Wittgenstein and the Athens-Jerusalem Conflict[[1]](#endnote-1)

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**Abstract**

The later Wittgenstein rejected the pseudo-objective rationalism of his earlier philosophy in order to justify a greater focus on the inescapable nature of human language. Yet this rejection of an objective reality beyond language was not a rejection of rationalism *tout court*. Rather, Wittgenstein was repudiating the rationalism of “Athens” (Socratic-Platonic philosophy) which, in his view, had contributed to the false and dualistic separation of language and reality. Wittgenstein instead sought a recovery of “Jerusalem” (biblical revelation) through his nuanced embrace of the ontological argument for God’s existence which, in his view, is at once rational and faithful (human and divine). The paradox which Wittgenstein articulates, particularly in his work *Culture and Value*, is that the truth of God (faith, religion) is intelligible only through the rationality of human interpretation, action, and language.

*(M)y thoughts are one hundred percent Hebraic.[[2]](#endnote-2)*

*-Ludwig Wittgenstein*

*All that philosophy can do is to destroy idols. And that means not creating a new one—say in the “absence of an idol.”’[[3]](#endnote-3)*

*-Ludwig Wittgenstein*

Readers of Wittgenstein are well aware of the dramatic transition that he undertook in his philosophical journey. This transition is typically divided up into two stages. The “early” Wittgenstein argues in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921) that it is the task of philosophy to make sense of facts with the utmost clarity in language. “Everything that can be thought at all can be thought clearly. Everything that can be put into words can be put clearly (4.116).”[[4]](#endnote-4) In short, the purpose of language is to describe reality as clearly as possible. Implicit in this description is the premise that there is a reality outside of language which philosophy, armed with the facts, can describe.[[5]](#endnote-5)

In contrast, the “later” Wittgenstein argues in the *Philosophical Investigations* that this approach to the role of philosophy is untenable, since there is no reality outside of language. Whatever we call “reality” reflects the limits of our language, or form of life. In the course of this transition, Wittgenstein shifted his attitude towards the history of philosophy as a whole. The early Wittgenstein embraced in the *Tractatus* what the later Wittgenstein called a “kind of Platonic myth,” the belief that there is a reality that language often conceals.[[6]](#endnote-6) The later Wittgenstein, in rejecting this dualistic separation of language and reality (or thought), instead declared that philosophy “leaves everything as it is.”[[7]](#endnote-7) In the process of rejecting the intelligibility of a transcendent reality beyond language, the later Wittgenstein also developed a sympathy for religious belief that, he thought, was immune to the rationalistic skepticism which philosophers from the Enlightenment onwards had advanced. If the meaning or truth of a belief simply reflects the rules of a language game[[8]](#endnote-8), then there is no philosophical way of determining whether a religion belief corresponds with an outside reality. In short, there is no reality beyond the rules of the language game. Consequently, philosophers cannot attack religion on the basis that it contradicts “reality,” since there is no objective reality in any case. Religion thus becomes defensible in a “fideistic” sense, resting on the assumption that its core beliefs retain meaning or truth within the rules of the language game. Philosophy cannot legitimately criticize religious belief as a result. What Kai Nielsen famously dubbed “Wittgensteinian Fideism” ostensibly defends religious faith from the rational scrutiny of philosophy.[[9]](#endnote-9)

This capsule summary of the dramatic transformation of Wittgenstein’s philosophy leaves some large questions unaddressed. In rejecting the “Platonic myth” of his early philosophical journey and defending a “fideistic” version of religious belief in his later stage, is he leaving behind philosophy altogether? Does he have good philosophical reasons to replace one with the other, or is he embracing a dogmatism that is philosophically indefensible? As Stanley Rosen writes, “Wittgenstein’s linguistic therapy points to the triumph of Jerusalem over Athens.”[[10]](#endnote-10) If Rosen is correct, Wittgenstein is arguing that the dogma of religion is immune to the skepticism of philosophy. Is he then insisting that philosophy can only pose questions while religion provides answers?

My purpose in this paper is to interpret Wittgenstein’s *reasons* for making the shift from Athens to Jerusalem. Although there is a vast secondary literature on the differences between the early and later Wittgenstein, there have been few attempts to explain these within the context of the conflict between Athens (Greek philosophy) and Jerusalem (biblical revelation).[[11]](#endnote-11) Without due attention to this conflict, it is hard to avoid the conclusion, which many of his readers have endorsed, that Wittgenstein categorically rejected philosophy in his later works. It is my contention that Wittgensteinian fideism is as philosophical as it is religious, although admittedly this paradox is often lost on scholars (both philosophers and theologians) who uncritically embrace the typically modern dualism between reason and faith. If I am correct in my interpretation of Wittgenstein, his rejection of Athens leads him to a Jerusalem that is both philosophical and religious. Despite his suspicion of the systematic nature of “philosophy of religion,”[[12]](#endnote-12) I am confident that the later Wittgenstein embraces philosophy as long as it is not in conflict with religion (the reverse is true as well). Above all, the later Wittgenstein is determined to show that it is Jerusalem, not Athens, which shows human beings how to live thoughtfully and faithfully.

My discussion will focus on Wittgenstein’s *Culture and Value*, a collection of notes which spans the years from 1914 until his death in 1951.[[13]](#endnote-13) Since almost half of these notes were written after 1945 (when Wittgenstein completed part one of the *Philosophical Investigations*), it is safe to say that this is a work written by the “later” Wittgenstein. I select this work because I believe that, of all his writings, it represents Wittgenstein’s deepest reflections on the conflict between Athens and Jerusalem (although I will cite other works when appropriate). To be sure, *Culture and Value* represents the same challenges as many of his works: an ambiguous and unsystematic style of presentation that often generates more questions than answers. Moreover, there is sharp disagreement among Wittgenstein scholars regarding the value of this work. Kai Nielsen argues that it is a work of “uneven quality” that should be used “with considerable caution.”[[14]](#endnote-14) In contrast, Fergus Kerr contends that many passages “disclose a sympathetic and penetrating understanding of the matter (regarding faith) that few Christians, never mind professed non-believers, could match.”[[15]](#endnote-15)

What I shall argue is most valuable about *Culture and Value* is Wittgenstein’s subtle defense of the ontological argument: our human idea of God demonstrates the existence of God. If I am correct in my interpretation, Wittgenstein stands out as one of the very few twentieth-century philosophers to defend an argument which modern philosophers for the most part have roundly dismissed ever since Kant decisively repudiated it in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. Yet the ontological argument, as Wittgenstein presents it, is absolutely central to understanding what is philosophical about his fideism as well as what is faithful about his philosophy. Moreover, as he shows in his characteristically nuanced way, it is Jerusalem, not Athens, which is the authentic source of the ontological argument. For all these reasons, Wittgenstein’s articulation of the ontological argument represents Jerusalem both philosophically and religiously. In fact, it is the ontological argument that shatters the dualism between philosophy and religion which has bedeviled the history of western philosophy.

Why, however, should I resurrect the ontological argument, which has been severely challenged and scrutinized since Kant’s demolition of its content? My contention is that the ontological argument, as Wittgenstein presents it in *Culture and Value*, helps us understand what is truly at stake in the conflict between Athens and Jerusalem. This conflict is not merely between philosophy and religion. Rather it is a conflict between two ways of life. Athens represents the *tragic* view of life in which mortals are ignorant of their final ends in life and thus subject to a fate or destiny (telos) which they can neither comprehend nor control. The authority of the divine (whether God or the gods) is indifferent to this suffering experienced by humanity. The life that mortals experience, then, is little better than death. For this reason, love of (search for) God requires mortals to liberate themselves from their tragic existence which dooms them to ignorance of the divine. Perhaps most tragic of all, we cannot love God or the gods unless we are indifferent to our fellow human beings. Leo Strauss, who was the most famous philosopher in the twentieth century to emphasize the importance of understanding the Athens-Jerusalem conflict, dramatically illustrates the tragic nature of divine authority among the ancient Greeks in his essay “Jerusalem and Athens: Some Preliminary Reflections” (1967):

The Aristotelian god like the biblical God is a thinking being, but in opposition to the biblical God he is only a thinking being, pure thought: pure thought that thinks itself and only itself. Only by thinking himself and nothing but himself does he rule the world. He surely does not rule by giving orders and laws. Hence he is not a creator-god: the world is as eternal as god. Man is not his image: man is much lower in rank than other parts of the world. For Aristotle it is almost a blasphemy to ascribe justice to his god; he is above justice as well as injustice.[[16]](#endnote-16)

Jerusalem, in contrast, reveals a God who not only creates humanity. He is a just God who cares for humanity by “giving orders and laws.” Unlike Aristotle’s unmoved mover, who is above the concerns of mere mortals, the God of revelation establishes a covenant with humanity which demonstrates his love. As Strauss shows in the rest of his essay, this idea of a covenant has no equivalent in either Greek philosophy (including Plato) or mythology.[[17]](#endnote-17) As Strauss notes elsewhere, the “faith in God as love, as the basis of all men’s love for one another, of universal brotherhood” is not universal, given the fact that pagan religions (e.g., Buddhism) do not “require God as love, a personal god.”[[18]](#endnote-18)

I believe that there are even larger implications that stem from Strauss’s distinction between Athens and Jerusalem. If God truly loves humanity enough to reveal a covenant, then we human beings must have some knowledge of God. Moreover, human life is not fated to be ignorant of one’s end or purpose, which is to love other human beings as one would love (worship) God. There is no fundamental dualism between God and the divine precisely because we are to love God as we love humanity in this life, the here and now.

This knowledge (love, worship) of God is at the core of the ontological argument which St. Anselm famously articulates in the eleventh century. The fact that human beings have an idea of God, who is “that than which nothing greater can be thought,” raises the question: is the ontological argument an act of faith or reason, religion or philosophy? We know from Anselm’s own testimony that his fellow monks asked him to provide a proof of God which rested on reason, not Scripture. Yet the very structure of the ontological argument comes across as a prayer to God.[[19]](#endnote-19) What, then, is philosophical about this “proof” of God’s existence?

Anselm’s argument is that our idea of God is the greatest idea that a human being can have. Moreover, God is intelligible only as an idea in our mind. We do not look to the empirical objects of the universe to demonstrate what God is, as in the 5 Ways of St. Thomas Aquinas. In simple terms, God must be thought, not known. To think God is to understand God as the greatest idea of all, not as an object of time and space (to invoke Kant’s terms). The ontological argument is fideistic to the core precisely because it argues against the temptation to “prove” God’s existence in empirical terms. Yet it is also rational to the core because, as Anselm reminds us, even the fool who denies God has an idea of God in his mind. In short, before we deny what God is, we need to understand what God is.

As Hegel provocatively argues, there is no ontological argument in the Greek mind (Athens).[[20]](#endnote-20) This proof rests on an idea of God that has no equivalent in Greek philosophy (nor literature and historiography). The God of Jerusalem, who blesses us with knowledge of His very existence, is the foundation of this argument. What is amazing (or miraculous?) is that we even have this idea at all, given the fact that it has no correspondence to the empirical world (as Gaunilo famously claimed in his debate with Anselm). What is perhaps even more amazing is that the ontological argument reconciles reason with faith: to *think* God is to *believe* in God.

*Wittgenstein and the philosophical tradition*

What I have written thus far on the conflict between Athens and Jerusalem as Wittgenstein understands it requires knowledge of how ancient Greek philosophy and the biblical tradition as a whole differ from each other, and how this difference helps us understand the historical evolution of western philosophy from antiquity to modernity. Is this conflict simply another version of the age-old conflict between philosophy and religion? Does Jerusalem, the tradition of biblical revelation, belong to antiquity or modernity? If Jerusalem is ancient, how does it relate to Athens, that other great tradition of antiquity? If Jerusalem is modern, how does it relate to the Enlightenment, that great modern tradition which ostensibly rejected religious faith?

In conventional terms, the vast majority of philosophers and theologians in our time tend to argue that the ancients appreciated religion whereas the moderns opposed it. The main premise that informs this distinction is that the advance of scientific knowledge in the modern age is so overwhelming that the cosmological claims of religion become obsolete. God-talk becomes less intelligible or useful as science acquires greater knowledge of the universe.[[21]](#endnote-21) Secular rationalism has surely triumphed over religious belief. If that is the case, does Wittgenstein’s later nuanced embrace of Jerusalem amount to a return to the ancients and a rejection of the moderns? In the process, does he reject modern philosophy as a whole?

In *Culture and Value*, Wittgenstein often conveys the impression that he is anti-modern to the core when he reveals his weariness with the most naïve assumptions of the modern mind, especially the progressivist faith that moral advancement of humanity would result from the advancement of science. In a 1930 entry, Wittgenstein doubts that the “typical western scientist understands or appreciates my work,” since the civilization of his time is “characterized by the word ‘progress,’” a word that lacks “clarity.” (CV 7e) He adds, in a 1947 entry, that it is not absurd to believe that “the age of science and technology is the beginning of the end of humanity, that the idea of great progress is a delusion,” and that mankind is “falling into a trap” as a result of its relentless search for scientific knowledge (CV 56e). In the same year, Wittgenstein grimly observes that science and industry, which have caused “infinite misery,” will leave no place for peace in the world, since these two forces “do decide wars, or so it seems.” (CV 63e)

Does Wittgenstein’s repudiation of modern progress entail a rejection of the philosophy that goes along with the modern tradition? Wittgenstein certainly faults the philosophy of his time for failing to confront “the problems of the intellectual world” that the West faces. Even Nietzsche “passed by” these problems. (CV 9e) Given the utter failure of western philosophy to address problems of its own making, including the delusory nature of progress, does Wittgenstein then call for a return to the ancients in order to recover or rebuild philosophy on the ruins of modernity?

This recovery project would make sense if Wittgenstein thought there is good reason to believe that ancient philosophy avoided the aporias of its modern rival. However, there is no evidence that Wittgenstein considered the ancients to be superior to the moderns. As early as his *Notebooks* (1914-1916), Wittgenstein took aim at both the ancients and moderns for falsely claiming that humanity can objectively understand nature according to forces that exist independently of human cognition: “In this way they [moderns] stop short at the laws of nature as at something impregnable as men of former times did at God and fate.” (6.5.16)[[22]](#endnote-22) Moreover, we have already seen that Wittgenstein rejected the philosophy of the *Tractatus* as a “Platonic myth.” Although he does not write extensively on the history of philosophy, the later Wittgenstein is deeply skeptical that a recovery of ancient Greek wisdom is the way out of the modern malaise.

There is also evidence from the *Philosophical Investigations* that Wittgenstein thought of Platonic philosophy as one that leads to a dead-end. At paragraph 518, Wittgenstein quotes Socrates’s statement in Plato’s *Theaetetus* (189a) that someone who imagines must be imagining something real. Wittgenstein then asks: ‘Well, tell me what the object of painting is: the picture of the man (for example), or the man whom the picture portrays?” In asking whether there is a “man” beyond the “picture” of the man, Wittgenstein is repudiating the Platonist assumption that there must be a reality beyond what human beings conceive as reality, even though whatever we call the “real” is only what we imagine to be real. In short, we have “pictures” of reality, not reality itself. This “reality,” as Wittgenstein warns in *Culture and Value*, to which we all must conform can easily become “dogmatism.” (26e)

Wittgenstein’s determination to fault the greatest minds of ancient Greek philosophy for failing to access the mysterious “foundations” of reality that transcend human thought or language clearly indicate that a return to Athens as a viable alternative to modernity is not in the cards.[[23]](#endnote-23) In *Culture and Value*, he further contends that Socratic questioning never went anywhere, since Socrates excelled in asking questions without providing answers to these questions. “Reading the Socratic dialogues one has the feeling: what a frightful waste of time! What’s the point of these arguments that prove nothing and clarify nothing?” (CV 14e) Socrates’s great student Plato, in the eyes of Wittgenstein, does not fare any better in this work. “I read: ‘philosophers are no nearer to the meaning of ‘Reality’ than Plato got,…’ What a strange situation. How extraordinary that Plato could have got as far as he did! Or that we could not get any further! Was it because Plato was so *extremely* clever?” (CV 15e; author’s italics)

Readers can be forgiven for concluding that Wittgenstein in *Culture and Value* was indicting the entire philosophical tradition for failing to address the great problems of philosophy. Western philosophy from Socrates to the present day has led to a cul-de-sac in which philosophers can cleverly ask only questions and yet provide no answers. Was philosophy, for the later Wittgenstein, a total failure that left a void which only religion could fill? “”God grant the philosopher insight into what lies in front of everyone’s eyes.” (CV 63e) If philosophy leaves everything as it is (to recall the *Philosophical Investigations*), or only shatters idols, does religion ultimately defeat philosophy?[[24]](#endnote-24)

It is not hard to make the case that Wittgenstein in *Culture and Value* draws some rather sharp distinctions between philosophy and religion, usually in favor of the latter. “’Wisdom is grey.’ Life on the other hand and religion are full of colour.” (CV 62e) Jerusalem, then, must be opposed to philosophy. “If Christianity is the truth then all the philosophy that is written about it is false.” (CV83e) What Kai Nielsen calls Wittgenstein’s “deeply anti-intellectualistic way” leads him to the conclusion that Wittgenstein rejected all rational attempts at making sense of religion: “Trying to be intellectual about religion—trying to rationalize religion—will never get you anywhere. People who are gripped by religious forms of life will not try to show how the religious life is reasonable, though they need not say it is unreasonable either. They will see all argument and attempts at reasoning here either on the part of the believer or the sceptic as utterly pointless.”[[25]](#endnote-25) In short, philosophy and religion are utterly opposed to each other, according to this conventional interpretation of the later Wittgenstein. Is there any point, then, to finding reasons for faith?

*Is Jerusalem philosophical? Towards the Ontological Argument*

It is my contention that Wittgenstein’s rejection of the Platonism or dualism that characterizes both ancient and much of modern philosophy does not amount to an unconditional rejection of philosophy, despite some rhetorical excesses in his later works. What Nielsen calls “Wittgensteinian fideism” is not anti-intellectual or anti-philosophical. In order to make this case, however, I shall examine passages in *Culture and Value* in which Wittgenstein at least implicitly advances a philosophical understanding of faith, although it is not philosophical in the “Platonic” sense that he opposes in this work and other later works. Ultimately, Wittgenstein defends the ontological argument as an idea that is at once philosophical and religious, divine and human. In the process, he rejects the dualistic opposition between reason and faith that has characterized western philosophy.

I begin with a general observation about Wittgenstein’s approach to matters of religion. Although he denies that religion, properly understood, necessarily contains doctrines, he never denies that religion has ideas. Nor does he conflate religion with superstition, since the first is about “trusting” and the second is a “false science.” (CV 72e) Moreover, the most religious (divine) ideas are intelligible in human terms. Wittgenstein absolutely denies that there is a truth to religion that is inaccessible to human understanding. “Only something supernatural can express the Supernatural.” (CV 3e) What exactly, then, is the non-supernatural truth of religion that human beings must not only understand but also put into practice? And, why has this truth been misunderstood by philosophers from antiquity to the present, particularly if this truth is philosophically intelligible? In short, what is philosophical about Jerusalem?

In *Culture and Value*, Wittgenstein describes the Jews as a people who reject tragedy. “Tragedy is something un-Jewish.” (CV 1e) Why is this so? “The Jew is a desert region, but underneath its thin layer of rock lies the molten lava of spirit and intellect.’ (13e) In fact, the Jewish intellect is unique. “It is typical for a Jewish mind to understand someone else’s work better than he understands it himself.’ (CV 19e) These passages are striking because Wittgenstein portrays the Jews as a people wedded to thought or intellect.[[26]](#endnote-26) Their religious faith does not contradict their intellectual achievements. Is he claiming, then, that the strength of their intellect and faith in tandem lead them to reject tragedy as antithetical to their identity? It all depends on what Wittgenstein means by *tragedy* here. Recalling his critique of Socratic-Platonic philosophy as full of questions but devoid of answers, I suspect that he considers the tragic way of life as one that is mired in ignorance. Yet the Jewish spirit, as Wittgenstein understands it, is not ignorant. What, then, do the Jews *know* that saves them from the tragedy of pagan ignorance?

The simple answer is: God. What is God to the Jews (including Wittgenstein)? Although Wittgenstein’s answer to this large question is, characteristically, an unsystematic one, it is one that is both philosophical and religious. With a nod to the Book of Genesis, Wittgenstein compares the experience of being psychoanalyzed to “eating from the tree of knowledge.” (CV 34e) What exactly is the “knowledge” that this tree bequeaths to humanity? Wittgenstein’s answer is provocative: “The knowledge acquired sets us (new) ethical problems; but contributes nothing to their solution.” (34e) In the brief passage, Wittgenstein implicitly closes the gap between “religious” and “secular” forms of knowledge. If the tree of knowledge (which was created by God) is comparable to psychoanalysis (which was created by a Jewish psychologist, Sigmund Freud) in giving humanity “ethical problems” that defy solution, then knowledge must be both religious and secular (or modern). If that is the case, then it must be possible to understand knowledge as both religious and philosophical.

What is the lesson of this knowledge? At first glance, Wittgenstein appears to be suggesting that this knowledge is another lesson in tragedy, since it amounts to imposing problems on human beings without solutions. Does this knowledge, then, get us past the limitations of western philosophy, with its abundance of questions and dearth of answers? This is not the way that I read Wittgenstein here. The tree of knowledge leaves us with “ethical problems,” not with ignorance of these problems. We still have knowledge, but of what, exactly?

We human beings presumably have knowledge of God and ourselves, as a result of Adam and Eve’s disobedience of God’s command not to eat from the tree of knowledge. What, then, do we know about God, according to Wittgenstein? Given the anti-systematic nature of Wittgenstein’s later thought, it is unsurprising that he would reject any attempt to empirically demonstrate God’s existence as a supernatural being.[[27]](#endnote-27) Religion, Wittgenstein constantly reminds us, is a matter of belief, not evidence. How, then, can we *know* anything about God?

Wittgenstein’s answer to this question ultimately takes us back to the ontological argument, which was first articulated by St. Anselm in the late eleventh century. Anselm’s bold declaration that “God cannot be thought not to exist” is also paradoxical, since he is also claiming that God must be thought as an idea.[[28]](#endnote-28) In order for faith to seek understanding (*fides quaerens intellectum*), we must first understand the God in whom we place our faith. Moreover, this idea exists in the human mind, which “is the image and mirror of the supreme being.”[[29]](#endnote-29) What is amazing to Anselm is that human reason, which is “so wrapped up in material fancies,” nevertheless has an idea of God which does not correspond to anything in the empirical world.[[30]](#endnote-30) As Anselm patiently reminds his skeptical correspondent Gaunilo, God’s perfection has no equivalent in the imperfect material world.[[31]](#endnote-31)

It should be clear from my brief discussion of the ontological argument that I do not see this “proof” of God as an empirical one. Since Kant’s famous demolition of the ontological argument, most philosophers have rejected it for failing to demonstrate the existence of God as an empirically verifiable being.[[32]](#endnote-32) This kind of God-talk is incoherent, since there is no way of knowing what exactly this “being” is. What, then, does this argument “prove,” if anything about God? Here Wittgenstein’s thoughts about God in *Culture and Value* are most pertinent, although they are not easy to tease out of his aphoristic style. In rejecting any attempt to understand God as a supernatural being, Wittgenstein strongly implies that God is most intelligible as an idea. In a 1946 entry, he writes: “The way you use the word ‘God’ does not show *whom* you mean—but, rather, what you mean.” (CV 50e; author’s italics) What, then, are we supposed to mean by God? More specifically, if God is merely an idea, what is the point of believing in God?

In order to answer these pivotal questions, it is important to recall why Wittgenstein in his later phase rejected the Platonism of his early phase. According to the later Wittgenstein, all that we have are ideas within language. Yes, we only have an idea of God. Then again, we only have an idea of humanity. There is no truth (meaning, discourse) outside of language. Put differently, all that we have are “pictures” of reality. A reality that transcends human notions of that reality would be incomprehensible, as Nielsen has rightly argued.[[33]](#endnote-33) When Wittgenstein declares that “The human being is the best picture of the human soul,” (CV 49e), he is claiming that we have no “knowledge” of the soul apart from what we know of humanity within the limits of our finite language.

If God is not a being per se, does God as an idea make any sense whatsoever? In other pivotal passages in *Culture and Value*, Wittgenstein boldly declares that the Christian faith is a practice that transforms your life; it is not a set of dogmas to which one adheres.

Christianity is not a doctrine, not, I mean, a theory about what has happened and will happen to the human soul, but a description of something that actually takes place in human life. For “consciousness of sin” is a real event and so are despair and salvation through faith. Those who speak of such things (Bunyan for instance) are simply describing what has happened to them, whatever gloss anyone may want to put on it. (CV 28e)

In many other places Wittgenstein emphasizes how the transformative effect of Christianity is central to a proper understanding of the faith, not its doctrinal truth.[[34]](#endnote-34) Consistent with his *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein is asserting that faith is a form of life which can only be understood by those who live it. Yet the passage on how “Christianity is not a doctrine” is arguably the most puzzling to scholars, since in a strictly empirical sense it cannot be true. The history of the Christian church since the time of St. Peter has in large part been the story of fierce debates over dogma or doctrine, after all. As Nielsen has argued, “there is no doctrineless religion” because “religion inescapably involves making cosmological (metaphysical) claims.”[[35]](#endnote-35) Does it make any sense for Wittgenstein to emphasize Christianity as a way of living but not a set of doctrines?

Nielsen’s challenge to what he has called “Wittgensteinian fideism” is instructive because it focuses on the large issues at stake in Wittgenstein’s approach to religion. How should we interpret the Bible? How should we even understand God? If Wittgenstein is arguing that God reveals how we are to live, albeit without the necessity of doctrines, what counts as “truth” in this context? Moreover, if Christianity (along with Judaism) is a way of life, why can’t the philosophical tradition that the later Wittgenstein repudiated make the same claim to offering a way of life? As Leo Strauss famously argued, Athens and Jerusalem simply present two opposing ways of life, the first based on rational questioning and the second based on faithful obedience.[[36]](#endnote-36) Is Wittgenstein simply being dogmatic (anti-intellectual) in insisting that one must live this life in order to understand it?

As we have seen, the later Wittgenstein is profoundly dissatisfied with the philosophical tradition since Plato because it does not teach us how to live. Although many readers portray him as anti-Platonic because he rejects the “foundationalism” that, since Plato, dogmatically postulates the existence of a reality (e.g., the Forms) beyond language,[[37]](#endnote-37) I believe that this interpretation does not fully explain why he appeals to the biblical tradition late in life. How does Christianity or Judaism show us how to live, presumably without the aid of doctrines? We have already seen Wittgenstein declare that the “tree of knowledge” gives us “ethical problems” that defy solution. What is the “problem of life” that logic cannot address? (CV 4e) Can biblical religion succeed where philosophy failed?

Wittgenstein’s appeal to the ontological argument ultimately sheds light on these questions. Although there have been a few attempts by scholars to analyze the presence of the ontological argument in his later works,[[38]](#endnote-38) to my knowledge no scholar has studied the contrast that Wittgenstein makes between this “proof” and ancient Greek thought or myth. This contrast is important because it helps explain why Wittgenstein rejected the “Platonic” tradition of philosophy that, we have seen, dualistically separates an ideal reality from human thought or existence. This contrast is important for another reason: it reveals Wittgenstein’s profound understanding that philosophy *and* religion, properly understood, help us live as long as we understand God properly.

In one of the last entries in *Culture and Value* (dated 1949, two years before his death), Wittgenstein refers to the substance of the ontological argument without actually naming it. He writes: “God’s essence is supposed to guarantee his existence—what this really means is that what is here at issue is not the existence of something.” (CV 82e) This brief restatement of the ontological argument is puzzling, since Wittgenstein seems to have in mind a version of this argument that is opposed to the one that Kant famously refuted: the idea of God logically proves the existence of God (existence is a predicate of God’s essence). Yet Wittgenstein is not finished with this version of the ontological argument, for he goes on to remark that the concept “God” defies description in a manner that the gods of ancient Greece do not: “There can be a description of what it would be like if there were gods on Olympus—but not: ‘what it would be like if there were such a thing as God.” (CV 82e) Is Wittgenstein, then, rejecting the ontological argument as incoherent because it fails to describe what God is?

At this point, Wittgenstein does not give up on providing “contributions” to a description. (CV 82e) This is no easy task since, in the passage in which he contrasts God with the Olympian gods, Wittgenstein implies that we cannot describe “God” in the same way that we would describe Zeus or Apollo. (As Strauss observes, the biblical God is mysterious.[[39]](#endnote-39)) In other words, “God” does not have the anthropomorphic features of the Greek gods.[[40]](#endnote-40) Wittgenstein even goes on to claim (in entries dated 1950) that someone who believes in God “is not craving for a (causal) explanation” when he asks about the origins of the universe. Rather, he is “expressing an attitude to all explanations.” Wittgenstein then asks the pivotal question: “But how is this manifested in his life?” (CV 85e) This existential question is just the opposite of seeking empirical proofs for God’s causal interventions in the universe. A few passages later, Wittgenstein reminds his readers that people do not believe as the result of “an intellectual analysis and foundation.” Only life “can educate one to a belief in God.” Whatever we “experience’ about God has nothing to do with the senses, for God is not an “object” whom we experience. (CV 86e)

In this rich collection of passages near the end of *Culture and Value*, Wittgenstein is not merely reiterating his famous view that God is unintelligible as a supernatural being. (If God were supernatural, what would count as a proof?) Instead he is arguing against the dualistic temptation to separate God from humanity. The paradox to which Wittgenstein points is that God is intelligible only in terms of human practice (language, action).[[41]](#endnote-41) It may not make sense to imagine that “God judges a man” (CV 86e) unless we imagine God saying “I am judging you out of your own mouth” (CV 87e). In short, we cannot understand the judgements of God unless we also understand that these are our own human-all-too-human judgements. Wittgenstein would agree with atheists (e.g., Kai Nielsen) that human beings ought to recognize that God is intelligible only in human terms![[42]](#endnote-42)

We understand God when we live a life of faith or belief. This is an affirmation of life in the here and now, an affirmation that is lacking in the ancient Greek tradition of philosophy (but also literature and historiography). Recalling the passage at 82e, in which he contrasts God with the Olympian gods, Wittgenstein remarks that we can describe the Greek gods. Is it legitimate, however, to describe a god given all his warnings that the divine should not be confused with an object of the senses? As Tim Labron has ably shown, the later Wittgenstein is preoccupied with the dangers of idolatry, or the “confusion” of an image of God with God himself.[[43]](#endnote-43) Idolatry is not a true representation of God. When Wittgenstein remarks that “God may grant the philosopher insight into what lies in front of everyone’s eyes,” (CV 63e), he does not have in mind a concrete graven image that philosophy rightly shatters It is idolatrous to claim that one representation of God is literally identical with the Almighty. It is doubly wrong and dangerous for human beings to deny that they themselves have created a graven image of God which they know to be a mere projection of their desires.

To live a life of real belief or faith, then, is to spurn idolatry. What I believe Wittgenstein saw as invaluable in the ontological argument is the prohibition against idolatry: thou shalt not describe God as an object that simply reflects human desires. To be honest believers (and philosophers), we must understand that there is no God outside of human existence (nor is there human existence outside of God[[44]](#endnote-44)). When belief degenerates into doctrine, the result is the idolatrous confusion of God with what Kant calls objects of time and space. God can never be knowable as an object because the worship of this object amounts to idolatry. The most important lessons in life are also not reducible to scientific knowledge of the objects of nature. As we have seen, Wittgenstein resists the idolatry of progressivism, which adulterates the true purpose of science. It is not the task of scientists to teach us how to live but to understand the workings of the universe. However, this task is fundamentally different from that of religious faith, which is to show us how to live.

The “tree of knowledge” to which Wittgenstein refers as the source of “ethical problems” is inconceivable to the dualistic Greek mind. As Wittgenstein often remarks, Socratic dialogues begin with ignorance and end with ignorance. One can never know God (the gods, the divine) until death, the end of life. The purpose of philosophy, as Socrates remarks in the *Phaedo* (64a-b), is to prepare mortals for death (although he warns at the end of the *Apology* that even death may not be the end of ignorance). Yet the “tree of knowledge” reveals knowledge of good and evil. This knowledge is not scientific, but it is identical to what Wittgenstein calls belief or faith. In order to struggle with ethical problems, one must have knowledge of what these ethical problems are. One must know good and evil. Wittgenstein could not make the judgements that he applies to the misuse of science, industry, philosophy, or religion if he did not know good and evil. Yet to know it is to live according to it. One does not truly believe in God unless one acts like God!

Wittgenstein’s brief yet provocative reflections on the tree of knowledge ultimately reveal, it seems to me, the substance of his 1929 entry that tragedy is “something un-Jewish.” It is not tragic to struggle with the “ethical problems” of life. Rather, it is tragic to be ignorant of what these problems are. Did the Greeks understand these problems? Let us recall Wittgenstein’s dismissal of Socratic dialogues that “prove nothing and clarify nothing.” In connecting these passages together, we can tease out of Wittgenstein’s critique of the Greeks that they lived a tragic existence precisely because they were ignorant. They lacked a “tree of knowledge.” Admittedly, these claims are strong ones that seemingly contradict the search for knowledge that characterizes ancient Greek philosophy. It is true that Socrates recognized his own “ignorance,” but does this make him literally ignorant of knowledge? As Leo Strauss cautions in a discussion of Socrates, “Knowledge of ignorance is not ignorance. It is knowledge of the elusive character of the truth, of the whole.”[[45]](#endnote-45) If Strauss is right that the idea of “Socratic ignorance” is still knowledge, is Wittgenstein’s critique of Greek philosophy as mired in tragic ignorance invalid?

In order to address this large question, it is critical to understand two things about the ancient Greek mind: their concepts of the human and the divine. With respect to the human, Socrates is utterly clear in the Platonic dialogues that he lacks knowledge of the eternal. In erotically seeking the unchangeable or divine good, Socrates constantly reminds himself (and his interlocutors) of their ignorance. Given the fact that human beings live in a world of flux, they cannot know what counts as eternal. Although they can have opinions about the “whole,” these do not count as knowledge due to the fact that these opinions are in flux. As Socrates dramatically observes in the *Meno*, a mortal cannot acquire knowledge unless they already begin with an idea of knowledge: ”He would not seek what he knows, for since he knows it there is no need of the inquiry, nor what he does not know, for in that case he does not even know what he is to look for.” (80e)[[46]](#endnote-46) Socrates searches for knowledge precisely because he lacks knowledge. In accord with the true meaning of *Eros*, he loves what he lacks.[[47]](#endnote-47)

Do the gods, then, liberate human beings from this ignorance? Socrates taunts the jury, which has voted for his execution near the end of the *Apology*, that the migration of his soul into Hades may well allow him to dialogue with dead Greek heroes. However, he will still remain ignorant of whether life is better than death (42a). Thus Socrates offers no refutation of Silenus who tells King Midas, as Nietzsche recounts in part 3 of *The Birth of Tragedy*, that non-existence is better than existence, and a short life is better than a long one. In seeking the divine, Socrates and his most sophisticated heirs Plato and Aristotle recognize that knowledge of the divine is impossible unless mortals shed their finite existence and become one with the gods (or God). There is no possibility that the human can know the divine and still remain human.

Why is Jerusalem, the tradition of biblical revelation, radically distinct from this ancient pagan teaching? Wittgenstein’s simple yet profound answer is: faith. Both Judaism and Christianity, properly understood, reveal that human beings must believe in life, not death. Is there a rational argument that demonstrates this truth? Wittgenstein would have to answer “no,” given his misgivings pertaining to both ancient and modern rationalism. No doctrine can provide a reason to believe that life is better than death, given all the suffering that life entails. As he wryly notes in a 1948 entry, “we could easily imagine the Devil had created the world or part of it.” (CV 71e) What, then, is the point of belief in life? The amazing thing is that “man exists in this world, where things break, slide about, cause every imaginable mischief. And of course he is one such thing himself.” (CV 71e) In other words, we faithful human beings exist (and persist) despite the travails of life, or the temptation to believe that evil (the Devil) is triumphant in the world.

Wittgenstein’s reflections on the Devil may remind the reader of what he writes about the “tree of knowledge.” In order to know life, we must also know death. In order to know good, we must also know evil (including idolatry) In order to love (believe in) life, we must know how tempting it is to embrace the nihilistic (demonic) denial of life. As Wittgenstein writes in a 1944 entry, “A love which acknowledges, as it were, that we are all wicked children” is one that is open to God (as Christianity teaches). (CV 46e) Salvation in this vein is distinct from the hatred that “comes from our cutting ourselves off from each other. Because we don’t want anyone else to look inside us, since it’s not a pretty sight in there.” (CV 46e) If I understand Wittgenstein correctly here, what Christianity (along with Judaism) reveals, in accordance with the “tree of knowledge,” is that we know ourselves only when we know God. And, we only know God when we open ourselves to other human beings in relation. (As Strauss astutely notes, “the true tree of knowledge” is “at the same time the tree of life.”[[48]](#endnote-48))

It is important to recall Wittgenstein’s provocative view that Christianity is not a “doctrine,” if by doctrine we mean empirically verifiable views. There is nothing scientific about the tree of knowledge, faith in God, or despair over the power of the Devil. As Wittgenstein constantly emphasizes, they are beliefs that have no content or meaning unless one *believes* in them. The ontological argument that, I believe, is the philosophical or rational equivalent to all of these biblical beliefs is not the same as a doctrine. Either one believes in life (love, God) or one does not. One question that remains is: why should we believe in any of this?

As Kai Nielsen has argued, Wittgensteinian fideism may as well be atheism, since it abandons all appeals to a supernatural God that orders human existence in a cosmological way.[[49]](#endnote-49) Nielsen’s argument rests on the assumption that traditional Christianity (along with the Bible) must have doctrines that make empirical claims, however unverifiable, about the role of humanity in the world or cosmos, a role that is absolutely subordinate to this Supreme Being. If God is not “transcendent” in some sense, or an objectively existing being, then the entire meaning of what He is becomes incoherent. Additionally, as Nielsen has shown in his numerous works on ethics and the philosophy of religion, a reasonably thoughtful atheist can have a meaningful life (perhaps even a hopeful life) without employing God-talk in any sense.[[50]](#endnote-50)

Although Nielsen presents a formidable critique of Wittgensteinian fideism, I believe that he ignores a crucial assumption that Wittgenstein presents in *Culture and Value*. Wittgenstein never insists that we human beings need to employ God-talk, but he certainly insists, as does Nielsen, that we understand what we are talking about when we refer to “God.” Following the logic of the ontological argument, Wittgenstein acutely recognizes that both believers and atheists must reject idolatrous concepts of both God and Man, both of which falsely conflate our God-talk and Man-talk with empirical certainties. As I have shown, Wittgenstein emphasizes how our understanding of God is inseparable from our understanding of humanity. More specifically, we cannot understand God apart from human language or intellect. Consequently, we must recognize how our idolatrous concepts of God and Man originate from our own frail wills. We are not literally equal to God, nor are we opposed to God.[[51]](#endnote-51) When we relate to God, we are relating to humanity at the same time. What we believe about God ultimately reveals what we believe about our fellow human beings. Nielsen is perfectly right to reject the idea of God’s transcendence as “inscrutable,” but his critique mainly applies to a Platonized idea of God that, we have seen, Wittgenstein categorically rejects in his later works.

Wittgenstein once observed that philosophy can only shatter idols. Yet the Bible also calls for the shattering of idols while embracing a true (non-idolatrous) concept of God. As the first commandment states: Thou shalt have no other gods before me. In order to understand what it means to idolize God, we first need to understand what God commands of human beings. If Wittgenstein is right, a command cannot be the same as a doctrine that emanates from a supernatural being. What, then, does God command? In accord with the first commandment, God commands the end of idols: Thou shalt have no other gods before me. We human beings must take responsibility for our knowledge of good and evil. God must not be the great excuse for human sin, inaction, or bad faith. What counts as ungodly in the eyes of this God?

Wittgenstein provocatively writes in a 1931 entry: “Within Christianity it’s as though God says to men: Don’t act a tragedy, that’s to say, don’t enact heaven and hell on earth. Heaven and hell are *my* affair.” (CV 14e; author’s italics) In this brief passage, Wittgenstein presents two powerful ideas. First, we have a choice to act “a tragedy,” a freedom that would be inconceivable to the philosophers of Athens. Second, to choose or act in accord with tragedy is tantamount to acting as if one is literally God. To “enact heaven and hell on earth” is not the proper responsibility of human beings, who are not gods. When God, in the human voice of Wittgenstein, tells humanity that heaven and hell are his affair, he is commanding that we human beings avoid the idolatrous temptation of acting as if we have the power and wisdom of God. Our idea of God, like anything that falls from the tree of knowledge, can be used for good or evil. The good news, however, is that we are not tragically fated to act out our lives in ignorance of God. Rather, we have no choice but to act according to our knowledge of good and evil. We only act tragically in the biblical age when we falsely justify our sins and crimes in the name of God (or Man).

The tree of knowledge gives us no excuses. There is no true progress (or the idolatrous abuse of progress) without knowledge of God or his gift of knowledge of good and evil. We have no choice but to know, although we can choose between good and evil. What is absolutely illegitimate is to blame the idol God for our transgressions. To know God is to know who we are. If there is any proof that the ontological argument offers, it is that we prove God lives when we act like God, loving our fellow human beings as we would love God.[[52]](#endnote-52)

Although Wittgenstein is not a philosopher of ethics, his view that God is not an object is consistent with his related view that religious belief is transformational. How is God, the greatest idea of all, supposed to transform human existence? As we have seen, to understand God as an object is tantamount to idolatry. If we human beings are not supposed to treat God as an object, we must not treat him as a “cosmic-bellhop” that is a mere instrument of our ends.[[53]](#endnote-53) What, then, is a non-idolatrous relationship to God? Unsurprisingly, Wittgenstein’s answer is biblical. When he writes that “Redeeming love believes even in the Resurrection” (CV 33e), he is referring to both the transformational power of religious faith and love. As a fideist, Wittgenstein could never accept an empirical demonstration of the Resurrection of Christ. What matters to him is the effect that this belief has on the believer. Although Wittgenstein does not explain what he means by “Redeeming love” here, I assume he means that we human beings can truly love each other only if we see each other as redeemable in the eyes of God. That is to say, we must love each other in accord with our understanding of God’s love. In the famous language of 1st John, “God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.” (4:16; NRSV) The redemptive power of love, then, requires us to love each other as we would love God. If it is wrong to worship or abuse God as an object, it must be equally wrong to objectify or mistreat human beings. The very idea of “God is love” is opposed to the objectification of God as supernatural, a deity that is the mere projection of humanity’s idolatrous ways.

As Wittgenstein well understood, the tree of knowledge imposes upon human beings ethical problems that defy easy solution because a life devoted to this manifestation of love is the hardest of all. The ethic of Jerusalem has no equivalent in Athens, whose greatest philosophers teach that human beings must shed their mortal coil in order to know God. As Socrates remarks at the end of the *Apology*, it is known only to his god (*daimon*) whether life is better than death. It is not surprising, then, that the ethic of universal love is absent in ancient Greek philosophy, as Strauss noted.[[54]](#endnote-54) The idea of “God is love” commands that we love human beings and God in the here and now because we know what this love is. Because we have this idea of God, as Anselm stresses in his presentation of the ontological argument, we have no choice but to understand God. To understand God, however, is to love God. Neither Anselm nor Wittgenstein denies that human beings can misunderstand (idolize) God for their own ends: the tree of knowledge, after all, reveals both good and evil. Despite its benefits, we know that science does not save us from evil. The progressivist faith in human reason is just as idolatrous as the supernatural God that Wittgenstein repudiates. What rational philosophy and religious faith must oppose are the idols of God and Man with equal determination.

1. In the course of writing this paper, I have benefitted from illuminating conversations with Kai Nielsen. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Rhees, Rush ed. 1984. *Recollections of Wittgenstein*. New York: Oxford University Press. Page 161 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 2005. *The Big Typescript: TS 213*. Edited and translated by C. Grant Luckhardt and Maximilian A. E. Aue. Oxford: Blackwell. Page 305e. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 1974. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. With a new edition of the translation by D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuiness. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Wittgenstein writes: “The world is independent of my will.” See the *Notebooks: 1914-1916*. Von Wright, G. H., and G. E. M. Anscombe ed. With an English translation by G. E. M. Anscombe. Oxford: Basil Blackwell. Page 73e. (6.375) [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Quoted in Janik, Allan, and Stephen Toulmin. 1973. *Wittgenstein’s Vienna*. New York: Simon and Schuster. Page 190. Wittgenstein also writes in the *Tractatus*: “Language disguises thought. So much so, that from the outward form of the clothing it is impossible to infer the form of the thought beneath it, because the outward form of the clothing is not designed to reveal the form of the body, but for entirely different purposes.” (4.002) [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*. 2009. The German text, with an English translation by G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell. Paragraph 124. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Wittgenstein writes in the *Philosophical Investigations* (23): “The word ‘language-*game*’ is used here to emphasize the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life.” (author’s italics) [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Nielsen, Kai. 2005. “Wittgensteinian Fideism,” in *Wittgensteinian Fideism?* Nielsen, Kai and D. Z. Phillips ed. London: SCM Press. Nielsen writes: “Philosophy cannot relevantly criticize religion; it can only display for us the workings, the style of functioning, of religious discourse.” (23) Nielsen argues against this defense of Wittgensteinian Fideism in this famous essay, which was first published in 1967. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Rosen, Stanley. 2002. “Wittgenstein, Strauss, and the Possibility of Philosophy,” in Rosen, Stanley, *The Elusiveness of the Ordinary: Studies in the Possibility of Philosophy*. New Haven: Yale University Press. Page 143. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. See Chatterjee, Ranjit. 2005. *Wittgenstein and Judaism: A Triumph of Concealment*. New York: Peter Lang. Pages 65-82; 93-131; Labron, Tim, 2006. *Wittgenstein’s Religious Point of View*. London: Bloomsbury. Pages 74-149. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Nielsen, “Wittgenstein and Wittgensteinians on Religion,” in *Wittgensteinian Fideism?* 225. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 1984. *Culture and Value*. Translated by Peter Winch. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. The original German edition was published as *Vermischte Bemerkungen* (*Miscellaneous Remarks*) in 1977. I henceforth reference this text as CV with the English page number. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Nielsen, “Wittgensteinian Fideism Revisited,” in *Wittgensteinian Fideism?* 117. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Kerr, Fergus. 1986. *Theology after Wittgenstein*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell. Page 36. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Strauss, Leo. “Jerusalem and Athens: Some Preliminary Reflections,” in Strauss, Leo, *Jewish Philosophy and the Crisis of Modernity: Essays and Lectures in Modern Jewish Thought*, edited by Kenneth Hart Green. Albany: SUNY Press. Page 396. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Strauss, “Jerusalem and Athens,” 388-396. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Strauss, Leo. 2013. “Introduction to Maimonides’ *The Guide of the Perplexed*,” in Strauss, Leo, *Leo Strauss on Maimonides: The Complete Writings*, edited with an introduction by Kenneth Hart Green. Chicago; University of Chicago Press. Page 426. Strauss gave this public lecture in 1960. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Kallenberg, Brad. 2004. “Praying for Understanding: Reading Anselm through Wittgenstein.” *Modern Theology* 20, no. 4: 527-546. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Hegel, G. W. F. 1988. *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, one-volume edition: *The Lectures of 1827*, Hodgson, Peter C. Berkeley, CA: UCLA Press. Page 181. Hegel writes: “This [ontological] proof passes over from the concept of God to the being of God. The ancients, i.e., Greek philosophy, did not have this transition; even within the Christian era it was not accomplished for a long time, because it involves the most profound descent of spirit into itself. One of the greatest Scholastic philosophers, the profoundly speculative thinker Anselm of Canterbury, grasped this representation for the first time in the following way: We have the representation of God. But God is no mere representation, for God *is*.” (author’s italics) [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Nielsen, “On Obstacles of the Will,” in *Wittgensteinian Fideism?* 312. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. In the *Tractatus*, he writes: “Thus people today stop at the laws of nature, treating them as something inviolable, just as God and Fate were treated in past ages. And in fact both are right and wrong: though the view of the ancients is clearer in so far as they have a clear and acknowledged terminus, while the modern system tries to make it look as if *everything* were explained.” (6.372; author’s italics) [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. See Labron, *Wittgenstein’s Religious Point of View*, 74-95. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Wittgenstein famously told his friend M. O. C. Drury: “I am not a religious man but I cannot help seeing every problem from a religious point of view.” See Rhees, Rush ed. *Recollections of Wittgenstein*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Page 79. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Nielsen, “Wittgenstein and Wittgensteinians on Religion,” 264. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. See Labron, *Wittgenstein’s Religious Point of View*, 99-106, for an informative discussion of Wittgenstein’s views on the Jews. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. See Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 1967. *Lectures & Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology, and Religious Belief*, Barrett, Cyril ed. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press. Wittgenstein dismisses the plausibility of believing in God based on evidence (see p. 60). [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Anselm. 1998. “Proslogion,” in Anselm of Canterbury, *The Major Works*, edited with an introduction by Brian Davies and G. R. Evans. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Page 88. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Anselm, “Monologion,” in *The Major Works*, 73. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. Anselm, “On the Incarnation of the Word,” in *The Major Works*, 237. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. Anselm, “Reply to Gaunilo,” in *The Major Works*, 111-120.

    [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. Polka, Brayton. 2012. “The Metaphysics of Thinking Necessary Existence: Kant and the Ontological Argument.” *European Legacy* 17, no. 5: 583-591. Polka persuasively argues that Kant’s rejection of the ontological argument as a falsely empirical (objective) proof of God is consistent with his defense of the authentic version of the ontological argument, which affirms the idea of God as the foundation of love and freedom. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. Nielsen, “Can Anything be Beyond Human Understanding?” in *Wittgensteinian Fideism?* Pp. 143-164. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. See *Culture and Value*, 29e, 32e, 53e, 64e, 77e, 80e, 81e. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. Nielsen, “Wittgenstein and Wittgensteinians on Religion,” 250. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. Strauss, “Progress or Return? The Contemporary Crisis in Western Civilization,” in Strauss, *Jewish Philosophy*, 122-123. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. Rorty, Richard. 1979. *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. See Kallenberg, “Reading Anselm”; Malcolm, Norman. 1960. “Anselm’s Ontological Arguments.” *The Philosophical Review* 69, no. 1:59-61; Brenner, William H. 1999. *Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Investigations*. Albany: SUNY Press, 147; Aikin, Scott, and Michael Hodges. 2014. “St. Anselm’s Ontological Argument as Expressive: A Wittgensteinian Reconstruction,” *Philosophical Investigations* 37, no.2: 130-151; Ledesma, Felipe. 2007. “The Ontological Argument in the *Tractatus*.” *Metaphysica* 8: 179-201. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. Strauss, “Jerusalem and Athens,” 393: “He cannot be seen; His presence can be sensed but not always and everywhere; what is known of Him is only what he chose to communicate by His word through His chosen servants.” [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. In *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, Drury recounts a conversation with Wittgenstein on the difference between the Greek gods and the God of the Bible. Drury remarked: “when, say, Plato talks about the gods, it lacks that sense of awe which you feel throughout the Bible—from Genesis to Revelation.” Wittgenstein, who was “standing still and looking at me very intently) said: “I think you have just said something very important. Much more important than you realize.” (161) [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. Admittedly, Wittgenstein, according to Rhees, was unhappy with Kierkegaard’s “frequent use” of the word “paradox.” See *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, 89. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. Nielsen, “Wittgensteinian Fideism Revisited,” in *Wittgensteinian Fideism?* 127. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. Labron, *Wittgenstein’s Religious Point of View*, pp. 101-2, 121-3, 130-38. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. See Polka, Brayton. 2006. “Philosophy without God? God without Philosophy? Critical Reflections on Antony Flew’s *God and Philosophy*.” *European Legacy* 11, no.1: 35-46. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. Strauss, Leo. 1988. *What is Political Philosophy? And Other Studies*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Page 38. In “Progress or Return?” Strauss writes: “As a philosopher, he [Socrates] knows that we are ignorant of the most important things.” (122) [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. Plato. 1982. *The Meno*, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, edited by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns. Princeton: Princeton University Press. The translation is by W. K. C. Guthrie. [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. Although in the *Meno* Socrates initially rejects this aporia as a bad argument that would make human beings too ‘lazy” to search for knowledge (81d), the entire dialogue vindicates Wittgenstein’s view that Platonic dialogues lead nowhere. Socrates remarks earlier (71b0 that he has “no idea what virtue is.” By the end of the dialogue he admits that he still has not discovered what it is “in and by itself.” (100b) [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
48. Strauss, “Jerusalem and Athens,” 393. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
49. Nielsen, “Wittgenstein an Wittgensteinians on Religion,” 266-68, and “On Obstacles of the Will,” 313-315. [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
50. Nielsen, Kai. 1990. *Ethics without God*. Buffalo: Prometheus Books. [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
51. Polka, Brayton. 1990. *Truth and Interpretation: An Essay in Thinking*. New York: St. Martin’s Press. Pages 172-173.. [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
52. Polka, “Philosophy without God?” 39. [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
53. King, Jr., Martin Luther. 1981. *Strength to Love*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press. Page 131. King is referring to the “callous misuse of prayer,” which looks to God rather than human beings to solve problems such as racism and discrimination. [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
54. See also Jaffa, Harry V. 1952. *Thomism and Aristotelianism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Pp. 23-34. [↑](#endnote-ref-54)