 2009, §3). Wittgenstein's point with the example is thus partly to show all that is missing if we think of the language game of the builders as a complete language. His remark also reads as a caution not to assume that we know what further features of communication one would need to add to this initial bare exchange of words and actions for a language, or a use of language, to be complete.[4]

One aspect of language use that falls out of this picture is precisely the possibility of inquiring into the point of A and B's activity. To see how bringing in this feature would change our understanding of the game they are playing, imagine B exclaiming, "What is the point of this?" What B is asking for here may, in the spirit of Wittgenstein's proposed context-dependence, vary with the context (cf. Wittgenstein 2009, §558, §584). It will, to mention one aspect of the relevant context, often matter to *what* B is saying, *how* B says it. If we imagine B loudly crying out the words, dropping a beam on the ground, and angrily walking away in frustration, leaving A equally perplexed and perhaps also frustrated of losing the help of their assistant, B's words have a different role in their interaction, than if B simply mutters the words "Why should I always do as A says?" to themselves under their breath, but goes on taking and reacting to A's calls for more building stones. Where the first case shows B's lack of interest or motivation in doing what A asks, the second reveals his unwillingness to continue, perhaps his feeling of being forced to play along in an inequitable game. It serves as a silent protest that nevertheless does not undercut their shared activity.

These two cases provide images of B failing to see their actions as meaningful. If we, on the other hand, imagine B curiously directing the question to A, when A, after asking for several blocks in a row, placing one on top of the other, suddenly asks for a beam and two slabs and places them on the ground, the words take on yet another meaning. B's question here takes their linguistic activity beyond a game that "consists in moving objects about on a surface according to certain rules" (Wittgenstein 2009, §3). It shows B's growing understanding of *what* they are doing, as well as a desire to find out *why* they are doing it. How is the passing of stones not just a response to A's requests for more material, a means of "executing his order", but part of "building"? (Cf. Wittgenstein's reminder "that the

speaking of language is part of an activity", Wittgenstein 2009, §23). This creates room for considerations of the relevance, and what I will later talk about as the importance of what they are doing in this particular context. How does the placement of building stones in a distinct order, for instance, contribute to erecting a stable construction? And how does their ability to erect a stable construction contribute to them rightly being taken by others, and themselves, as builders?

From a point of what Jack Canfield calls "just doing" (Canfield 1975, p. 383), following the rules of the game almost blindly, going on in the same way they had done before, B's inquiring into the point of what they are doing thus alerts both builders to a question about how they, individually or together, *should go on*, and *what* they are doing as they go on. It asks them to look at what they are doing, in some respect, with new eyes. A's response to B's final question can, for instance, be seen as A aiding B to look at what they are doing with A's eyes. This new way of looking may raise a question about whether they share an understanding of the same rules, but also whether they should continue playing the same game.

For the first case, imagine that B makes a mistake in delivering the right stones to A. A asks B, "What are you doing? Why are you bringing me a slab when I asked for a beam?" In response, imagine first B saying that they did not hear what A said or that they were thinking of something else. Here, B provides a psychological explanation of their action, which indicates that the action was not intentional. B assures A that they did not fail to see the point of following A's order. They only failed in their execution of it.

Compare this to a second case where B instead answers that they were trying to "pull A's leg". They intentionally brought the wrong stone to "startle A". In this case, B is in some way changing the game, initiating a new course of action, and providing a new frame for understanding what they were doing. They were not just playing by the rules but found an inventive way of playing *with* them.

Finally, imagine B making their own judgement about what was needed, rather than just trusting A's judgement in executing the order. "You called for a beam, but clearly what we need next is a slab." B here takes the game to a new level. They no longer serve as a mere assistant of A, responding appropriately to A's orders, but show their own understanding of what is appropriate and called for in this context. B does not just show the ability to act in accordance with a rule, but an understanding of why acting according to it is in place. This would be comparable to what Wittgenstein in the "Lecture on Aesthetics" calls developing "a feeling for the rules", showing B's ability to "interpret" the rules (cf. Wittgenstein 1967, p. 5).

In all these cases, the question of *what* B was doing is not easily distinguishable from the question of *why* they did it, whether we conceive of this in terms of what caused them to do it, or what reasons they had for doing it. Here, however, I want to pursue an aspect of asking for the point of *what* they are doing that is not reducible to asking *why* they did it. The relevant contrast can be brought into view by separating the *point* of a practice from its *purpose*. I see the purpose of doing something as pointing to the intention behind an action or the aim of performing it, the state of affairs the action is expected to produce. The purpose, then, is external to what is done. The point, however, is internal to our understanding of what the practice is. It is, as it were, connected with that which makes us see it as a meaningful activity in the first place, informing both a sense of what it is good to do within the activity, and an understanding of why engaging in it is good.

Where the purpose of building is relative to the aim of building, what they are building and what they are building it for, its effects or end-results, the point of building does not extend to anything beyond the activity in which they are engaged. A and B may be building a house for themselves to protect their families and their belongings from wind and storm,

and the value of their building is then measured by the house meeting this end. They may, however, also be building to earn a living, and the value of employing their skills is, in that case, measured by different means. What A and B will *achieve by* their building (the purpose) may thus be hidden from our view in watching them build. Without any more prompting than Wittgenstein's description of at least A as a builder, we are, however, able to *see* them *as* building (the point of their actions). We see them moving blocks and beams as part of a meaningful activity, and we also see ways in which they may fail to meaningfully contribute to it, given our understanding of what constitutes part of the activity.[5]

The sense in which the point of their activity is internal to our understanding of what the activity is can be read alongside one of the remarks Wittgenstein explicitly makes about ethics in the *Tractatus.* This is the idea that any notion of reward in ethics "must lie in the action itself" (Wittgenstein 1922, §6.422). Read in the light of my proposal that the point of a practice is not reducible to its purpose, perceived as an external end point of an action, this suggests that we should not do what is good, or refrain from doing harm, with a view to some further good we may receive as a consequence of our actions, even if we act out of a concern for appearing good to others, or with a view to feeling good about doing it ourselves. The point of acting well, in other words, does not lie in what you may achieve by your actions, such as a good life. Rather, it is the mark of a good life, which for the young Wittgenstein coincides with a happy life, with his distinct idea of happiness, that we act solely with a view to our action being good (cf. Wittgenstein 1922, §6.43; 1961, pp. 73–87).

Speaking of *seeing* A and B *as* 'building' as well as *seeing* an action *as* 'good' can helpfully be brought under seeing under an *aspect*, as discussed in Wittgenstein's remarks on aspect perception (cf. Wittgenstein 2009, PPF §111f).[6] It thus points to features of his thought that can be seen as consistent throughout his earlier and later thought. Nevertheless, there are aspects of his earlier and later philosophy that separate reflection on the point of our different practices from reflection on the ethical point of his earlier philosophy. The focus of his earlier work is on the attitude we take to the world, and also our life, as a whole, where the dividing line for meaningful and meaningless language use is between those things we can say, because they state facts, and those that are unsayable but nonetheless express, or show, values.[7] The later work, however, does away with this very restricted view of what can be said and rather makes room for the different points we can see in a range of linguistic activities, acknowledging the very different things we do in language beyond stating facts (cf. Wittgenstein 2009, p. 23).

In those ways, it may be helpful to mark a more pronounced contrast than is usually done between the *ethical point* alluded to in his early philosophy and the *moral dimensions* of investigating language use in his later thought. Where the first brings out the attitude expressed in what one *sees* as important in what one is saying, the second comes with an emphasis on what we *do*, and *ought* to do, together in speaking. I will talk about this as an *evaluative* and a *normative* element of language use.

An interesting feature of Wittgenstein's later philosophy is, as it were, that it brings in a normative feature of speech, before any moral norms or ethical standards, as morality traditionally has been perceived, seem to enter the picture (cf. Christensen 2024, p. 7). In taking the builders to be building, that is, by considering "building" an answer to the question "what are they doing", we are, in other words, not necessarily asked to consider the evaluative question whether A and B are good builders. We do not, for instance, direct attention to whether builder A's instructions are leading them to erect a building in an effective way, whether they help B deliver the supplies in a suitable order, making sure that they work in ways that "get the right things done" (Drucker 2006, p. 2). Neither do we need to consider whether they are building well or are good at building, whether they "do

things right" (Drucker 2006, p. 2), which at least to a certain extent boils down to being efficient builders.[8]

Instead, Wittgenstein directs attention to what goes into the understanding we have of what building is, what a builder needs to do to count as building. In the terminology he employs, we can think of these as the *rules* of building. They make up the normative commitments and requirements that are both internal to and constitutive of building as a form of joint interaction.[9] They call forth what A and B need to do for the other to see that they are contributing to their joint activity, but also what is important to the perception and sometimes judgment from a third person that they are not doing anything else than building. To explain what it means for assistant B to be answering A's requests, it can thus be said that B *ought to* fetch the right building stones according to A's requests. Otherwise, B cannot be described as partaking in their practice.

This is not necessarily to say that the rules of "building" or the language game of "calling for and fetching building stones" are necessarily explicitly considered by the participants in the activity, nor that their activity must involve them actively passing the judgement that this is the activity they are engaged in, for us to meaningfully describe them as doing it. This is an aspect of the anti-intellectualism Wittgenstein exposes that falls under Canfield's "just doing" (Canfield 1975, p. 389). The normative requirements, or "rules", need not figure in any explicitly stated thoughts accompanying their actions. Their understanding of what it means to be acting according to the rules may only show in what they at times think they ought to be doing to continue being engaged in the same activity, as well as in the explanations we as bystanders can give of what they are doing.

Here the judgements as to whether the builders are building well, and whether they are good builders, bring in a different form of evaluation of their activity. We here judge the quality of their actions, as well as of the results of their activity, rather than what their actions are. We also judge them, and their worth, in their capacity as builders. In drawing on the normative aspects of any activity, what one ought to do to be judged, and judge oneself, as doing it, and the evaluative aspects of judging what is done and whether one is doing something well, we can thus distinguish between two different ways of judging an action and the performance of the acting person. In the first case, we see them as performing an action in the first place. In the second case, we see them as performing it well, with some degree of virtuosity.[10]

This is not to say that following the rules does not involve the builders in any evaluation, or that the evaluative step only comes in when they consider what they do as a case of building. On the contrary, each activity comes with a set of evaluations that are internal to it. B's seeing a block in distinction from a beam, or A seeing that after three blocks, a beam is needed, are examples of such evaluative judgements. What matters to me at this point is merely the possibility of making a distinction between judging *what* someone does and *how* they do it, to bring into view the different standards available for judging whether they are getting the activity right. Where one expresses a responsiveness to rules (what I ought to be doing), the other expresses something similar to an aesthetic judgement (what it is to do) (cf. Wittgenstein 1967, p. 5).

This distinction also allows us to reflect on two ways in which perception enters action. In the first, we employ our sight purposefully as a tool in order to do something, such as *look for* blocks to fulfil an order. In the second, we attend to what we are doing in a less purposeful way, perhaps placing what we do alongside other possible courses of action, to bring into view the importance of choosing one over another. Here our ways of attending to what we are doing in our thought can be said to reveal our ethical vision, reflecting in one way or other what we see as important.

Interestingly, the judgements required for performing a practice appear to rest more on evaluation when we think of the origin of a practice. Even if B clearly uses their sight to single out a stack of blocks and take a piece from it, the room for speaking about B making an evaluation is almost minimal, if we imagine B seeking out a standardized block from a stack marked with "BLOCKS".[11] If we, however, imagine B going through a rubble of stones, finding pieces that fit the size of a "block", perhaps judging the fit by comparing the rocks to a model of wood, or by measuring their size with a measuring tape, then chiselling out the rock to obtain the right shape, the more involved is his evaluation of this rock as having the qualities necessary to be a block. A "block" is then not just any standardized piece that sorts under the sign "BLOCKS" but something he sees as fitting in the rock. In this case, we can imagine an experienced B being an expert in discerning "blocks" in the rocks, where the expert judgement lies in almost never having to use the model or measure to determine whether a specific rock is fitting.[12]

In a similar manner, we can also expect that the more B assists A in building, paying close attention to what A does, and not just to what stones A calls for, the more B will be able to judge in advance what it is that A needs. We should also not forget that an experienced builder would want their assistant to not only do what they are asked to do, but to learn what needs to be done. If B then can only see themselves as carrying out A's orders, although expediently, we may think that B in some ways has missed the point of what they are doing, or what they ought to be doing in "assisting" A. B's question about the point of their activity may then arise because B in this way has failed to make the necessary connections between what they are asked to do, and what they are doing.

In reflecting on the point of a practice, we thus see how the normative and evaluative aspects of acting and judging one's activity come together. The normative question of what we ought to do to be building is understood in the light of the evaluative judgement that this is a case of "building". B seeing a block in the rock above is then related to seeing what a "block does" in the building process and why it is needed at a certain point. In response to B's curious question as to why A now calls for pillars, A can explain to B, "You need pillars around the door frames to support the beam. The beam supports the blocks above." Their seeing the point of what they are doing thus shows in how their individual actions form part of a larger, meaningful whole. The placement of the pillars and beams is there to create a solid structure. A structure that thus fails to present this solidity proves that the attempt at building has failed. A house poorly built does not provide us with an exemplary case of "building".

We can, however, see the point of a practice, acknowledge the rules that govern it, and make aesthetic judgements of fit internal to it, without agreeing that it has an ethical point. If the land on which A and B have erected their house is in an occupied area in a war-ridden territory, their actions can certainly count as building. If A and B are good builders, we may also imagine that their buildings display excellent craftsmanship. Their actions may, however, also be seen as breaking a peace agreement, which many of us may find hard to see as good, at least not without appeal to any mitigating circumstances. The normative question whether the builders were 'building', or the evaluative question whether they were building well, which here emerges as a question that may be answered purely in aesthetic terms, then appears as a very different question from the ethical question whether it was good of them to build their house in this place at this specific point in time. Their actions appear specifically damning if one considers that they, on this view, make themselves complicit in a war crime, actively purveying harm.

Cannot their building be seen as displaying all these qualities? Yes. If we take the evaluations made to what they are doing, and how, as internal to the distinctive games they are playing, as some have taken Wittgenstein to suggest in his later philosophy (see

Phillips 1993, p. 56f for references to this criticism in the context of religion), there seems to be no absolute ethical point from which to criticize their actions for being unethical. Any judgement of what they ought to do, or what is fitting for them to do, is delivered from within a view to what is good in a distinct practice. Then it may not seem to matter much whether it is the soundness of their structure, the beauty of their craft, or the political significance of their actions that is given pride of place in one's judgement of what makes their actions good.

A similarly relativistic conclusion can be drawn from the Tractarian suggestion that ethics and aesthetics are one if taken to an extreme. If the core of ethical and aesthetic judgements is taken to lie in their ability to express the value seen in something, by showing different ways in which the parts can be related to a whole, it may seem as if there is no way of distinguishing the wholes that are good from the ones that are merely beautiful. (Wittgenstein 1922, §6.421; 1982, "Philosophy", §§31–33). If both target that which looks good to us, how do we determine what is really good?

A slightly different take on what Wittgenstein saw as the ethical point of the *Tractatus*, however, may help us see the matter differently. The mostly negative ethical lesson of the *Tractatus* suggests that a proper analysis of what you are doing will show up in the things you no longer see as doable. Thus, if you, on the *Tractatus'* still very restricted scheme of "saying", understand what you do when you "say" things, that is, utter empirically verifiable sentences, then you will understand that there are certain things you cannot say in those ways, such as positively state or ground values as facts. Therefore, they are better left unsaid. In these ways, one can understand Wittgenstein's remark to Ficker that his book consisted of two parts, the one he did write and the one he did not write, as a way in which "the Ethical is delimited from within" (Monk 1990, p. 178).

Seeing the ethical point of a practice, for the early Wittgenstein, was then connected with seeing the place of that practice in life as a whole, seeing how it could contribute to living it well, but also the value of acknowledging its limits. In the context of his early philosophy, perceived more narrowly as a formal analysis of the logic of language, this meant providing a logical notation that solved some of the problems facing Frege's and Russel's attempts at formalizing meaningful statements. But also, in a broader understanding of philosophy as attending to the problem of life, it involved recognizing the limits of that logical notion in capturing the form of what a person saw as important in their life.

In the case of the builders erecting a house in a war-ridden zone, we could similarly think that if they only realized that the house they built would fail to create a safe space for their inhabitants and thus fail to do what a house should do, they would, for themselves, come to see that this was something they could not do. This would involve them in not merely seeing "the house" as the end product of their activity, as one possible purpose of building. Their conception of what a house is, and why it is important for us to have houses, would rather figure as a picture of what gives the activity of building its point.

The essential point of a house would then neither be how it appeared to others, that is, as beautiful, nor how they would appear to others in light of their beautiful building, that is, as excellent builders. Instead, reflecting on the ethical point of building would provide a different way of picturing the meaning of their activity, as ultimately contributing to protecting its inhabitants from the natural elements, allowing for the possibility of rest and at least some kind of peace in the inhabitants' relationships with others. Such a point would only come alive to them if they cared to reflect seriously on what they were doing. Did their activities really fit into their visions of a good life, and if they did, then which way of conceiving life stood out to them as most important?

3. A Religious Point of View

In a remark, published in *Culture and Value*, but couched in discussions of aspect-seeing in the original manuscript in which it appears, Wittgenstein writes, "The Sabbath is not simply a time to rest, to recuperate. We are supposed to look at our work from the outside, not just from within" (Wittgenstein 1998, p. 91e). The reference to the Sabbath as a religious symbol is of course interesting itself in the context of a discussion on religion. My interest in the remark, however, mirrors Wittgenstein's in asking what the institution of a day for rest every week enables for the believer, that is, the possibility, or even need, to "look at our work from the outside".[13]

This resonates with my earlier discussion on how reflection on the point of a practice is anchored in the interaction between what we are doing and our ways of looking at what we are doing. As in the case of the builders erecting a house in a war zone, this interaction turns on the realization that we, in different contexts, may come to look very differently at what we do. We may perceive different aspects of our activities when we consider them from a different point in time than when we are in the midst of them. Here, I want to take this picture further to reflect on the space a day dedicated to rest creates for more peaceful reflection on the point, and also the ethical point, of our practices, as well as what illumination it provides for Wittgenstein's talk about "a religious point of view".

Where I have connected ethics (in terms of our perception of value) to what we see, and morality (in terms of our commitment to shared regulative norms) to what we do, I here see the religious point of view as pointing to the position from which these ways of thinking appear meaningful to us. It thus shows both in what we see and what we do, and thus naturally throws light on what aspects of our life we are able to perceive as good, and what courses of action we consider right in our interactions with others in the light of that good. More importantly, however, I will connect it with our ability to experience life as meaningful as a whole, and the questions about what we may hope for, which it thereby raises.[14]

To become clear about this aspect of the religious point of view, I want to examine two sets of remarks by Wittgenstein that centre on experiences of life that he connects with religious belief. The first is his reference to feeling absolutely safe in *LE*, a feeling he explicitly connects with religious experience. The second appears in his notebooks in the *Nachlass* and refers to the necessity of being able to rest secure in love (Wittgenstein 2016, Ms-133, 8r[2]), a turn of phrase that more indirectly ties in with other descriptions he offers of religious experience at other places in his notebooks.

Before I turn to these remarks, however, I will take recourse to another remark in "Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough" (Wittgenstein 1993). It may help us see just how attending to religious experience can illuminate the feeling for life available to someone attending to existential and philosophical questions about meaning from a religious point of view. It surfaces in a comment on "the myth–or the belief–that we had chosen our bodies before birth" (Wittgenstein 1993, p. 137). Wittgenstein writes,

> If a man were given the choice to be born in one tree of a forest, there would be some who would seek out the most beautiful tree or the highest tree, some who would choose the smallest, and some who would choose an average or below average tree, and I certainly do not mean out of philistinism, but rather for exactly the same reason, or kind of reason, that the other had chosen the highest. (Wittgenstein 1993, p. 137)

He adds that "the feeling which we have for our lives is comparable to that of such a being who would choose for himself his viewpoint in the world". Such a feeling, he suggests, could further be seen as underlying the notion that the vantage point afforded by our bodies was not coincidental but chosen (Wittgenstein 1993, p. 137).

The imagined choice of a tree is evocative. When Wittgenstein in relation to the myth of choosing one's body comments that his spirit would have had to be "very sure of itself" to choose "this unattractive creature as its residence and vantage point. Perhaps because the anomaly of a beautiful residence would be repugnant to it" (Wittgenstein 1993, p. 135), it is also tempting to speculate about what tree he would have chosen for himself, and how that would mimic or contrast with our own.

However telling of Wittgenstein's sense of humour and sense of self the reflection of his own spirit's choice of body may be, the point of introducing the idea of a chosen vantage point is not to think of which tree any given individual would choose, and for what reasons. The sheer number of possible motivations people could give for choosing a particular tree, or place in a tree, in different contexts, is enough to suggest that it is far from clear what we can learn from reviewing such choices or even trying to tie down different responses in neat categories. Choosing the highest tree may, as it were, be a matter of finding the tree that offers the most far-ranging views, but also of securing a view that allows one to look down on others.

What interests me is rather the connection Wittgenstein makes between imagining being able to choose our point of view and "the feeling which we have for our lives" (Wittgenstein 1993, p. 137), which is expressed in that choice. In other words, one's choice of a vantage point can reveal one's ethical vision of what is important in life, but also afford a place from which to contemplate life that meets one's affective needs and emotional insecurities. Registering such a connection between what someone can be said to "see as important in life" and "how they feel about life" is not in the first instance a step to securing a privileged place from which to look at life, but to contemplate the existential significance of how we may think of ourselves as placed in life or in relation to others. Or as Wittgenstein says in a preceding remark,

> One could say 'every view has its charm' but that would be false. The correct thing to say is that every view is significant for the one who sees it as significant (but that does not mean, sees it other than it is). Indeed, in this sense every view is equally significant. (Wittgenstein 1993, p. 135)

Keeping in mind the significance of picturing such a "dwelling place of one's soul" or a "residence or vantage point" of one's spirit (Wittgenstein 1993, p. 135), let us turn to "the experience of feeling absolutely safe" (Wittgenstein 1993, p. 41) that Wittgenstein offers as one picture of religious experience in *LE*. He introduces it to help us think about what it means to speak of the good in an absolute sense.[15] He captures the verbal expression of this experience in the words, "I am safe, nothing can injure me whatever happens", a string of words he at the time of the lecture takes to be nonsensical or as constituting a misuse of language (Wittgenstein 1993, p. 41). Now, although Wittgenstein at the end of the lecture mentions that such ways of speaking document "a tendency in the human mind" that he "cannot help respecting deeply", and also seems to find "saying that we are safe in the hands of God" (Wittgenstein 1993, p. 42) fitting to his own experience (Wittgenstein 1993, p. 44), what is important here is again not registering the kinds of experience that were available to him.[16] What is important is rather the ways of looking at life that are made available to a speaker through such experiences, and also, of course, how to analyze the kind of use we make of language in saying such things.

What turns the verbal expression of the experience into a characteristic misuse of language for Wittgenstein at this stage of his thinking is that we, in speaking of safety in an absolute sense, speak as if the words captured a state of being that would, and thereby also could, always be true. This is something that no one, in Wittgenstein's recounting of the example, is able to say if we take it as similar to recording a fact. If being safe means that it is "physically impossible that certain things should happen to me" (Wittgenstein 1993, p. 42),

I cannot, as Wittgenstein states, be safe "*whatever* happens" (Wittgenstein 1993, p. 42, emphasis in original).

The words, "I am safe, nothing can injure me *whatever* happens", are thus not anything I say because I, for some reason, fail to be aware of my vulnerability to misfortune, or with the certainty that nothing could in fact injure me. I rather say them despite my awareness of uncertainty. My words express my experience of life, rather than seek to describe a state of affairs. In those ways, the words are also not used to record a previous experience, since they too could be given as a description of a past state of affairs (Wittgenstein 1993, p. 43). Saying, "At that point I felt invincible", can be delivered as a simple fact. "I felt like that then, but not anymore."

From the point of view of Wittgenstein's later philosophy, we may reject his talk of a misuse of language in *LE*. We can say that we do not misuse language when we speak of "good" or "safety" in an absolute sense. We simply use language differently than when we report facts and experiences or use the words in a relative sense, that is the sense in which houses are good for us because they provide us with relative safety from some physical harms (cf. Wittgenstein 1993, p. 42). Thereafter, we may imagine different lived contexts and inquire into *what* sense it makes to speak of feeling absolutely safe in those contexts, what we *do* when we speak these words (cf. Knepper 2009, p. 68; Kronqvist 2011, pp. 662–64). The words may, say, be used as an attempt to *calm* ourselves or others by *silencing* doubts, but also to *express*, say, *faith*, *serenity*, a sense of *peace*, or *one's hope for tomorrow*. Reflecting on such uses may then provide examples of how our words and the expressions we find fitting in one way or other reveals us, or what is of importance to us, to others. This may land us, as in "Remarks of Frazer's Golden Bough", in a contemplation of the simile or picture they offer of "the feeling which we have for our lives" (Wittgenstein 1993, p. 137).

Continuing such a line of inquiry, I next want to consider the kind of place, or vantage point, from which speaking in terms of absolute safety appears as something someone wants to say. Further, I want to consider the difference it makes if we characterize this place in religious or ethical terms. For this purpose, let me change the sentence "I am safe, nothing can injure me whatever happens" slightly and contrast it with two other sentences.

(1) I am good, I cannot injure anyone whatever I do.
(2) People are good, they cannot injure me whatever they do.

In what kind of context would it make sense, and what sense would it make, to say either of these sentences? Out of what kind of experience would someone who expressed themselves in this manner be speaking? What, in other words, would be the characteristic feature of the "dwelling place of [their] soul"? (Wittgenstein 1993, p. 135).

Now, we may well imagine someone having the kinds of feelings for life that could be expressed in these sentences. Perhaps we think of a child entering the world with what appears as an absolute confidence in themselves and an unshaken trust in others. This may strike some of us as naivety in the first case, or as innocence in the second case. Partly, because it is easy to imagine situations in which this sense of security is taken from them, cases in which life, as one says, "teaches you a lesson". If and when a child learns such a lesson, we may therefore think that it reveals to them that their previous sense of safety was illusory, as we perhaps thought all along.

If, however, someone recognizes that hardships in our relationships with others are also a part of life, yet persists in holding these views, then must we conclude that they are under an illusion? Beginning with (2), the idea that a person could exclude the possibility of being harmed in their relations to others appears as a notion that can only too easily be challenged. How could anyone exempt themselves from injury, at least not of the physical kind? What kind of fool would deny that pain, and also pain caused by

others, is an unavoidable aspect of life? Nevertheless, the experience of physical pain need not necessarily lead a person to reject the notion that "people are good". A momentary experience may do only so little to interrupt the pervasive attitude a person takes toward others and their life.

In different schools of wisdom, for instance, we find the attempt to exempt oneself from moral injury, as it were, by definition or stipulation. Whatever blows life or other people throw at me, I may, in this spirit, deny the reality of it beyond the physical pain it causes. In other words, I see the physical pain as unimportant in guiding me to what I see as good or revealing to me what is bad, since pain that does not stem from lethal wounds can be expected to pass. As an example of such a teaching, we can consider Socrates' musings on whether it is better to suffer wrongdoing than to do wrong in the *Gorgias*, as well as the notion, referring to that discussion, that a good man cannot be harmed (cf. Winch 1965). These musings suggest that we can take it upon ourselves not to regard anything that someone else does to us in (2) as a moral injury, harming our sense of what is good. A rotten apple, contrary to general wisdom, does not necessarily have to spoil the whole barrel.

Reminding ourselves of the contexts in which we may speak meaningfully about such matters, we may thus consider the role these kinds of sayings have in spiritual teaching. Rather than attempting to determine the truth of a statement, they are here targeted at building character and preserving a commendable spirit. In such contexts we may also find some overlap in thinking "Nobody can harm me" and "I am absolutely safe", as both can be taken to express a commitment to regard life *as good* "whatever happens". If I speak in such fashion, I speak as if the expression "This is good!" in response to what I experience right now would capture an absolute truth. I speak, as Wittgenstein suggested, absolutely, seeing my life, the life that I am living, as good.

Speaking in this way about my life and whatever happens to me in (2) may thus issue out of a refusal to see anything that happens to me as a harm. In (1), when relating to the possible harm I may do to others, however, this form of refusal does not appear possible. To the extent that being good is not just a matter of doing what I ought to do, or perceiving value in my life, but constitutively places me in relation to others, it is impossible for me to assume my own goodness. Whether I am good or not, is, in those ways, not relative to how I evaluate my life and actions. In light of Wittgenstein's distinction between saying and showing, it is rather something that shows in what I do, in how I do it, and also in how I see things. What thus shows will necessarily depend on the evaluations of others.

And this is the crux. Just because my goodness is expressed in action, behaviour, and perception, rather than delivered as a statement that could be true, I cannot ensure how others will see me. Even if I act in good faith, that is, without any explicit ill intention, or with the best of intentions, there is the possibility that I may injure someone. If not through my words and actions, then through the things I did not say or do. I cannot thus rely upon myself not to cause harm, because the question of whether I did so, is not only up to me to answer. It relies in important respects on what others see, or are able to see, in me.

So, although our understanding of what it means to speak of what is "good" in an absolute sense, may be informed by thinking of how sentences like "This is good" or "Life is good" are expressive of a feeling of absolute safety, we may not rest as secure in relation to how we reveal ourselves to others in our interactions with them. I may speak of life as good and valuable to me, and what I say will be expressive of my relation to the good that I see in it, my reactive attitudes towards it, as well as my determination to think of what I encounter as good, *whatever* happens. I cannot, however, speak in the same sense about myself as good. If I harm you, even unintentionally, my relation to the good I see must be acknowledged in admitting the harm, not in the insistence that it is impossible for me to harm because I act with good intentions.

This again connects to limits in my own vision of myself in relation to others, and the in some ways trivial point that although I look at others, I may not directly be aware of how I see them, and what my way of seeing reveals about me (cf. Manhire and Kronqvist 2025). Often, I only see the injury I have caused others, by responding to the pain in their eyes (cf. Kronqvist 2019). This reveals, on the one hand my vulnerability to others and what they can see in me, but also my vulnerability to myself. As Anne-Marie Christensen puts this thought in relation to Wittgenstein,

> If we evaluate our lives in ethical terms, it is always possible for us to question our motives and suspect ourselves of not trying hard enough, that is, it is always possible to ask whether we have succumbed to what we could call the temptation of the good conscience. (Christensen 2011, p. 221)

Ethics in those ways does not offer us a place where we can rest secure. I cannot state as a fact that I am good, and the question of whether what I want to do is or what I did do was good must remain an open question as long as your response to me is needed to answer it. Thus, ethics for Wittgenstein, as Christensen says, is "characterized by inherent insecurity". It is an insecurity, as she also says, with a reference to Kierkegaard, which carries with it the danger of "self-absorption" (Christensen 2011, p. 221). The realization that being good is not within my control may, as it were, come to control my thoughts, increasing my feelings of insecurity, and thus eventually backfire. If I, as it were, become absorbed with being good in the eyes of the others, I no longer am attentive to them and thereby fail them also under this description. It is here that religion, or religious experience, may seem to offer not a solution, but a form of support in our ethical insecurity.

This leads to the second remark I want to consider, "In love I have to be able to rest secure" (Wittgenstein 2016, Ms-133, 8r[2]). This remark appears in a coded diary, in the context of Wittgenstein's own struggle to reconcile feelings of joy and pain in relation to love (see also Kronqvist 2023). The reference to the dire need to do so thus appears in a context in which Wittgenstein himself appears unable to rest secure, in his failure to put trust neither in his own love or Ben Richards, nor in God. He confesses that he does not trust his own legs to carry him and admits his fear that Richards will not offer the necessary support (Wittgenstein 2016, Ms-133, Ms-133, 36r[3]et36v[1]). He also laments his lack of the necessary faith, wavering in the hope that good will come out of this relationship (Wittgenstein 2016, Ms-133, 7r[3]). His qualms thus reveal a case of an individual who struggles to rest secure, a human who does not feel safe in the hands of God, by contrast to the image of feeling absolutely safe.[17]

The state of mind, or ailment of the soul, to which Wittgenstein's remarks on his and Richards' relationship give testimony, is in stark contrast with another picture Wittgenstein had offered on trust in God in a manuscript in 1937–1938, that is, roughly eight years after *LE*. Addressing the question of what it means to believe in God's redemption, he writes that "holding on" to religious belief can only "come about if you no longer support yourself on this earth but suspend yourself from heaven" (Wittgenstein 1998, p. 38e). He goes on to explain that "someone who is suspended looks like someone who is standing but the interplay of forces within him is nevertheless a quite different one & hence he is able to do quite different things than can one who stands." (Wittgenstein 1998, p. 39e.)

This picture of being suspended offers a contrast to other bodily images of unrest that Wittgenstein presents as lamentable states that he himself feels unable to escape.[18] It thus serves as an additional picture of what it could mean to rest secure in love, or rest safe in the hands of God (cf. Kronqvist 2023, Forthcoming). What this suspension from heaven affords the one suspended, on my take on it, is not in the first place a view from above, what one could think of as a "God's eye perspective" or a "view from nowhere". This is particularly relevant as a contrast to what Wittgenstein says about regarding the

work of art or the good life from the perspective of the eternal, *sub specie aeternitatis*: "The work of art is the object seen *sub specie aeternitatis*; and the good life is the world seen *sub specie aeternitatis*." (Wittgenstein 1961, p. 83e). Here, as in the quote about the Sabbath, Wittgenstein suggests that from this perspective objects are seen not "from the midst of them" but "from outside" (Wittgenstein 1961, p. 83e). The question remains, however, how to think of this view from "outside".

What the idea of being suspended, hanging from heaven, as another picture of being safe in the hands of God, offers, as I see it, is not primarily a picture of someone hanging in the air, and thus being able to look down. The contrast is rather not having to "support yourself on this earth" (Wittgenstein 1998, p. 39e). In other words, you do not have to use your strength to steady your feet, straighten your legs, or pull yourself up. It rather looks to others as if you were just standing (as Wittgenstein also explicitly states) with the support from above. The sought support from God thereby does not come from the kind of overview being suspended offers, but in the ability to stand steadily, when your feet would otherwise give way. It is also present in the ability to feel differently about what now plagues you because the offered support presents new possibilities of reacting by changing the forces within.[19] Being suspended thus enables both rest and recuperation, and through that a different way of looking at one's possibilities in life.

Thus, we do not need to think of being suspended as offering a view from above, but can rather picture it as a place for our bodies to rest. Yet, I do not think Wittgenstein ever gave up on the thought that "the good life is the world seen *sub specie aeternitatis*" (Wittgenstein 1961, p. 83e). I also would not disconnect this "outside" view completely from the way of looking at one's life, and the feelings one's way of looking shows that one has to it, which Wittgenstein associated with a religious point of view. What I challenge is therefore not thinking of the religious point of view as showing the good life seen under "the aspect of eternity". Rather, I am critical towards the idea that this perspective issues from a place beyond our lives.

We may certainly imagine looking at our life from a point outside of space. If and when we do, however, our way of looking is similar to the consideration given to a work of art in an aesthetic judgement. When we consider a work of art, or our life taken as a whole, as our own work of art, our creation, we can look at it as an object. As in Wittgenstein's reference to himself as an "unattractive creature" (Wittgenstein 1993, p. 135), we may picture our life as having a specific form and seek a description that fits our experience of it. Wittgenstein's religious point of view, however, need not be taken to resemble an aesthetic judgement in this way. Rather, it seems to revolve around a different experience of fit. Compare this experience to the following remark.

> The solution of the problem you see in life is a way of living which makes what is problematic disappear. The fact that life is problematic means that your life does not fit life's shape. So you must change your life, & once it fits the shape, what is problematic will disappear. (Wittgenstein 1998, p. 31e)

The religious experience of being absolutely safe seems to fit the experience of fitting into the shape of one's life that Wittgenstein is picturing here. Importantly, however, in gesturing at *feeling* safe, the notion of judging or determining a fit, as when A judges they can fit three more blocks in a row, does not stand out as the most important aspect of this experience. Rather, it is the possibility of living a different kind of life, where we are also free from the requirement to fit any particular form, which merits attention. The experience of a misfit in fitting one's life's form can then be considered in line with not feeling at home in one's house. Rather than focusing on how the parts contribute to any given whole, one feels oneself as part of a whole. This is also a reason for emphasizing what a person is able to do in this kind of context (when the play of forces in them is different), rather

than considering what they see from where they stand. Whether a person feels at home in a house can, for instance, be seen in how they move around the house, calmly and confidently, as well as in how they experience it, as safe and comfortable.

What a person who rests secure in their life in those ways is able to perceive as good, what they are able to see, think of or take as true, and how they are able to think of different possibilities in their life, or perceive as possibilities in the first place, are in those ways a function of feeling safe and protected from any real harm. The ability to perceive meaning in life in such ways here easily appears as a gift, as something that does good, and not as a result of one's own actions. Being able to look at one's life as good on such terms, is not a creative act of bestowing meaning to one's circumstances. Rather, it is dependent on an ability to receive the meaning that, in some ways, is available to one through one's particular ways of being placed in one's context. This mode of experiencing one's placement within one's own life silences worry, doubt, and despair.

An exchange between Wittgenstein and Rhees reveals a similar sense of peace imagined as the endpoint of philosophy, but also Wittgenstein's hesitation in conceiving of such a possibility. In relation to a passage that now occurs in *PI* §133 in which Wittgenstein speaks of being able to break off his philosophizing when he wants to, calling this the "real discovery" in philosophy, Rhees recollects that Wittgenstein suggested that his way of describing this possibility had not been completely truthful. "As he was leaving, this time, he said to me roughly this: 'In my book I say that I am able to leave off with a problem in philosophy when I want to. But that's a lie; I can't.'" (Wittgenstein et al. 2015, p. 54). To this episode, Rhees adds that his memory is vague and thus does not bear quoting.

Whatever Wittgenstein's exact words were here, the important point of this episode to me is that the transformation in one's philosophical thought that Wittgenstein wanted to bring about cannot be brought about by oneself. Wittgenstein's solution to a philosophical problem went through ways of surveying one's problem in such a way that one's troubles would disappear (cf. Wittgenstein 2009, p. 125). His way of writing philosophy also reads as an attempt to place the reader in a position to the philosophical problems from which they can see that their way into the problem was misconceived.[20] The kind of salvation ("Erlösung") he conceived for the philosopher, however, was in certain ways out of the philosopher's reach.[21]

Where Wittgenstein, in response to a religious struggle, in facing the problem of life, writes, "I may reject the Christian solution to the problem of life (salvation, resurrection, judgement, heaven, ell) but this does not solve the problem of my life, for I am not good & not happy. I am not saved" (Wittgenstein 2003, p. 169), many of his expectations for what effects his philosophy could produce seem to end in the same sense of disillusionment. Just as I cannot use religion as a means to save myself, and also cannot save myself, and my perception of myself as good, from me, there is no guaranteed remedy in philosophy that will ensure that I escape my predicament when deeply drawn into philosophical confusion.

Nevertheless, Wittgenstein seems to be clear about what it would be, and also feel like, to be able to look at what troubles us from a point of view where one in one way or another, is saved from one's own thinking. Perhaps the most religious conviction he held was that it was possible for us to find ourselves in such a state in our philosophizing. This conviction intimates one of the meanings I have suggested we can see in talking about seeing things from a religious point of view, a vantage point from which we still somehow may feel absolutely safe.

4. Concluding Discussion

An important puzzle in Wittgenstein's philosophy was how we can bring ourselves to see something we do not see, and also what consequences this has for how we think

of the solutions philosophy can offer to our problems. He provides descriptions of a philosopher caught up in a problem, likening them, in the case of the solipsist, to a fly flattering against the walls of the fly bottle, (Wittgenstein 2016, Ms-149 34r[5]et34v[1]) or a person who looks for a missing object by throwing out all the contents of drawer, then throwing them back in an haphazard manner, without taking the time to look in a focused manner or to search methodically (Wittgenstein 2016, Ms-153b, 22v[2]et23r[1]et23v[1]). Both descriptions provide images of purposeful activity that yet seem utterly pointless to the onlooker. Where the philosopher thus aimlessly tries to get on with what they are doing (cf. Wittgenstein 1998, p. 86e), Wittgenstein in both instances responds by asking how he could be of help in their quest. What can he do if the ones searching for a solution are unable to come to peace (again in the line of the German idiom "zu Ruhe kommen" which also indicates "to rest")? Where the predicament of these philosophers is to continue by trying to force a way forward, not considering what it is they do, the solution Wittgenstein proposes is not simply to become more focused or methodical in their doing. Rather, he tries to bring into view what it is they are doing, to come to see whether their way of approaching the issue is wrongheaded.[22]

In my discussion, I have tried to attend to these issues by considering from what place we may look at what we are doing when we speak from a religious point of view. On my way there, I have considered what it may mean to talk about seeing the point of our activities, and how we place ourselves in relation to what we are doing, when reflecting on that point. I have connected this way of seeing the point of what we do with a normative dimension of meaningful activity, which comes out when considering language as an activity that, at least to some extent, is rule-governed. This is shown in what we see as important to be doing in order to be doing something. I have contrasted this with an evaluative dimension of judgement that reveals what we see ourselves as doing, and also the ethical point of it. Here, the importance we attach to what we see ourselves as doing is shown in what we see and react to as appropriate, and also correct and incorrect, ways of doing it. This also alerted us to the aesthetic dimension of many of our value judgements.

I have found it necessary to distinguish between the moral and ethical dimension of Wittgenstein's thought to bring out the interaction between these two features of how we may think of the point of our practices. Where I have described the moral dimension as an aspect of attending to needs and obligations within our shared activities, I have described the ethical dimension as an aspect of how we place our activities, and their importance for us, in the context of our lives as a whole. I then went on to show how the ethical is not reducible to the moral, but also how the religious is not reducible to the ethical. As in Wittgenstein's remark on the Sabbath, I pointed to the need to look at what we do, not just from within the rules governing the activity, or in the midst of our own purposeful behaviour, but from the outside. This outside perspective is necessary to not simply think of what I do as a means to my ends, but to critically examine the wholes, the meaningful activities, to which my actions, unbeknownst to me, may contribute. In these ways, Wittgenstein's thinking in different ways calls us, in the first person singular, to consider what is important in our acting, in our ways of perceiving, but also in our ways of being and experiencing life as meaningful.

Using imagery that Wittgenstein repeatedly returns to, I have called upon different notions of how I am placed in relation to what I see as good, and especially pointed to the religious dimension that can be seen in my often failing ability to rest securely in my experience of life as good. Pointing to a central vulnerability in inquiring into what is good, I reflected on the impossibility of precluding harming others in my ethical relations to them. Yet, I showed how reflecting on myself from a religious point of view may enable me to think of myself as someone who cannot be harmed. Responding to *my life* as good and

meaningful when taken as a feeling for my life as a whole does not, as it were, ensure that I am good. Yet, it may reveal a form of faith in life that can be seen as a presupposition for being at peace. Experiencing such peace may also support us in our quest to continuously answer to what is demanded of us ethically. The possibility of experiencing life as good, or meaningful, despite there being no guarantee that I am good, then points to one way in which the religious perspective can sustain us in our ethical strife. It points to the existential importance of a place where I can rest secure in accepting insecurity.

The religious point of view, then, is related to the possibility of seeing what we do in different contexts and seeing how the ethical value changes depending on how we are placed within particular contexts. Philosophically, it thus relates to the important role context-dependence has in Wittgenstein's thought, as well as to the role of imagination in picturing alternative ways of understanding what we do in language. Reflection on Wittgenstein's religious point of view can thus help us bring out a contemplative dimension of his philosophy (cf. Phillips 1999). It also brings out an imaginative element in it. It allows us to consider different possibilities, which at times challenge what may appear as the only possible way of looking at a problem. This possibility may liberate us from ways of conceiving our problems, out of which we cannot find our way. Yet, the embodied metaphors of a philosopher and human being at peace with their surrounding environment, also suggests that the possibility of different perspectives, the ability to discern different aspects of our life and activities as important, may not preclude the ability at times to find rest in one aspect, to be, at least, at ease (Wittgenstein 2016, Ms-145, 96[3]).

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

1 For relevant discussions, see Agam-Segal and Dain (2019), Cahill (2011), Christensen (2021, 2024), and De Mesel and Kuusela (2019).

2 This assessment must be qualified since much of the early work on Wittgenstein's philosophy, by philosophers who are usually counted as Wittgensteinian, was dedicated to exploring this dimension of his work. More directly in Norman Malcolm's *Wittgenstein: A Religious Point of View*? (Malcolm 1997), including a discussion by Peter Winch, and indirectly in the philosophy of Rush Rhees, Peter Winch, and D.Z. Phillips, who in different ways attempt to work out how a specific spirit can be seen at work in Wittgenstein's thinking about language. For more recent attempts to articulate the relevance of Wittgenstein's "religious point of view" for thinking about religion, see Arrington (2001), Labron (2006), McDonough (2016), and Peters (2022), as well as some of the contributions to this Special Issue.

3 This backward approach can be seen as a way of naturalizing Wittgenstein's remarks on both ethics and religion, in the sense of demystifying what many readers of *Tractatus* regard as its mysticism (cf. Nieli 2009). In particular, this approach can demonstrate the relevance of the distinction between *saying* and *showing* as a dynamic of quite ordinary language use, rather than assuming it involves instituting a realm of unsayable truths (cf. Knepper 2009).

4 See §§11, 17 in the section on "Philosophy" (Wittgenstein 1982) for a place where Wittgenstein more directly addresses this inclination in our thought.

5 An extreme case of seeing someone as building with no seeming purpose is found in Jim Henson's *Fraggle Rock* where the Doozers, equipped with building attire and machines, are a group of creatures whose sole purpose seems to be building structures that are of no use to anyone, except by serving as food to the Fraggles, who eat their constructions.

6 Wittgenstein's remarks on aspect perception are often connected with his later philosophy, and especially the discussion of it in part two of *PI*, which has later been called *Philosophy of Psychology, a Fragment*. It is, however, important to see that it is a topic to which he returns throughout all of his philosophy, beginning in the remarks about how the happy and unhappy man see

the world. The first explicit use of "aspect" I was able to track down in his *Nachlass* is in the manuscript *Philosophical Remarks* (Wittgenstein 2016, Ms-105, 57[3]).

7 The point of language on this logical analysis of it, we could say, is to state what is true among those propositions that can be either true or false, but not to affirm the truth of sentences that could only be true, or never false.

8 The quotes by the managing consultant Peter Drucker I refer to here are the closest to a saying often attributed to him in the book *The Effective Executive* (Drucker 2006). The saying uses the distinction between efficiency and efficacy to point out two way in which an action can be judged as right, and goes, "Efficiency is doing things right, effectiveness is doing the right thing."

9 Cf. (Tomasello 2016, p. 64f), on the origin of the "ought" in joint intentionality.

10 Cf. Stanley Cavell's distinction between rules and principles (Cavell 1976, pp. 28–29).

11 Even speaking of him as employing his sight might be adding too much to the description. A reason for us to be thinking that this is what it means for him to be using his sight is shown in his being able to return the right object to A.

12 Where the rules for measuring blocks in the rocks using the wooden model or measuring tape are more objectively available, anyone who can apply the rule, or perhaps rather standard, in the correct way will get it right. The more immediate seeing the block in the rock comes to B, the more subjective is B's way of looking. Here, I speak of subjective, in the manner of calling on the subject to make a judgement of fit. It thus becomes a matter of how well they can use sight as a tool to determine whether the raw material fits the desired form.

13 Read this in line with Nora Hämäläinen's way of framing William James' interest in "what kind of work [a] new spiritual movement does for the people who embrace it". He "observes that it seems to do them at least some good: that it is a functional form of religion that enables them to live better than at least some available alternatives, offering spiritual refreshment and purpose" (Hämäläinen 2023, p. 65). This can also be compared to Wittgenstein's mention, in a letter to Russell, 22 June 1912, that reading James's book "is doing him a lot of good" (McGuinness 1966, p. 321).

14 In 1929, Wittgenstein remarks that "What is Good is Divine too. That, strangely enough, sums up my ethics" (Wittgenstein 1998, p. 5e). This testifies to how tightly the ethical and religious were intertwined in his own life, and gives one indication about what it meant for him to respond to life as a meaningful whole.

15 In the lecture, Wittgenstein also links two other religious experiences to "absolute value", wondering at the existence of the world and describing one's feeling of guilt by saying that "God disapproves of our conduct" (Wittgenstein 1993, p. 42). I will not discuss these further for reasons of space, but it seems clear to me that the first experience of wonder is connected with how the world appears to the happy man of the *Tractatus*, and is also internally related to experiencing safety in the hands of God. As for the final example, it is interesting how little time Wittgenstein spends on it. Christensen (2011) offers interesting reflections that seem connected to it in the context of thinking of himself as bad. On the whole, however, Wittgenstein often rejects imagery of God as judge (cf. Wittgenstein 1998, p. 38e). The predominant religious pictures that seem to speak to him are rather connected with the ability to perceive life as both good and wonderful.

16 McGuinness, however, makes a reference to a mystical experience Wittgenstein seems to have had himself in connection with the performance of a play. McGuinness relates this experience to the saying "Nothing can happen to you" that he claims was "almost proverbial in Vienna" (McGuinness 1966, pp. 327–28). This offers some support for thinking that the example chosen was also of personal importance.

17 My reasons for linking his thinking on love with his thinking of faith thus refers back to qualms he explicitly addresses, in pointing to "trust in God" as a possible solution to his problem (Wittgenstein 2016, Ms-133, 9r[1]), but also to biblical sources that use the same imagery as Wittgenstein, and even fall back on the same words in some of the translations that were contemporary with him. The expression "sicher ruhen" is in one important instance found in Psalm 16, a poem by David, which in the Elberfelder Bibel, is given as "Darum freut sich mein Herz, und frohlockt meine Seele. Auch mein Fleisch wird in Sicherheit ruhen." (16:9). In Acts 2:25b-28, Peter also refers back to the same psalm. "Denn David sagt über ihn: »Ich sah den Herrn allezeit vor mir; denn er ist zu meiner Rechten, damit ich nicht wanke. Darum freute sich mein Herz, und meine Zunge jubelte; ja, auch mein Fleisch wird in Hoffnung ruhen".

18 This is not just a dimension of his qualms in relation to Richards, but a recurring theme in often coded diary records of his state of mind.

19 Cf. Psalm 16.9, which mentions not swaying, in German, "wanken", when God is by one's side, which offers more such imagery. Your heart is glad, and your spirit rejoices, as the Bible verse suggests, when your body can rest secure.

20 In these ways, Wittgenstein's likening of the work of philosophy to the work in architecture is striking, for what he seems to construct is an architecture of viewing one's problem from a perspective that helps one see it, and one's relation to it, aright.

21 Many of Wittgenstein's more meta-philosophical remarks on the difficulty of providing a solution, or dissolution, to someone unable to do anything with it, can also be read in this light (see, e.g., Wittgenstein 1998, p. 10e).

22 Cf. the picture of philosophical problems as locks that open only through dialling in a specific word or number, but do not open by force (Wittgenstein 2016, Ms-109, 191[2]). Wittgenstein here uses the German word "Einstellung", which is mostly translated as "attitude" but also, as here, can be used to speak of the settings of a device.

References

Agam-Segal, Reshef, and Edmund Dain, eds. 2019. *Wittgenstein's Moral Thought*. New York: Routledge.

Arrington, Robert L. 2001. 'Theology as Grammar': Wittgenstein and Some Critics. In *Wittgenstein and Philosophy of Religion*. Edited by Robert L. Arrington and Mark Addis. New York: Routledge, pp. 167–84.

Backström, Joel, Hannes Nykänen, Niklas Toivakainen, and Thomas Wallgren, eds. 2019. *Moral Foundations of Philosophy of Mind*. Cham: Springer.

Cahill, Kevin. 2011. *The Fate of Wonder: Wittgenstein's Critique of Metaphysics and Modernity*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Canfield, John V. 1975. Wittgenstein and Zen. *Philosophy* 50: 383–408. [CrossRef]

Cavell, Stanley. 1976. *Must We Mean What We Say?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Christensen, Anne-Marie S. 2011. 'A Glorious Sun and a Bad Person'. *Wittgenstein, Ethical Reflection and the Other. Philosophia* 39: 207–23.

Christensen, Anne-Marie S. 2021. *Moral Philosophy and Moral Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Christensen, Anne-Marie S. 2024. *Wittgenstein and Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

De Mesel, Benjamin, and Oskari Kuusela. 2019. *Ethics in the Wake of Wittgenstein*. New York: Routledge.

Drucker, Peter F. 2006. *The Effective Executive*. Pymble: HarperCollins.

Drury, Maurice O'Connor. 2018. *The Selected Writings of Maurice O'Connor Drury, on Wittgenstein, Philosophy, Religion and Psychiatry*. London: Bloomsbury.

Hämäläinen, Nora. 2023. The Making of the Good Person. In *Self-Help, Ethics and Philosophy*. New York: Routledge.

Hertzberg, Lars. 2012. Rhees on the Unity of Language. *Philosophical Investigations* 35: 224–37. [CrossRef]

Knepper, Timothy D. 2009. Ineffability investigations: What the Later Wittgenstein has to Offer to the Study of Ineffability. *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 65: 65–76. [CrossRef]

Kronqvist, Camilla. 2011. The Promise That Love Will Last. *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy* 54: 650–668. [CrossRef]

Kronqvist, Camilla. 2019. Can You Forgive Me? *Ethical Perspectives* 26: 299–322.

Kronqvist, Camilla. 2023. "The Frightening Thing Is the Uncertainty": Wittgenstein on Love and the Desire for Certainty. In *Philosophical Perspectives on Moral Certainty*. Edited by Cecilie Eriksen, Julia Hermann, Neil O'Hara and Nigel Pleasants. New York: Routledge, pp. 58–75.

Kronqvist, Camilla. Forthcoming. Listening to Who's Talking: The Speakers as Context. In *Contextual Ethics*. Edited by Anne-Maries S. Christensen, Niklas Forsberg and Raffaele Rodogno. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Labron, Tim. 2006. *Wittgenstein's Religious Point of View*. London: Bloomsbury.

Malcolm, Norman. 1997. *Wittgenstein: A Religious Point of View?* New York: Routledge.

Manhire, Ryan, and Camilla Kronqvist. 2025. "Tap-dancing Around the Conversation": Difficulties in an Intimate Deep Moral Disagreement. *Synthese* 205: 1–24. [CrossRef]

McDonough, Richard. 2016. Wittgenstein: From a Religious Point of View? *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 15: 3–27.

McGuinness, Brian F. 1966. The Mysticism of the Tractatus. *The Philosophical Review* 75: 305–28. [CrossRef]

Monk, Ray. 1990. *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*. New York: Free Press.

Nieli, Russell. 2009. Review of James R. Atkinson, The Mystical in Wittgenstein's Early Writings. *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews* 8.

Peters, Michael A. 2022. Wittgenstein, Mysticism and the 'Religious Point of View': 'Whereof One Cannot Speak, Thereof One Must Be Silent'. *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 54: 1952–59. [CrossRef]

Phillips, Dewi Z. 1993. *Wittgenstein and Religion*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Phillips, Dewi Z. 1999. *Philosophy's Cool Place*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Rhees, Rush. 1960. Wittgenstein's Builders. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 60: 171–86. [CrossRef]

Tomasello, Michael. 2016. *A Natural History of Human Morality*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Winch, Peter. 1965. 'Can a Good Man Be Harmed?'. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 66: 55–70. [CrossRef]

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 1922. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. London: Kegan Paul.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 1961. *Notebooks, 1914–1916*. New York: Harper & Brothers.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 1967. *Lectures & Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*. Berkeely: University of California Press.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 1982. *Wittgenstein's Lectures, Cambridge, 1932–1935: From the Notes of Alice Ambrose and Margaret Macdonald*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 1993. *Philosophical Occasions 1912–1951*. Edited by James Klagge and Alfred Nordman. Indianapolis: Hackett.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 1998. *Culture and Value*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 2003. *Private and Public Occasions*. Edited by James C. Klagge and Alfred Nordmann. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 2009. *Philosophical Investigations*. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 2016. *Interactive Dynamic Presentation (IDP) of Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophical Nachlass*. Edited by Alois Pichler. Bergen: Wittgenstein Archives at the University of Bergen. Available online: http://wittgensteinonline.no/ (accessed on 11 October 2025).

Wittgenstein, Ludwig, Rush Rhees, and Gabriel Citron. 2015. Wittgenstein's Philosophical Conversations with Rush Rhees (1939–50): From the Notes of Rush Rhees. *Mind* 124: 1–71. [CrossRef]

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.