

Scenes of Inner Devastation: Confessional Improvisation

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Abstract: Wittgenstein and Cavell have both been alerting me over the years to unsettling possibilities: that secularization is not always a lessening of religious intensity, that philosophy can be a religious calling, that God is less real in our theories than in the grammar of our lives. In short, I have been made aware of the possibility of a secular confession, not as an amputated version of the religious original, but as a genuine improvisation: a way of speaking to God without having to say much, if anything, about God. When Cavell's hefty memoir came out in 2010, some thirty years after my first encounter with his writing, I assumed I would have my chance to test this possibility. This essay is the outcome of that testing.

Keywords: Cavell, Wittgenstein, Augustine, Autobiography, Confession

If life is hazardous, this the greatest of all:
the heart cannot be led like a dog
but rises up, and seeks its goal.

— Ellen Hinsey

In a scrap-box of loose notes, gathered over a nearly 20-year stretch of life and more deliberately than one might have first imagined, Wittgenstein's last scrap, his parting offering (but to whom?), reads as follows:

"You can't hear God speak to someone else; you can hear him only if you are being addressed."—That is a grammatical remark. (no. 717, Wittgenstein 1967).

What Wittgenstein means here by grammar, this being a case of a philosophical or religious grammar, is not easy to make out. I think I have a grip at least on what he does not mean. It is not as if Wittgenstein has been polling prophets and noticing that they are all stuck in parallel play. He is not generalizing from the experience of those who profess to hear God's voice only to find themselves corralled into the separate spaces of an unbidden ecstasy. But I also suspect that too sharp a contrast

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with the empirical tends to confuse Wittgensteinian grammar with a transcendental fiat.

I don't take Wittgenstein to be insisting that a condition for the very possibility of being addressed by God is that you cannot convey what you have heard to others. That would be to confuse the liability of self-anointed genius with the labor pains of a prophetic calling. The Wittgenstein who once used to insist on the absolute definitiveness of whatever he was able to be put into words, the rest being grist for pious silence, has long since given place to the Wittgenstein who attends to assembled scraps of meaning and invests his words in a form of life which, if fixed ahead of time, is so only in the barest form of a need to be shared.

The grammar of being addressed by God, being no less beholden than any other grammar is to a form of life, is not divorced, nor can it be, from the life I hope to share with others, but it does seem to lag behind the rush of consequences I normally take to be authenticating or discrediting my life's inspiration—its status as inspired. It's as if I were attempting to speak intelligibly to you ahead of having grasped the grammar that structures the distinction between my words and yours and so affords me even the possibility of a point of view. Of course I don't relish the thought that I speak incomprehensibly to those I aim to reach across a divide of separate flesh, but I have been teaching and lecturing long enough to know that I often do. I also know that familiarity is no guarantee of mutual understanding. I am familiar with my family members; this does not mean that I can readily translate into words or gestures what I experience to be an imperative of inner spirit—something in me that, when I convey it well, releases me from myself and works to relieve my loved ones of their aloneness or alternatively reconciles them to it. Perhaps I am a better translator than I think I am; perhaps I am considerably worse and don't translate at all. The uncertainty lands me in a place of shipwreck, where I can never be sure that my ventures beyond myself, into the worlds of others, escape the shoals of soliloquy. I will call this spectacle of unintended self-preoccupation, borrowing a phrase from Stanley Cavell, a "scene of inner devastation" (Cavell 2010, p. 21). When I bring my best sense of what creates such a scene, the drama behind it, within the compass of Wittgenstein's grammatical musing, I am left with the unsettling thought that a scene of inner devastation, viewed from a different angle, can be sanctified ground, a place for hearing God's address. That thought, raw as it is now, is what I hope to refine for you over the course of this essay.

In June of 2014, I co-facilitated a small faculty and advanced graduate

student seminar at the Center for Theological Inquiry in Princeton, on the unlikely theme of “confessional improvisation.” I wasn’t sure what that was going to mean, if anything, but my co-facilitator, my old and very dear friend, John Bowlin, a professor at Princeton Theological Seminary, had generously ceded to me all rights of text selection. I picked, as core texts, Augustine’s *Confessions* (Chadwick trans., 1992), Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* (Revised 4th ed., 2009), with a brief and breathless nod to the *Tractatus* (Pears and McGuinness trans., 1961), and, most hopefully, Cavell’s recent memoir, *Little Did I Know*, subtitled, not without some irony, *Excerpts from Memory* (Cavell 2010). Usually an excerpting, being an exercise not just of selection but also of a deliberate leaving out, connotes something condensed. Cavell’s memoir doesn’t begin to wind down until over 500 pages have passed by, and then only because he has come to appreciate the way in which memory always memorializes more than a single life and then finally takes on a life of its own. At the beginning of Part 14, with more than a year’s worth of memorialization behind him, Cavell, at age 77, an endgame age, will write: “I am seeking a way to take my leave now not because I feel I have exhausted effective memory; it would be more accurate to say that memory has discovered itself to be inexhaustible” (p. 518). “And I am increasingly aware,” he importantly adds, “that memories of my life are so often unforgettably no longer mine, not mine alone, so I have repeatedly to concern myself with considerations of propriety beyond those that are functions merely of my awkward self-revelations.”

There is a great deal of awkwardness in *Little Did I Know* in regard to which Cavell will claim full propriety rights. Augustine will do something similar in the *Confessions*, where sin takes the place of awkwardness or perhaps just re-describes it. Neither man, for all his genius with words, finds life in the flesh a comfortable proposition. There are no words to seal the union between love and time, and even if there were, who would be in a position to hear them? It would be like being able to hear the eulogy at your own funeral. Augustine thinks of death as a punishment, as a forced and unnatural incongruity between soul and body that finally resolves itself into a howling separation. If the story ends well, and in most cases, Augustine believes, it does not, there is a further union of soul and soul-bereft clay, and love resurrects by way of its own uniquely indeterminable incarnation, albeit this time and forever more without the incongruity. Cavell thinks of the human being, and so of himself, as “the unnatural animal” (p. 547), and by that I take him at least partly to mean that death

offers no resolution for him and his kind to the awkwardness that comes of aspiring to love in and through a mortal life.

Suppose that I miraculously come to receive knowledge of death in life—the very knowledge that Adam and Eve were angling for in the Garden. Either I now know that death is the absolute cessation, without hope of renewal, of a particular spirit's covenant with particular flesh, a nullity then, or I know death to be the dreaded name for a necessarily mysterious subliming of spirit, or what seems to be, from another angle, a nullification of flesh. Neither branch of forbidden knowledge encourages in me the thought that I can end the awkwardness of my life, where I am often oddly beside myself, and still recognize my life's resolution, where I am all in, as my own. It is my undespairing acknowledgment of such inescapable limitation, fraught with possibilities both tragic and transcendent, that gives me my access to anything I would remotely be tempted to call "redemption" in Cavell.

Here is Cavell, still in the business of bringing his infinitely capacious power of memorialization to a timely end (p. 547):

...I have, I find, now closing this writing from memory, been drawn to exemplify, still with some surprise, the condition that telling one's life, the more completely, say incorporating awkwardness, becomes one's life, and becomes a way of leaving it. And now that seems to be as it should be, given that it is a human life under question. The news is that this awkwardness, or say, self-consciousness, or perpetual lack of sophistication, stops asserting itself nowhere short of dying.

What Cavell describes is very much a writer's sense of redemption—that of being unburdened of the freight of one's words and, by the same token, becoming an emissary or angel for the word itself and its original power, rivaled only by that of memory, to sustain seeking. Cavell speaks a number of times in his memoir of wanting to write for strangers, of writing irreducibly for the stranger (see, e.g., pp. 444, 521, 526). Partly this is a matter of his not wishing to rely too much on the consolation of friends, or those who tend to take his sense-making largely for granted and so abandon him, with the best of intentions, to his internal clutter. But insofar as his writing is intended to be *irreducibly* for strangers, Cavell hints at his desire for self-estrangement, to be free finally of the need to win others over and to become vulnerable again, nearing death, to the Siren song of a first language. "In this memoir generally anticipating the

ending of my life, I am becoming freer than ever," Cavell writes, "from the desire to persuade" (p. 527). Meanwhile Augustine prays in his writerly fashion to the God who steals his words, albeit out of infinite grace, and who is nothing to him if not irreducibly strange.

My idea for bringing Augustine and Cavell together in a seminar on confessional improvisation, where Wittgenstein would play a mediating role, was one that had deep roots for me. In the dark ages of my undergraduate days, I had come to read Wittgenstein through Cavell's eyes, and this inclined me, much to the bemusement of some of my Princeton professors, to wed philosophy to confession. I think, if this is really possible, that I was even more struck than Cavell was by Wittgenstein's decision to launch the *Philosophical Investigations* with an excerpt from the *Confessions*, the part where Augustine is affecting to recall his learning of a first language (*conf.* 1.8.13)—this being a recollection first of his having used his divinely inspired mind to observe adults attach words to objects of desire and then of his having conformed his budding word-use to an adult and precipitously storm-tossed manner of desiring. Language and a loss of innocence go hand-in-hand here.

In the way that he excerpts the passage, Wittgenstein leaves out Augustine's invocation of the God who stays, as it were, on the inside edge of words, as an inner teacher, and he leaves out as well Augustine's recognition of how his first-language learning had from the start been hijacked by substitute teachers, or people having grown deaf to inner inspiration. It is possible to think of this manner of excerpting as Wittgenstein's secularization of Augustine, and, by extension, his naturalization of philosophy. I am willing to think this, if it is also borne in mind that when it comes to philosophy, Wittgenstein has more the aspirations of a saint than an academic. He aims to acknowledge his own awkwardness, to take it in somehow, and thereby to get right with the world—the world being, as the *Tractatus* famously puts it "all that is the case," but also, for the happy person, the face of God (see TLP 1 and 6.43).

Wittgenstein and Cavell have both been alerting me over the years to unsettling possibilities: that secularization is not always a lessening of religious intensity, that philosophy can be a religious calling, that God is less real in our theories than in the grammar of our lives. In short, I have been made aware of the possibility of a secular confession, not as an amputated version of the religious original, but as a genuine improvisation: a way of speaking to God without having to say much, if anything, about God. When Cavell's hefty memoir came out in 2010, some thirty years

after my first encounter with his writing, I assumed I would have my chance to test this possibility.

To be honest, I didn't have time to read *Little Did I Know* before John and I would need to finalize the seminar readings. I just trusted that the memoir, being Cavell's, would certainly be confessional in a philosophically astute, religiously subtle, and aesthetically inventive way, and that his words would redeem my hastily issued promissory note about improvisation: Cavell would show us all how to do it, to be confessional after the death of God. Towards the end of the frantic week before the start of the seminar, where I was spending much of my time wading through a seemingly endless soup of alien memories, hoping in vain to discern a principle of selection there, it finally dawned on me that the endlessly meandering, expansively incomplete quality of Cavell's memoir was not an accidental feature of the writing, a function of editorial absenteeism, but of its very essence.

The clear parallel was to the *Philosophical Investigations*. In the preface to that work, Wittgenstein tells us that out of a desire to convey the natural transitions of his thought, from one subject to the next—a conveyance, ideally, of naturalness—he has given up on fitting parts into a whole and settled on something akin to “sketches of landscapes.” And although he criticizes himself for sometimes being a clumsy draughtsman, he gives us no reason to believe that his readers would be better able to negotiate these landscapes were we to have an aerial view. On the contrary, to find our way about in a philosophical investigation, we need to have our feet on the ground. When Cavell stops sketching memories—his last entry, dated September 1, 2004, is his birthday—he is not finishing up with something that is ever ideally done. He is acknowledging in his own way that, as Wittgenstein puts it, “explanations come to an end somewhere” (PI §1). We are compelled to hear a note of resignation or sorrow in that sentiment only if we assume, as Cavell does not, that a life can dictate its own ending.

My insight into the nature of what I am now willing to call, with a clearer conscience, Cavell's most confessional piece of writing was not, alas, very helpful to me in my efforts to excerpt from the excerpts and give the members of my seminar a concentrated taste of the knowledge on offer in *Little Did I Know*. Little, after all, is not nothing. Augustine, in different surroundings, might have called his confessions, *Little Did I Know*, but for him a little knowledge of God presumably goes a long way. I think I would like to have Augustine's knowledge of God; Cavell's too.

But this way of putting it, I concede, makes it sound like I want to borrow their clothes or play with their toys. I am in the neighborhood of a child's desire for connection. When I am not living in this neighborhood, when I am back, that is, in my sophistication, I am more or less convinced that intimate knowledge of life and death, mythologized as either heavenly or serpentine, but in either case as divine, is just not transferable. Recall my mulling over Wittgenstein's cryptic remark that one cannot, on pain of a grammatical faux pas, eavesdrop on someone else's conversation with God. I don't get more sophisticated than that. But here is a fair question for my sophistication: what can you sanely hope, from the depths of a guarded intellect, to know? That human beings, when most responsive to a source of life, are to one another like soundproofed cubicles? This strikes me as knowledge that is crying out for an undoing, a dispossession, perhaps even an exorcism. But of course you cannot dispossess yourself of something you never possessed in the first place.

It cost me some of my sophistication before I could see that I was having a hard time believing in Cavell's willingness to live and take leave of his life without having to make a gesture towards a life that finally undoes the conjunction between living and leave-taking. I was missing some sense of an eschatology from him, I suppose: the happy postmortem, sentimentally deferred, that doesn't bear much scrutiny. Augustine ends the *Confessions* with an invocation of God's Sabbath, of the peace that only God can give, and a reminder that the door to divine favor, always unlocked, opens with but a faithful knock. It is a pleasing, if ultimately blank, image. Cavell ends his memoir with an allusion to *King Lear* and how the death of Edmund, the bad son, might be played and with a quirky little story about his own father's resistance, some two years before his death, to having a pacemaker put in to aid his failing heart. Cavell visits his father in his hospital, and his father, who first needs reassurance from his son that he is making sense and not confused, asks his son to intervene and stop preparations for the procedure. The father is old, about eighty-three, and finds it unseemly that the likelihood of his death should be deemed an emergency, as if a child were at risk. He says to his son, "Tell them to stop," to which his son replies, "That's not my job." Cavell's final thoughts in this last entry are of his father's awkwardness; the old man had fallen asleep before the deep questions of responsibility, arguably the domain of the philosopher, could be addressed or resolved. "I walked out," writes Cavell, "to find my mother" (p. 548).

The note of leaving-taking on which Cavell decides to end his

memoir and, not coincidentally, mark his birthday, strikes me as almost devastatingly mundane. He is going to have a talk with his mother, always for him the easier of his two parents, about his father's impatient self-deprecation, coming across, as it has so many times before, as a down-hearted demand for reassurance. Cavell must have worked something out with his mother—his father does live on for another two years—but we don't know what the terms of the negotiation were; most tellingly we don't know whether the son was inclined to assume further responsibility for his father's lagging sense of self-worth or more resolved to recuse himself from that irksome trial. "That's not my job" is here a resonant phrase. All I am willing to venture, with some degree of confidence, is that, for Cavell, claiming your life as your own is never a matter of living beyond the ragged ways in which love and sorrow in a human life are perpetually, but also uniquely, being acknowledged and refused. "It is common to observe," Cavell reminds us, near the beginning of his memoir, "that life is unfair." "It would be less common, or less easy, to say," he goes on (p. 19), "if it were said more plainly: It's a mad world, my masters."

I confess that I am less disposed than Cavell is to keep my mind fixed on madness—madness of the inextricably human kind—and never avail myself of the thought, not of the world's madness, but of its inconceivability. Madness doesn't make sense of course, but being ordinary, it is unavoidably conceivable, like original sin. Cavell faults modern professional philosophers, here those with a mania for perfect sense, for taking too little an interest in ordinary madness, in lives that simply, but not always tragically, fail to add up. "In this," writes Cavell (p. 446), "philosophy has suffered from the way it has put distance between itself and theology. Theology is drenched in fallen worlds, the only ones there are, anyway the only ones that contain philosophy (or theology)." If I grant the force of that plural—that the human worlds are many and not one, and all fallen—then my desire for the one perfect world, fully restored, is a refusal of company, even my own. But it is not obvious to me that perfection is the enemy of inclusion and that I cannot fairly want a life I have no business being able to conceive.

When I take a step back and look at my affinity for Augustine's offer of a confessional ending—that of an open door to inconceivable love, beyond memory—I am struck less by the corruption of hope, his or mine, than by the irrelevance of hope to a confession. It is the resolute worldliness of Cavell's extraordinary manner of confessing that has put me back in touch with a basic confessional truth: that a confession is not

fundamentally a plea or petition for salvation, or, much less, an exercise in abasement; it is testimony to having been released, for a time, from the trap of self-reparation and awakened to the reality of someone else. But how is such testimony to be credited? Cavell has given up trying to persuade, Wittgenstein has denied hearsay a grammar, and Augustine is busy offering himself to correction. It is indeed a mad world, my masters, and if I must take my truth from there, what can I possibly expect to learn?

I want to attend now more directly to Cavell's notion of a scene of inner devastation, for it speaks not just to the element of theater in my manner of facing madness but also and more broadly to the precarious position of any subject who stakes a claim to having perspective on the world as a whole. Cavell folds his explication of inner devastation into his recollection of his discovery, deep into his philosophical career, of Wittgenstein's kind of irony. Here are his words and a few of Wittgenstein's, quoted selectively but at some length (p. 21):

It was an important, relatively late moment in my recurrence to passages in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* that produced the recognition of what I might call Wittgensteinian irony. In a passage I have in mind, Wittgenstein recognizes that "our investigation" "seems only to destroy everything...important" but insists that he is "destroying nothing but a house of cards" (§ 118). Read more persistently, however, the moment conveys a recognition of inner devastation, expressed explicitly in a phantasm of the rubble of a destroyed city ("leaving behind only bits of stone and rubble").

I pause here to interject a note of exegetical caution. By way of persistence, Cavell has managed to invert Wittgenstein's emphasis in passage 118. There Wittgenstein moves from a philosophical investigation that appears truly destructive, think of a bombed-out city, to one that is dangerous only to pretense. Take note here those of you who prefer idealizations of language to the unscripted possibilities of a shared form of life. You live in a house of cards, and the broom is coming. But also be assured: the ground will remain beneath your feet. Cavell's alternative emphasis, which is rather less reassuring than Wittgenstein's, bends the passage back towards a specter of real devastation. Now be aware that it is not always such an easy thing to lose a cherished illusion; some people really like to hold on to their cards. Here is Cavell again, hesitant and introspective (p.

21, continued):

I do not leap to the conclusion that my attraction to philosophy was as to an intellectual region from which I might avert or provide reparation for scenes of inner devastation. I do, however, now intend to bear in mind the thought that this has been a cause of my particular attention to the words of *Philosophical Investigations*.

I can't help think that while making a bid on self-disclosure here, Cavell is still holding on to a few of his cards. What does he have in mind, for instance, when he cues reparation to a *scene* of inner devastation and not to devastation itself?

Perhaps there is no real difference here, but it strikes me that, having invested himself in Wittgensteinian irony, Cavell has already signaled to us that, for him, there is. Entertain the contrary possibility. A scene of inner devastation is just what it appears to be—something devastating—and I have recourse to philosophy, a region of mind, both for sanctuary and for a source of reparation. The problem with this picture, aside from its grotesque overvaluation of intellectual self-help, is that it makes it utterly mysterious why I would ever want to *avert* reparation. But now suppose that my mind manufactures for me scenes of inner devastation. I may want to provide reparation for those scenes; I may not. It depends on how I am feeling about life in my particular house of cards.

Let me make this less abstract. I'll put two scenes of inner devastation on the table, one drawn from the *Confessions*, the other from *Little Did I Know*. Augustine and Cavell are both brilliant sons who outspoke their less luminous fathers but lack the words to connect with them. The sons take their material for inner devastation mostly from there.

Cavell believes that he can actually recall the moment at which, as he puts it (p. 14), "I realized that my father hated me, or perhaps I can more accurately say, wished I did not exist." He refers here to a childhood memory. Cavell is a young boy, nearing his seventh birthday, and he and his parents have recently moved the last of their belongings out of the house he has lived in since birth, a house that once raucously teemed with his mother's extended family, and into an apartment on the north side of Atlanta, where there would be new austerities and a lot less room for teeming (p. 17): "...my mother and father and I were going to live here alone." As the boy roams around rooms of newly unpacked things, not yet noticing that he is alone in the apartment with his father, his eyes

alight upon an ornamental dish full of chocolate mints, the kind speckled with white dots of hard candy. These sweet harbingers of company had come over from the old house. The boy then becomes aware of his father's presence, picks up a mint, and says, the way a person might comment on the weather (p. 18): "I didn't know we had these here." His father's reaction, to call it a response would offend responsiveness, wrecks havoc:

He lurched at me, wrenched the dome top and the wafer out of my hands, and said in a violent, growling whisper, "And you still don't know it!"

Well, yes: *Little Did I Know*. It is possible to read Cavell's entire memoir as his attempt to avert or provide reparations for the knowledge that he is disowning here.

When Augustine is looking for material to stage a scene of devastation within himself, he is much more likely than Cavell is to draw from the shallows and depths of his sexual desire. Where Cavell is hyperaware of his need to write and to find in writing a way sanely to take leave of himself, Augustine fixates on the unmasterable alchemy that turns self-abandon into a way of being with others. Their sensibilities are similar in the way they both wrestle so memorably with the same anxiety: that the human capacity for love is bound either to overwhelm or fall short of the desire to connect and so is perpetually at odds with itself. In the sixteenth year of his life, Augustine will find himself back on the family farm, short of funds, and waiting for his father, a small town wheeler-dealer, to get it together to send him to the big city, where he may begin to make a fortune of his own. Augustine looks back at this time and remembers a very particular interaction with his father. They are at the local bathhouse together, and when his father sees him naked, he notices, with relish, how well equipped his son is for baby-making; later that day, he tells Augustine's mother to expect grandchildren and then promptly gets drunk. In point of fact, Augustine will, while still an adolescent, have a child—his beloved son, Adeodatus—conceived during the wild days of his father's first big city adventure. But it is his own father's lust that Augustine will memorialize in confession (*conf.* 2.3.6): "He was beside himself with the intoxication that makes the world forget its own maker and in place of you to love the thing made." Here we have sonship, thrice denied.

I'll make an obvious point. A scene of inner devastation is not devastating apart from how it is being viewed. Augustine casts his

father's lust in the role of sin incarnate and the resulting expropriation of his generative power by his father nearly incapacitates Augustine's memory for any other experience of paternity. Such casting is internally devastating. The miracle of Augustine's conversion is really that he is somehow enabled to remember, at that height of his obsession with big, stupid, and sterile appetites, that he has been a father to his son. Now he is freed to be a son to his father, both the tragicomic wheeler-dealer and the one with infinitely better earthly connections. Cavell is far too psychoanalytically shrewd not to understand, in retrospect, that his father's angry denial of the presence of white-speckled mints in the new household is just transparently misdirected shame and grief; his father is obviously feeling very guilty about the impact the down-sizing move is likely to be having on his young son. But of course Cavell doesn't want to remember himself as his father's therapist; he wants to remember himself as his father's child. The wedge in his memory between those two roles is what makes the staging of his paradigm scene of inner devastation especially devastating. We don't get the hint of a respite until the very last entry of *Little Did I Know*, the story about his father's anxiety over having his heart fixed. At this place of parting, both with and from Cavell, we have to have the presence of mind to consult the annotated table of contents, the memoir's only gesture at synopsis. There we will be cued to the words: "To put away—perhaps not to discard—childish things." Those words must surely stand as the subtlest confession of a son's forgiveness in all of philosophical literature.

When I make the obvious point that a scene devastates by virtue of how it is being seen, I am not implying that we have or would want to have the freedom to see it in whatever way we choose. When I find myself having that kind of freedom, I am no more captivated in my attention by love than I am by love's absence, and in relation to my inner life, or really to any life, I am put into the position of an eavesdropper. That may happen—philosophy has no power to save me from what the theologians call a second death—but I cannot take my self-knowledge from there.

I began this essay with Wittgenstein's grammatical remark. I end with words from one of his letters. He is writing to M. O'C. Drury, a beginning resident at a hospital and one of Wittgenstein's acolytes; the day before Drury had admitted to his mentor that he was having real doubts about his worthiness to be a doctor. My friend John introduced me to Wittgenstein's letter to Drury over the course of our seminar together. It is one of the many small, but cherished graces I have received from him.

Here are Wittgenstein's words:

I have thought a fair amount about our conversation on Sunday, and I would like to say, or rather not to say but write, a few things about these conversations. Mainly I think this: Don't think about yourself, but think about others, e.g. your patients. You said in the Park yesterday that possibly you made a mistake in having taken up medicine: you immediately added that probably it was wrong to think such a thing at all. I am sure it is. But not because being a doctor you may not go the wrong way, or go to the dogs, but because if you do, this has nothing to do with your choice of profession being a mistake. For what human being can say what would have been the right thing if this is the wrong one? You didn't make a mistake because there was nothing at the time you knew or ought to have known that you overlooked. Only this one could have called making a mistake; and even if you had made a mistake in this sense, this would now have to be regarded as a datum along with all the other circumstances inside and outside which you can't alter (control). The thing now is to live in the world in which are you, not to think or dream about the world you would like to be in. Look at people's sufferings, physical and mental, you have them close at hand, and this ought to be a remedy for your troubles. Another way is to take rest whenever you ought to take one and collect yourself. (Not with me because I wouldn't rest you.) As to religious thoughts I do not think the craving for placidity is religious; I think a religious person regards placidity or peace as a gift from heaven, not as something one ought to hunt after. Look at your patients more closely as human beings in trouble and enjoy more the opportunity you have to say 'good night' to so many people. This alone is a gift from heaven which many people would envy you. And this sort of thing ought to heal your frayed soul, I believe. It won't rest it; but when you are healthily tired, you can just take a rest. I think in some sense you don't look at people's faces closely enough. (p. 110, Wittgenstein 1981.).

A scene of inner devastation, like Drury's place of self-doubt, can be a place of divine visitation. But it is never where I put my feet. I find myself elsewhere.

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