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Religious Diversity and Religious Skepticism

Abstract

In this paper I argue that given the present state of relevant inquiry, the facts of religious diversity justify religious skepticism. Because of the diversity of religious claims, the denial of any detailed religious proposition is equivalent to a large disjunction of alternative claims. The same is true of the denial of metaphysical naturalism. And having typically acquired no detailed understanding of the whole panoply of religious views, religious believers and metaphysical naturalists are rarely in a position to judge, of any such disjunction, how likely it is to be true. Now the investigative deficit here might conceivably be overcome, but the paper concludes by showing that even where it is overcome, we remain in conditions supporting religious skepticism because of the evolutionary immaturity of our species, which prevents us from being in a position to judge whether *religious diversity as humans in the future – or some future species – will know it* includes ideas about the Divine trumping any contrary ideas of today.

Religious belief, in an important sense, is not one thing but many. And thinkers who address the intellectual status of religion are finding it more and more difficult to ignore this fact. Philosophy of religion textbooks these days generally try to say something – though it may be a bit halfheartedly, in a chapter tacked on at the end – about how we should respond to the fact that religious beliefs fail to speak with one voice.

But we are still very much in the early days of this discussion. Just as people of diverse religious traditions have not yet fully come to know each other, so the topic of religious diversity has not yet fully penetrated the texts and conversations of the philosophy of religion.ⁱ In this essay I want to help it seep in further by exposing how strong is support for the conclusion that the facts of religious diversity justify, for all of us, religious skepticism.ⁱⁱ

‘Religious skepticism’ I shall here take to mean being in doubt about whether any detailed religious claim is true. And a detailed religious claim I shall regard as any claim endorsing but also adding content to the basic religious claim that there is something transcendent of the natural world in the three ways distinctively emphasized by human religion – metaphysically (in the nature of things), axiologically (in the value the transcendent instantiates), and soteriologically (in what it contributes to the human good). Call what is affirmed by the basic claim triple transcendence.ⁱⁱⁱ A detailed religious claim affirms triple transcendence but also goes beyond this to tell us more about the nature of the Divine transcendence. And so, for example, theistic religion tells us that the transcendent is to be understood in *personal* terms: the Divine is something like a Person. Christian theism goes even further, positing three Persons in the One Divine Reality. Virtually all forms of religious life visible in the world today do something comparable, thus generating many – and very diverse! – detailed religious claims. Because they do so, the popular thought that “all religions teach the same message” is quite misleading. Yes, religions may have in common an emphasis on triple transcendence. But they disagree deeply about how that idea is to be filled out, and it is in these *distinguishing* characteristics that the identities of Jews and Christians and Muslims and Hindus and Buddhists (and so on) are lodged.

Through its promotion of skepticism about the idea that some such detailed religious claim

is true, religious diversity threatens the rational standing, in the world today, of religious beliefs in a much more thoroughgoing way than many other things philosophers of religion talk about, including the problem of evil. The problem of evil may challenge certain detailed religious beliefs but it doesn't challenge them all. The problem of religious diversity *does* challenge them all. And even though religious skepticism, as I am understanding it, means only being in *doubt* about whether any detailed religious claim is true, it can just as effectively prevent us from believing some such claim as a similarly general *disbelief*. Moreover, it is at least as able as the latter, when secured by arguments of the sort I shall develop, to prompt deep changes in the way we think about religion in the twenty-first century.

Perhaps, then, we should expect that by the end of that century, the chapter on religious diversity will come nearer the beginning in those textbooks.

Blooming Logic

The first steps in our journey from religious diversity to religious skepticism take us by some relevant logical facts.^{iv} Notice, in particular, that the denial or negation of any claim is equivalent, logically, to the disjunction of its alternatives – where an alternative to a claim states one of the ways, logically exclusive of other ways, in which that claim can be false. A disjunction is an either/or proposition; it has the form (P or Q). Of course there may be, in a disjunction, many more disjuncts than just two: (P or Q or R or S....).

Cashing out the logic, suppose you've made a fairly detailed religious claim, say the Christian claim that there is a trinitarian personal God. We might ask why you believe this rather than its denial or negation – the claim that there is *no* trinitarian personal God. But now we can

also make the question more interesting. We can point out that the denial of the claim that there is a trinitarian personal God is logically equivalent to a disjunctive claim identifying *all the logically distinct ways in which there could fail to be such a God*. Because of the Christian claim's detail, the disjunction equivalent to its denial will be a big one, and of course, given religious diversity, the alternatives mentioned by it will include numerous other religious claims. So we can ask you why you're so sure it's the Christian claim that has got it right rather than one of these many alternatives.

But that's not all. Let me now direct your attention to another lovely logical fact growing along our pathway. If you want to know how *probable* is an exclusive disjunction of the sort just mentioned, you can simply add up the separate probabilities of its disjuncts. (Though that word 'simply,' as we'll soon see, should be greeted with a smile, the basic logical point is unimpeachable, vouchsafed to us by the probability calculus.) Each alternative to a religious claim R that appears in the bulging disjunction we've seen to be equivalent to R's denial will have a certain probability of being true on the Total Relevant Evidence. Whatever the combined probabilities add up to, that's the probability of the disjunction, which says one of the alternatives is true. And since this disjunction is logically equivalent to Not-R, *that is also the probability of Not-R being true*.

Maybe you can already see a problem of religious diversity blossoming forth from these logical points. As we increase detail the number of alternatives increases, and the more detail a religious claim has, the more religious alternatives we should expect there to be. Unless the probability of each of these alternatives is regarded as being very low indeed, the *combined* probability of alternatives must, in any such case, *swamp* the probability of the claim in question,

leaving it much less probable than its denial and, therefore, a less than appropriate object of belief.

But, I can hear you saying, how in the world are we supposed to come up with a reliable probability assessment for each of the religious alternatives to the claim that – sticking with our example – there is a trinitarian personal God? I sympathize with your pessimism: even if our estimates can be offered in a loose qualitative rather than in a tight numerical way, the task in question does seem a difficult one. How probable, on the Total Relevant Evidence, should we regard it as being that instead of a trinitarian Christian theism conforming to reality, a more straightforward Jewish or Islamic monotheism is true; or that there is no personal creator of the world of any kind because Reality is non-dual in the manner described by many Hindu scriptures; or that, as many Buddhists have been heard to say, there is no substantial Self or self or World-Soul either? A diligent religious inquirer, one who investigates with the care and thoroughness required for justified belief, must surely conclude that he or she has *no clue* what these probabilities are, and so no clue how probable is the relevant disjunction, namely, the one equivalent to the negation of Christian theism – which is to say that he or she has no clue how likely Christian theism is to be false. *But if one has no clue how likely Christian theism is to be false, how can one form an opinion as to how likely it is to be true?*

The upshot is that we are left in doubt or skepticism about trinitarian Christian theism, and since the process can be repeated for any detailed religious claim, this skepticism can quickly become a wide one indeed. Despite our probabilistic ignorance, therefore, and indeed *because* of it, it appears that we can, given religious diversity, show a very wide tract of religious beliefs to be rationally unjustified.

A Deductive Exit From the Maze of Probability?

At this point many religious philosophers will want to take what may seem an obvious way out of the puzzling difficulties into which our logical points, together with the facts of religious diversity, have sought to lead them. And they have their own logical points to get them moving. For if some religious claim R is true, then any claim incompatible with R must be false. It follows that any of the *alternatives* to R must be false if R is true. If, for example, Christian theism is true and reality consists of the world and a Threefold God, then the more uncompromising monotheism of Islam, which divides reality exactly in *two*, into world and the God Who is One, must be false. Then, also, the non-quadrupalist and non-dualist picture of Advaita Vedanta, which says *reality* is One, must be false. This is what logic dictates. (Reality can be irreducibly one or split up into two or four, but it can't be all three!) But then, if some claim R strongly seems to the religious believer to be true, why can't she simply *infer deductively* that each of the alternatives to R packed into the disjunction equivalent to its denial is false, and has whatever low degree of probability on the Total Relevant Evidence is required to make it so? Of course we need a pretty strong conviction that R is true to make this move work. "Therefore," a sophisticated Christian may say, "let me emphasize that it's not on the basis of disputable arguments that I regard my view as true but because of the influence on me of a powerful sense of God's presence as I read the Christian Bible and creeds – on account of which *I simply can't help believing* that there is a trinitarian personal God and being in this fortunate position where I can use deductive logic to exit your maze of probability." (Perhaps it's no coincidence that the epistemology of religious experience has received renewed attention from Christian philosophers such as William Alston and Alvin Plantinga – see Alston [1991) and Plantinga [2000] -- just when the facts of religious diversity are, as those authors themselves

acknowledge, becoming more difficult to ignore.)

My response to this attempt to get out of the argument of the previous section is straightforward: it is postponing the inevitable. Though it may be tempting to emphasize even more what makes one's *own* detailed religious belief convincing when the conflicting experiences and beliefs of others begin to loom over the horizon, this is not a feasible long-term strategy for any diligent religious inquirer of the twenty-first century. Indeed, it's not even a good short-term strategy. The proper approach is much more demanding. This is shown by certain additional facts relevant to religious diversity that we need now to consider.

The facts I have in mind this time are not logical but empirical – and, we might add, broadly phenomenological and experiential. The vital observation is this one: religious believers tend to know a great deal less about what it is like, from the inside, to participate in rival traditions than they know in this way about their own tradition. (Here we encounter again the point from the beginning of this paper: that religious believers have a long way to go before they have really gotten to know each other.) Suppose a religious believer recognizes himself in this description. He sees that a certain deep phenomenological/experiential element is missing from his investigation, even though he might have acquired it. Is he any longer in a position to take the deductive exit we are contemplating? I think not.

“But,” a Christian may remind me, “I *cannot help* seeing things religiously as I do: my access to religious experience puts me into this position.” Now I didn't point this out before, when this notion of (what I will call) invincible belief first came up, but there's a wrinkle here. As the most sophisticated religious philosophers realize (see, for example, Plantinga 2000), the ‘can't help it’ point has a chance of achieving intellectual respectability only if the situation of invincible

belief is one in which the believer finds himself *after the most careful and rigorous attention to apparently countervailing considerations, including those emerging from religious diversity*. Is the one who invincibly believes fully acquainted with the latter? He may think he is because he has done some reading about other religions. But that is not nearly enough. Indeed, and ironically, his own favoured way of supporting religious belief should help him see this: if private experiential evidence may appropriately enrich his ‘information’ there, why not *here*? Public propositional evidence concerning other religions must be joined to substantial knowledge by acquaintance of diverse religious experiences, beliefs, and people if one is to win the right to take the deductive exit. Believe one may, and without being able to help it, but if one is ever to call one’s belief *justified*, then one must for the time being seek to adopt the stance of the investigator and avoid what may well amount to jumping to conclusions. The deductive path out of the problems of pluralistic probability, in other words, is closed to would-be diligent inquirers who satisfy my description of the typical religious believer.

So why must this additional evidence be procured? Well, most simply, because it’s relevant and available! But, more specifically, because of certain facts about the nature of religious belief, themselves empirical and phenomenological, which any truly diligent inquirer will know about. The main thing to notice here is the “sense of reality” that the experience of believing instantiates.^v As is well known, the disposition to experience such a thing in connection with some view on the world can militate strongly against a desire to properly acquaint oneself with alternative views, and indeed can lead to all manner of epistemic misadventures.^{vi} Such is all the more the case for religious beliefs – especially ones that seem powerfully supported by religious experience – since religious beliefs are so tightly interwoven with what provides a basic sense of meaning in the lives

of those who hold them, and with their very identity as persons. Religious belief, by its very nature, will typically instill in the believer a strong motivation to *preserve* such belief.

Suppose now that one is a religious believer aiming to be a diligent inquirer and contemplating all this. One is seeking to keep a love of truth and understanding motivationally central in one's life. Will such a person take the exit we are considering? No. In fact, he will now want to be doubly sure that his own specific allegiances have *not blinded his eyes* and that nothing relevant concerning religious diversity has been missed. For this reason, should a believer recognize that he has not acquired, in any depth, the knowledge by acquaintance mentioned above, he will surely be prevented by this awareness from taking the deductive exit. Either that, or we will ask him to relinquish the label 'diligent inquirer.'

The Naturalistic Turnoff

So the religious believer's deductive strategy for responding to the argument from religious diversity won't work – at least not immediately. The facts relevant to religious diversity not only make possible the original argument for religious skepticism but also, rather conveniently, allow for a way of defending it against this strategy of rebuttal. However the believer's response is only one sort of response to our skeptical reasoning, representing only one side of the opposition we must expect. The other side is the *disbeliever's* response – and I have in mind here a perfectly general religious disbelief grounded in metaphysical naturalism. The disbeliever may now gesture toward what she takes to be a naturalistic turnoff just ahead on the path we have been travelling, suggesting that she has her own way of exiting the argument. Why should religious diversity make *her* skeptical about whether any detailed religious claim is true rather than inclined to leave us in

this way?

The answer is actually quite similar to the one just offered to the believer. But let's back up a bit and consider the structure of the response we're facing here. Metaphysical naturalism is (roughly) the view that concrete reality is a single system of natural law partaking in no way in transcendent spiritual things of the sort that religious claims in their different ways all assert to be operative in the world. Now you may have noticed that naturalism is therefore *itself* an alternative to any religious claim R; although we didn't mention this earlier, it belongs in the disjunction equivalent to Not-R alongside all the religious alternatives I have been emphasizing. But the naturalist will think she doesn't need the help of all those religious disjuncts. The naturalistic disjunct, all on its own, is capable of defeating any of the religious claims to which it is opposed, including the triple transcendence claim. "My reason to be a naturalist is so obvious," the naturalistic disbeliever may say, "that I can immediately reject any claim with which naturalism is incompatible – and so just any religious claim at all."

Notice that the naturalist's strategy is similar to the religious believer's. We find some claim logically entailing that the religious propositions in the disjunction I've been talking about are all false, and so entailing that the disjunction is false. Then we argue that that claim is *true*, or justifiedly regarded as true – which legitimates *believing its entailments*, including the falsehood of that disjunction. And of course if the disjunction is false, then we have good reason to reject the religious skepticism I have sought to base on it. The difference here is that the religious believer's claim, whatever it is,^{vii} is *one* of the claims whose falsehood naturalism entails.

So how shall we answer naturalism? In a nutshell: by replaying the original argument from religious diversity to religious skepticism, this time pointing out how large is the disjunction of

detailed religious and other alternatives (including the relatively non-detailed triple transcendence claim) to which *naturalism's* denial is logically equivalent, and then pressing home an analogue of our phenomenological/experiential point, noting that your average naturalist knows little more about the wide range of religious traditions represented among those alternatives than does your average religious believer. Hence her naturalistic belief, which entails that *all* those traditions are wrongheaded, is premature. She may look longingly at the naturalistic turnoff but will have to ignore it, at least for now, since justification for naturalistic belief will require much more investigation of religious options than perhaps most naturalists have yet undertaken.

It's interesting to notice that naturalists are prevented from mounting a good comeback at this stage by two facts: the fact that their naturalism is more a product of social enculturation than reasoning, and the fact that naturalism in the west has always tended to see itself as facing but one real religious competitor: traditional theism. Again because of the manner in which religious diversity is still a phenomenon we are getting used to, a rather large lacuna in the investigative results of even the most sophisticated philosophers is not hard to identify. After all, it's not as though naturalistic philosophers have carefully and diligently examined the full range of religious options in the world today and *concluded* that theism is the only serious religious contender. No. They are part of a tradition reaching far back in history that has been nourished by neglect, focused only on the sort of religious belief found in western religion – belief in a personal God.

But not only are there these investigative shortcomings. Naturalists don't have much of an argument for their naturalism in the first place, and so would lack any real basis for making the inference that religious alternatives are all false even given the assumption that their investigation of religious options is complete. True, some will try to argue for their view on the basis of the

success of science, but as I have shown elsewhere (Schellenberg 2007), such reasoning is quite weak. And many don't argue at all, not feeling the need in a secularized academic world that in many quarters simply assumes the truth of naturalism or something like it. In these circumstances, any would-be diligent inquirer who has naturalistic impulses should be shaken awake by the facts of religious diversity and prevented from exiting the patch of problems my argument has led us into in much the same way as the religious believer of the previous section should be.^{viii}

How Science Seals Off the Exits and Secures the Argument

So exactly where are we? And where might we go from here? Well, those religious inquirers who fail the phenomenology test administered in the previous two sections have some serious religious exploration ahead of them and need to plow straight ahead, moving deeper into the complexities of current religious life rather than ignoring them. How long will it take to get the job done – to really get to know the alternative options represented by the world's religious traditions that religious believers and naturalists would be much more comfortable leaving, as it were, invisible by inference? No doubt this will vary from case to case. But given prominent examples of sensitive and open exploration – Huston Smith, Ninian Smart, John Hick, and Thomas Merton (at least in later life) come to mind – and the difficulties of cross-cultural communication these people have encountered, one might not implausibly conclude that even a lifetime will be insufficient.

But suppose we wax optimistic instead and humor the religious believer or naturalist who thinks she can fulfil her investigative obligations in relation to the world's religious traditions and be back here, ready to take one or another deductive exit from skepticism, in a relatively short period of time. Of course, some will think they have fulfilled these obligations already. Suppose

we go along with this. Does that mean admitting that the force of any skeptical argument from religious diversity is limited? Is it *my argument* that has been postponing the inevitable?

Now one might speculate at this point that many religious believers and naturalists who really do fulfill their religious investigative obligations will not return to this point unchanged – will, much like Smith, Smart, Hick, and Merton, lose their easy confidence that this or that detailed religious claim or else naturalism is true. But such will not be my approach. I have another one in mind. Indeed, it's now that things *really* start to get interesting because of a final fact (or set of facts) relevant to religious diversity not yet mentioned, which takes us into a completely unexplored – indeed, largely unnoticed – terrain.

Ironically for the naturalist, this new information is revealed to us by science. What I have in mind, briefly stated, are facts about *deep time* that should produce in us the realization that we are still at a very early stage in the development of intelligent life on our planet, and may well be in a similarly early stage of religious development and investigation.

Given the timescales involving months, years, centuries, or (at most) millennia that tend to dominate the activities of our daily lives, including intellectual activities, making the transition to scientific timescales can be stunning and disconcerting. And this transition is, for humans today, still quite incomplete. “But,” you say, “surely we have been getting used to facts about deep time: consider all that has been learned and internalized regarding the long meandering path of evolution that ultimately led to the development of our species.” Yes, I reply, that is important. But it's only one side of the story. The rest of the story, which concerns the deep future, has yet to be told. More specifically, the rest of the story will have us noticing *our place in time*, wedged between the 50,000 years of thinking and feeling that, on a generous estimate, our species has put into the Big

Questions so far and another billion on the other – life’s potential future on our planet. A billion years is a period of time ridiculously longer than 50,000 years! (Elsewhere I have called this the Great Disparity.) What developments in religiously-relevant thought and feeling might Earth see in so much time, whether from our species or from others that may follow us?

And now we can start to notice how this science talk is relevant to religious diversity and religious skepticism. Given a temporalist approach – ‘temporalism’ is my name for the position that emphasizes our place in time and the importance of adjusting our thought accordingly – we’ll see that what we can learn from religious diversity, even in a full human lifetime, about possible alternative construals of a transcendent Divine reality may be only the tip of the proverbial iceberg. Because of the very early stage of intelligent development on our planet that *Homo sapiens* – certainly as we know it today – represents, we must grant that there may be many religious alternatives to any detailed religious claim and to naturalism that we haven’t yet conceived, perhaps including ones we are presently quite unable to conceive. This state of affairs is, as philosophers will say, *epistemically possible*, which means that we have no way justifiedly to rule it out, and so have no way justifiedly to believe in a manner that does rule it out (see Schellenberg 2013).

But might what we learn from religious diversity in our own time at any rate be *representative* of what’s ‘out there’ in conceptual space, and so enable the religious believer or naturalist who familiarizes herself with it to make safe inferences about the worth of religious alternatives to her claim, either yea or nay? Well, it *might* be representative, but it also might not: in other words, it’s epistemically possible that it’s not. And so the inferences in question are ruled out. When it is noticed that, in scientific terms, humans are still at the very *beginning* of an

investigation into the most profound questions, we – at least we who are diligent inquirers and not just pushing some ideological agenda – will conclude that we are not justified in treating what we discover of religious possibilities by examining religion today as being representative of what's out there. It could be that in a future potentially twenty thousand times as long as its past, reflective and spiritually sensitive intelligence on our planet will uncover religious ideas or undergo religious experiences far more impressive than any that life on Earth has seen so far. Who can say it will be otherwise? To bring the discussion back to those disjunctions to which the denials of specific religious claims or of naturalism are logically equivalent, we have no idea how big those disjunctions are and whether they may not include religious disjuncts that far surpass in power and illumination any large-scale explanatory idea yet conceived by human beings.

It follows from these considerations that even *after* we have come to know present religious traditions and their experiences and beliefs with a phenomenologically satisfying completeness, we must, all of us, whether religiously or naturalistically inclined, *remain* in conditions supporting religious skepticism. Our present evolutionary immaturity means that we are quite ignorant on a rather important matter: the matter of whether *religious diversity as our species in the future – or some future species – will know it* includes ideas about the Divine trumping any contrary ideas of today. Science therefore seals off the exits religious believers and naturalists may still be contemplating and secures the argument from religious diversity to religious skepticism.

Temporal Reorientation on the Path of Religious Inquiry

Someone may now suggest that my reasoning about deep time, if successful at all, shows rather

more than I or any other human inquirer into matters religious could possibly be comfortable with. For it suggests the futility of all our efforts to assess the verdict of the Total Relevant Evidence on matters that ultimately concern us. If endorsed, this reasoning will only drain all our investigative energy and motivation away, leaving us sitting around glumly in my maze of inscrutable probabilities instead of pushing forward boldly along *any* religious path of inquiry.

This is a tempting view, but I want to suggest in closing that temporalism instead allows for an important experience of reorientation and the discovery of new zest for participation in the investigative journey. For temporalism promotes a whole new way of looking at inquiry, including religious inquiry. The key insight, which may initially seem counterintuitive, is that we should do more than just make a few modest adjustments and concessions to time, instead allowing temporalist thinking to push us all the way over into a whole new way of conceiving the human investigative task, which pictures it in a radically *diachronic* manner (spread out over much time) instead of *synchronically* (with primary reference to our time). We need to see our role in inquiry differently, thinking about which intellectual goals and attitudes short of belief or knowledge might, at least on matters sufficiently ambitious or controversial, suffice to give life to our investigations *here where we are*, near the beginning of intelligent inquiry. Of course, if what we want most is to figure everything out, as quickly as possible, then such a reorientation will not seem very attractive. But if we hold before our minds the idea of an understanding of ultimate things (whether religious or nonreligious) beheld by finite beings but so magnificently deep that all our present thinking, even if it contains much truth, is just a bare beginning, then as inquirers we may be attracted to a completely different stance. We may think that it would be wonderful if this thought were true, or could become true, and we may want to do all we can to help *make* it true.

Some will still be pessimistic about how much we can do to advance such an extravagant vision, even in ten thousand or a hundred thousand or a million years. Such pessimism is understandable, but it needs to be tempered by a clear view of evolutionary possibilities. For even if our minds are now severely limited, why suppose that this must always be the case? Who knows what new environments we will need to adapt to in the future, and what new mental structures will be fashioned by natural selection – in us or in others to whom the intellectual baton is passed? If we really have just begun the processes of intellectual investigation and may still have a billion years to work with, shouldn't we assume that some intellectual problems may well be solvable over hundreds or thousands of generations to come, instead of in our own lifetime or a few more? May not some of the most profound projects of human intellectual exploration indeed properly be viewed as projects for the *species as a whole*? Here again epistemic possibility should move us – this time in a positive way, since no one can justifiably believe that fascinating new developments sufficient to justify our energetic intellectual labours in the present will not arise in Earth's good time.

If we take these ideas seriously and work at a full temporalist reorientation on matters religious, then the present need to settle into religious skepticism on account of such facts as the facts of religious diversity, which means losing the 'sense of reality' of a believer or disbeliever, will take on a completely different complexion. Religious and irreligious belief are simply not appropriate attitudes for beings as immature as we are. This leaves open the possibility that certain other positive propositional attitudes, compatible with skepticism, *may* be appropriate for us. And it is here, I suggest, that the most fruitful application of recent thinking in philosophy of science and philosophy of religion about nonbelieving attitudes of *acceptance* or *faith* will be made (see

Alston 1996, Audi 2008, Cohen 1992, Howard-Snyder 2013, Schellenberg 2005). Of course, the naturalist may point out that the concepts of nonbelieving acceptance and faith are ones to which would-be disbelievers convinced by my religious skepticism, as much as anyone else, may help themselves. Perhaps a *naturalistic* faith will take hold. Indeed – perhaps it will. But imbued with reason’s love of truth and understanding, and working within a temporalist frame of reference, we will now be required to look for criteria by which to determine, for this or that large-scale view, whether it should under present circumstances be allowed to dominate our thinking or not. And it’s not at all obvious that naturalism and a generalized religious disbelief must come out ahead when such criteria are applied (Schellenberg 2009, 2013). Certainly, a reconfigured religious perspective may now hope for as full a hearing as any other.

Here it is also worth reminding ourselves of the distinction between detailed religious claims and ones that are more general, such as the triple transcendence claim mentioned at the beginning of this paper. In a new temporalist dispensation of inquiry, we may find ourselves wanting to fight shy of detailed religious claims, embraced in belief *or* in a nonbelieving faith, because of how premature they must seem. But this may only mean ceding the stage to the more general triple transcendence claim, which now comes into its own as suggesting an appropriate object of imaginative-skeptical faith for immature humans and, at the same time, as providing an excellent framework within which investigation of various ways of *filling out* such a general religious idea may long continue.^{ix}

It’s not hard to see how, if moved by thoughts such as these, the argument from religious diversity to religious skepticism that I have fashioned may be regarded as a stepping stone to higher and better intellectual endeavours in regions religious – perhaps on plateaus previously

hidden from our sight as we milled about in the maze of probabilities – rather than as intellectually stultifying in any way.

Notes

i. As we'll see, these two facts may be causally connected. And the two together will aid the argument for skepticism.

ii. A similar conclusion is suggested by David Hume's discussion of conflicting miracle reports in Selby-Bigge, ed. (1975). But very few have taken this thought forward in our own day. One suggestion as to how it might be supported, similar in some ways to the approach I shall develop, appears in Hasker (1986).

iii. For more on this notion, see Schellenberg (2013). In earlier work, I have emphasized what amounts to triple *ultimacy*, in connection with a claim I call 'ultimism.' See Schellenberg (2005). In my view thinking about religion in terms of ultimism best satisfies the relevant purposes of philosophical investigation. But there will be less controversy over what I say here if I loosen things up a bit, speaking more generally of transcendence, without any assumption to the effect that religious transcendence entails ultimacy.

iv. The following argument bears more than a few resemblances to the argument of Schellenberg (1997). However I will here be emphasizing much more than I did there the skeptical response to questions about probability. Here I am also much less pessimistic than I was there about the prospects of a response to religious diversity phrased in terms of a much more *general* religious

proposition.

v. This pithy and straight-to-the-point expression comes to us from William James. See James [1890] (1981), p. 913.

vi. The biases of judgment to which we are psychologically prone have been explored in great depth by Daniel Kahneman. See, for example, Kahneman (2011), esp. pp. 84-88.

vii. We have been referring to trinitarian Christian theism, but precisely because of the facts of religious diversity, that is just one among various possible examples a religious skeptic can use.

viii. Notice that any argument for skepticism concerning naturalism of the sort suggested here will at the same time justify an even deeper religious skepticism than the one I am most concerned to defend in this paper: skepticism or doubt embracing not just detailed religious claims but also the more general triple transcendence claim. The latter can justifiably be believed or disbelieved only if skepticism about naturalism (whose falsehood the triple transcendence claim entails) is rejected.

ix. In Schellenberg (2013) and, earlier, in Schellenberg (2009), I argue that the transcendence claim can and should be transformed into an *ultimacy* claim. But there is room for many proposals here. And a temporalist approach will be glad to see many flowers bloom.

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Biographical Note

J. L. Schellenberg is Professor of Philosophy at Mount Saint Vincent University and Adjunct

Professor in the Faculty of Graduate Studies at Dalhousie University. His first book was *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason* (Cornell, 1993) and his most recent is *Evolutionary Religion* (Oxford, 2013).