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# Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard<sup>1</sup>

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“Mind you I don’t believe what Kierkegaard believed, but of this I am certain, that we are not here in order to have a good time”.<sup>2</sup>

I do not pretend to be a Kierkegaard scholar. And I am very uncertain about how to understand Kierkegaard’s works (the pseudonyms included). However, I am not the only one! At the American Academy of Religion’s annual meeting at Boston in December 1987, Dr. Abraham Khan presented a multicolored diagram showing nine different ways of reading *Philosophical Fragments*. Nine different ways of reading one single book among the many Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms have written! Now, this is by no means a problem that is confined to Kierkegaard’s textual universe. It is a problem connected with all texts and all kinds of texts. One can contend, as many modern and “postmodern” literary critics do, that there is no single definitive way of reading or interpreting a text. The well-known American literary critic, Stanley Fish, has put it like this:

“The fact that it remains easy to think of a reading that most of us would dismiss out of hand does not mean that the text excludes it but that there is as yet no elaborated interpretive procedure for producing that text”.<sup>3</sup>

If we bring his viewpoint to bear on Kierkegaard’s texts, it means that the correct reading is the one that a group of readers agrees upon. If other readers agree upon another interpretation, this second reading is just as correct. In reality it is the readers who are the producers of the text through their interpretation of it. As Fish writes: “...like it or not, interpretation is the only game in town”.<sup>4</sup> My problem would then seem to be that I have as yet not found out which group of Kierkegaard-readers I ought to join!

I am in a somewhat better position with respect to Wittgenstein, with whose work I am much more familiar, having devoted much more time to him and written about him. But also in the case of Wittgenstein, one could produce diagrams with at least nine different readings. This, I hasten to add, in no way diminishes the value of the texts in question. On the contrary, it is the possibility of *many* different interpretations that make a text valuable or “classic”.<sup>5</sup>

Let me draw a quick sketch of Wittgenstein’s life and work. He was born in Vienna in 1889. His father was an important Austrian industria-

list and the family was of Jewish origin. Ludwig Wittgenstein himself was baptized into the Roman Catholic faith. He participated in the Great War and in the trenches he worked on a book which, according to him, would bring all philosophy to an end. The book was published just after the war, with Bertrand Russell giving its title: *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*. Having finished the book Wittgenstein, very logically, gave up philosophy. Instead he became a primary school teacher in a remote valley in Austria. His life in the valley turned into a complete failure – for many reasons. One reason was that the peasants had no interest whatsoever in the excursions that Wittgenstein took with his pupils – when school was over the children ought to return to their homes and work on the farms. Another reason of a more general kind was that an urban intellectual like Wittgenstein had nothing in common with the peasants and was unable to communicate with them. Later on he worked as a gardener in a monastery and still later he designed a mansion in Vienna for his sister. The mansion can still be seen and visited in Kundmann-gasse 19 and, according to recent interpretations, be understood as an architectonic expression of the basic ideas in *Tractatus*.<sup>6</sup> During the following years Wittgenstein returned to philosophy and became the successor of G. E. Moore in Cambridge in 1939. Here he took up a whole new philosophical project which culminated in the posthumous *Philosophical Investigations*, published in 1951. Prior to the completion of the manuscript he had once more given up academic philosophy, retired from his professorship and spent the last few years of his life more and less as an eremite. One of his personal struggles, much discussed during the last couple of decades, had to do with his being a homosexual. His homosexuality was first brought to the fore by the American philosopher, William Bartley III, who wrote a Wittgenstein-biography.<sup>7</sup> Bartley's biographical work raised a storm among Wittgenstein's friends and disciples, and Bartley himself was told by an Englishman: "The general line here is that you are to be drummed out of the trade and that no academic invitation of any kind will be extended to you from the United Kingdom henceforth".<sup>8</sup> Today not many will deny that Wittgenstein was in fact a homosexual. Some even find the key to his philosophy in his being a homosexual. Bartley himself rejects such an approach. His argument runs approximately like this: Whether one is redhaired or homosexual, is born in the country or in a city, one thinks thoughts and develops theories. Once one's thoughts and theories have come into being they have a life of their own, so to speak, and will influence others as well as oneself. Therefore it can be stated that Wittgenstein was a homosexual just as it can be stated that Kierkegaard was a rentier, but neither Wittgenstein's philosophy, nor Kierkegaard's, can be explained or understood by referring to biological or sociological facts. It could be that Bartley's line of argument is a bit too fast. To recall Stanley Fish again, one might say that if a group of interpreters agrees upon reading a texts in the light of what is known about its author, then that too is a legitimate way

of reading – until others agree upon something else. As far as I am concerned, I must admit that I find it much easier to understand that loneliness which springs forth from so many of Wittgenstein’s notes, when I know that he also felt lonely for biological or cultural reasons. – At any rate, both books, *Tractatus* and *Philosophical Investigations*, have been widely read and are still being read all over the world. Both books have also had a school-building effect. *Tractatus* has especially been a source of inspiration for the dominant philosophical trend between the two world wars, in Denmark commonly labelled “logical empiricism” or “logical positivism”. *Philosophical Investigations* has likewise inspired much of the postwar philosophy of language, sometimes labelled “analytical philosophy”. In recent years *Philosophical Investigations* has been read and cited by postmodern philosophers like the French Jean-François Lyotard. Finally there are those who read Kierkegaard through Wittgensteinian lenses and Wittgenstein through Kierkegaardian ones. An outstanding representative of this group is the American, Paul L. Holmer, whom I had the privilege of listening to in this society almost 20 years ago!

There is at least one good reason for bringing Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein together, namely the fact during most of his life, Wittgenstein took a great interest in Kierkegaard. Wittgenstein’s friend, Norman Malcolm, reports for example that Wittgenstein held Kierkegaard in esteem and referred to him “with something of awe in his expression, as a ‘really religious’ man”.<sup>9</sup> He also tells us that Wittgenstein had read the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* but found it ‘too deep’ for him. But without doubt Wittgenstein had read much more of Kierkegaard’s works than the *Postscript*. This can be seen, e.g., in that collection of Wittgenstein’s notes which was published in 1977 under the modest German title *Vermischte Bemerkungen* (“Mixed Remarks”) and the somewhat more pompous English one, *Culture and Value*. I will concentrate on those notes and give a few examples of how Wittgenstein read Kierkegaard. Whether the texts, according to us, exclude Wittgenstein’s way of reading is another matter! First I want to cite a note from 1937 in which Kierkegaard is explicitly mentioned:

“Kierkegaard writes: If Christianity were so easy and cosy (German: *gemütlich*), why should God in his Scriptures have set Heaven and Earth in motion and threatened *eternal* punishments? – Question: But in that case why is this Scripture so unclear? If we want to warn someone of a terrible danger, do we go about it by telling him a riddle whose solution will be the warning? – But who is to say that the Scripture really is unclear? Isn’t it possible that it was essential in this case to ‘tell a riddle’? And that, on the other hand, giving a more direct warning would necessarily have had the *wrong* effect? God has *four* people recount the life of his incarnate Son, in each case differently and with inconsistencies – but might we not say: It is important that this narra-

tive should not be more than quite averagely historically plausible *just so that* this should not be taken as the essential, decisive thing? So that the *letter* should not be believed more strongly than is proper and the *spirit* may receive its due. I. e. what you are supposed to see cannot be communicated even by the best and most accurate historian; and *therefore* a mediocre account suffices, is even to be preferred. For that too can tell you what you are supposed to be told. (Roughly in the way a mediocre stage set can be better than a sophisticated one, painted trees better than real ones, – because these might distract attention from what matters.)

The Spirit puts what is essential, essential for your life, into these words. The point is precisely that you are only *supposed* to see clearly what appears clearly even in *this* representation. (I am not sure how far all this is exactly in the spirit of Kierkegaard.)”<sup>10</sup>

Wittgenstein is not quite sure whether he catches the spirit of Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard was too deep for him, as he said to Malcolm. Others were also uncertain about his understanding of Kierkegaard. Another American philosopher, O. K. Bouwsma, went for a walk with Wittgenstein in 1949 and tells us that Wittgenstein asked him whether he had read some Kierkegaard. Bouwsma had. Wittgenstein had read some. Kierkegaard is very serious, he said. But he couldn’t read him much. He got hints. He didn’t want another man’s thoughts all chewed. Sometimes a word or two was enough. But Kierkegaard appeared to him almost as a snob, too high for him, without any concern for the details of everyday life. E. g. his prayers. They didn’t move him. But once he read Samuel Johnson’s prayers and meditations. They were food for him. And then Bouwsma ends his note by writing that he wasn’t sure of Wittgenstein’s evaluation of Kierkegaard here.<sup>11</sup>

It is very likely that Bouwsma has not really grasped what Wittgenstein on this occasion said about Kierkegaard. However, his report catches something very essential about Wittgenstein’s way of reading Kierkegaard. Wittgenstein did not adopt or try to reproduce Kierkegaard’s understanding of Christianity. But he got ideas, hints. And maybe he in this way got hold of something very Kierkegaardian!

Let us return to the note of 1937. As far as I can see, Wittgenstein has read *The Instant*. And he has taken a word or two from the second issue of *The Instant*, from the paragraph entitled “If we really are Christians – what then is God?” Kierkegaard’s own answer goes like this:

“He is the most comical being that ever lived, His Word the most comical book that ever has come to light: to set heaven and earth in motion (as He does in his Word), so threaten with hell, with eternal punishment . . . in order to attain what we understand by being Christians (and we indeed are true Christians) – no, nothing so comical ever occurred”.<sup>12</sup>

In Kierkegaard's context the idea is, that if the intent of God's terrifying threats was only that we should make our life on earth as profitable and enjoyable as possible while refraining from ordinary crimes – then God was nothing but a twaddler. What Christianity, true Christianity, amounts to according to *The Instant* is the following of Christ, renunciation, and suffering. Only the following of Christ, the renunciation and the suffering correspond with God's threatening with hell and eternal punishments.

Obviously Wittgenstein lifts the approximate Kierkegaard-quotation out of the context of *The Instant* and gives it a different turn. He does so by asking: But why is this Scripture, that is, the New Testament, so unclear? To Søren Kierkegaard writing *The Instant*, the New Testament is not unclear. Over and over he establishes that one has merely to read the New Testament in order to see what Christianity means – as opposed to official bourgeois “Christendom” (Christened). Wittgenstein for his part argues that the New Testament is unclear. And his point is that it is precisely the New Testament's unclarity and mediocrity as a historical account that serves to divert attention from its own mediocrity and to what matters (worauf es ankommt). But after all, isn't this in agreement with Kierkegaard? Everyone can find out for himself what Christianity is all about, Kierkegaard contends. But what happens when someone reads the New Testament? In another place in the same issue of *The Instant* Kierkegaard describes what happens:

“What Christianity wants is ... the following of Christ. What man does not want is suffering, least of all the kind of suffering which is properly the Christian sort, suffering at the hands of men. So he dispenses with “following”, and consequently with suffering, the peculiarly Christian suffering, and then builds the sepulchers of the prophets. That is one thing. And then he says, lyingly before God, to himself and to others, that he is better than those who killed the prophets. That is the second thing. Hypocrisy first and hypocrisy last – and according to the judgment of Christ ... bloodguilt”.<sup>13</sup>

Cast in Wittgensteinian terms, one could possibly say that such a reader gets stuck in what is unclear; it blinds him and he rejects it as being unclear. It cannot be right that what Christianity demands is imitation and suffering. That does not make sense. That is inhuman. – Admittedly, there *are* differences between Wittgenstein's and Kierkegaard's outlooks here, but maybe they are due to the fact that Wittgenstein approaches Christianity, as it were, from the outside, as the philosopher trying to understand what religion in general (and Christianity in particular) is all about. Kierkegaard on the other hand finds himself in the midst of Christianity as the theologian, or perhaps even dogmatician, who wants to tell others what Christianity amounts to. No doubt Kierkegaard, who knows what Christianity is, will find that Wittgenstein evades the issue.

Wittgenstein, for his part, finds Kierkegaard too deep precisely because he *knows* what Christianity means. Furthermore, if Bouwsma's report is to be trusted, he has called Kierkegaard "too high" or even a snob. It baffles me that he seemingly has used this expression about Kierkegaard. I have only met with it this one time, in Bouwsma's report. However, if he has ever said anything like this, it could be understood as pointing to a certain elitist trend in Kierkegaard's understanding of Christianity. In the first place it is something so extraordinary to be a Christian that it goes against everything that an ordinary human being could wish for his earthly life. Secondly, it is only due to a time-honored theological schooling that one can make such sweeping statements about what a human being wants or does not want. In the final analysis these statements are nothing but variations on the doctrine of original sin. In contrast with Kierkegaard's prayers, Wittgenstein preferred Samuel Johnson's – the famous English literary critic of the 18th century. What is it that attracts him to Johnson's *Prayers and Meditations*? Once he sent Malcolm a copy of this little book and wrote in the accompanying letter: "I wish to say that normally I can't read any printed prayers but that Johnson's impressed me by being *human*".<sup>14</sup> And so they are. By way of an illustration, this is what Johnson wrote the 2nd of January 1781:

"I rose according to my resolution, and am now to begin another year. I hope with amendment of life. – I will not despair. Help me, help me, O my God. My hope is

1 To rise at eight, or sooner

2 To read the Bible through this year in some language

3 To keep a Journal

4 To study Religion

5 To avoid Idleness

6 To (rest of line illegible)

Almighty God, merciful Father, who hast granted me such continuance of Life, that I now see the beginning of another year, look with mercy upon me; as thou grantest encrease of years, grant encrease of Grace. Let me live to repent what I have done amiss, and by thy help so to regulate my future life, that I may obtain mercy when I appear before thee, through the merits of Jesus Christ. Enable me O Lord to do my duty with a quiet mind; and take not from me thy Holy Spirit, but protect and bless me, for the sake of Jesus Christ. Amen".<sup>15</sup>

It appears, to me at least, that one cannot find examples of a corresponding naive everyday piety in Søren Kierkegaard. But at the same time Kierkegaard is also "deep" according to Wittgenstein. And "deep" always has positive connotations in Wittgenstein's terminology. But "deep" can also be graded. In 1948 Wittgenstein wrote to Malcolm:

“I’ve never read ‘The Works of Love’. Kierkegaard is far too deep for me, anyhow. He bewilders me without working the good effects which he would in *deeper* souls”.<sup>16</sup>

Apart from my believing that Wittgenstein had in fact read the *Works of Love*, I would suggest the following interpretation of this citation: deep persons are persons who have really understood the basic existential or philosophical questions. Kierkegaard was such a person. But with his characteristic modesty (always bordering on its opposite) Wittgenstein will not call himself “deep” as Kierkegaard was deep. He has touched upon the same questions as Kierkegaard, but he has not come as far in his understanding of them. In particular, he has not come as far religiously as Kierkegaard. Immediately after the note about the unclarity of Scripture, with its references to Kierkegaard, this one follows:

“In religion every level of devoutness must have its appropriate form of expression which has no sense at a lower level. This doctrine, which means something at a higher level, is null and void for someone who is still at the lower level; he *can* only understand it *wrongly* and so these words are *not* valid for such a person.

For instance, at my level the Pauline doctrine of predestination is ugly nonsense, irreligiousness. Hence it is not suitable for me, since the only use I could make of the picture offered would be a wrong one. If it is a good and godly picture, then it is so for someone at a quite different level, who must use it in his life in a way completely different from anything that would be possible for me”.<sup>17</sup>

This note should not, in my opinion, be read as evidence of some kind of a theory of stages in Wittgenstein. In the original German the note opens in the subjunctive mood (*müsste es so sein*). It is something like a thought experiment. And what the thought experiment amounts to is that one can imagine that, when Wittgenstein does not understand, for instance, Paul’s doctrine of predestination, it stems from his standing at a lower religious level than Paul. Similarly, generally speaking, he stands at a lower level than Kierkegaard in religious matters. By the way, the implication of this thought experiment would seem to be that one is saved at one’s level of belief. Martensen and “Christendom” at theirs and Kierkegaard and the true Christians at theirs. Not a very Kierkegaardian idea, but very much in line with a postmodern way of thinking! At any rate, I for one, would not dare to grade Wittgenstein in relation to Kierkegaard or vice versa. Rather, they find themselves in different positions and bring different aspects to the fore. Listen to the following note:

“Christianity is not based on a historical truth; rather, it offers us a (historical) narrative and says: now believe! But not, believe this narrati-

ve with the belief appropriate to a historical narrative, rather: believe, through thick and thin, which you can only do as result of a life. *Here you have a narrative; don't take the same attitude to it as you take to other historical narratives! Make a quite different place in your life for it. – There is nothing paradoxical about that!*"<sup>18</sup>

When one reads this note, it is difficult not to be reminded of *Philosophical Fragments* and of the question on the title page:

“Is an historical point of departure possible for an eternal consciousness; how can such a point of departure have any other than a merely historical interest; is it possible to base an eternal happiness upon historical knowledge?”

I cannot help thinking that during a period in 1937 – possibly when he was living alone in a cabin in Norway – Wittgenstein must have been reading Kierkegaard or at least occupied himself with his thoughts. But Wittgenstein answers differently from Johannes Climacus. Or does he? Let us take a closer look at Wittgenstein's answer. In the first place Wittgenstein does not deny the historicity of Christianity. Christianity offers us a historical narrative (*Nachricht*), he writes. We might add: about Jesus of Nazareth. But Christianity is not based on historical truths about Jesus of Nazareth. The belief that Christianity demands is not a belief appropriate to a historical narrative. You are not asked to believe that Jesus lived, died and rose from the dead in the way that it is reported of him in the New Testament. Christianity demands a belief through thick and thin, and this is something altogether different from believing a historical report. One can believe a historical report. Moreover it is possible that such a belief will have some role to fulfill in a person's life. For example, I am in a better position to understand the Americans' perpetual fear of the Russians when I know – or believe in – the historical report that the Americans in 1918 sent an expeditionary force to Siberia in order to combat the Bolshevik revolution. But the kind of belief that Christianity demands has a completely different place in my life, or else it is not Christian belief. To believe through thick and thin is the result of a life, of a totally different way of living. What such a life looks like Wittgenstein does not tell us. But as a matter of principle it might very well be a life of imitation and suffering, as Kierkegaard depicted it. Note, in this connection, Wittgenstein's own words, quoted above this article: we are not here in order to have a good time.

Now for Kierkegaard's answer. As I said in the beginning there are at least nine different ways of reading *Philosophical Fragments*. I do not pretend to master any of them. But everyone will agree that, according to Kierkegaard's answer, there can be a historical point of departure for an eternal consciousness, that it can be of more than historical interest if one speaks of the Christ-event, but that one cannot base an eternal hap-



piness on historical knowledge, but only on belief. “Faith in the eminent sense” as he says. Through all this there is seemingly no disagreement between Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard or there need not be. It even looks as if Wittgenstein has borrowed his distinction between belief in a historical report and that kind of belief demanded by Christianity from Climacus or Kierkegaard. In *Philosophical Fragments* we find the same distinction between “faith in the direct and ordinary sense (belief)”, which relates to history, and Christian belief, which is “faith in the eminent sense”. But why is it that Wittgenstein says, “there is nothing *paradoxical* about it”? Does he reject Kierkegaard’s talk of the paradox, thereby showing, according to Kierkegaard, that he is “like a lover without passion: a paltry mediocrity”.<sup>19</sup> It is impossible to speak about the belief, which Christianity demands, without speaking of the paradox. As Climacus writes:

“But in that case is not Faith as paradoxical as the Paradox? Precisely so; how else could it have the Paradox for its objects, and be happy in its relation to the Paradox? Faith is itself a miracle, and all that holds true of the Paradox also holds true of Faith”.<sup>20</sup>

And then compare Wittgenstein’s “there is nothing *paradoxical* about it (daran ist nichts *Paradoxes!*)”! My guess is, but here I can only offer a guess, that what Wittgenstein wants to say is this: It is all very well with the God in time and the moment, the condition that has to be given, etc., etc. You might call it a paradox and belief itself a paradox. But there is nothing paradoxical about believing through thick and thin and as the result of a life. And yet this is the belief that Christianity demands. At one level Wittgenstein might be right. But if the problem that has to be solved is the problem of contemporaneity – and this is what *Philosophical Fragments* is also about – how can one then evade the paradox? Allow me to take a word or two from Kierkegaard, or rather from Hermann Deuser<sup>21</sup>, using them as “hints”: Maybe the paradox is necessary in a wider sense if one has to live one’s life in such a way that one is both contemporary to and in solidarity with one’s own times – and yet is able to retain a permanent critical distance to them, as Kierkegaard was and as Wittgenstein in his own way also was. One of Wittgenstein’s famous statements from *Philosophical Investigations* tells us, that “(philosophy) leaves everything as it is” (# 124). It does sound as a legitimation of status quo, as a very conservative statement. But Wittgenstein was at the same time in every respect a completely independent person – this is why he did not want another man’s thoughts “all chewed”! – and, for all his solidarity with his own times, he criticized them without mercy – again just like Kierkegaard did.

Another note, still from 1937, deals once more with the relation between history and belief. It opens like this:

“Queer as it sounds: The historical accounts in the Gospels might, historically speaking, be demonstrably false and yet belief would lose nothing by this: *not*, however, because it concerns ‘universal truths of reason’! Rather, because historical proof (the historical proof-game) is irrelevant to belief. This message (the Gospels) is seized on by men believably (i. e. lovingly). *That* is the certainty characterizing this particular acceptance-as-true, not something *else*”.<sup>22</sup>

The line of thought is the same as before. The ‘universal truths of reason’ (allgemeine Vernunftwahrheiten) refer of course to Lessing, as does the question on Climacus’ title page. What is new is that now we are being told what it means ‘to believe’ namely ‘to love’ (lieben). That belief equals love – this Wittgenstein could have learned from Kierkegaard (cf. *Works of Love*), even if he did not need to do so. After all, as the many Scripture-quotations in *Works of Love* show, it is a dominant theme in the *New Testament*. But let us see how Wittgenstein develops this equation of belief and love in the note that follows:

“What inclines even me to believe in Christ’s Resurrection? It is as though I play with the thought. – If he did not rise from the dead, then he is decomposed in the grave like any other man. *He is dead and decomposed*. In that case he is a teacher like any other and can no longer *help*; and once more we are orphaned and alone. So we have to content ourselves with wisdom and speculation. We are in a sort of hell where we can do nothing but dream, roofed in, as it were, and cut off from heaven. But if I am to be REALLY saved, – what I need is *certainty* – not wisdom, dreams or speculations – and this certainty is faith. And faith is faith in what is needed by my *heart*, my *soul*, not my speculative intelligence. For it is my soul with its passions, as it were with its flesh and blood, that has to be saved, not my abstract mind. Perhaps we can say: Only *love* can believe the Resurrection. Or: It is *love* that believes the Resurrection”.<sup>23</sup>

Belief in the Resurrection thus has nothing to do with wisdom or speculation. It is not my abstract mind, my intellect, that needs to be redeemed. What needs redemption is the soul with all its passions. Therefore the Resurrection does not redeem through an act of the intellect, but through passion – or through love. Only love can believe in the Resurrection, only love redeems. Judging from the way Wittgenstein expresses himself in this note, he does not have this love. He does not believe in the Resurrection, he only plays with the thought. And as an autobiographical observation this may be true. At any rate Wittgenstein was not a believer in any ordinary sense. On the other hand it seems to me that he comes very close to Kierkegaard’s thoughts in this note. And he comes even closer in a note written in 1946:

“I believe that one of the things Christianity says is that sound doctrines are all useless. That you have to change your *life*. (Or the *direction* of your life.)

It says that wisdom is all cold; and that you can no more use it for setting your life to rights than you can forge iron when it is *cold*. The point is that a sound doctrine need not *take hold* of you; you can follow it as you would a doctor’s prescription. – But here you need something to move you and turn you in a new direction. – (I.e. this is how I understand it.) Once you have been turned round, you must *stay* turned round.

Wisdom is passionless. But faith by contrast is what Kierkegaard calls a *passion*.<sup>24</sup>

The belief which Christianity demands is love or a passion that changes the direction of one’s life. Even if Wittgenstein apparently rejects his use of the paradox and does not let God become “the middle term” as in *Works of Love*<sup>25</sup>, Kierkegaard could have had no objections. Belief as a passion that changes the direction of life – or belief as following of Christ – that is one of the hints Wittgenstein has gotten from Kierkegaard. Very likely he has gotten other hints as well. In yet another posthumous collection of notes, *Zettel*, Wittgenstein writes:

““You can’t hear God speak to someone else, you can hear him only if you are being addressed.” – That is a grammatical remark”.<sup>26</sup>

The last phrase, “that is a grammatical remark”, expresses one of Wittgenstein’s basic thoughts, namely, that in each of the many languages we speak, there is a certain grammar, certain rules for how we can put words together. If we transgress the rules or mix them up, our speech becomes incomprehensible or – at best – comical. When we in Danish ask, “Which is the highest: The Round Tower or the High C?” this is precisely such an incomprehensible, but comical sentence. We have two languages, or “language games”, as Wittgenstein also says. In one of them we can combine the word “high” (or “tall”) with words that designate buildings and affix a unit of measure, such as metre. In the other we again have the word “high” but here it can only be combined with words for notes and not with metre. The task of the philosopher, as conceived by Wittgenstein in his later philosophy, is to describe the various grammars and keep them apart. Among our many languages, we also have a religious, and in particular Christian, language. Possibly it is the most important of them all since it has to do with the direction of our lives. This, I think, is how Wittgenstein thought of the matter. But this language has its own distinct grammar. And according to the rules of Christianity or of the Christian faith, one cannot hear God speak to another. It is always *you* who are concerned. *Tua res agitur*, as the Ancients said. God does not lay his claims on others or, if he does, you – as a Christian – know

nothing about them. Therefore it is in principle always unchristian when people, who confess themselves to be Christians, venture to speak on others' behalf about their obligations. It is you on whom the claims are laid. You are the one who is being addressed. Wittgenstein puts his grammatical remark in quotation marks. Consequently my guess is that he might be alluding to Kierkegaard. Though Kierkegaard never uses this precise wording, the idea itself can be found in many places – for instance in the *Works of Love* which I therefore feel certain that Wittgenstein has read, even if he has once more only gotten hints. One might think of Kierkegaard's discussion of the Pharisee who asked about his neighbour and got caught in Christ's answer which set the task:

“... divine authority ... is like the single eye; it constrains the person addressed to see who is talking with him and then fastens its piercing look on him and says with this glance, “It is to you whom this is said”.<sup>27</sup>

Obviously Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein are situated differently. Kierkegaard is in no doubt that this is how God or his Son, Christ, speaks. Wittgenstein assumes the role of the impartial spectator. From the outside he observes how God is spoken of in the Christian language. Or of how God addresses one according to the rules of the Christian language game. But if we were to imagine Wittgenstein observing Kierkegaard's attack on “Christendom”, he undoubtedly would have been on Kierkegaard's side. He would have condemned “Christendom” just as forcefully as Kierkegaard did when he ridiculed the talk about our all being Christians. But he would have done it as a philosopher, because Martensen and all the rest were transgressing the rules of the Christian grammar – he would not have done it in the name of Christianity itself. This is the meaning of his famous statement that “the philosopher's treatment of a question is like the treatment of an illness” (*Philosophical Investigations* # 255). This is what he meant when he compared philosophical methods with therapies (# 133). The philosopher is like a therapist who clears away the bad habits of his patient, teaching him to assume the right positions. Or teaching him how to use his language correctly. This, one might say, gives the philosopher a wider field of activity than the theologian, for there are innumerable languages and forms of languages. But it also points up a convergence in the nature of their activities. One could ask what right the philosopher has to criticize and treat people's use of language, regarding them as though they were ill? Why should people not be allowed to confuse their grammars? When Kierkegaard criticizes, say, Martensen's grammar, he does so with reference to the God in time. The philosopher has no such authority. As a matter of fact he can only rely on what everyone agrees upon. This is what Wittgenstein brings out when he writes, “If one tried to advance *these* in philosophy, it would never be possible to debate them, because everyone would

agree to them” (*Philosophical Investigations* # 128). This agreement, however, can never be reached. Wittgenstein writes:

“The problems arising through a misinterpretation of our forms of language have the character of *depth*. They are deep disquietudes; their roots are as deep in us as the forms of our language and their significance is as great as the importance of our language. – Let us ask ourselves: why do we feel a grammatical joke to be *deep*? (And that is what the depth of philosophy is.)” (# 111).

I don’t know whether one will feel the joke about the Round Tower and the High C as being deep (apart from the fact that it is about height!). But let us assume that we do. In what does its depth consist? It consists in the confusing of two quite basic human activities – that of building a house in which to live, and that of playing, dancing, or singing. If one built houses the way one plays, not too seriously, not too scrupulously – like children building houses out of cardboard – well, one could not survive in such buildings. But neither could we survive if we, in contrast, made our playing, dancing and singing into something as serious and, figuratively speaking, as quadrangular as houses. Yet this is the kind of confusion or misinterpretation of forms of language that we involve ourselves in time and again. Work becomes its own goal, for instance, not a means of earning one’s living. One’s residence becomes a symbol of status, not a place to live in. The song does not become a spontaneous expression of joy but something to buy on records or to watch on TV. As long as things continue that way, there will be problems for the philosopher to deal with. And behind all those problems, or even deeper down, there lurks the problem of the direction of our lives. The theologian’s problem!

I have come to the end of my paper, even if I could easily produce more illustrations of Wittgenstein’s direct or indirect use of hints from Kierkegaard. However, in concluding I would like to put one question to Wittgenstein or to Kierkegaard behind him. Is it true that one can only hear God speaking when it is oneself that is addressed? In my view Wittgenstein, and Kierkegaard before him, have reduced the scope of the Christian grammar with remarks such as this. I do not deny that Christianity has to do with “the single one”. What I am asking is whether it has *only* to do with the single one? If such were the case, if one could not hear God speak to anyone other than oneself, then I would have no concern with, say, Apartheid in South Africa. Whether God speaks to the black people or to the white people I would not know, as long as I was not being directly addressed. But that does not ring true to me. I can hear God speaking to Alan Boesak or Desmond Tutu or anybody else. I can do so because I am the celebrated single one *only* by virtue of my interaction with all the other single ones and, for that matter, with nature around us. I can hear God speaking to anyone who rises against the maltreatment of human beings or nature, for we have a common cause. To speak in Witt-

gensteinian terms, “deep” matters are at stake – our existence as human beings as well as nature’s existence. Everybody can join the game. Indeed, everybody has already joined the game. There is no reason for grading our different “depths”. Rather it is a matter of being “deep” and confronting the problems – or, as Kierkegaard put it, being frivolous and seeing all difficulties disappear.<sup>28</sup>

1. Paper read in the Søren Kierkegaard Society Copenhagen January 1988.
2. M. O’C Drury, “Some Notes on Conversations with Wittgenstein”, In Rush Rhees, *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, Oxford-New York. Oxford University Press, 1984, p. 88.
3. *Is There a Text in this Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980, p. 345.
4. op. cit. p. 355.
5. To borrow an expression from David Tracy. See his *The Analogical Imagination. Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*, London: SCM Press, 1981, esp. chapter 3.
6. See Benny Schuster, “Tavshedens arkitektur”, In Hans Hauge and Schuster (eds.) *Essays om Babel*, Århus: ANIS, 1986, pp. 187–217.
7. W. W. Bartley III, *Wittgenstein*, LaSalle, Illinois: Open Court, 1985 (1973).
8. Bartley, op. cit. p. 163.
9. Norman Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein. A Memoir*, London: Oxford University Press, 1966 (1958), p. 71.
10. *Culture and Value*, transl. Peter Winch, Oxford: Blackwell, 1980, p. 31f.
11. O. K. Bouwsma, *Wittgenstein. Conversations 1949–1951*. Ed. J. L. Craft and Ronald E. Hustwit. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1986, p. 46.
12. *Kierkegaard’s Attack Upon “Christendom” 1854–55*, transl. by Walter Lowrie, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1968, p. 110.
13. op. cit. p. 123.
14. Malcolm, op. cit. p. 44.
15. The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson, vol. I, *Diaries, Prayers, and Annals*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958, p. 303.
16. Malcolm, op. cit. p. 75.
17. op. cit. p. 32.
18. *ibid.*
19. *Philosophical Fragments*, transl. by David F. Swenson, revised by Howard Hong, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1962, p. 11.
- 20.- op. cit. p. 81.
21. Hermann Deuser, *Søren Kierkegaard. Die paradoxe Dialektik des politischen Christen*, München-Mainz: Kaiser-Grünewald 1974.
22. *ibid.*
23. op. cit. p. 33.
24. op. cit. p. 53.
25. *Works of Love*, transl. by Howard and Edna Hong, New York: Harper Torchbooks 1862, p. 113.
26. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1967, # 717. Cf. Jens Glebe-Møller, “Two Views of Religion in Wittgenstein”, In Richard H. Bell, ed., *The Grammar of the Heart*, San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988, p. 98f.
27. op. cit. p. 104f.
28. *The Instant*, p. 265.