John Calvin, Myth and Reality

IMAGES AND IMPACT
OF GENEVA'S REFORMER

Papers of the
2009 Calvin Studies
Society Colloquium

Edited by
AMY NELSON BURNETT

In memory of Robert M. Kingdon (1927–2010)

10

Respect for the Word

What Calvin and Wittgenstein Had against Images

CONSTANTIN FASOLT

If you offer a sacrifice and are pleased with yourself about it, both
you and your sacrifice will be cursed. The *edifice of your pride* has
to be dismantled. And that is terribly hard work.

All that philosophy can do is to destroy idols.

—LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN

John Calvin, the sixteenth-century theologian, and Ludwig Wittgenstein,
the twentieth-century philosopher, are not exactly known for having
much in common.[1] Their juxtaposition may therefore strike the reader

as far-fetched.[2] The purpose of this chapter is to show that, on the contrary, reading them side by side opens an approach to the core of their thinking that would be difficult to find by reading either one in isolation from the other.

The core I have in mind is sketched in the title of this chapter: Calvin and Wittgenstein both had respect for the word, and they both had something against images. But this sketch is very rough indeed. It would be tempting to try and make it more detailed by delving straight into the writings of our authors. Tempting, but unlikely to succeed. What Calvin shares with Wittgenstein departs so widely from our most deeply rooted ways of thinking that it is bound to remain invisible without sufficient preparation. I should therefore like to start with the deeply rooted ways of thinking from which they both departed. Let me refer to those ways as conventional wisdom.

Conventional wisdom holds that I know nothing better than myself. My body is *my* body, and my mind is *my* mind. I know what I feel; I know what I think; and I know it better than anything else. Whatever I happen to think about the external world may be subject to doubt. But the knowledge I derive from introspection is different. I think, therefore I am. That much, conventional wisdom says, is absolutely certain.

From this certainty conventional wisdom infers a number of corollaries. Let me spell out some of the most important. First, con-

2. A review of the scholarship would corroborate that supposition. I have found no publications examining Calvin and Wittgenstein side by side. The subject heading "religion and religious belief" in Frongia and McGuinness, *Wittgenstein*, 398, covering the period from 1914 to 1987, lists no less than 126 books and articles on some aspect of Wittgenstein's relationship to religion, and the index of names features a good many references to figures like St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, and Kierkegaard. Calvin, however, is not mentioned. Searching for abstracts or titles of articles combining the terms "Calvin" and "Wittgenstein" on 16 March 2009 in JSTOR and the American Theological Library Association's religion database online yielded a single result: an article by Morse, "Raising God's Eyebrows," 39–49, which turns out to focus on Karl Barth. Full-text searches yield many more results, but only because they include references to Calvin College or to authors like Calvin Normore and Michael Calvin McGee. In order to compensate, however slightly, for the distance separating scholarship on Calvin from scholarship on Wittgenstein, I will take advantage of the footnotes to quote both Calvin and Wittgenstein at some length. I realize that experts on either side of the divide will be distraught by the degree to which quotations taken out of context from a limited range of sources can mislead unwary readers on the other side. I hope they will forgive me for having found no better way of making up for failing to do what I cannot do here and do not plan to do later, which is, to turn this chapter into a book.

ventional wisdom finds that there is some kind of gap or boundary or veil between myself and the external world. Unlike my thoughts and feelings, the external world is therefore not immediately present to my self. That is the reason *why* the knowledge I have of the external world is not as certain as the knowledge I derive from introspection.

Second, knowledge of the external world therefore requires some means with which to cross the boundary that lies between it and my self. Those means have been called many different names: ideas, sensations, immediate sense data, mental representations, and so on. But whatever the differences between the names, their basic function is the same: they provide an intermediary third between my self and the external world. Without that intermediary, my self would have no knowledge of the external world.

Third, my knowledge of the external world is therefore only indirect. Regardless of how well my ideas or my sensations succeed in representing the external world to me, they do not abolish the distinction between that world and its representation. What I actually know, conventional wisdom maintains, is therefore not the external world itself but only its representation. I study the phenomena as they appear to me. Reality as such is placed beyond my ken.

Fourth, my knowledge of what goes on in the minds of other people is even more indirect. The immediate knowledge that other people have of their own thoughts and feelings is utterly concealed from me. I know about the way they experience *their* thoughts and feelings only by analogy with my experience of *my* thoughts and feelings. That makes it possible to wonder if they even have the same thoughts and feelings that I have, or if they merely use the same words for completely different experiences. Conventional wisdom treats this question as both valid and impossible to answer. It is valid because I know about the selves of others only from their words. It is impossible to answer because their real thoughts and feelings are known only to themselves.

Fifth, it follows that language is merely an artificial system of more-or-less arbitrary signs whose meaning depends upon the things they signify. A chair is a chair, whether I call it *chair* or *Stuhl* or *cathedra* or *sedes*. And my thoughts and feelings are whatever my thoughts and feelings happen to be, regardless of the words in which they are expressed. Language merely serves as a channel for the communication *of* ideas, a system of signs referring *to* the material world, a symbolic structure of

signification *about* reality. Its workings need to be explained in terms of the underlying realities to which it refers and from which it takes its meaning.

Conventional wisdom thus treats language as an epiphenomenon. What is basic about language is nothing in language itself. Basic is the underlying reality. Reality can of course be conceived in many different ways. The most familiar ways are three: dualism, which divides reality into ideas (mental, cultural, abstract) and matter (physical, natural, concrete); materialism, which views ideas as an effect of matter; and idealism, which views matter as a reflection of ideas. These three basic possibilities have given rise to many conflicts and permutations. But notwithstanding the differences between them, dualism, materialism, and idealism are in principle agreed on this: however the problems they raise may eventually be solved, they cannot possibly by solved by studying the language in which we talk about reality. They must be solved by reference to reality itself.

This, then, is conventional wisdom.[3] It tells us that the self is both privileged and lonely. The self is privileged because there is nothing as certain as the knowledge the self has of its own thoughts and feelings. The self is lonely because it has no equally certain knowledge of the external world. Its knowledge of the external world is only indirect. It is simply indirect for the physical world, because the self knows the external world only by means of mental representations. It is doubly indirect for other minds, because the self knows about them only by analogy with itself. Conventional wisdom concludes that language is a marvelous but arbitrary invention that allows the self to modify but not transcend its state of isolation.

I am confident that Calvin would have found it difficult to agree with any of this. The points of disagreement are so obvious that it will be enough for now merely to list the most important. In the first place, Calvin believes that human beings stand in dire need of salvation because they lack the very thing that conventional wisdom regards as their

---

3. Readers will notice that what I call conventional wisdom has obvious parallels in the thought of Descartes, Locke, Hume, Kant, and, more broadly speaking, in the main strands of modern philosophy. I have refrained from documenting those parallels because it would distract from the point, which is conceptual, not historical, at least not in the usual sense of "historical." Readers may also wonder just what gives me the right to describe conventional wisdom as I do. That is a question I cannot answer here.

most salient property: self-knowledge. As far as Calvin is concerned, whatever knowledge the self can have of itself is not only uncertain but downright impossible without true knowledge of God; and what is worse, true knowledge of God is impossible to obtain without true knowledge of self.[4] This may seem to be a point of mere epistemology. But it is something altogether different. It constitutes a paradox that goes to the foundations of what it means to be a human being. It is the first point Calvin makes in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*: the reason *why* man stands in need of salvation, the beginning from which everything else follows and on which in some sense everything else depends.[5]

In the second place, the knowledge of God that Calvin regards as a necessary condition for true self-knowledge is not to be had from

---

4. Battles, *Institutes*, 35–37 (I.i.1): "Without knowledge of self there is no knowledge of God," and 37–38 (I.i.2): "Without knowledge of God there is no knowledge of self." Calvin's opening words are as follows: "Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. But, while joined by many bonds, which one precedes and brings forth the other is not easy to discern" (Battles, *Institutes*, 35). On 37–38 he clarifies this: "It is certain that man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God's face, and then descends from contemplating him to scrutinize himself. For we always seem to ourselves righteous and upright and wise and holy—this pride is innate in all of us—unless by clear proofs we stand convinced of our own unrighteousness, foulness, folly, and impurity. Moreover, we are not thus convinced if we look merely to ourselves and not also to the Lord, who is the sole standard by which this judgment must be measured. For, because all of us are inclined by nature to hypocrisy, a kind of empty image of righteousness in place of righteousness itself abundantly satisfies us." For a first approach to Calvin see McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin*; and Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin*. On the question of images in particular, see Zachman, *Image and Word*.

5. Book 1 of the *Institutes* thus deals with "The Knowledge of God the Creator," book 2 with "The Knowledge of God the Redeemer," book 3 with "The Way in Which We Receive the Grace of Christ," and book 4 with "The External Means or Aids by Which God Invites Us into the Society of Christ and Holds Us Therein." As the editors point out at the beginning of book 1, 35 n. 1, "The word 'knowledge' in the title, chosen rather than 'being' or 'existence' of God, emphasizes the centrality of revelation in both the structure and the content of Calvin's theology. Similarly, the term 'Creator,' subsuming the doctrines of Trinity, Creation, and Providence, stresses God's revealing work or acts rather than God in himself. The latter is more prominent in Scholastic doctrines of God, both medieval and later 'Calvinist.' Despite the titles of Books I and II, Calvin's epistemology is not fully developed in the *Institutes* until Book III, 'The Way in Which We Receive the Grace of Christ.'" Cf. especially the meaning of knowledge in faith, III.ii passim.

introspection or observation or sense impressions, let alone from their mental representations. It is to be had from but one single place, and that of course is Scripture.[6] Scripture, in a famous metaphor, serves as a kind of spectacles with whose help human beings can see clearly what they cannot discern so long as they look only into themselves or at the signs of God's presence in the created universe.[7] Scripture authenticates itself.[8] The certainty of knowledge therefore depends on Scripture, not on the self. Only Scripture offers the knowledge leading to salvation.

Language, therefore, is anything but a system of more-or-less arbitrary signs whose workings need to be explained in terms of the underlying realities to which it refers and from which it takes its meaning. It is the other way around: the underlying realities need to be explained in terms of language. For language is the means by which God created the world in the first place, and by which he reveals the saving truth to man. It is not an invention at all, not even an invention of God. Language is in and of itself divine and uncreated, the eternal Word, the Word spoken

by God, the Son of God the Father, the second Person of the Trinity.[9] If Scripture is the set of spectacles with through which to learn about God, the Word confirmed by the Spirit is the image of God himself.[10] Human language, however confused it may have become since the tower of Babel, is inconceivable apart from that foundation.

So Calvin's disagreement with conventional wisdom is obvious enough. But it is not so obvious what to make of that disagreement. One could of course say that Calvin was concerned with salvation, that his mind was on the supernatural, and that his domain was Christian faith. One could, in other words, draw a sharp line between faith and reason, and put Calvin on one side of that line. If one did so, one would find oneself in excellent intellectual company.[11] But one would also

---

6. Battles, *Institutes*, 69–71 (I.vi.1): "God bestows the actual knowledge of himself upon us only in Scripture."

7. Ibid.: "Just as old bleary-eyed men and those with weak vision, if you thrust before them a most beautiful volume, even if they recognize it to be some sort of writing, yet can scarcely construe two words, but with the aid of spectacles will begin to read distinctly; so Scripture, gathering up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in our minds, having dispersed our dullness, clearly shows us the true God. This, therefore, is a special gift, where God, to instruct the church, not merely uses mute teachers but also opens his own most hallowed lips. Not only does he teach the elect to look upon a god, but also shows himself as the God upon whom they are to look. He has from the beginning maintained this plan for his church, so that besides these common proofs he also put forth his Word, which is a more direct and more certain mark whereby he is to be recognized."

8. Ibid., 80–81 (I.vii.5): "Scripture bears its own authentication," esp. 80: "Let this point therefore stand: that those whom the Holy Spirit has inwardly taught truly rest upon Scripture, and that Scripture indeed is self-authenticated; hence, it is not right to subject it to proof and reasoning. And the certainty it deserves with us, it attains by the testimony of the Spirit. For even if it wins reverence for itself by its own majesty, it seriously affects us only when it is sealed upon our hearts through the Spirit. Therefore, illumined by his power, we believe neither by our own nor by anyone else's judgment that Scripture is from God; but above human judgment we affirm with utter certainty (just as if we were gazing upon the majesty of God himself) that it has flowed to us from the very mouth of God by the ministry of men. We seek no proofs, no marks of genuineness upon which our judgment may lean; but we subject our judgment and wit to it as to a thing far beyond any guesswork! This we do, not as persons accustomed to seize upon some unknown thing, which, under closer scrutiny, displeases them, but fully conscious that we hold the unassailable truth!"

9. Ibid., 129–30 (I.xiii.7): "The deity of the Word," and 130–31 (I.xiii.8): "The eternity of the Word," esp. 129: "'Word' means the everlasting Wisdom, residing with God, from which both all oracles and prophecies go forth. For as Peter testifies, the ancient prophets spoke by the Spirit of Christ just as much as the apostles did [1 Pet 1:10–11; cf. 2 Pet 1:21], and all who thereafter ministered the heavenly doctrine. Indeed, because Christ had not yet been manifested, it is necessary to understand the Word as begotten of the Father before time [cf. Ecclus. 24:14]. But if that Spirit, whose organs were the prophets, was the Spirit of the Word, we infer without any doubt that he was truly God. And Moses clearly teaches this in the creation of the universe, setting forth this Word as intermediary. For why does he expressly tell us that God in his individual acts of creation spoke, Let this or that be done [Gen. 1] unless so that the unsearchable glory of God may shine forth in his image? It would be easy for censorious babblers to get around this, saying that the Word is to be understood as a bidding and a command. But the apostles are better interpreters, who teach that the world was made through the Son, and that he upholds all things by his powerful word [Heb 1:2–3]. For here we see the Word understood as the order or mandate of the Son, who is himself the eternal and essential Word of the Father."

10. Ibid., 95–96 (I.ix.3): "Word and Spirit belong inseparably together"; esp. 95: "By a kind of mutual bond the Lord has joined together the certainty of his Word and of his Spirit so that the perfect religion of the Word may abide in our minds when the Spirit, who causes us to contemplate God's face, shines; and that we in turn may embrace the Spirit with no fear of being deceived when we recognize him in his own image, namely, in the Word."

11. I cannot think of any major modern thinker known for having engaged with Calvin as a rational intellectual worth taking seriously. Enlightenment thinkers are largely defined by breaking intellectual ground outside the limits of the confessions. Rousseau owes an obvious debt to Calvinism but writes in opposition to it. Marx, Durkheim, Troeltsch, and Weber, even at their most sympathetic to religion, stand at a critical distance from it. The only plausible exceptions may be thinkers like Schleiermacher, Barth, or Niebuhr, who are themselves primarily regarded as religious thinkers.

banish Calvin from the realm of reason and consign him to the realm of irrationality. One would turn him either into an object of purely historical interest, worthy of having his thoughts recorded but not of having them taken seriously in their own right; or into a theologian worth being taken seriously only by other theologians, by Calvinists, or by people willing to abandon reason for the sake of something unintelligible called religious faith. One would, in other words, beg the question *why* Calvin disagreed with conventional wisdom.

That is one of the main reasons why I think it is useful to take a closer look at Wittgenstein.[12] For Wittgenstein disagreed with conventional wisdom just as sharply as Calvin did. But of course he did not do so because he was a theologian, let alone a Calvinist. The form of reasoning he developed in the *Philosophical Investigations* is utterly modern and just about as far removed from the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* as could be imagined. That combination of a shared hostility to conventional wisdom and utterly different forms of reasoning presents a golden opportunity to grasp Calvin's meaning without putting him on one side of a line dividing faith from reason. It thus promises a means of rescuing Calvin from the historical and theological ghetto in which his rejection of images is difficult to understand as anything other than a kind of primitive spiritual taboo with a significance limited to a certain historical period and credible only for the members of a certain religious tribe; it allows Calvin's caution about images to stand as a particularly salient manifestation of a perfectly reasonable disagreement with the condition of humanity proposed by conventional wisdom.

In order to make good on that promise, I should begin by pointing out that there is at least one kind of image on which Wittgenstein launched as ferocious an assault as any iconoclast ever did on images of God or the Holy Trinity, namely, the mental representations that conventional wisdom regards as the necessary means by which we learn

about the external world. His assault is all the more remarkable in that earlier in his life, in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Wittgenstein himself had offered perhaps the most elegant attempt any philosopher ever made to prove the truth of what is often called the picture theory of propositions: the theory that knowledge consists of propositions modeling reality like pictures of the reality they represent. Readers of Wittgenstein disagree about the meaning of the picture theory of propositions and about whether he actually endorsed it or merely advanced it tongue in cheek, as it were, in order to demonstrate its absurdity.[13] But no one doubts that he broke with it in the *Philosophical Investigations*. Throughout the *Philosophical Investigations*, he attacked the notion that our knowledge of the external world consists of mental representations and ridiculed introspection as a method for discovering their nature and function. He argued that most of the time there are no mental representations to be found at all, and when there are, they are beside the point.

Two objections Wittgenstein raised to the picture theory of propositions may be worth special mention. One is this: How could a picture possibly represent negation? How could it possibly explain our ability to tell that something is *not* the case? I have no trouble understanding what it means to say, "this table does *not* have five legs." But what intermediary form of representation could represent the nonexistence of those five legs to me? Whatever image you may conjure up in order to fulfill that purpose would have to represent *something*. It could not possibly represent *nothing*.[14]

The other objection is that the supposition of a picture's representing reality to me leads to an infinite regress. If my mind has no immediate access to reality but only access mediated by a picture representing the reality, how can it have immediate access to the picture? Would it

---

12. On Wittgenstein in general see the biography by Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein*; and the introduction by McGinn, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Wittgenstein*. Serious readers of the *Philosophical Investigations* will want to consult Baker and Hacker, *An Analytical Commentary*, a major scholarly accomplishment distinguished by equal degrees of thoroughness and lucidity but, like everything else in Wittgenstein scholarship, far from uncontroversial. For readers interested in looking more closely at the scholarship on Wittgenstein's place in theology and the philosophy of religion, one may recommend Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein*; Crosson, *The Autonomy of Religious Belief*; and Phillips and von de Ruhr, *Religion and Wittgenstein's Legacy*.

13. For a collection of essays laying out the terms of the debate, see Crary and Read, *The New Wittgenstein*.

14. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, henceforth cited as PI, § 429: "The agreement, the harmony, of thought and reality consists in this: if I say falsely that something is *red*, then, for all that, it isn't *red*. And when I want to explain the word 'red' to someone, in the sentence 'That is not red,' I do it by pointing to something red." PI § 443: "'The red which you imagine is surely not the same (not the same thing) as the red which you see in front of you; so how can you say that it is what you imagined?'—But haven't we an analogous case with the propositions 'Here is a red patch' and 'Here there isn't a red patch'? The word 'red' occurs in both; so this word cannot indicate the presence of something red."

not rather need a further intermediary image to mediate between the picture and myself, at least in order to distinguish representations of reality from mere illusions? Would it not need a means of representing the representation? And if there were such a means, would it then not need yet another means to represent this new representation of the representation of reality? And so on.

A powerful line of modern and postmodern thought takes this argument as proof that we can have no knowledge of reality at all.[15] According to this line of thought, our knowledge consists entirely of representations. It never makes contact with reality itself. We therefore live in something like an infinite hall of mirrors from which there is no possible escape. The signs are all we have. We can interpret them in many different ways, and we can even interpret the interpretations. But none of that allows us to cross over from interpretation to reality.

Given the frequency with which Wittgenstein has been enlisted in support of this line of thinking, it is important to stress that he repudiated it.[16] If he drew attention to the infinite regress entailed by the picture theory of propositions, he did not do so in order to prove that knowledge was impossible but, quite the contrary, in order to prove that the picture theory of propositions was absurd. He drew a cardinal distinction between interpretation and understanding. He acknowledged that every sentence can be subjected to infinitely many different interpretations, even a sentence as simple as "This table has four legs." But he insisted that the very possibility of offering any one of those interpretations presupposes understanding, and that understanding is

categorically different from interpretation.[17] When we say, "This table has four legs," we neither talk nor think about representations of the table. We talk about the table and its four legs. To understand the sentence "This table has four legs" is to talk about the table and its four legs. No intermediary is required.[18] To take the sentence "This table has four legs" as referring to a representation of the table rather than to the table itself is not to understand the sentence.[19]

Wittgenstein's hostility to the idea that knowledge of the external world requires mental representations of the external world vaguely resembles Calvin's hostility to the idea that knowledge of God requires images of God. Both Calvin and Wittgenstein clearly regarded the use of representations as a means of access to a fundamental but otherwise inaccessible reality as fraught with danger. But this resemblance is hardly enough to establish any substantial agreement. It rather raises a series of questions: What kind of danger did they have in mind? What could have excited their hostility to a degree so much greater than would appear to be warranted by a purely intellectual failing? What was the target of their anger? What was the cause of their concern? In order to answer those questions it will be instructive to consider two different

---

15. The literature supporting that line of thought is huge. In a basic sense it may be said to include most of phenomenology, structuralism, and poststructuralism—if not all of modern philosophy ever since Kant declared things in themselves to lie beyond the boundaries of knowledge. Among its most influential recent supporters one may count Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Richard Rorty. For an approach to the underlying issues and the current state of theoretical affairs in the study of history, see Pippin, *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem*; Bonnell and Hunt, *Beyond the Cultural Turn*; Jenkins, *The Postmodern History Reader*; and Sewell, *Logics of History*.

16. For influential accounts casting Wittgenstein as a relativist who destroyed the possibility of talking about reality, see Gellner, "A Wittgensteinian Philosophy," 65–102; Bloor, *Wittgenstein*; Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*; and Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth.* For two pointed rebuttals, see Stone, "Wittgenstein on Deconstruction," 83–117, and Crary, "Wittgenstein's Philosophy," 118–45.

17. PI §201: "This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule. The answer was: if everything can be made out to accord with the rule, then it can also be made out to conflict with it. And so there would be neither accord nor conflict here. It can be seen that there is a misunderstanding here from the mere fact that in the course of our argument we give one interpretation after another; as if each one contented us at least for a moment, until we thought of yet another standing behind it. What this shews is that there is a way of grasping a rule which is *not* an *interpretation*, but which is exhibited in what we call 'obeying the rule' and 'going against it' in actual cases. Hence there is an inclination to say: every action according to the rule is an interpretation. But we ought to restrict the term 'interpretation' to the substitution of one expression of the rule for another."

18. PI §94: "'A proposition is a queer thing!' Here we have in germ the subliming of our whole account of logic. The tendency to assume a pure intermediary between the propositional *signs* and the facts. Or even to try to purify, to sublime, the signs themselves.—For our forms of expression prevent us in all sorts of ways from seeing that nothing out of the ordinary is involved, by sending us in pursuit of chimeras."

19. Ibid., §95: "'Thought must be something unique.' When we say, and *mean*, that such-and-such is the case, we—and our meaning—do not stop anywhere short of the fact; but we mean: *this—is—so.* But this paradox (which has the form of a truism) can also be expressed in this way: *Thought* can be of what is *not* the case" (italics original).

but closely related arguments Wittgenstein made about the nature and extent of human self-knowledge.

One of these arguments focuses on statements like "I am in pain," which is to say, statements in the first-person present indicative about the speaker's own state of mind. The argument is that such statements amount neither to a description of that mental state nor to a claim to knowledge. They rather are expressions, avowals, or confessions of the speaker's feeling, sensation, or belief. They can of course serve as foundations on which to erect claims to knowledge. But this is not what they are in and of themselves. For Wittgenstein, the difference between *being in* pain and *knowing* pain is fundamental. Not to recognize that difference can only lead to confusion.

This is precisely the confusion at the heart of conventional wisdom. Conventional wisdom insists not only that statements in the first-person present indicative about the speaker's own mental state not only constitute a claim to knowledge, but also that the particular kind of knowledge to which they lay claim is more certain than any other claims. Now, Wittgenstein grants the certainty of those statements. Of course I can be positively certain that I have the feelings I express. Conventional wisdom is right that here there is no room for doubt. But conventional wisdom is wrong about the reason *why* there is no room for doubt. The reason is not that I know my thoughts and feelings particularly well. It is that I *have* them. I merely seem to know for certain. In fact, I do not know at all. To construe the relationship I have to a pain that I feel in terms of the relationship I have to things that I know is therefore to utterly misconstrue my feeling. If it were otherwise, then one should at least be able to imagine a case in which I do *not* know about a pain I have. In such a case it would make sense to say, "It's possible that I'm in pain, but I cannot be certain until I have examined myself." But that does not make sense: one cannot be in pain without feeling it. Hence the opposite does not make sense either: If I determine that I am in pain based not on my sensations but rather on my detached examination of myself, then I could say, "I have no doubt that I'm in pain because my knowledge of my own pain is absolutely certain." But what I say is neither true nor false because my feeling pain is not separate from the experience of pain. What I say is nonsense—the kind of nonsense we reject whenever someone doubts an expression of our feelings and we reply, presumably with some degree of irritation, "What do you mean,

'do I know'? I'm talking about my feelings here. What gives you the right to doubt what I am feeling?" To use the nonsense we reject as a foundation on which to postulate that I know my own thoughts and feelings better than anything else is to make an elementary mistake.[20]

The opposite is closer to the truth: It is much easier for me to know the thoughts and feelings of other people than my own. I know by listening to their words, by watching their behavior, and by looking at their bodies, especially their hands, their faces, and their eyes. "The human body is the best picture of the human soul," Wittgenstein wrote.[21] Of course I can go wrong. But that does not prove that I cannot instead be right. I know the thoughts and feelings of other people just as reliably as I know other things about the world. I can be wrong about those too. When I see someone groaning and writhing on the ground just after he has fallen from a window on the fifth floor, I know this person is in pain with as much certainty as anything is possible to know. To think otherwise is to ignore the ties of feeling and understanding uniting human beings with each other and to condemn them to the loneliness of solipsism.

It is quite different with my own thoughts and feelings. I can begin to know these only as soon as I no longer have them, perhaps because they have slid into the past or because I have somehow detached myself from them. All I can do until that moment is follow them wherever they may lead. They are not even really mine. They come to me unbidden and not infrequently unwanted. In that regard Wittgenstein was in agreement with what I take to be one of the basic points of psychoanalysis. Like a psychoanalyst, he was concerned to delve beneath the

20. Ibid., §244: "'So you are saying that the word "pain" really means crying?'—On the contrary: the verbal expression of pain replaces crying and does not describe it." PI §245: "For how can I go so far as to try to use language to get between pain and its expression?" PI §246: "In what sense are my sensations *private?*—Well, only I can know whether I am really in pain; another person can only surmise it.—In one way this is wrong, and in another nonsense. If we are using the word 'to know' as it is normally used (and how else are we to use it?), then other people very often know when I am in pain.—Yes, but all the same not with the certainty with which I know it myself!—It can't be said of me at all (except perhaps as a joke) that I *know* I am in pain. What is it supposed to mean—except perhaps that I *am* in pain? Other people cannot be said to learn of my sensations *only* from my behaviour,—for *I* cannot be said to learn of them. I *have* them. The truth is: it makes sense to say about other people that they doubt whether I am in pain; but not to say it about myself."

21. Ibid., part II, section iv, 178.

appearance of what merely looks like knowledge I have of myself, but what is in fact an expression of my feeling or belief. And like a psychoanalyst, he did so, not in order to ascertain any reality supposedly underlying the feeling, but in order to relieve the pain of human beings' mistakenly confusing their thoughts and feelings with knowledge of themselves and so suffering the consequences of their mistake.

The second argument turns on what has come to be known as Moore's paradox, because G. E. Moore, Wittgenstein's friend and predecessor at Cambridge, was the first to draw attention to its importance. It consists of an important variation on statements in the first-person present indicative involving the speaker's own state of mind, namely, statements that do lay a certain claim to knowledge. The paradox is this: I cannot meaningfully say, "I believe it is raining and it is not raining." I can of course say the words, but I cannot say them in the conviction that they are true.

Why is this a paradox? Because the sentence that I cannot meaningfully say may very well be true. It is perfectly conceivable that I believe it is raining when in fact it is not raining. There is no objective reason why such might not be the case. To the contrary, this is precisely the sort of thing that happens on a daily basis to every human being: believing something to be true that is in fact false. Nor is there any logical reason to make the sentence incoherent.[22] "I believe it is raining" is a contingent proposition. "It is not raining" is also a contingent proposition. There is no logical obstacle to combining the two contingent propositions into a composite proposition linked by the operator *and*: "I believe it is raining *and* it is not raining." Both parts of the composite may very well be true. Neither contradicts the other. If both are true, the whole sentence is true. And yet I cannot state that truth without spouting nonsense. As Wittgenstein put it, "One can mistrust one's own senses, but not one's own belief. If there were a verb meaning 'to believe falsely', it would not have any significant first person present

indicative."[23] An expression of belief in the first-person present indicative, it seems, can only express belief in truth.

This is all the more remarkable in that it applies only to the *first-person present* indicative. It does of course not apply to the subjunctive. I can very well say, "I believe it is raining, but it might not be raining." There is no conflict between my present belief and my awareness of my fallibility as a general matter. Yet Moore's paradox does also not apply to statements in the *third*-person present indicative. One can very well say, "He believes it is raining, and it is not raining." There is no obstacle to someone else's pointing out that something I believe to be true is in fact false. I just cannot do it for myself. And still more striking, I cannot do it for myself only at the moment at which I am holding the erroneous belief. Later on, when time has passed, and I have recognized my error, I can speak about my *past* error without falling into paradox, as if it were no longer really mine but that of some other person. I can say, "Yesterday morning I believed it was raining, and actually it was not raining at all." Nothing prevents me from speaking meaningfully about my own errors so long as they lie safely in the past. The only thing I cannot do is to avow my present error.[24] My present error is in principle impossible for me to acknowledge, not in and of itself, but for me.

The reason for Moore's paradox obviously consists in a grammatical distinction between statements in the first person and statements in the third person or in the past tense. But even though the paradox may be obvious, it is easy to misconstrue.[25] Let me therefore repeat: the reason why I cannot say, "I believe it is raining and it is not raining," is neither physical nor logical. It is not a matter of some personal bias that could be corrected by an effort of will, by a more determined applica-

---

22. There *is* a logical reason if "logic" includes what Wittgenstein called "grammar." To have shown that logic must include grammar is perhaps Wittgenstein's most fundamental philosophical accomplishment. But in order to avoid confusing the reader I shall use "logic" and "logical" to refer to laws of reasoning whose validity is traditionally thought to require no attention to grammar, such as above all the law of the excluded middle.

23. PI, part II, section x, 190.

24. Hence the apparent simplicity of the difference between the tenses of "I believe" and "I believed" is thoroughly deceptive. It shows the difference between past and present, but it conceals the difference between a belief I can disavow and a belief I cannot disavow. "Don't look at it as a matter of course, but as a most remarkable thing, that the verbs 'believe', 'wish', 'will' display all the inflexions possessed by 'cut', 'chew', 'run.'"(PI part II, section x, 190).

25. "Moore stirred up a philosophical wasps' nest with his paradox; and the only reason the wasps did not duly fly out was that they were too listless" (Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 76e). In the meantime, a whole body of scholarship has grown up around Moore's paradox; see Green and Williams, *Moore's Paradox*. Even so one wonders if the wasps have become more animated than Wittgenstein thought they were.

tion of scientific discipline, or by an improvement in my education. It cannot be eliminated by any conceivable improvement in the mechanical engineering of my brain or by administering drugs. It has no material cause. But neither is it the result of a logical contradiction. Nothing really prohibits anyone from acknowledging its truth if it is true. Only I cannot acknowledge its truth. And the reason lies in a grammatical distinction.

That puts Wittgenstein in stark opposition to conventional wisdom about the nature of human beings, their place in the universe, and their relationship to one another.[26] According to conventional wisdom, the starting point in any effort to determine who we are, what we can know, and what we ought to do consists in the distinction between myself and the external world. But conventional wisdom states that beginning in the third person. "I" do not show up in that beginning, except in the guise of "my self." This is not insignificant. Note how comfortably the language of *self* and *world* flows from the tongue. Note how much easier it is to speak about my misguided subjectivity than to say, "I have been wrong." It is easier because it conceals the naked truth that *self* means "I" so well that I no longer need to be afraid of being shamed by Moore's paradox. Transforming the first-person "I" into the third-person "self" puts me at a distance from the beliefs I hold and thus absolves me of responsibility for holding them. It turns what "I believe" into "my beliefs" or "my ideas"—ideas that I seem free to keep or drop as I please. It collapses the difference between the first person and the third person into the language of objects conducted entirely in the third person. It seems to endow me with the power to abstract from the first person and treat my self as though it were a certain kind of thing—a thing whose nature I can analyze objectively by means of introspection, a thinking thing, *res cogitans*, whose difference from other things, *res extensae*, chiefly consists in that it happens to be thinking and happens to be mine.

Replacing "I" with "my self" looks like a minor twist in language, a tiny sleight of speech. But the significance of that sleight exceeds its trifling size by a considerable measure. It constitutes a license for crossing a sacred line. Crossing that line is to replace the lead of language with fictions designed to show us how the world might be if only we could take a stand outside the ground that language has prepared for us. But

26. This and the following paragraph owe a great deal to Tugendhat, *Self-Consciousness and Self-Determination.* Cf. Winch, "The Expression of Belief," 7–23.

the entire enterprise is misconceived.[27] It assumes that the distinction between myself and the external world is like the difference between two different kinds of things—between an inner world of mind and an external world of matter—as opposed to two different grammatical persons. It begs the fundamental question: what is the relationship between these persons? Instead of taking up that question, it assumes that a description of "my self" in the third person is sufficient for an adequate understanding of myself and my relationship to the world. Once this assumption has been made, there is no turning back.[28]

Wittgenstein's objections to the picture theory of propositions thus go far beyond mere questions of epistemology. If one accepts the arguments about human self-knowledge that I have just sketched, language is nothing like a system of more-or-less arbitrary signs representing supposedly more fundamental logical and scientific truths on which it is based and by reference to which it needs to be explained. There is no underlying reality to which we could refer in order to explain why language distinguishes between the first person and the third person. The idea of such an underlying reality is a mirage, a fiction of a misguided imagination that puts false images of the truth in the place of language. Language, as it were, stands on its own two feet. It is the ground of our existence, the given that we must accept in order to be able to live our lives as human beings. Agreement in language, as Wittgenstein put it in

27. PI §413: "Here we have a case of introspection, not unlike that from which William James got the idea that the 'self' consisted mainly of 'peculiar motions in the head and between the head and the throat'. And James' introspection shewed, not the meaning of the word 'self' (so far as it means something like 'person', 'human being', 'he himself', 'I myself'), nor an analysis of such a thing, but the state of a philosopher's attention when he says the word 'self' to himself and tries to analyse its meaning. (And a good deal could be learned from this.)"

28. Ibid., §339: "Thinking is not an incorporeal process which lends life and sense to speaking, and which it would be possible to detach from speaking, rather as the Devil took the shadow of Schlemiehl from the ground.—But how 'not an incorporeal process'? Am I acquainted with incorporeal processes, then, only thinking is not one of them? No; I called the expression 'an incorporeal process' to my aid in my embarrassment when I was trying to explain the meaning of the word 'thinking' in a primitive way. One might say 'Thinking is an incorporeal process', however, if one were using this to distinguish the grammar of the word 'think' from that of, say, the word 'eat'. Only that makes the difference between the meanings look *too slight.* (It is like saying: numerals are actual, and numbers non-actual, objects.) An unsuitable type of expression is a sure means of remaining in a state of confusion. It as it were bars the way out."

a famous line, is nothing like agreement in opinions; it rather is agreement in a form of life.[29] Language tells us what the essence of things is.[30] It lays foundations that logic must presuppose before it can even begin to do its work of discriminating true from false.[31] Language—not logic, not physics, not metaphysics, but language—fixes the terms of our relationship to the world, to other people, and to ourselves at the most fundamental level. It is language that prevents us from acknowledging our present error while permitting us to see the errors of our neighbors plainly as day. Language guarantees that expressions of our beliefs and feelings are matters neither of knowledge nor of observation. Language is the reason for our shame and humiliation whenever we are forced to admit that we were wrong. Whenever our belief is shown to rest on an illusion, such that it turns out to be *mere* belief; whenever our expectations are deceived; whenever our memories are shown to be mistaken; whenever, in short, we are compelled to renounce a belief that we once held in the first-person present indicative, we are divided into parts, sacrificed, so to speak, on the altar (or, if you prefer, crucified on the cross) on which our belief dies at the command of the third person, so that we may renew our ability to express our belief in the first person with full confidence, despite the possibility that this expression too may turn out to lead us into error and may have to be sacrificed.

That brings us to the heart of the matter—the point at which reading Wittgenstein and Calvin side by side opens an approach to the core of their thinking that would be difficult to find by reading either one in isolation from the other. I would put it like this: Calvin and Wittgenstein share a basic understanding of what it means to be a human being. For both of them a human being comprises two separate persons: the feeling, believing, thinking, and remembering person that avows its feelings, beliefs, thoughts, and memories in the first-person

present indicative but has no knowledge of itself; and the objectively existing person that is seen, examined, known, described, and judged primarily by others, only with difficulty by itself, and not at all in the first-person present indicative. For both Calvin and Wittgenstein the difference between these persons is asymmetrical. For both it is a matter neither of logic nor of physics nor of metaphysics but of what Calvin called the Word and what Wittgenstein called language. It does not permit one person to be substituted for the other, and it cannot be represented by images, because it is itself the ground on which the meaning of those images depends. Attempts to overcome the asymmetry of persons by images or by any other means of representation can therefore only take one of two equally destructive forms: eliminating the first person in the name of the third, or the third person in the name of the first. Eliminating the first person means suppressing, denying, and exterminating expressions of feeling and belief in the name of logic, science, nature, history, and whatever else "one knows" to be the case. Eliminating the third person means suppressing, denying, and exterminating observation, proof, and knowledge in the name of mere feeling and belief. The former establishes the tyranny of reason over feeling and believing, the latter, of feeling and believing over reason. Both are destructive of humanity. For language makes a human being what it is: a creature internally divided, never fully present to itself, and impossible to reduce to coherence without annihilating one of the two persons, which is to say, without killing the human being. That is the danger Calvin and Wittgenstein had in mind. That is the reason why Calvin believed that man stands in need of salvation and why Wittgenstein believed that "the philosopher's treatment of a question is like the treatment of an illness."[32] That is the link between Calvin's hostility to the idea that knowledge of God requires images of God and Wittgenstein's hostility to the idea that knowledge of the external world requires mental representations of the external world.

It follows that the sort of autonomy or sovereignty promised to human beings by conventional wisdom is spurious. Coherence does not lie within the grasp of human beings except in death. The truth is that human beings, by virtue of being human, are vulnerable to a special kind of suffering that arises from the impossibility of reducing the

---

29. Ibid., §23: "The *speaking* of a language is part of an activity, or of a form of life." PI §241: "'So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?'—It is what human beings *say* that is true and false; and they agree in the *language* they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life." PI IIxi, 226: "What has to be accepted, the given, is—so one could say—*forms of life.*"

30. Ibid., §371: "*Essence* is expressed by grammar." PI §373: "Grammar tells what kind of object anything is. (Theology as grammar.)"

31. Ibid., §242: "If language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgments. This seems to abolish logic, but does not do so."

32. Ibid., §255.

first person to coherence with the third—the impossibility of seeing the beam in your own eye as clearly as the mote in the eye of your neighbor, of loving your neighbor as yourself, and above all of knowing what you are doing. Every belief and feeling passes, and in passing dies a certain kind of death, not because it has passed, but because in passing it turns from what is felt, remembered, and believed into what can be known as no first-person present statement can. Every passing moment thus furnishes an opportunity for feeling and belief to conflict with what is known to be the case. The possibility of such a conflict has to be endured. It is not a problem, much less a problem that could conceivably be solved. It rather is what makes a human being human.

Reading Calvin and Wittgenstein side by side thus puts them both into a different light. Neither was first and foremost concerned with mere avowals of belief (in isolation from the truth) or with mere truths of logic, history, or science (in isolation from belief). Both rather were preoccupied with the relationship between the two. Calvin was emphatic that faith rests on knowledge and is incompatible both with ignorance and with blind submission to authority.[33] Wittgenstein was equally emphatic that religious faith is radically different from mere opinion.[34] Both recognized the asymmetry between the persons as

33. Battles, *Institutes*, 545 (III.ii.2): "Faith rests not on ignorance, but on knowledge. And this is, indeed, knowledge not only of God but of the divine will. We do not obtain salvation either because we are prepared to embrace as true whatever the church has prescribed, or because we turn over to it the task of inquiring and knowing. But we do so when we know that God is our merciful Father, because of reconciliation effected through Christ [2 Cor. 5:18–19], and that Christ has been given to us as righteousness, sanctification, and life. By this knowledge, I say, not by submission of our feeling, do we obtain entry into the Kingdom of heaven." Battles, *Institutes*, 551 (III.ii.7): "Now we shall possess a right definition of faith if we call it a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit."

34. Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 64e: "It strikes me that a religious belief could only be something like a passionate commitment to a system of reference. Hence, although it's *belief*, it's really a way of living, or a way of assessing life. It's passionately seizing hold of *this* interpretation. Instruction in a religious faith, therefore, would have to take the form of a portrayal, a description, of that system of reference, while at the same time being an appeal to conscience. And this combination would have to result in the pupil himself, of his own accord, passionately taking hold of the system of reference. It would be as though someone were first to let me see the hopelessness of my situation and then show me the means of rescue until, of my own accord, or not at any rate led to it by my *instructor*, I ran to it and grasped it." I am grateful to Linda

fundamental to humanity and as a paradox—the paradox identified by G. E. Moore and stated by Calvin at the beginning of the *Institutes*.[35] Both denied that they were seeking to develop novel theories. On the contrary, they insisted that the kind of truth at which they aimed lay open to public view, freely available to every human being—something of which one might have said, as Vincent of Lérins did say in antiquity, that it "has been believed everywhere, at all times, and by all," had it not been for the temptations that keep leading human beings to seek the truth where it cannot be found.[36] They thought of themselves, not as creators or inventors, but as teachers trying to show their students how to avoid misunderstanding.[37] Both regarded the spell cast by misleading

Zerilli for drawing my attention to this passage.

35. See n. 4, above.

36. Battles, *Institutes*, "John Calvin to the Reader, 1559," 4: "I have had no other purpose than to benefit the church by maintaining the pure doctrine of godliness." Battles, *Institutes*, 80 (I.vii.5): "We seek no proofs, no marks of genuineness upon which our judgment may lean; but we subject our judgment and wit to it as to a thing far beyond any guesswork! This we do, not as persons accustomed to seize upon some unknown thing, which, under closer scrutiny, displeases them, but fully conscious that we hold the unassailable truth!" PI §89: "It is, rather, of the essence of our investigation that we do not seek to learn anything *new* by it. We want to *understand* something that is already in plain view. For *this* is what we seem in some sense not to understand." PI §124: "Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can in the end only describe it. For it cannot give it any foundation either. It leaves everything as it is." PI §126: "Philosophy simply puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything.—Since everything lies open to view there is nothing to explain. For what is hidden, for example, is of no interest to us." PI §435: "If it is asked: 'How do sentences manage to represent?'—the answer might be: 'Don't you know? You certainly see it, when you use them.' For nothing is concealed. How do sentences do it?—Don't you know? For nothing is hidden." For Vincent of Lérins see *Duo Commonitoria*, MPL 50:640: "In ipsa item Catholica Ecclesia magnopere curandum est ut id teneamus quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est." Cf. Wittgenstein's observation in PI §128: "If it were possible to advance *theses* in philosophy, it would never be possible to debate them, because everyone would agree to them."

37. Battles, *Institutes*, "John Calvin to the Reader, 1559," 4: "It has been my purpose in this labor to prepare and instruct candidates in sacred theology for the reading of the divine Word, in order that they may be able both to have easy access to it and to advance in it without stumbling. For I believe I have so embraced the sum of religion in all its parts, and have arranged it in such an order, that if anyone rightly grasps it, it will not be difficult for him to determine what he ought especially to seek in Scripture, and to what end he ought to relate its contents." PI §90: "Our investigation is therefore a grammatical one. Such an investigation sheds light on our problem by clearing misunderstandings away." Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 18e: "Language sets everyone the same traps; it is an immense network of easily accessible wrong turnings. And

images over the human mind as the chief obstacle to overcome.[38] Both attacked the pride that leads human beings to rebel against the lessons they are taught by language and to replace them with superstitions of their own invention.[39] Both thought that victory over superstition con-

sisted of a fundamental turn away from the allure of images—the kind of turn to which Calvin referred as repentance, and that Wittgenstein described as "turning our whole examination round the fixed point of our real need."[40]

I do not mean to belittle the differences between Calvin and Wittgenstein. Language is not simply identical with the Word, and grammar is not identical with Scripture. The self-authentication of Scripture in Calvin's thought is not to be confused with the autonomy of grammar in Wittgenstein's thought. Wittgenstein leaves more room for pictures in religion than Calvin could have countenanced.[41] The God of the Hebrew Bible, who says, not coincidentally in the first person, "I am who I am," differs from the Word of the New Testament that is said to have become incarnate in Christ and promised eternal life to his followers—and both differ from the language whose philosophical

---

so we watch one man after another walking down the same paths and we know in advance where he will branch off, where walk straight on without noticing the side turning, etc. etc. What I have to do then is erect signposts at all the junctions where there are wrong turnings so as to help people past the danger points."

38. Battles, *Institutes*, 109–10 (I.xi.9): "Any use of images leads to idolatry"; esp. 109: "Now it appears that men do not rush forth into the cult of images before they have been imbued with some opinion too crass—not indeed that they regard them as gods, but because they imagine that some power of divinity dwells there. Therefore when you prostrate yourself in veneration, representing to yourself in an image either a god or a creature, you are already ensnared in some superstition. For this reason, the Lord forbade not only the erection of statues constructed to represent himself, but also the consecration of any inscriptions and stones that would invite adoration [Ex. 20:25]." PI §112: "A simile that has been absorbed into the forms of our language produces a false appearance, and this disquiets us. 'But *this* isn't how it is!'—we say. 'Yet *this* is how it has to *be!*'" PI §115: "A *picture* held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably."

39. Battles, *Institutes*, 47–8 (I.iv.1), "Superstition," esp. 47: "Indeed, vanity joined with pride can be detected in the fact that, in seeking God, miserable men do not rise above themselves as they should, but measure him by the yardstick of their own carnal stupidity, and neglect sound investigation; thus out of curiosity they fly off into empty speculations. They do not therefore comprehend God as he offers himself, but imagine him as they have fashioned him in their own presumption. When this gulf opens, in whatever direction they move their feet, they cannot but plunge headlong into ruin." *Institutes*, 99–100 (I.xi.1), "We are forbidden every pictorial representation of God," esp. 100: "God himself is the sole and proper witness of himself . . . Therefore in the law, after having claimed for himself alone the glory of deity, when he would teach what worship he approves or repudiates, God soon adds, 'You shall not make for yourself a graven image, nor any likeness' [Ex. 20:4]. By these words he restrains our waywardness from trying to represent him by any visible image, and briefly enumerates all those forms by which superstition long ago began to turn his truth into falsehood." *Institutes*, 107–9 (I.xi.8): "The origin of images: man's desire for a tangible deity"; esp. 108: "Man's mind, full as it is of pride and boldness, dares to imagine a god according to its own capacity; as it sluggishly plods, indeed is overwhelmed with the crassest ignorance, it conceives an unreality and an empty appearance as God." PI §109: "Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language." PI §110: "'Language (or thought) is something unique'—this proves to be a superstition (*not* a mistake!), itself produced by grammatical illusions. And now the impressiveness retreats to these illusions, to the problems." PI §118: "Where does our investigation get its importance from, since it seems only to destroy everything interesting, that is, all that is great and important? (As it were all the buildings, leaving behind only bits of stone and rubble.) What we are destroying is nothing but houses of cards and we are clearing up the ground of language on which they stand."

Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 72e: "Religious faith and superstition are quite different. One of them results from *fear* and is a sort of false science. The other is a trusting."

40. Battles, *Institutes*, 597, 601: "On this account, in my judgment, repentance can thus be well defined: it is the true turning of our life to God, a turning that arises from a pure and earnest fear of him; and it consists in the mortification of the flesh and of the old man, and in the vivification of the Spirit . . . Therefore, in a word, I interpret repentance as regeneration, whose sole end is to restore in us the image of God that had been disfigured and all but obliterated through Adam's transgression." PI § 108: "The *preconceived idea* of crystalline purity can only be removed by turning our whole examination round. (One might say: the axis of reference of our examination must be rotated, but about the fixed point of our real need)." PI §133: "The real discovery is the one that makes me capable of stopping doing philosophy when I want to.—The one that gives philosophy peace, so that it is no longer tormented by questions which bring *itself* in question." PI §309: "What is your aim in philosophy?—To shew the fly the way out of the fly-bottle." It may be useful to point out that "repentance" was coined in Latin to render the Greek μετάνοια, meaning "change of mind."

41. PI IIiv, 178: "Religion teaches that the soul can exist when the body has disintegrated. Now do I understand this teaching?—Of course I understand it—I can imagine plenty of things in connexion with it. And haven't pictures of these things been painted? And why should such a picture be only an imperfect rendering of the spoken doctrine? Why should it not do the *same* service as the words? And it is the service which is the point." For more detail see Winch, "Wittgenstein," 64–80. Cf. Battles, *Institutes*, 12 (I.xi.): "The functions and limits of art"; 112: "Therefore it remains that only those things are to be sculptured or painted which the eyes are capable of seeing: let not God's majesty, which is far above the perception of the eyes, be debased through unseemly representations. Within this class some are histories and events, some are images and forms of bodies without any depicting of past events. The former have some use in teaching or admonition; as for the latter, I do not see what they can afford other than pleasure."

study is supposed to remind us of what we have always known. There are striking parallels between the "incommunicable" quality that Calvin summoned in order to explain how one and the same God can be divided into three different persons and the grammatical asymmetry that Wittgenstein identified as crucial to grasping the nature of a human being.[42] It would be enlightening to pursue those parallels and quite in keeping with Wittgenstein's endeavor. Wittgenstein was deeply preoccupied with religion. He once asserted "I cannot help seeing every problem from a religious point of view."[43] But in the very same sentence he also asserted that "I am not a religious man," and in 1946 he wrote, "I cannot kneel to pray because it's as though my knees were stiff. I am afraid of dissolution (my own dissolution), should I become soft."[44] Nowhere in Wittgenstein's thought will readers find an equivalent to Calvin's belief in a personal God whose providential action guides the world at every step of the way from creation to the final judgment. Precisely because Calvin and Wittgenstein agreed that human beings cannot be reduced to logical coherence without violence to their nature, it would be a travesty to claim that their thinking is united by some underlying essence establishing some kind of definite identity between the two. "I'll teach you differences" is a line from *King Lear* that Wittgenstein regarded as a suitable motto for his approach to philosophy.[45] Those differences are not to be ignored.

I do believe that Wittgenstein and Calvin were united in tracing the gravest threat to human integrity, not to human fallibility, but, quite the contrary, to the desire to emancipate humanity from fallibility. That desire finds its most pointed expression in the attempt to seek knowledge of reality from representations of reality. On the surface, representations of God may seem to have little to do with those mental representations of the external world that lie at the heart of modern epistemology. In reality, both promise human beings a means of detaching themselves from their own belief, achieving control over their fal-

libility, and thereby delivering themselves from the necessity of sacrifice demanded by the asymmetry of persons. But that promise is treacherous. It is the serpent's promise that "your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil."[46] Belief cannot consist of my attachment to any kind of object, mental or otherwise—not even to an object called a representation of reality. Belief can only be expressed in the first-person present indicative, "I believe." The first-person present indicative leaves no room for distinguishing myself from my belief—no room for holding any truth that I do not believe. It requires that I do in fact believe what I call my belief. If I do no believing in the first-person present indicative, then I do not believe at all. And if I say what I do not believe, then I disqualify myself from speaking. Thus the picture theory of propositions and what Calvin called idolatry both lead from the desire to avoid sacrifice, via the invention of images designed to carry the burden of my fallibility, into exile from speech. "So in the end when one is doing philosophy one gets to the point where one would like just to emit an inarticulate sound."[47]

Two conclusions seem to me to follow from the line of reasoning I have laid out above. One is that Calvin's hostility to images is poorly understood if it is cast as nothing but an expression of religious faith or mindless obedience to a divine command for which nothing that looks like an intelligible reason can be adduced. Of course it was an expression of religious faith and of obedience to a divine command, but no more irrational or mindless than it is to follow any kind of rule, religious or otherwise.[48] It went hand in hand with a perfectly intelligible understanding of humanity. On that understanding, human beings may not be imagined as consisting of a self that knows nothing better than itself but is divided from the external world. Human beings are rather to be taken as composed of separate persons, and the difference between these persons is to be taken as something that is given in language and that no picture on its own account can represent. Only language makes it possible for us to speak in different persons. That is the reason why the Word deserves respect. Not to respect the Word is

---

42. Battles, *Institutes*, 128 (I.xiii.6): "The meaning of the most important conception"; esp. 128: 'Person,' therefore, I call a 'subsistence' in God's essence, which, while related to the others, is distinguished by an incommunicable quality. By the term 'subsistence' we would understand something different from 'essence.'"

43. Malcolm, *Wittgenstein*, 1; cf. Bouwsma, *Wittgenstein*.

44. Malcolm, *Wittgenstein*, 1, 22; cf. Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 56e.

45. Rhees, *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, 171.

46. Gen 3:5 (KJV).

47. PI §261.

48. Ibid., §218: "When I obey a rule, I do not choose. I obey the rule *blindly*" (italics original).

to do violence to human nature. That is the reason why images must not be substituted for the Word.

The second conclusion is that what I have called conventional wisdom must be regarded as an instance of what Calvin called idolatry. Conventional wisdom about the self and its privileged but lonely position in the universe merely seems to rest on more-or-less self-evident truths that lie at the foundation of all knowledge. In fact it is an artifice invented to shelter human pride from the humiliating recognition that language does not allow me to detach myself from my erroneous belief. It substitutes the self—what nowadays is often designated "my identity"—for the asymmetry of persons. That may seem more persuasive than the wooden, graven, painted things the ancients used to represent the place of human beings in the world. But it marks a break from language quite like the break that Calvin charged to idolatry. The price for making such a break consists of treating myself as though I were a thing, or more precisely, two different kinds of thing: a body and a mind. The price may well seem small. But it entails a deep confusion that saps our ability to speak intelligibly to one another, to recognize each other as fellow human beings, to distinguish truth from illusion, and to trust our judgment in the face of opposition. It would be rash to jump to the conclusion that Descartes and his followers are responsible for the ills of the modern world. But one need not at all invoke the wrath of God or threaten the punishments of hell to recognize the danger that lack of respect for the asymmetry of persons and resistance to the sacrifice that it demands lead to tyranny and human desolation. One merely needs to read Wittgenstein and Calvin side by side.

Works Cited

Baker, Gordon P., and P. M. S. Hacker. *An Analytical Commentary on the Philosophical Investigations.* 4 vols. Chicago - Oxford: University of Chicago Press - Blackwell Publishers, 1980-1996.

Bloor, David. *Wittgenstein: A Social Theory of Knowledge.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1983.

Bonnell, Victoria E., and Lynn Avery Hunt, eds. *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

Bouwsma, O. K. *Wittgenstein: Conversations, 1949-1951.* Ed. J. L. Craft and Ronald E. Hustwit. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1986.

Battles, Ford Lewis. Trans. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, by John Calvin. Ed. John T. McNeill. 2 vols. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960.

Crary, Alice Marguerite, and Rupert J. Read, eds. *The New Wittgenstein.* London - New York: Routledge, 2000.

Crary, Alice Marguerite. "Wittgenstein's Philosophy in Relation to Political Thought." In *The New Wittgenstein*, ed. Alice Marguerite Crary and Rupert J. Read, 118-45. London - New York: Routledge, 2000.

Crosson, Frederick J., ed. *The Autonomy of Religious Belief: A Critical Inquiry.* Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981.

Frongia, Guido, and Brian McGuinness. *Wittgenstein: A Bibliographical Guide.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990.

Gellner, Ernest. "A Wittgensteinian Philosophy of (or Against) the Social Sciences." In *Spectacles and Predicaments: Essays in Social Theory*, by Ernest Gellner, 65-102. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979.

Green, Mitchell S., and John Williams, eds. *Moore's Paradox: New Essays on Belief, Rationality, and the First Person.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007.

Jenkins, Keith, ed. *The Postmodern History Reader.* London - New York: Routledge, 1997.

Kerr, Fergus. *Theology after Wittgenstein.* Oxford: Blackwell, 1986.

Malcolm, Norman. *Wittgenstein: A Religious Point of View?* Ed. with a response by Peter Winch. London: Routledge, 1993.

McGinn, Marie. *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Wittgenstein and the Philosophical Investigations.* London - New York: Routledge, 1997.

McGrath, Alister. *A Life of John Calvin: A Study in the Shaping of Western Culture.* Oxford - Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1990.

Monk, Ray. *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius.* Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1991.

Morse, Christopher. "Raising God's Eyebrows: Some Further Thoughts on the Concept of the analogia fidei." *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, 37 (1981-1982): 39-49.

Muller, Richard Alfred. *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition.* New York: Oxford University, 2000.

Phillips, D. Z., and Mario Von der Ruhr, eds. *Religion and Wittgenstein's Legacy.* Aldershot, Hants, England - Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005.

Pippin, Robert B. *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem: On the Dissatisfactions of European High Culture.* 2nd ed. Oxford: Blackwell, 1999.

Rhees, Rush, ed. *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Personal Recollections.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981.

Rorty, Richard. *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Sewell, William Hamilton, Jr. *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

Stone, Martin. "Wittgenstein on Deconstruction." In *The New Wittgenstein*, ed. Alice Marguerite Crary and Rupert J. Read, 83-117. London - New York: Routledge, 2000.

Tugendhat, Ernst. *Self-consciousness and Self-determination.* Trans. Paul Stern. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986.

Vincent of Lérins. *Duo Commonitoria.* Patrologia Latina, vol. 50 (Paris: Migne, 1846), 637-686.

Winch, Peter. "The Expression of Belief." *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 70 (1996): 7-23.

Winch, Peter. "Wittgenstein: Picture and Representation." In *Trying to Make Sense*, by Peter Winch, 64-80. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Culture and Value.* Ed. G. H. von Wright. Trans. Peter Winch. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations.* Trans. G.E.M. Anscombe. 3rd ed. New York: Macmillan, 1958.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. "Philosophy." In *Philosophical Occasions, 1912-1951* ed. James Carl Klagge and Alfred Nordmann, 158-99. Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 1993.

Zachman, Randall C. *Image and Word in the Theology of John Calvin.* Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007.