
Were I ever to feel the need for yet further expert philosophical support for my basic analysis of the experiences lying behind religion, certainly not the least resourceful thinker I could turn to would be Wittgenstein. This, in any case, will be my working hypothesis pending further study and understanding of his work beyond what has brought me to adopt it.

Wittgenstein speaks of three fundamental experiences in connection with religion. The first two of these seem to me to be, in effect, the two aspects of what I distinguish as basic faith in the meaning of life. The first experience of wonder, not at *what* there is, but at the fact *that* there is something (notwithstanding that there could not even conceivably be nothing at all!), is the experience of something that makes my own existence and all existence really possible. Similarly, the second experience of feeling *safe*, no matter what happens (notwithstanding that what happens can always make a difference to one's safety!), is the experience of something that makes my own life (and by implication) everything else ultimately worth while.

As for the third experience Wittgenstein speaks of, i.e., the experience of *guilt* (notwithstanding that there's no reason to feel guilty about nothing in particular!), it is arguably the very experience that lies behind any axial, or—in terms of Santayana's distinction—any “ultimate” religion. As Santayana puts it, “The enterprise of life . . . is utterly irreligious. . . . It is precisely that from which a veritable religion would come to redeem us.”

8 September 2004