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Natural Thoughts and Unnatural ‘Oughts’:

Lessing, Wittgenstein, and Contemporary CSR

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“This, then, is the ugly broad ditch which I cannot get across, however often and however earnestly I have tried to make the leap.”

—Gotthold Lessing, *On the Proof of the Spirit and of Power* (1777)

Abstract. Wittgenstein’s “Lectures on Religious Belief” (LRB) provide a source for as yet unexplored connections to religious ideas as treated in Robert N. McCauley’s book *Why Religion is Natural and Science is Not* (2013), and to other CSR scholars who focus attention on how “cognitively speaking it is religion that is natural and science that is largely unnatural.” Tensions are explored in this paper between our “maturationally natural” religious inclinations to adopt religious ideas and the “unnatural” demands sometimes made upon people, either a) by imposition of evidentialist norms over religious utterances, or b) by an agent’s adherence to perceived demands of theological correctness and to a particularly demanding conception of genuine or authentic faith. Wittgenstein uses Bertrand Russell and Father O’Hara to articulate these two tensions, and to offer alternatives which to some degree assuage them. I argue that such tensions are not only illuminating of the more and less helpful models of the relationship between reason and faith, but also open up new research questions which connect contemporary CSR and Wittgensteinian (or more broadly Continental) approaches to philosophy of religion.

1. Introduction: Wittgenstein on Russell's Skeptical Ire and O'Hara's Friendly Fire

Wittgenstein's "Lectures on Religious Belief" (LRB) provide a source for as yet unexplored connections to religious ideas as treated in Robert N. McCauley's book *Why Religion is Natural and Science is Not* (2013). Pascal Boyer, Scott Atran, and McCauley are among leading CSR scholars who point out that "cognitively speaking it is religion that is natural and science that is largely unnatural." CSR's concern with universal cognitive architecture is a concern with *etiologically deep* sources of religious ideas, and not with what is *etiologically shallow*, in the sense of ideas acquired along with culture, or religion-specific theologies. While Wittgenstein's Lectures focus around the examples such as a person holding a biblically-based Day of Judgment belief, I will try to show that the questions which Boyer, Cohen and McCauley ask, questions which elucidate the many tensions between natural thoughts and unnatural oughts, are also quite directly engaged by Wittgenstein. They are engaged not only when he is expressing what Gorazd Andrejč refers to as an *instinctivist model*, but also in the many ways in which a grammaticalist, or existentialist or mystical conception models help Wittgenstein present alternatives to approaching religious ideas as do those who present science and faith as necessarily in conflict.

The radical religious fideism which Wittgenstein contemplates in LRB through his example of one Father O'Hara, as well as the skeptical evidentialism he attributes to Bertrand Russell, are ways of approaching religious ideas that Wittgenstein thinks of as poorly equipped to comprehend religious ideas. The skeptical evidentialism of Russell and members of the Vienna Circle, as well as the apologetic project of Father O'Hara, who takes his biblical Day of

Judgment belief as one for which he can (and should) give compelling epistemic reasons, prompts Wittgenstein in one of his personal correspondences to quip that “Russell and the parsons between them have done infinite harm, infinite harm.”¹

These sentiments are often attributed to Wittgenstein’s distaste for Conflict models of the relationship between religion and science, or faith and reason, and his constant attempts to articulate an alternative Independence model. This is one helpful way to look at it:

Wittgenstein’s comment putting Russell and O’Hara in the same basket anticipates Ian Barbour’s (1990) description of a Conflict model, since Barbour takes Conflict as having not one but two sources, one secular and one religious. The secular form comes either with a scientific materialism (confusing science and metaphysics) or with a stern religious evidentialist ethics of belief (confusing faith with empirically grounded belief, and psychographic contrariety with propositional disagreements). The religious source for Conflict, whatever its other motivations, which Barbour describes simply as “biblical literalism,” more broadly involves naïve realism about religious language, or absolutistic claims about special religious authority or special access to truth or moral law within the *home* religion.

While the promise of Independence is that contrariety in linguistic, ritualistic, and even theological practices need not be thought of as contradictions in belief: contrariety is not conflated with contradiction, and science and faith are not brought into a relationship where they conflict. Yet as Bob Plant points out, Wittgenstein’s comments sometimes stray from descriptions of concept use, and reflect his own conception of faith and its differences with certain others: “In [LRB], Wittgenstein clearly has a specific conception of what constitutes

genuine religious belief. As such, his remarks are often (albeit covertly) normative rather than merely descriptive.”²

So, a way of thinking about theologically correct faith such as Wittgenstein attributes to Father O’Hara is suggested by Wittgenstein, as we will see, to be equally as ‘unnatural’ in its own way; people can still err or make ‘blunders’ in their language game, and O’Hara “cheats himself,” and becomes “ludicrous” in Wittgenstein’s view of him.³ But there is something deeper and more positive as well, which more careful attention to multiple tensions between what seems natural to think or to do, and normative demands of various kinds, can help us to unpack. In this chapter, we engage CSR research more directly by exploring tensions between people’s “maturationally natural” inclinations to adopt religious ideas and the “unnatural” demands sometimes made upon people, either a) by imposition of evidentialist norms over religious utterances, or b) by an agent’s adherence to perceived demands of theological correctness and to a particularly demanding conception of genuine or authentic faith. Wittgenstein’s discussions of Russell and O’Hara help also to articulate these two tensions, and to open up alternatives which to some degree assuage them. I argue that these tensions we will explore are not only illuminating of the more and less helpful models of the relationship between reason and faith, but that they also provide new research questions which connect Wittgensteinian (or more broadly Continental) approaches to philosophy of religion, to contemporary CSR.⁴

Andrejč, Thomas Carroll and other Wittgenstein scholars think is best to characterize Wittgenstein’s work as expressing not just Independence, but several different more specific conceptions. Andrejč for example articulates the *grammaticalist* conception for which the later Wittgenstein is best known, but also finds *instinctivist*, *existentialist*, and *non-sensicalist* (or

mystical) conceptions expressed throughout his writings. As a result of this plurality in his thought, we will proceed according to Andrejč and Carroll's advice that each conception has its own resources, and it is hazardous to interpret Wittgenstein's reflections as committing him only to a single conception.⁵

2. Maturationally Natural Ideas and the Practiced Natural

CSR seeks explanations of cultural phenomena in terms of acquisition, representation and transmission involving cognitive capacities. These evolutionary and cognitive approaches display less interest in study of cultural differences, but need not exclude them. CSR researchers study what they call the content and context biases that play an important role in the acceptance and transmission of religious beliefs; but these biases are present in other domains as well. For the CSR scholars, human beings have specific biases that make them susceptible to acceptance and transmission of religious beliefs. Like philosophy of religion, there are both secular and religious CSR researchers, and they sometime debate whether evolutionary explanations are "reductionist," or compatible with religious realism. McCauley and other naturalists typically steer clear of reductionism, but insist that philosophers of religion, hyphenated or not, resist "special pleading," and the methodological unnaturalness "of insisting (1) that religion and religious experience, in particular, are unique and, therefore, (2) that religion requires special methods of study."⁶

McCauley points out how, "[A]t least on some fronts science does not come at all naturally to humans" (2013, 7). So normative goodness and badness do not easily line up with or against the maturationally natural/unnatural distinction. "Oughts" or normative prescriptions can come from different sources, and these prescriptions coming from on high may seem natural or

unnatural to different people in different ways. Still, these distinctions can help us see the functions of these prescriptions, and perhaps even to decide which “oughts” to follow, when they collide. Maturationally natural ideas may be appealing, adaptive, and easily transmissible. The naturalness of religious ideas in itself neither supports nor debunks them. But it also makes for presumption that religious domain is no *exception* to the role of bias in cultural selection. Natural ideas can facilitate some things and impede others, so that there is no clear evaluation of them as a class. An agent who ignores “oughts” as unnatural when they have the force of inductive patterns to support them, exposes their professed beliefs to serious aetiological challenges. For violation of inductive normativity is always epistemically relevant, and is in all *other* domains clear grounds for censure.

McCauley describes CSR research as multidisciplinary, and argues that it is best characterized as an explanatory pluralism. But he points out that numbering among the considerations that render scientific explanations important are “their abilities to highlight patterns and to describe the mechanisms that produce them,” and “their coherence with what else is known and, especially, with other scientific knowledge.” There are multiple research programs in contemporary CSR, some more cognitivist than others. So, we should not overgeneralize about CSR any more than about Wittgenstein’s thought reflecting only a single conception of religious language. As self-described “cognitivists,” McCauley and Cohen (2010) argue “that the cross-cultural recurrence and historical persistence of religion is attributable to the cognitive naturalness of religious ideas, i.e., attributable to the readiness, the ease, and the speed with which human minds acquire and process popular religious representations” (779).

At first glance, Wittgenstein’s discussion of religious and every day belief in his *Lectures on Religious Belief* would seem difficult to interpret in McCauley and Cohen’s cognitivist terms,

if not counterpoint to it.⁸ For one thing, their approach leads to a focal interest in “popular” religious representations, in contrast to interest in the dynamics of adherence to an orthodoxy or to “theologically correct representations.”⁹ McCauley finds most interest in those who opt out from demands of theological correctness; Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard, with those who opt in. A strong theme in McCauley’s book is that, “[N]o matter how meticulously theologians articulate doctrines or how strenuously ecclesiastical authorities police orthodoxy, human minds will regularly follow paths and introduce variations that more closely harmonize with their natural cognitive prejudices” (238). But the primary example of religious belief Wittgenstein uses, the Day of Judgment teaching, is drawn from purported revelation within the Abrahamic family of narrative testimonial faith traditions, and Wittgenstein’s special attention is on O’Hara’s conception of faith and its peculiarly problematic features. McCauley focuses on the role of *content* biases, whereas it is arguably *context* biases that are most pertinent to Wittgenstein’s studied examples. Study of context biases will include the early education through which a model of faith, norms of theological correctness, and particular beliefs of a theological sort are typically acquired.¹⁰

Another reason for the apparent misfit is that there are other research programs in CSR besides those of the cognitivists, and a more Humean approach like Atran’s might seem a better match with Wittgenstein writings. Emotions play more than the “minimal role“ in the acquisition and transference of religious ideas that evolutionary scientists sometimes allege: “Hume’s proposals about our psychological biases and propensities receive a good deal of support from recent work in the social sciences.”¹¹ Atran and Norenzayan (2004) and others such as Collier (2014) for example argue that Boyer, McCauley, and Cohen fail to provide a complete account of people’s “natural” belief in gods and spirits.¹² While the cognitivists find emotion and value to

be overemphasized in psychology of religion, Wittgenstein, like Lessing, James, Kierkegaard and others who emphasize religious experience and the insider's perspective, find emotion and value to be central to religious language and practice. There is more concern for phenomenology or insider's perspective, as when Wittgenstein writes that, "This message (the Gospels) is seized on by a human being believably (i.e. lovingly): That is the certainty of this 'taking-for-true', nothing else."¹⁴

I will argue that despite these differences in focus, there are rich connections between Wittgenstein's reflections on religion, and contemporary cognitive science, especially where he, and both branches of CSR are concerned with tensions between natural thoughts and unnatural oughts.¹⁵ But it will remain important to us that affectively-driven evaluations of total evidence, and fideistic models of faith which prescribe emotional affirmations of scriptural or theological teachings, are directly important to understanding these tensions. It is important for locating research questions at the intersection of CSR and Wittgensteinian thought, that we not neglect how religious adherents very often adopt a particular model or conception of authentic faith, along with more particular teachings.

In LRB, these concerns are expressed by Wittgenstein not just through his reflection on differences between passionately-appropriated religious teachings and evidentially-grounded historical statements, but also between narrative testimony and everyday assertive testimony. Wittgenstein describes an adherent of a narrative testimonial tradition who comes into contact with objective patterns or general facts that might challenge their belief, but who then declares: "No. There it will break down. . . . No induction. Wittgenstein's comment on this response is: "That is, as it were, part of the substance of the belief."¹⁶ In *Culture and Values*, he further writes, "Belief is not any kind of occupation with the object of belief. Fear, however, longing,

and hope, occupy themselves with their objects....”¹⁷ These reflections again suggest that passions and values are strong determinants of religious affirmations, and that with any doxastic states induced by affect or emotion, the *basis* of one's belief is somehow partially constitutive/determinative of *the content* of one's belief.

We will return to develop Wittgenstein's reflections more fully later, but it may help to here clarify McCauley and his co-authors' thesis, in order to clarify my own thesis. McCauley and Graham (2020) understand maturationally natural systems as *untutored*: “they are untaught and need not be taught...The advent of these predilections of mind does not rely on training, teaching, cultural artifacts, or the special preparation of environments.”¹⁸ This leads them to describe these systems as cognitive processes which are “automatic, instantaneous, and unreflective.” To go further, “The *maturational* naturalness of perception, cognition, or action contrasts with another form of implicit cognition, that is, with the *practiced* naturalness that various individuals may develop with some culturally specific materials. Practiced naturalness deals with the wide range of capacities that individuals exhibit, from basketmaking to bicycle riding, at which many can, *eventually* with lots of experience or practice, achieve an expertise” (15). So, McCauley and Graham allow that “Systematic reflection generates intellectual working space beyond that which our maturationally natural tendencies supply” and that “matters of practiced naturalness are not just domain specific; they are also *culturally specific*” (16).¹⁹

On my view this re-invites the role of affect, and so also the study of religious fideism, and the role of a model or conception of faith for the religious themselves.²⁰ The practiced natural, especially in relation to an inherited testimonial faith tradition, typically results in a religious adherent holding their theological beliefs together as a packet, rather than separately. This in turn has the consequence that agents often forget that the theologies which purport to explain these

interconnections are secondary constructions, offering interpretation of the theological lessons of ancient sacred narratives. So, while there is much to be studied regarding popular religiosity, and popular religiosity may be the natural object of sciences rooted in evolutionary theory, I will be insisting again that cognitive psychologists not neglect what can be learned from studying religious fideism, but instead study directly the impact which adoption of a specific conception of genuine faith or theological correctness has for situated religious adherents. My thesis is that the ‘bottom up’ of CSR’s approach, and ‘top down’ concern with agents conforming to very particular and sometimes very demanding models of faith and of theological correctness are *both* needed to understand tensions between natural thoughts and unnatural oughts.

In order to highlight a productive intersection between Wittgensteinian scholarship and CSR, the next section focuses close attention on Wittgenstein’s response to Lessing’s distinction between “two ways” that an adherent of an Abrahamic religion may take in regard to faith-based belief, with narrative scriptural testimony and the “Day of Judgment” belief, in particular, as his main example. Here we will see how ‘top down’ concerns are illuminated by responses to Lessing’s problem, the problem of the “ugly, broad ditch.” The subsequent sections go on to argue that Wittgenstein’s subtle and searching reflections on the two ways are: 1) reflective of some of the most significant differences between moderate religious fideism and problematically strong fideism; 2) connected thematically with central hypotheses pursued through experimental means in contemporary CSR; and 3) illuminated descriptively through the *psychology* of luck and risk, and philosophically through recognition of the comparative riskiness of models of faith that associated with religious enthusiasm, the riskiness stemming from their prescribing a (to use Kierkegaard’s term) ‘teleological suspension’ of the moral, or epistemological, and logical.²¹

3. Facing the ‘Ugly, Broad Ditch’: Lessing, Wittgenstein and the Unnatural ‘Oughts’ of O’Hara’s Biblicism

In LRB, Wittgenstein asks us to “suppose somebody made this guidance for this life: believing in the Last Judgment.”²² Wittgenstein reflects on the different grammars of a professed Day of Judgment believer, in conversation with another person who does not profess to have that belief. They are depicted as talking past one another, and their communication is poor, since the Day of Judgment believer is not making a claim that can be assimilated to everyday or empirical claims, nor even historical ones: “These controversies look quite different from any normal controversies. Reasons look entirely different from normal reasons. They are, in a way, quite inconclusive.”²³ Imagining various ways that such a person might attempt to converse with various other persons who do not share the belief but are interested to understand it allows Wittgenstein to compare and contrast the prescriptions of faith with scientific questions of the objective “grounding” of belief. He goes on to comment, “In a religious discourse we use such expressions as: ‘I believe that so and so will happen,’ and use them differently to the way we use them in science. . . . [T]here is this extraordinary use of the word ‘believe.’ One talks of believing and at the same time one doesn’t use ‘believe’ as one does ordinarily”.²⁴ “One talks of believing and at the same time one doesn’t use ‘believe’ as one does ordinarily. You might say (in the normal use): ‘You only believe – oh well....’ Here it is used entirely differently; on the other hand it is not used as we generally use the word ‘know’.”²⁵

Wittgenstein also places O’Hara in imagined conversation with others who may assent to or confess what he does, but who do not understand their faith-based assent in the same way as O’Hara, who is keen to offer what he takes to be evidentially-sufficient support. Using the Biblical “Day of Judgment” teaching as his main example, Wittgenstein thus tries to assuage

tensions in O'Hara's religious apologetics by explaining how for adherents of a testimonial faith tradition, the affirmation of scriptural teaching is not like that of everyday beliefs, or like a prediction based upon past experience. Rather, it draws upon an "entirely different kind of reasoning." More carefully, Wittgenstein writes that for believers themselves, either beliefs of this sort:

- (1) "are not treated as historical, empirical, propositions"; or
- (2) they are treated as "historical facts that are different from a belief in ordinary historical facts."²⁶

Wittgenstein here identifies "two ways" which Christian thinkers have taken to religious claims stemming from scriptures. I believe that Gotthold Lessing's famous discussion of the "ugly, broad ditch" faced by adherents of testimonial faith traditions supplies a backdrop for many of Wittgenstein's reflections in LRB, including this description of the two ways to treat narrative teachings drawn from scripture.²⁷ Since we begin with Lessing's problem and its image of a ditch or waterway, I will refer to those who ascribe to the first of these two ways as Left-Bankers, and those who ascribe to the second as Right-Bankers.

The literature on the ugly, broad ditch, or what we will simply term Lessing's problem, recognizes three distinct aspects or "gaps," as Lessing first developed them. There is a different but related "unnaturalness" of these temporal, metaphysical, and existential gaps,²⁸ which frustrate self-attribution of religious goods in the manner of the second and more radical way, and in the way that O'Hara represents when Wittgenstein introduces him as "one of those people who make it a question of science" (4).²⁹ My use of Left and Right-bankers are not intended to mirror Left and Right (wing) Wittgensteinians as they have been described by Bernard Williams (1992; 2005) or others, though there clearly is some strong overlap.³⁰ The "two ways" seem to

involve very different ways of setting or not setting religious beliefs apart from other domains, or uses. This passage might be used to explain a dividing point between self-described Wittgensteinians, insofar as liberal theologians from testimonial faith traditions tend to take this first option while conservative thought favors the second. Wittgenstein does not clearly promote one or the other of these two options; however, Independence fits most comfortably with the first way, and right-bankers are on my view *disguised* Conflict theorists, even while (and by) explicitly embracing this contingent/necessary truth conflation as a core apologetic strategy. The reduction dictates that science or reason can never really challenge religious dogma, and it arguably treats reason only as a handmaid of theology or accepted orthodoxy or scripture. Wittgenstein's reflections on the two ways are informed by his close reading of Gotthold Lessing and Soren Kierkegaard, and their earlier struggles with the "ugly broad ditch" problem that attends prescriptively fideistic conceptions of faith prevalent in the Abrahamic religions. A New Testament example of prescriptive fideism is John 20:29: "Then Jesus told him, 'Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'"

While Wittgenstein does not unequivocally accept the first way and reject the second, he does explore in great depth how the second option – that scriptural narrative events, past or future, are historical facts, and evidence of them is objective but 'in a different way' from historical evidence – invites paradox.³¹ O'Hara does *not* do what Wittgenstein prescribes: He treats it as another historical message, and does not "make a quite different place" for it than normal or everyday belief (CV, 37). One's faith-based belief being at odds with our everyday use of "is certain" and even "believes," doesn't necessarily undercut these self-attributions of belief and of undoubting surety or constancy. But he does illuminate the ditch, which is to say, the tensions with the use of "believes," which correspond to Lessing's three 'gaps.' It also reveals

much about the tensions within models of faith which are *prescriptively fideistic* by, for example, prescribing belief, prescribing certitude or constant undoubting.³² If applying objective reason to answer questions that are partly of the heart is radically counter-intuitive or unnatural, as CSR describes science and critical thinking to appear to merely intuitive or maturationally-natural thinking, then separating objective and epistemological “reasons” and “evidence” enough to refrain from self-attributing special access to truth, is radically counter-intuitive or unnatural to a religious enthusiast.

Mr. Lewy, one of Wittgenstein’s former students at Cambridge, and O’Hara were both persons who Wittgenstein actually knew, but in LRB he is merely using them to illustrate different kinds of thinkers. O’Hara, unfortunately, seems to be a concrete example of someone who, instead of recognizing different uses of language, asserts his Day of Judgment belief in such a way as to make it look either like religious authoritarianism (biblicism), or like the worst connotation of fideism: belief *grounded* on weak evidence. He does not do justice to the *prescribed* underdetermination of faith by evidence; nor does he or Lewy provide a very functional response to the serious problems with which Lessing and Kierkegaard struggled. To refer again to the image of the ‘ugly, broad ditch,’ O’Hara is a prime example of the second path, and of a right-banker to self-ascribe truths achieved through non-epistemic means. In *Problems of Religious Luck: Assessing the Limits of Reasonable Religious Disagreement* (2019), I described this as the urge to ‘have one’s ditch, and cross it, too.’ Here I will elaborate these this point by contrasting O’Hara’s response to the ditch problem as *akratic* or intellectually incontinent, with Left Bank responses, which I see as *enkratic*, or continent (and more self-consistent) responses to Lessing’s problem, and to the problems of religious contrariety.³³ Let us look at the first and second responses in more detail.³⁴

a. Left Bankers

Mill, James, Kierkegaard, and Wittgenstein, each in their own subtle way, *deflates* the epistemic standing of faith-based states or acceptances. This expresses the first way, and a continence, or *enkratic* response to the Enlightenment challenge to religious enthusiasm: the self-attribution of belief but not knowledge in any, and the self-denial of the pleasures of unconstrained religious absolutism. One may always wish to self-ascribe religion-specific knowledge, and moral and epistemic superiority over unbelievers at the same time. But in resisting this ‘natural’ impulse to award oneself the religious “prize,” one instead remains true to what in the literature on exclusivist and pluralistic responses to religious contrariety, is referred to as the Intellectual Golden Rule (IGR). As Hick describes it, this is a rule imbibing me to dialectically grant to others a premise which we rely on ourselves: that our tradition’s scriptural transmission, and instruction through elders, is sincere in its teachings and guidance.³⁵

Left-bankers acknowledge faith-based beliefs they acquire from culturally particular settings to be poor candidates for knowledge or objective justification. But this has nothing to do with faith’s intellectual ‘failures,’ but rather with the differences between faith-based commitments and inferences from evidence. The left-bankers refrain from indulging in knowledge claims, or from asserting the historicity of events in the home religion’s sacred narratives.³⁶ This self-limitation allows the faithful justification but not exclusive truth or religion-specific “knowing.”³⁷ To give a closer example, Benton (2006) argues that the triadic organization of Kierkegaard’s response to Lessing (through the writings of his pseudonym Climacus) signals his awareness of the threefold nature of Lessing’s problem. In this subjective response, “Climacus maintains that ‘belief is not a knowledge but an act of freedom, an expression of the

will' ...Climacus here is pointing up the volitional, rather than cognitive, character of belief. Hence, 'The conclusion of belief is no conclusion [*Slutning*] but a resolution [*Beslutning*], and thus doubt is excluded'" (35).

b. Right-Bankers

The second way seems to allow the Kierkegaardian move from faith to truth (Pojman 1986a), but does not well-acknowledge that it conflates narrative and assertive testimony, and potentially proliferates contrary, religion-specific "truths" and "knowledge." The idea of religion-specific knowledge in the face of religious contrariety is a difficult concept, indeed. The problems of grounding a literal-historical interpretation of Biblical teachings are severe. While Lessing says that he cannot honestly make the leap required to cross the ugly broad ditch, this problem is 'resolved' in the minds of many contemporary Protestant Christian philosophers simply by going *unacknowledged*.³⁸ Lessing claimed that 'you can have true Christianity by living with love' and need not take the miraculous as historical. By contrast, William Lane Craig arguably epitomizes the Right Bank response in an interview where he is asked directly about Lessing. Craig first responds that Christians are "not dependent on historical proofs for knowledge of Christianity's truth," but then seems in his religious *epistemics* to negate the conceded logical and evidential underdetermination, saying that "through the immediate, inner witness of God's Holy Spirit every person can come to know the truth of the Gospel once he hears it.... So that's how I leap Lessing's ditch. Christian belief is confirmed by the historical evidence for those of us fortunate enough to be epistemically so situated as to be able to appraise it correctly; but Christian belief is not based on the historical evidence."³⁹ So while the first way acknowledges a lack of criteria for self-evidence, and the arbitrariness of intuitional faculties, the second way

is akratic in asserting a unique phenomenology as a means to guarantee the Christian's religion-specific knowing.

c. Wittgenstein and O'Hara

Wittgenstein says of the Day of Judgment believer *not* that s/he's unreasonable, but rather just that s/he's "not reasonable." This *could* mean a blunder, but for the generic believer would not necessarily justify censure, or as Wittgenstein puts it, "rebuke." It could mean instead that "they don't use *reason* here." That could just indicate that they are making a different place for it while remaining modest or enkratic; but right after this Wittgenstein, rather stunningly, turns back to father O'Hara, and turns *against* him in censure:

I would definitely call O'Hara unreasonable. I would say, if this is religious belief, then it's all superstition. But I would ridicule it, not by saying it is based on insufficient evidence. I would say: here is a man who is cheating himself. You can say: this man is ridiculous because he believes, and bases it on weak reasons.⁴⁰

This criticism results from O'Hara's failure to acknowledge what James calls the 'mood of faith' behind his evidentialist apologetic, and from his subsequent conflation between his subjective certainty and objective or epistemic certitude. Firstly, that O'Hara or someone like him assumes that to be reasonable in his faith he must offer an evidentialist apologetic, makes this person a "ludicrous" figure to him, Wittgenstein says. This surely is a term of censure or rebuke associated with making a "blunder," even if "a blunder in a particular [game or] system."

O'Hara, a religious rationalist of sorts, holds the Biblical "Day of Judgment" belief as historical event, and his high credence in this narrative, as revelation or prophesy he would take to be supported by broader natural theology. Wittgenstein finds O'Hara's biblical evidentialism to be a misconstrual of faith; O'Hara does not recognize the mismatch between his faith-based belief (the assumption of Biblical authority) and "grounding" evidence for that belief. No doubt there are substantial differences between Catholic and Protestant conceptions of faith that could be coming into play, but both should lead adherents to acknowledge and embrace the "mood of faith," as James would put it, in their affirmations. The more O'Hara or others appear blind to this themselves, the more apparent their confusion, in Wittgenstein's terms, symptomatic and criterial treatments of evidence.⁴¹ One can of course have knowledge of a narrative, or of what a particular theory claims or entails, without thinking yourself well situated to have a settled view about whether the personages and events within the narrative are (or are even intended to be) historically accurate, or whether the theory is "true" in some full-blown sense. The second way, in which a person self-attributes religious truth and knowledge, may seem more 'natural,' yet far more epistemically risky than the other, which does not self-ascribe such full-blown knowledge.

Wittgenstein reflects on some epistemological implications of Lessing's problem: "We don't talk about hypothesis, or about high probability. Nor about knowing. In a religious discourse we use such expressions as: 'I believe that so and so will happen,' and use them differently to the way in which we use them in science. Although the temptation is great to think we do. Because we do talk of evidence, and do talk of evidence by experience" (LRB, 55-56). The expressions 'I believe that,' and 'I believe in,' reflect "an entirely different kind of reasoning," which his imagined interlocutor should acknowledge, even if O'Hara himself does not. The interlocutor wonders what is meant, and sees contrariety if he does not similarly hold

the Day of Judgment belief; but O'Hara supposes an undue clarity, in order to reduce the contrariety to propositional *contradiction*.⁴²

One 'naturally' wants to self-privilege: to stand on the far bank, and not the near, Left-bank of the ditch. One wants to suspend inductive norms, since one would otherwise have to deny that similarly situated inquirers cannot obtain to the same epistemic or alethic goods in their own, contrary testimonial tradition. One wants to suspend universal aspects of reason, and yet not be challenged in one's faith-based beliefs. Yet counter-inductive inference, and historical belief on non-historical grounds, are equally 'unnatural.' The "oughts" issued by prescriptively fideistic conceptions of faith appear to be both unfulfillable and unnatural. The criterial usage of language that goes best with the first of these two ways may produce independence and hence insulation much less paradoxically than the second way, where symptomatic (inductive or objective) reasoning is taken as applicable to Biblical events. An apologist for the second of Wittgenstein's two ways demands explaining these "facts" which are "different" than how facts are understood in any other domain. Such apologetics are associated with insider/outsider binaries, and counter-inductive thinking to maintain them.⁴³

It is perhaps common to suppose that if I believe something, and if believing that x entails thinking that x is true, then my believing x must also entail that I *think* I know x, and that absent any undefeated defeater, I *do* know x. It is common, in other words, to assume that self-ascribing a belief x, is to ascribe to myself a knowledge-claim. But is it best to draw the major line between believing or withholding "belief" where all other epistemic goods come in tow with belief? Or is it best to say one can self-ascribe religious beliefs, while yet withholding self-attribution of knowledge and understanding?

Right-bankers typically hold conceptions of faith incompatible with allowing that doubt as normal feature of religious life. To this extent, it is no less an “ideal theory” than those that evidentialist maxims imbibe, that it is always wrong to believe anything on logically insufficient evidence. Indeed, the debate over the appropriateness of ideal theory for the normative tasks of epistemic and ethical evaluation, is a debate caught up in assumptions which sometimes strike us as natural, and other times as quite unnatural. Why should this be less so when we include the normative or prescriptive posits of a model of authentic, or again of theologically orthodox, religious faith? Theologies, and especially accounts of divine providence and salvific value (soteriology), utilize ideal assumptions in describing faith, and in narratives featuring exemplars of faith. Theological evaluation, that is, evaluation on the basis of ideal religious virtues, and character-types who exemplify faith or one of its contraries, makes prescriptions that sometimes strike us as natural, and other times quite unnatural. Philosophical concerns about teleological “suspensions”⁴⁴ of the moral or the epistemic, where these are understood as normative and based upon human “universals” is thus at the same time a concern about how adherence to one theological method/model or another might affect not only assumptions about theological value, but moral and epistemic value as well.⁴⁵

Wittgenstein strongly (and wisely) resists any over-easy characterization of differences between the Day of Judgment believer and his skeptical interlocutor as being characterized by logical or propositional contradiction. To generate a contradiction, it appears that the agent must *intend* their affirmation be taken in a specific-enough sense that the other could deny what is affirmed.⁴⁶ But it is at least easier to generate such a contradiction between single statements, and Wittgenstein realizes that theological systems are secondary constructions. He seems to O’Hara’s evidentialism as a “blunder” in some neutral (philosophical) sense, it is a blunder

within the particular system or game, since it is both fideistic and rationalistic at once. In cases where beliefs that *need* not rub-up against each other nevertheless do, perhaps because a speaker is pushed to give clear propositional content to what she claims to believe, or claims is true, further issues arise of what constitutes “grounds” and why lacking grounds is important or not.

Christian philosopher Dick-Martin Grube (2015; 2005) explains how bivalence “implies a particular way of dealing with that which is genuinely different: It implies that, if position A is true and position B differs from A, B *must* be false. [Yet]... B’s falsity is not affirmed after careful scrutiny by default, viz., simply by virtue of the fact that A is held to be true. Under bivalent parameters, there is no other choice than to consider B to be false. Since only A *or* B can be true but not both, B must be false if A is true [so that] bivalence implies an *equation between difference and falsity*.”⁴⁷ Especially so when contraries are multiple, and represent systems with explanatory ambitions, inductive evidence begins to mount that the presumed contradictions are not so truth-apt as the propositional language assumes, and philosophers of religion and CSR should actively investigate the reduction of contrariety to contradiction. As psychologically-driven inferences, biased-closure inferences reduce contrariety to simple contradiction, and the central theological or religious claims of the home religion as true or false, simpliciter.⁴⁸ This type of formally fallacious inference is common-place, insofar as the study of social biases related to belief polarization reveals it. But it is nurtured by religious apologetics which pretend to the logical point that ‘there is at most one correct theological system,’ which in practice turns siblings into rivals in the Abrahamic family of testimonial faith traditions, over the one true religion, or most authentic or authoritative church, or set of scriptures.⁴⁹

These may be other reasons why Wittgenstein surprises his readers in writing that he “would definitely call O’Hara unreasonable.” O’Hara’s stance suggests to me a want for

recognition of ‘the ugly, broad ditch,’ reflection on which Lessing, Kant, Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and other provide such illuminating reflections. The second way seems to raise the ante in various respects, and while a sufficient marker of fundamentalist religious orientation, it is associated by Wittgenstein with various ills, or potential blunders. More contentious, it seems to comparative philosophy of religion, and ecumenical efforts among theologians pointless, prescribing instead something similar to Luther’s contention against Erasmus, that there is no place for a skeptical, but only for an assertive Christianity. The second point takes on positive apologetic projects which Wittgenstein and many others have thought are both philosophically confused or ‘blundering,’ inimical to genuine faith to the extent that they deny the relevance of risky strategies of belief formation and maintenance to epistemological norms, and to the ethics of belief. Owning up to risk, and thus to our fallibility and doxastic responsibility, will be important in the remaining sections, as we consider further the adequacy (philosophically and also theologically) of various responses to Lessing’s problem.

4. A Philosophical Refrain

We started by asking how Wittgenstein’s provocative, even if somewhat inflated, “infinite harm” statement, one which lumps religious and skeptical rationalists together seemingly unnatural ways, can help us understand developments in Continental, post-Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion. We asked how Wittgenstein’s critical stance toward them, and discussion of assumptions they share, might be of renewed interest to philosophers of religion (hyphenated or not), and to long-standing debates over the science and religion. We used Wittgenstein’s reflections in PRL and elsewhere, especially where they plausibly show a direct concern with what we called Lessing’s problem, as a further sounding board for answering these questions,

and for drawing out deep tensions between seemingly natural thoughts and seemingly unnatural oughts. And we connected and elaborated these tensions, and Wittgenstein's own interest in them, directly to some questions centrally asked in contemporary CSR. The questions of most pertinence to us were questions concerning how to understand tensions between our maturationally natural leanings with inductive norms and scientific reasoning on the one hand, and with the sometimes radically counter-intuitive prescriptions of particular, often historically prevalent conception of authentic religious faith, on the other.

So, where does our exploration of this rich intersection between Wittgenstein and contemporary CSR leave us? It is of course presumptuous to say just what 'oughts' to follow, over even which oughts seem most natural and unnatural to different persons. But our point is not that unnatural oughts are good or bad, simpliciter; rather, it is that there are various thoughts about these pairs –natural and unnatural, good and bad, and their intersections which help us to ask pointed questions about how one can and should respond to them in different practices or domains of discourse. One thing I think we discovered is that the purposeful diminishment (from the absolutist's perspective) of the epistemic status of faith-based belief is neither incidental nor accidental to the trio of Kierkegaard, James, and Wittgenstein. It is instead, as I take Wittgenstein to be showing us, co-extensive both with the special value accorded to faith *by* the faithful, and in another way with his working definition of philosophy and philosophical method as a "battle against bewitchment of intelligence by means of language."⁵⁰ Moreover, this epistemic diminishment is not taken as inimical to the value of faith ventures, since personal existential risk and genuine faith are fused for each of these writers.

Wittgenstein's reflections on symptomatic reasoning helps to explain the strong *conceptual* connection between inductive strength/cogency and positive epistemic status, or

candidacy for “knowledge.” There are close conceptual connections between epistemic risk and violation of inductive norms, on the one hand, and between unsafe or risky etiology of belief and low epistemic standing, on the other. Thus, I count Wittgenstein along with James and others as articulating mainly a Left-bank perspective, reminding us that the self-attributions of religious knowledge needlessly beget Conflict, that genuine faith does not require such self-attributions or the apologetic projects they give rise to (in O’Hara for example).

From the agent’s perspective, the religious ideas one is immersed in are likely to have much personal appeal, but the *theological constraints* carried by the particular conception of faith one adopts can be quite demanding upon them. While McCauley tends to emphasize the contrast of religious ideas as natural, and scientific reasoning as often counter-intuitive, he does also acknowledge the radical counter-intuitiveness of some of the demands of “theological correctness.” One may well recognize that one’s primary use of religious concepts is “criterial,” not “symptomatic” –not “grounded” in the way that inference from evidence is, and that “knowledge” is in the everyday and scientific sense. But some of the dictates of one’s adopted model of faith are likely to appear quite unnatural. This will be so whether salvation is presented in either in a radically deterministic/fatalist way, or else in a radically voluntarist way, where full and unchanging belief is prescribed as a condition of correct or genuine faith.

But arguably, the ‘ditch’ problem, and Wittgenstein’s reflections on it, exposes the unhappy mix of voluntarism and involuntarism in those who place themselves on the far side of the ditch, with inerrant or “historical” belief.⁵¹ This problem makes all-too-evident the right-bankers bad faith with respect to their lack of acknowledgment of the epistemic risk they are taking. Voluntaristic assumptions are readily evident in divine command narratives, and in confessionalisms, evangelisms, and biblicisms. O’Hara’s apologetic is one where “we risk pretty

little,” but presenting the matter so would be disingenuous, or the result of multiple logical blunders. Radical fideism often manifests as believing *on faith*, but in such manner that belief is treated as an *achievement* concept in respect to correct adoption of the theological orthodoxy of the true religion, or sect. So, for both logical and psychological reasons, a great deal of unnaturalness attends authentic faith portrayed as involving certitude about matters of creed. Prescribed ‘certitudes’ of doctrinal voluntarisms exhibit logical gaps; they also invite cognitive dissonance on the part of agent they become normative for –ironically even as faith is portrayed as permanently closing the gap between subjective and objective truth, or between existential and metaphysical concerns, by sheer goodness of will on the part of the confessing or “believing” agent.

The special problem with a Right bank response to Lessing’s problem is that it makes religious or theological discourse/practice an exception to how we look at all other truth claims, and to make this exception is, for any neutral inquirer, a most unnatural ought. Systems of theology often make radically counter-intuitive prescriptions, and the “historical” religions perhaps more so than most others, because of the fideistic models of faith that they incorporate. When a person is presented evidence of a pattern of which they are part, and this person says “no induction,” or in other words, ‘the pattern stops here,’ why should we not take their response as important further evidence that they *do* fit the pattern which they deny? Counter-inductive thinking and the epistemic risk which attends it, in other words, is fertile soil for serious aetiological challenges.

I want to suggest that while Wittgenstein is trying to find intelligibility in religious cognition and its expression, what he is saying is not so different either from what is maintained by theologians like Paul Tillich or William Sessions, or from humanists like Philip Kitcher. Paul

Tillich on my view has a concern with Lessing's problem in mind when he writes, "The affirmation that Jesus is the Christ is an act of faith and consequently of daring courage. It is not an arbitrary leap into darkness but a decision in which elements of immediate participation and therefore certitude is mixed with elements of strangeness and therefore incertitude and doubt. But doubt is not the opposite of faith; it is an element of faith. Therefore, there is no faith without risk."⁵² George Sessions in his study of different models of faith writes that, "Non-evidential firm belief is central to faith on this [Belief] model... The belief is a matter of conviction, not certainty.... Evidential risk is therefore ineradicable for the belief model, and it prevents faith from pretending it is knowledge."⁵³

Wittgenstein often engages with the expectation that persons should always be in a position to provide reasons for their beliefs. The misguided nature of this expectation, as Queloz (2016) points out, was for Wittgenstein traceable "to the tendency to think of chains of reasons on the model of chains of causes."⁵⁴ Interestingly, Philip Kitcher, similarly takes beliefs to be legitimately self-ascribable in ways that do not commit one to also self-ascribe propositional knowledge or warrant/grounds. An explicitly secular philosopher, Kitcher yet shows himself to be quite sensitive to how this sort of point applies to religious epistemics. Indeed, it informs his response to Richard Dawkins and to skeptical evidentialists more generally: "Asking after the grounds of contemporary religious belief, and embarrassing the believer by demonstrating that the processes that underlie it are unreliable tries to confine devout people in places where they do not belong. Lack of epistemically secure grounds can simply be conceded.... The separation can be made in either of two distinct ways. ... One can take faith to be a legitimate mode of grounding belief, even though the doctrines accepted do not count as items of knowledge. [Or] one can think of faith as a form of commitment, not expressed in beliefs at all."⁵⁵

Sessions provides a description of moderate religious fideism, and Kitcher's matching two options allows for the naturalness of religious inclinations, and for moderate belief permissivism in response to them. Together I think that they help articulate some of Wittgenstein's most interesting reflections on religious language and practice, and explain O'Hara's confusion of faith-based commitments with beliefs-amounting-to-knowledge. While what Sessions and Kitcher each propose seems possible and self-consistent, many people will treat as a matter of theological correctness that one must reject Session's gap between faith being a matter of conviction *rather than* certainty. They will reject *both* of Kitcher's two self-restricting choices along with it. But what is going on in such cases of discontent with a Left-bank response seems to be that a more radical fideism is asserting its orthodoxy over a more moderate and self-aware faith venturer. The more radically fideistic one's conception of faith, the more that Session's liberal re-interpretation and Kitcher's self-limitation from knowledge-claims are taken as unnatural impositions of liberal theology, or of philosophy, or of Enlightenment reason: Radically fideistic impulses are evident as they declare any such self-restriction from self-ascribing religion-specific 'knowledge,' as most unnatural oughts.

Yet in the face of great contrariety in the domain of religious /areligious worldviews, culturally specific testimonies seem like poor candidates for proper basicity, or for a 'hinge epistemology' might uphold these radicalizing impulses through largely negative apologetics. Consider also that Wittgenstein's position on criterial uses of language doesn't appear to be as permanently fixed as the hinge metaphor suggests. He does not always lean only on the hinge metaphor, but sometimes speaks more diachronically of a river-bed. Here not just the contours, but what is most stable, and what most fluid, may change: "The river-bed of thoughts may shift" (OC §324). The riverbed *does* move, but more slowly than the waters which flow upon in.⁵⁶

Kitcher accepts the reasonableness of doxastic faith ventures, but where qualifications termed “skeptical” by their critics are accepted as part of faith, and not the undoing of faith:

No champion of any religion should be perturbed by the thought that he or she cannot provide marks that distinguish the preferred beliefs about the supernatural from those offered in rival traditions, or worried by the fact that religious traditions evolve in ways that have nothing to do with truth. To be sure, if religion were a form of knowledge, these considerations might be unnerving. That, however, is to mistake the character of religious acceptance. Properly understood it is a matter of faith.⁵⁷

Belief, or at least its self-ascription by the religious insider, is permitted on this broadly permissive ethics of belief, but not the self-ascription of religion-specific “knowledge,” where this is supposed to add something over and above the idea that to believe that x is already to believe “that x” is true. Philosophical reflection and argumentation are valued, but not taken to be the *cause* of belief, nor the end-all in its evaluation by different individuals.

Session’s and Kitcher’s proposals both acknowledge the risk-taking which Tillich draws attention to. They are both clearly in the permissivist spirit which one finds not only in Lessing but in Voltaire and many others of their time in Europe and the Americas.⁵⁸ They respect that reasonableness, and interpersonal permission, often follows *possibility*, not the far different norm of high probability, or inductive strength.⁵⁹ They both seem to be to elicit what William James famously describes as “that spirit of inner tolerance without which all our outer tolerance is soulless, and which is empiricism's glory.”⁶⁰ It is consistent with acknowledgment of the ‘burdens of judgment’ with respect to holistic weighing of evidence in acquisition and

maintenance of their ‘worldview beliefs,’ or what John Rawls called in less doxastic language, their *comprehensive conceptions of the good*. But it does not suppose that, having utilized the burdens of judgment to defend one’s own reasonableness, one is free to invoke superiority assumptions and exclusivist responses to religious differences that violate these burdens by placing the basis for claiming such superiority in a tradition, or authority figure external to oneself –i.e., by what psychologists term *belief disownership*.

There has been a good deal of study of the virtue of intellectual humility and some have argued that a philosophical account of it must go beyond attentiveness of human weaknesses, to “owning” one’s intellectual limitations, especially in domains of controversial views: “[O]wning an intellectual limitation consists in a dispositional profile that includes cognitive, behavioral, motivational, and affective responses to an awareness of one’s limitations.”⁶¹ Owning and disowning beliefs and limitations can be studied psychologically, and not, of course, only with religious beliefs. Owning/disowning have a “multi-track dispositional profiles” which are increasingly being studied in social psychology through specific markers.

Belief ownership and acknowledgment of risk are conceptually entangled. Faith and risk cannot be dissociated, even if negative religious apologetics typically incorporate discrediting mechanisms explaining the wrongness of teachings contrary to those of the home religion. So, one conclusion of our study is that philosophers of religion, whether ‘hyphenated’ or not, should incorporate psychology, including bias studies. Another conclusion is that theologians, philosophers, religious studies and CSR scholars all ought to study the ‘oughts and noughts’ of prescriptively fideistic models of faith, and the rhetorical strategies, which Right-bankers employ.

The ‘oughts’ and ‘noughts’ (‘ought nots’) which logicians, philosophers, decision-concerning sciences, religious authorities, and theologians, and others issue, as prescriptions for virtuous thought and conduct, are quite varied, indeed. They often cite independent fonts or sources for the kind of value that right or efficacious agency, right or wrong judgment, which they assert as normative over us. This is because they draw from different *telos*, or type of value: moral, epistemic, alethic, salvific value, etc. Philosophy of religion, theology of religions, and even have tried to reduce these perceived sources and types of value, or to a single principle stating the biggest of oughts: for one’s best judgment all things considered. This at least admits the need for holistic evaluation evidence, but it does not yet recognize how far the contrariety among such candidates for a master principle of thought or conduct is due to taking different things as “evidence,” and using concepts, including philosophical concepts, in different ways. When this is the case, the result is often to impose evidentialist standards, or a burden of logically-sufficient evidential reasons where they don’t belong. Or else it is to pit salvific value in God’s eyes, or one’s fate come Judgment Day, *against* reason in some untoward way.

I propose instead that the thing which these ‘oughts’ and ‘noughts,’ have in common is that studying them has everything to do with studying *risk*. The most ardent of theists and atheists I think can agree with this, and that knowledge is self-ascribed in the relative absence of objective risk, not in an agent’s simple denial or ignorance of it.⁶² I hope to have convinced the reader that both risk-embracing and risk-eschewing normative prescriptions can appear unnatural in the extreme, even to the same individual. This is especially so with regard to one’s own religious ideas, which may fail a test of authenticity if not logically supported (held to a standard of scientific or everyday discourse), or again, if not held stably, or whole-heartedly enough (prescriptive fideism).

But the worst response to tensions between reason and faith perhaps is to embrace just one of these unnatural prescriptions, while entirely denying all others. This raises a paradox which in turn invites Conflict: On the one prescription (for teleological suspension, or self-privileging in knowledge attributions) one's religious beliefs threaten to lose their reasonableness; on the other prescription (for public evidence and non-circular justification), their specialness! This is a choice which, if taken as forced, blinds us to ground for intellectual humility with respect to self-attributions of religious truth and knowledge, as well as to how my own doxastic risk-taking may result in epistemic injustice to others. To choose only one of these unnatural prescriptions and not to find complementary value in the other leads to loss of the grounds for reasonable disagreement, since reasonability is now cast in terms of one radical ideal theory or the other. For the evidentialist this choice forces them to deny reasonable disagreements even in domains of controversial views. For the theist it threatens loss of *both* the reasonableness *and* of specialness of their doxastic faith venture. In contrast both to the attitudes of an O'Hara or a Russell as Wittgenstein uses them, our study would spur more theologians to engage with the relevance of CSR and bias studies, and to re-evaluate models of faith in relationship to the risk-taking they prescribe.

I have not said that Wittgenstein clearly or unambiguously preferred his first, or Left-bank response to Lessing's problem, the 'ugly, broad ditch.' But I have tried to show that it fits better than the Right-bank response with the conceptions of faith scholars have discerned in his writings, and that in LRB he is not wrong to be critical of fudges and 'blunders' in Right-bank responses. And I have tried to give the reader additional reasons to think that *enkratic* or Left-bank responses contribute far better to inter-faith dialogue, and to comparative philosophy of religion, than can *akratic* or Right-bank responses. They support doxastic responsibility and intellectual humility,

and do not ‘disown’ this risk of committing hermeneutic or testimonial injustice towards religious outsiders though our attitudes towards them and towards religious differences more generally.⁶³

5. Conclusion (Or, an Unapologetic Postscript)

We have now seen that Wittgenstein’s focal concerns in LRB are not purely descriptive, but also reflect his own fideistic orientation, and the value he attaches to religious practice. Philosophy should observe and support our natural tendencies to religious thought and practice, something that Russell is seen to discount, and O’Hara to distort. Russell’s fault, one might say, is his *philosophical* correctness: religious beliefs and those who hold them will be evaluated like normal beliefs according to symptomatic or inductive reasoning, without first reflecting upon differences in grammatical usage, and the wide range of doxastic and sub-doxastic states that might be characterized as religious. O’Hara’s fault is his ascension to this evidentialist demand, and his conflating of subjective certainty with objective certitude in his biblical beliefs. This way of “cheating himself” includes not only what Wittgenstein seems to regard as the *logical*, but also the *theological* incorrectness of O’Hara’s religious epistemics, in so far as O’Hara speaks as if he “risks little” in his self-attributions of religious knowledge.⁶⁴

O’Hara’s apologetic project leads him to unnecessary conflicts between his reason and his faith. Wittgenstein is far closer to Lessing and Kierkegaard than to either Russell or O’Hara. On my reading Wittgenstein is drawn to an *enkratic* fideism, or the first of his two ways. Wittgenstein’s response to Lessing’s paradox is quite akin to Lessing’s own, when the latter confesses: “This, then, is the ugly broad ditch which I cannot get across, however often and however earnestly I have tried to make the leap.”⁶⁵

But if Wittgenstein means to devalue the enterprises of natural theology and its contrary, disproof of atheism, his conception of faith would seem perplexing, and itself an extreme rather than moderate religious fideism.⁶⁶ Does not faith seek understanding, and is it enough for O'Hara to *confess* belief without analyzing it? While the interpretation of Wittgenstein offered in this chapter explains his distaste for religious apologetics, I would have to take issue with Wittgenstein if he means to completely devalue the work of natural theology. But Wittgenstein of course *himself* reflects philosophically on his beliefs, and like Lessing, Kierkegaard and many others, apparently finds much value in philosophical reflection upon religious language. So, the more moderate thing a Wittgensteinian might say is that one can sometimes benefit from the study of formal arguments, but that their study need not assume that a rationalistic, propositionally-focused approach is overall fitting to one's subject matter.⁶⁷

Not all of our natural thoughts are wonders: many deserve to be scrutinized and moderated or let go. And not all seemingly unnatural 'oughts' are blunders: Faith *is* quite different than belief acquired inferentially and measurable by degrees of credence. And faith is valued precisely for these reasons.⁶⁸ But taking inductive patterns and general facts about human beings seriously, however natural it may seem to be to dismiss them as misleading, provides us a mirror on our own biases. Together with its special concern for Right-bank theologies and apologetic projects as especially problematic responses to Lessing's problem, this chapter has generally supported the soundness of one of contemporary McCauley's key claims: that while resisted as 'unnatural' impositions on our doxastic practices, inductive norms of evidence "often provide powerful tools, and serve as vital checks on biases."⁶⁹ While we rarely want to face our cognitive limitations, risk-aware theologians and philosophers acknowledge that "bias is not a

childhood phenomenon that inevitably gets revised and replaced through maturation but a cognitive default that may exist throughout life.”⁷⁰

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https://www.informationphilosopher.com/tractatus/Collected_Works.pdf

Notes

¹ Rush Rhees, a biographer of Wittgenstein, recalls this complaint, and comments thusly on it: “‘Russell and the parsons between them have done infinite harm, infinite harm.’ Why pair Russell and the parsons in the one condemnation? Because both have encouraged the idea that a philosophical justification for religious beliefs is necessary for those beliefs to be given any credence. ...Religious beliefs are not analogous to scientific theories, and should not be accepted or rejected using the same evidential criteria” (1981, 101).

² Plant (2012) 206 note 58. This is also why what has become known as Wittgensteinian fideism in the literature is weakly prescriptive as well. His views about the distance between scientific and faith-based practice seem to instill an Independence model of the relationship between science and religion. Science and religion may not be friends, on a moderate fideist’s views, but it is best not to treat them wholly as strangers, and certainly not as enemies.

³ Wittgenstein 1967, 58.

⁴ A methodological balance must be found between an emphasis on common form and on distinct ideas and practices, as I argue more explicitly in Axtell 2022a. Such a balance also better allows the relevance to CSR of the wide range of models of faith (or theological methods) which people adhere to, of their embodiment in narratives and in exemplars of faithfulness, and of how people respond to them while trying to exemplify faithfulness and other religious virtues in their own actions and beliefs.

⁵ Carroll, this volume, draws on the *Remarks on Frazer* as a key source for an “instinctivist” conception of religiosity.

⁶ McCauley (2000), 65-66. One concern I have is that on the modular view of mind that innatists emphasize, context biases in the uptake of specific theologies and models of faith will remain under-appreciated. Biabanaki (2020) explains, “Cognitive science of religion researchers divide cognitive biases into two types: content biases and context biases.... [C]ontext biases are not concerned with the content of beliefs and input information, but rather with the context in which those beliefs are transmitted, such as the reliability or validity of the source of belief production.... Content biases are mainly used to explain religious beliefs, not theological beliefs. This also seems to be because theological beliefs are formed in the context of a particular culture, and therefore require contexts and elements of the same culture to transmit, while content bias has nothing to do with the context of a belief, and it only deals with the content of that belief.... [W]hile content biases can explain why some religious beliefs are memorable and widespread, they cannot explain why people are committed to and believe in the reflective religious beliefs (theological beliefs) in a particular culture. In contrast, context biases play a central role in the prevalence of theological beliefs. The context biases are shaped by human cultural interactions and act on theological beliefs within a particular culture” (3, 6-7).

⁸ McCauley and Cohen explain that, “Cognitive theories of religion do not hold that the mind contains a specific module for religion. Instead, most hold that religion exploits a diverse collection of cognitive inclinations in the minds of human beings that enjoy neither a logical

nor a psychological unity. The upshot of this analysis is that, cognitively speaking, religions are like Rube Goldberg devices, which is to say that they are exceedingly complicated contraptions calling on all sorts of psychological propensities that are, otherwise, usually unlinked” (2020, 782).

⁹ Wittgenstein’s example of the day of judgment belief, and the passionate appropriation of it which Wittgenstein associates with “genuine” faith do not fall easily into Boyer’s or McCauley’s approach, since they find William James to overemphasize emotions, and would likely make a similar criticism of Wittgenstein’s account. But while McCauley and Cohen insist that they are not dismissing a role for emotions in religious uptake, other CSR scholars including some of more Humean in approach, research the role of emotions more explicitly. Scott-Kakures (2001) notes how Hume finds motivated thinking, which includes motivated or directional thinking and wishful thinking, very salient: “Wishful thinking can also be motivated by the desire to alleviate fear and anxiety. Patients who are terrified of mortal illness, for example, might interpret their symptoms in reassuring ways.” This of course fits Wittgenstein’s “No induction. Fear.” description of fideistic faith pretty well. And Collier (2014, 6-7) comments that “This is precisely the manner in which our ancestors, according to Hume, arrived at their ontological commitment to gods and spirits. They did not come to believe in supernatural agents on the basis of evidence; rather, they did so because it mitigated their ‘anxious concern’ in the face of uncertainty (NHR 152).” So, I think McCauley and other cognitivists should go further in acknowledging the contribution of emotion at the individual level to the uptake and transference of religious ideas, and at the group level especially where a prevalent ideal of theological correctness or authenticity prescribes radically counter-intuitive or counter-inductive thinking. I would argue that without such acknowledgment, it becomes problematic for the cognitivist to explain *why* theological systems move from a cluster of *minimally* counter-intuitive ideas with wide appeal, to *radically* counter-intuitive prescriptions for the true believer. This in turn weakens the point McCauley wants to make about people’s survey results showing that people very often fall back from “orthodox” to “popular” religious responses to provided scenarios and questions on psychological surveys.

¹⁰ “Theological” here is inclusive of teachings stemming from narrative testimonies in different or overlapping testimonial faith traditions; “models of faith” are often expressed narratively

through exemplars (in middle-eastern religions, Abraham; Job, Moses, for example). While Wittgenstein dislikes the term, his example of the Day of Judgment is one of a “theological” belief. See the religious/theological belief distinction, endnote 4, above.

¹¹ Nor is Hume’s account of emotion overly narrow, since he distinguishes direct from direct emotion and does not reduce emotions to feelings. On the contrary, “Hume makes a number of important contributions to our understanding of the causal antecedents, psychological mechanisms, and behavioral effects of the indirect passions” (Collier 2011, 15).

¹² Collier refers also to Atran and his colleagues in criticism of this lapse in CSR: “Atran objects to cognitive theories of religion on the grounds that they cannot explain why some counterintuitive agents (Zeus, Vishnu) become the objects of devotion, worship, and sacrifice, whereas other counterintuitive agents (Mickey Mouse) do not. Gods and spirits are culturally transmitted, according to Atran, because they help to resolve existential anxieties about death and deception (Atran 2006, 186; Atran and Norenzayan 2004, 726-8 [see also 2006]). This emphasis on the passionate motivators of religious belief lands Atran and his colleagues squarely in the Humean camp” (12, note 3).

¹⁴ CV 37-38. While this is an exceptionally strong statement of the passions as motivating acceptance of the “message” of narrative gospel teachings, emotion arguably plays a significant role in *all* of the different conceptions of faith which scholars have distinguished in Wittgenstein’s thought.

¹⁵ Affectively-driven evaluations thrive on conflation between the *de dicto* and *de re* standing of evidence, that is, roughly, between subjective conviction and objective certitude. This for me is a big part of the problem, and among the best ways to connect Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion and contemporary CSR. The approach shared by Hume and James in describing fideistic uptake are likely better evidenced on these specific points, and help us to better understand how testimonial traditions develop, often with different teachings but with formally similar conceptions of “true” “authentic”, or “genuine” faith. While we can hereafter set aside most of these differences between these subgroups within CSR, it is worth mentioning at the outset. While I will be picking up McCauley’s contrast between what is received as natural and

unnatural, I will also be concerned with commonalities between Wittgenstein, Kierkegaard, and James in describing the passionate appropriation of religious ideas, and of a religious identity.

¹⁶ Wittgenstein 1967, 56.

¹⁷ CV, 64. Reflections such as these suggest the distinction between believing *that*, and believing *in*. Louis Pojman (1986b) relatedly argues that faith can best be understood as hope or hopefulness, rather than belief: “If belief-in, or trusting, can be analyzed in terms of commitment to a course of action or a disposition to act, then it seems that we do not need to believe-that *x* exists in order to believe-in or deeply hope in the existence of *x*. We can live in profound hope, trusting in the object of hope. ... Sometimes it is thought that belief-in statements entail existential belief-that statements. That is, belief-in some object *x* presupposes that one believe-that *x* exists or will exist. But this seems to be incorrect. The object need not be realizable, nor need the subject believe that he will realize it. All that is necessary is that the individual believe that there is some possibility of realizing it” (1986, 167). See also Howard-Synder 2018.

¹⁸ McCauley and Graham (2020), 14. So, any cognitive naturalness that scientific reasoning may take on “is a decidedly practiced naturalness” (286), and this means that together with the counter-intuitiveness of its epistemic norms, scientific thinking starts out with a natural disadvantage to maturationally natural ideas, in terms of their adoption and transference.

¹⁹ Experimental psychology indicates a human penchant for relying on their maturationally natural cognitive systems “even when their deliverances are thoroughly contrary to the norms of deductive and probabilistic inference” (McCauley 2013, 237). Religious metaphysics “overwhelmingly square with the deliverances of our maturationally natural cognition, and they capitalize, especially, on the penchant of human minds to presume that noteworthy events result from the actions of intentional agents. Proliferating agents present no special cognitive problems for human minds in standard operating mode [and religious representations are often optimized for selection when they] incorporate modest violations of humans’ maturationally natural presumptions” (224).

²⁰ The radical counter-intuitiveness of certain prescriptions associated with theological correctness as Catholics, Protestants, or others understand it is not interesting only for evidence of widespread non-compliances, or a return to simpler and less demanding religious expressions. The plurality of “models” of faith, and the impact that adopting a particular conception in the development of religious identity needs to be examined also.

²¹ This fits well I think with CSR’s concern with universal cognitive architecture. But it already muddies the water for propositional requirements on faith. Faith is said to be a pro-attitude towards something, and many would fill that in with proposition in the form of believing *that*. But James and Wittgenstein, both of whom emphasize the affective/conative aspects of faith, are also thinkers who see theologies and creeds as secondary constructions, secondary to far more basic or instinctual religious/spiritual responses to experience. Relatedly, McCauley and Cohen run experiments which show how religious subjects often slip back from providing responses which would be considered theologically correct in monotheism, to the theological incorrectness of more basic folk or popular religious responses. But *axiologically*, that is in terms of prescriptions or oughts, standards of theological correctness are often in place which hold the faithful to an orthodoxy, and pronounce them. Cognitivist CSR largely studies religion through *species-universal* cognitive modules. But these may involve transmission as well as origination of beliefs, and cultural selection as well as natural and sexual selection.

²² Wittgenstein 1967, 53.

²³ Wittgenstein 1967, 54.

²⁴ Wittgenstein 1967, 57; 59. Wittgenstein also writes, “We don’t talk about hypothesis, or about high probability. Nor about knowing. In a religious discourse we use such expressions as: ‘I believe that so and so will happen,’ and use them differently to the way in which we use them in science. Although the temptation is great to think we do. Because we do talk of evidence, and do talk of evidence by experience” (56). Wittgenstein uses “different” thirty-eight times in LRB, to describe the types of reasons or judgments in religious, in contrast to everyday, scientific, or “normal” (used twelve times) situations and concept use.

²⁵ Wittgenstein 1967, 58.

²⁶ Wittgenstein 1967, 58-59. A closely related passage from *Culture and Value* provides further evidence of Wittgenstein grappling with Lessing's problem: "Christianity is not based on a historical truth, but presents us with a (historical) narrative & says: now believe! But not believe this report with the belief that is appropriate to a historical report,--but rather: believe, through thick & thin & you can do this only as the outcome of a life. Here you have a message! --don't treat it as you would another historical message! Make a quite different place for it in your life.-- There is no paradox about that!" (CV, 37). The passage firstly show that Wittgenstein sees differences between narrative and non-narrative testimony (see Chapters 3 and 4 of Axtell 2019). Also, the last line here, "There is no paradox about that!" remains part of the longer supposition that Wittgenstein places in quotation marks. So, we likely need not attribute this attitude directly to him, but should see it as the conclusion of a popular line of reasoning he thinks we should investigate. Its self-consistency or paradoxicality is what he wants to investigate, and one might think that the first and second ways offer more moderate and radical interpretations of the "now believe" prescription.

²⁷ Wittgenstein is known to have been quite familiar with Lessing's work on religion. Thanks to Robert Vinten for pointing out to me the strong evidence of this in Drury (2018). On page 71 (fn. 95) we are told by Drury, Wittgenstein's psychiatrist, that "In his will, Wittgenstein left his 'volume of Lessing's religious writings' to an old friend, Dr. Ludwig Hansel, a teacher in Vienna." Drury also recounts that "When we were out walking a few days later, Wittgenstein began to talk to me about Lessing. He quoted with great emphasis Lessing's remark: 'If God held closed in his right hand all truth, and in his left the single and untiring striving after truth, adding even that I always and forever make mistakes, and said to me Choose! I should fall humbly before his left hand and say: Father grant me! The pure truth is for you alone'. Then he said he would like to read to me something of Lessing's. So we turned back and hurried up to the public library to see if we could find anything either in German or in English. We found nothing; and I had to regret that I never heard him selecting what it was he wanted me to know" (118-19).

²⁸ The existential gap "involves the 'problem of religious appropriation'. This ditch concerns the 'conditions necessary for an individual's successfully apprehending, accepting, and perhaps even understanding the religious message', which may seem 'dubious, strange, or fantastic'" (Benton, 35). Barbour relatedly writes, "Another movement advocating a sharp separation of the spheres of science and religion is *existentialism*. ... Common to all existentialists -- whether atheistic or theistic -- is the conviction that we can know authentic human existence only by being personally involved as unique individuals making free decisions. The meaning of life is

found only in commitment and action, never in the spectatorial, rationalistic attitude.... “ (7). Barbour describes *expressive* and *linguistic* views of religious language which have also supported Independence and other models besides Conflict.²⁸ But linguistic analysis has helped us to see how diversity of functions of religious language are, and how diverse are religious communities or traditions themselves, which yet find common meaning in holding a religious identity.

²⁹ Briefly, the temporal gap stands between historical evidence and biblical miracles: “The temporal distance between himself and the time of Christ is problematic, since the proof which was enjoyed in the first centuries of Christianity, the ‘proof of the spirit and of power no longer has any spirit or power, but has sunk to the level of human testimonies of spirit and power’. Thus, ‘reports of fulfilled prophecies are not fulfilled prophecies; that reports of miracles are not miracles’, and finally, that such testimonies are ‘a medium which takes away all their force’” (31-32). The metaphysical gap frustrates further metaphysical inferences, even from evidence of particular miracle events: “accidental truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths of reason” (Lessing, 53). Lessing here “points out that what happened (which he now grants for the sake of argument) and conclusions of religious truth derived from them....” (Benton, 5). Benton attributes the metaphysical aspect in Lessing’s description of the ugly, broad ditch largely to Lessing’s study of Leibniz, and to the peculiarities of the latter’s views. However, the identification of scripture as a kind of a priori synthetic is already there in both Catholic and Protestant thought, and Protestants did not explicitly embrace Conflict in that day any more than today, but rather something closer to the glowing optimism of the traditional “faith seeks understanding” idea. Thus, an apologetic strategy on which reason is “the very voice of God,” of “the Candle of the Lord” articulates a stance on which reason and revelation are both emanations of God, and even where this seeming consonance runs these together so overtly as to betray highly ethnocentric claims that all truth, including necessary truths, are divulged in Christian scripture. So, for example Chillingworth (1638), in *Religion of Protestants*, writes, “And then all necessary truth being as I have prov’d, plainly set down in scripture, I am certain by believing Scripture, to believe all necessary truth” (chap VI, 376). I interpret Lessing, Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein as quite aware of these Protestant views.

³⁰ Quelo and Cueni (2020) describes Right Wittgensteinians as denying a critical role to philosophy, and encouraging excessive conservatism. A Left Wittgensteinian view is described as allowing for critical discrimination of practices which merit reasonable confidence and practices which do not. In continuing Williams' elaboration of the resources of a Left Wittgensteinian account of concept use and of conceptual change, the authors interestingly describe the Right's account as characterizing every choice as "equally a matter of *how we find it natural to go on*" (9). Bob Plant (2011) relatedly, takes the naturalistic strains in Wittgenstein's thought to place significant constraints on his more fideistic-relativistic remarks. In my terms, Wittgenstein's prescriptive fideism as found in his remarks on "genuine" faith militates against biblical literalism and religious dogmatism more generally, and not just against emotionally denuded religious rationalism. Wittgenstein as Plant points out views genuine faith as a "love" or "what Kierkegaard calls a passion" (CV p. 33; 53). But it is odd that Plant does not see the conceptual confusions that the fundamentalist-literalist view commits in trying to assert the passionate appropriations as literal-historical truth-claims. What is problematic is not that genuine faith, as a passion or "trusting" (CV 72) is without qualification, but that its *being* unconditional qualification means should be taken in the intellectually impoverished sense as propositional, or naively realistic "belief that" –something arguably neither necessary *nor* sufficient for genuine faith. The idea of prescribed certitude already invites these logical confusions, but they are of course multiplied when a confessional involves elements of a *narrative* testimony. Wittgenstein seems right to me to contrast 'categorical' commitment, especially on an existential account where this involves passionately taking hold of a system of reference or "world-picture" (1999, §67) with those who are "apologetic"; yet Christian thinkers seem to increasingly run these together.

³¹ On the one hand, Wittgenstein sometimes construes "standing fast" in naturalistic terms as "something animal" (OC, §359). On the other hand, Wittgenstein criticizes religious dogma and authoritarianism for being "irrefutable and beyond the reach of attack" (CV, p. 28). In his response to the appearance of such paradoxes paradox we see some of the strongest aspects of what Andrejč terms an *existential* account in Wittgenstein. I would add that the anti-rationalism described here as helping to dissolve the appearance of paradox is clearly of the sort associated with an

independence model of the relationship between religion and science, rather than the stronger sort associated with biblical literalism. Wittgenstein writes,

If I am to be REALLY saved, – what I need is certainty – not wisdom, dreams or speculation – and this certainty is faith. And faith is faith in what is needed by my heart, my soul, not my speculative intelligence. For it is my soul with its passions, as it were with its flesh and blood, that has to be saved, not my abstract mind (CV, 33).

Thus, the ugly, broad ditch isn't bridged by arguing for rational propositional faith in all testimonial faith traditions or in just one. But it is effectively *bypassed* in *Culture and Value* and other places where Wittgenstein presents faith as an existential choice in the context of a praxis or living linguistic community. It is not that the attitude of faith has definitely gone subdoxastic in this account, but rather that where the active and *diachronic* commitment is present, mysteries and paradoxes of faith can remain what they are without offense to reasonability; and what psychologists and philosophers, or for that matter, theologians, would describe as an isolated propositional attitude of an agent to be (as in the "Day of Judgment belief"), matters little.

³² "In existential matters, one never has absolute evidence, and therefore faith always involves some amount of risk" (Vainio 2021, np). What is necessary to authentic faith includes acknowledgment of risk, and Vainio reminds us of the passage both in Luke and in Matthew, where Jesus asks, "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?" Yet exclusivist soteriologies seem to evoke just this "hypocrisy" (Luke 6: 41-42; Matthew 7: 1-5). In contrast to fundamentalisms with conflate psychological and objective certainty, Vainio (2021, np) holds that "the credence the individual has does not necessarily have a direct and immediate effect on the status of his or her faith. This is because faith is a broader concept than knowledge. Faith is not antithetical, with high epistemic standards, but faith always has both pragmatic and practical elements. Even if faith does not entail discarding epistemic virtues, it is not constituted by constant and high evidential certainty, whereas it is constituted with certain epistemically grounded desires and practices."

³³ For discussion of a paradox about enkratic, or *continence conditions* on rationality, and about the type of irrationality which epistemic akrasia or incontinence presents, see Lasonen-Aarnio (2020). Aristotle treats akratic and enkratic attitudes as not making agents as blameworthy as manifesting a vice, but enkratic persons as less praiseworthy than other who, having fuller virtue, don't experience great conflict between what they morally ought to do and their own desires. This fits our thesis that the censure applied to counter-inductive thinking is not ordinarily one of strong or direct blame; the kind of rebuke or censure needs to fit the contextual description of the agent's epistemic situation. But the temptation to cast off the burdens of judgment and to award oneself religious uniqueness and truth is felt in common by the akratic and the enkratic person. They are expressed by theologians as well as by persons. Richard Kraut (2018, np) writes, "The Greek terms are *akrasia* ("incontinence"; literally: "lack of mastery") and *enkrateia* ("continence"; literally "mastery"). An akratic person goes against reason as a result of some *pathos* ("emotion", "feeling"). Like the akratic, an enkratic person experiences a feeling that is contrary to reason; but unlike the akratic, he acts in accordance with reason. His defect consists solely in the fact that, more than most people, he experiences passions that conflict with his rational choice. The akratic person has not only this defect, but has the further flaw that he gives in to feeling...."

³⁴ Our distinction between left and right-bank Wittgensteinians, and between enkratic and akratic responses to Lessing's problem, I have recently found to be described in other terms Katherine Dormandy's work, and in particular in her distinction between two defenses of *doxastic partiality*, which she calls "anti-epistemological" and "epistemological partiality." The former which she uses Kierkegaard to illustrate, is heroic, acknowledging the dissonance that attends stubborn counter-evidence to one's beliefs, but supposing that "noetic struggle makes faith

excellent”; the latter, epistemological partiality, by contrast, “eschews struggle and fosters noetic ease”. It aims not just to avoid cognitive dissonance but to annihilate it. In religious contexts, epistemic partiality may seem truth-conducive – a sort of reliable cognitive bias – and epistemic partialism encourages its unearned indulgence, sometimes to such an extent that for any potential impartialist counterevidence, it is the height of both faith and of philosophical reason to hold it “defeated” simply by reiterating one’s evidence-weighting policy of giving greater weight to what favourable, partialist, evidence one already has (2021a, 11). This over-ease in appeal to partialist evidence (which Dormandy finds in Plantinga’s apologetics among others where counter-evidence is too easily pronounced misleading), I argue (Axtell 2022a) is also the concern that we should have in the application of “belief-credence dualism” to religious epistemics.

³⁵ The Intellectual Golden Rule (IGR) as discussed in the literature (Hick, 235; see also Knitter) is very much in the spirit of Gotthold Lessing’s famous ‘parable of the rings’ section in his play, *Nathan the Wise*. This widely re-published section also offers a clear and vivid illustration of what we are calling Lessing’s problem, and both that narrative and Hick’s (IGR) principle I have found make for an excellent classroom discussion. Those theists who allow (IGR) would seem to be granting that adherents of different revealed religions stand equally vulnerable in relation to Lessing’s “ugly, broad ditch,” and can be equally sincere in their religious identity. So mutualist ethics / epistemics and acceptance of (IGR) seem conceptually linked, as does particularist ethics / epistemics with denial of (IGR).

³⁶ McCauley says relatively little about narrative testimony and its uptake in religious identity development. But what he says is still insightful, and I will build upon it. Even prior to being canonized and taking on additional authority in this way, texts and founding narratives with prophets or other exemplars of normatively correct faith supply a kind of cultural scaffolding that aids memory and successful transmission. While generally less radically counter-intuitive than theological orthodoxies, studies show that people find special appeal in “minimally” counter-intuitive ideas and stories – those that contain one, rather than a whole nest of counter-

intuitive ideas. Narratives or teachings that have this “optimal” balance of naturalness and violation attract attention, and are especially memorable, and secure. McCauley and Graham (2020, 19) write, “Narratives organize long trains of events that turn on the causal relations between intentional agents’ states of mind and actions and their effects on their own and other agents’ states of mind and actions. Fashioning stories along such lines, in which events are woven together on the basis of agents’ mental lives and conduct, makes them easy to comprehend and easy to remember.”

³⁷ Philosophers and natural theologians generally want to render faith acceptable to reason, but acknowledging limits to rational understanding can be *honest*. The strong fideist who acknowledges mysteries of faith may maintain a basic religious realism, and still respond to them as did Kierkegaard (1992, 182): “If I am capable of grasping God objectively, I do not believe, but precisely because I cannot do this I must believe.” Or as James did, they may respond by bidding that we not take as “necessities of universal reason,” what are “at bottom, accidents more or less of personal vision which had far better be avowed as such” (1909, 10). Kierkegaard insisted (1992, 53) that faith “has in every moment the infinite dialectic of uncertainty present with it.” His understanding of faith was of “an objective uncertainty, held fast through appropriation with the most passionate inwardness.” Let us identify this as a tenet of at least this self-aware type of *prescriptive* fideism: genuine faith, or at least honest faith, requires acceptance of the condition of objective uncertainty. Risk-acknowledging intellectual honesty is the logically necessary prelude to *taking responsibility* for doxastic risk, and for seeing how peerhood is not plausibly denied in any domain where efforts to acquire justified beliefs are especially challenged by evidential ambiguity or underdetermination.

³⁸ Paralleling the sharpness of Luther’s criticism of Erasmus, “representing Lutheran orthodoxy... Goeze launched a fierce attack against Lessing... Lessing was a blasphemous person who ‘derided the entire Christian world to its face....’ But when it began to look as if he might lose the battle, Goeze appealed to the civil authority. In July 1778 all of Lessing's publications became subject to strict censorship, and in August of the same year, Lessing was required to receive permission from the government of Brunswick before he could publish anything. ...Lessing decided to return to ‘his old pulpit, the theater,’ to resume the theological battle. He then wrote "a play , the content of which has some analogy with his present

disputes.’ Lessing characterized this play, his famous Nathan the Wise, as ‘a son of his approaching old age, [a son] whom the polemic helped to bring to birth’; [he added that] “Nathan's attitude toward all positive religions has always been my own.” (Source: 2020 Wilmington for Christ blog, accessed at <https://www.wilmingtonfavs.com/spinoza-conversations/lessing-and-the-fragments-controversy-fragmentenstreit.html>)

³⁹ Craig and Harris (2008, np). In Axtell (2019), I argue that Craig’s approach appeals to being specially placed to receive truth, but that this response exacerbates problems of religious luck.

⁴⁰ LRB, 4. The sharpness of his criticism of O’Hara’s evidentialist apologetics is explained in part by Wittgenstein’s conception of faith, a conception which is *prescriptively* fideistic in the sense that it tends toward an extreme he expresses thusly: “The point is that if there were evidence, this would in fact destroy the whole business” (2-3). Wittgenstein is usually quite careful to offer descriptive observations and not to make overtly prescriptive claims. Like Kierkegaard, he does find the disparities between faith and evidential thinking important, and wants to float them rather than sink them. But his typical caution to distinguish the mood of faith from objective certitude, and his evenness in description of faith tendencies rather than advocacy of them, is sometimes disrupted. It is disrupted where we read that Father O’Hara would be “unreasonable” if he tried to offer objective or inductive norm-abiding evidence for it, but not so for the belief itself, apart from such an evidentialist apologetic. “What seems to me ludicrous about O’Hara is his making it appear to be *reasonable* (LRB, 4). The general point for us here is that the more the conversants take their religious acceptances as assertions of historical facts where a standard of evidential support is presumed, the more that genuine contradiction between them will be possible, but also the more “not reasonable” (which is not to yet to say ‘irrational’) the religious controversy becomes.

⁴¹ The final chapter of *Problems of Religious Luck* (2019) proposed a research program at the intersection of CSR research concerned with authority assumption in testimonial faith traditions, and an inductive risk account of the ethics of belief. To advance that research program proposed in the final chapter of PRL by connecting it with Wittgensteinian thought, we should examine Wittgensteinian key distinction between symptomatic, or epistemic/inductive norm-abiding inferences, as distinguished from criterial uses of language.

We should examine the extant conceptions of faith associated with fundamentalist thinking, and how for some far more than others, counter-intuitive ideas are featured, along with counter-evidential beliefs or prescriptions for counter-inductive (evidential pattern-violating) inferences. In the concepts of philosophy of luck and risk I apply in the book, we would say that O’Hara ascribes high credence and epistemic justification to his belief, but his internalist account is philosophically unsatisfactory because the proposition is not inductively strong, and the evidence he attests is not of the same kind to make strong inferences. Religious narratives place readers where they can feel what it is like to have certain sorts of experience, but they appear not to situate them well for making truth claims, let alone exclusivist ones, on their basis (Fraser 2017). If we get so far as the kind of either/or dilemma with respect to religious affirmation as epistemically rational in an internalist sense, we are already making the mistake. The propositional belief as O’Hara describes *himself* as having I would argue aggravates problems of *propositional luck*.

⁴² This suggests kind of pluralism about disagreement, where full belief and agnosticism are rightly to be treated philosophically as non-contradictory, are not necessarily contradictory, even if theology so often treats agnostic stances as culpable ‘unbelief,’ and analytic epistemology so often treats religious belief *that p* on analogy with atomistic empirical propositions. Michele Palmira’s (2021) aptly titled Kinship account aims to account for the relationships between not just between full and degreed doxastic attitudes, but also between *believing* and *not having belief*; between *not having a belief* and *disbelief*; between each of these latter two and *middling or low credence*, etc. Palmira’s form of epistemic pluralism would seem to articulate Wittgenstein’s point here, and to complement or extend the appealing characteristics of Wittgenstein’s account as well as the B-C dualists. To expand, epistemic pluralism draws directly from which the different doxastic states which epistemologists and social psychologists posit; epistemic permissivism draws in turn from epistemic pluralism.

⁴³ “A more extreme view which privileged the insider’s status was one which gained some currency in the philosophy of religion in the 1960s, and which asserted that not only was the believer’s account superior to that of the non-believer, but that the believer’s account could really be understood by the believer, and never by the non-believer. This position came to be known as Wittgensteinian fideism, when principle experiments of which was the philosopher of

religion D. Z. Phillips” (Chryssides and Gregg 2019, 8). The *sui generis* nature of particularist religious belief is one that Phillips attributes on this fideistic model; he then connects it to the historical and metaphysical gaps in Lessing’s argument. Phillips rejects a literal-historical understanding of the Day of Judgment, much as Wittgenstein does. This perhaps makes Phillips a supporter of a Right-bank response. But philosophy’s forbearance of all criticism, on so quietist a view as he sometimes seems to espouse, assures that the insider is the soul measure of what it takes to cross the ditch from the Jesus of history to the Christ of faith. Besides the common assumption that there is or was a once ‘pure’ versions of these religions to base these *sui generis* ‘oughts’ upon, and the vagueness of what it means to be an insider or outsider, Chryssides and Gregg also point out a normative expectation of exclusive to sectarian allegiance as “a further preconception which impinges on the insider/outsider debate” (11-12).

⁴⁴ The term ‘teleological suspension of the ethical’ enters the literature in Kierkegaard’s discussion of the paradox of faith exemplified in Abraham’s decision in the *Genesis* narrative to follow divine command in the sacrifice of his son, Isaac, in *Fear and Trembling* (1985). I am extending the concept by showing how fideistic and confessional thought operates by an analogous suspension of epistemic and even logical norms.

⁴⁵ Luhmann uses “faith frame” in place of conception or model of faith. In *How God Becomes Real* (2020) she points to evidence that it isn’t easy for people to maintain a sense that there are invisible spirits who care about you. Instead, people must work incredibly hard to make gods real and this effort helps explain the enduring power of religious faith. She argues that people have both a faith frame and an everyday frame which often makes the former hard to maintain. She writes that, “By ‘faith frame’ I mean the set of memories, expectations, and representations which are evoked when someone calls God or the supernatural to mind, and thinks and acts on the basis of those memories, expectations and representations.... The faith frame catches up the way the faithful want to be and the world as they think it could and should be. To choose to think with the faith frame is a decision to enter into another way of thinking about reality which—like fiction—calls on the resources of the imagination to re-organize what is fundamentally real and what lives in tension with the ordinary factual frames of everyday reality” (2018, 315-316). Luhmann goes some distance towards accommodating Wittgenstein’s crucial distinction between criterial and symptomatic uses of language. It is not

as if these frames are strictly incommensurable, or that they are in logical conflict. If either of those were the case, there would be no sense to Wittgenstein giving such long and careful thought to how they relate, as he does in the LRB. Different frames co-exist, but problematically. Luhmann thinks it would aid CSR in instead of focusing on emotions like fear, it would recognize that “There is a kind of obduracy about the world of the visible which means that when inferences about invisible others is not supported by experience, the commitment to the invisible can fade away.” But this is why faith is prescribed as needing to be constantly practiced, practiced as “a sustained, intentional commitment to the deliberate belief that an invisible other is real...” (316).

⁴⁶ Mentioning cases like beliefs about transubstantiation and virgin birth, Wittgenstein concedes instances in which there could be “contradiction” between something of a theological nature stated, and that statement’s denial. But this is quite unnatural it seems, in that it presupposes a kind of truth-aptness inappropriate to them, at least in the biblical cases. “And so if Moore said ‘I know that this is wine and not blood,’ Catholics would contradict him” (OC §239). Even if we surmise that Wittgenstein would criticize the value of natural theology, he is not just reflecting a more Protestant view, but noting an important distinction. Father O’Hara is an outlier even among Catholic priests for his taking religious rationalism to apply to ‘proving’ religion-specific or scriptural teachings, or epistemic rationality of beliefs of this sort. This is just the sort of ‘proof’ that Lessing finds wanted but lacking.

⁴⁷ Grube (2015), 421. Grube (2005, 359-360) rightly points out that “Lessing provides a way out of the dilemma between either uncritical thinking and reducing/rejecting positive religion,” a way on which the faithful in testimonial faith traditions do not have to leap the ditch, or “overstep the limits of what is humanly possible to know in order to maintain positive religion.” Grube argues that this is one of the ways (another is sociological or other (including postmodernist ‘reductionisms’) *of depriving the concept of truth of its normative function*. For further discussion of the tendencies of fundamentalists to reduce religious contrariety to a simplistic “bivalent” relationship between (absolute) truth and falsehood, see Grube (2005), and Grube and Van Herck. (eds.) (2018). He points out Joseph Margolis (1991) as earlier arguing against bivalence as a general logical principle taken as holding indiscriminately across

domains of inquiry. Margolis argues that there are many domains where applying a bivalence principle is misguided.

⁴⁸ John Locke's *A Letter Concerning Toleration* contains a related critical reflection on what we are calling biased-closure inferences among the religious enthusiasts of different testimonial faith traditions: "But if one of these churches hath this power of treating the other ill, I ask which of them it is to whom that power belongs, and by what right? It will be answered, undoubtedly, that it is the Orthodox Church which has the right of authority over the erroneous or heretical. This is, in great and specious words, to say just nothing at all. For every church is orthodox to itself; to others, erroneous or heretical. For whatsoever any church believes, it believes to be true and the contrary unto those things it pronounce; to be error. So that the controversy between these churches about the truth of their doctrines and the purity of their worship is on both sides equal; nor is there any judge, either at Constantinople or elsewhere upon earth, by whose sentence it can be determined" (124).

⁴⁹ Compare Bouwsma (1987), especially 54-58.

⁵⁰ Wittgenstein, *PI* §109.

⁵¹ Norman Malcolm's 1952 paper, "Knowledge and Belief," relatedly asks, "Can I discover in myself whether I know something or merely believe it?" Malcolm comes to make a distinction between two senses of know which provide different ways of answering this question: "When I use " know " in the weak sense I am prepared to let an investigation (demonstration, calculation) determine whether the something that I claim to know is true or false. When I use " know " in the strong sense I am not prepared to look upon anything as an investigation; I do not concede that anything whatsoever could prove me mistaken; I do not regard the matter as open to any question; I do not admit that my proposition could turn out to be false, that any future investigation could refute it or cast doubt on it." (183) He treats the strong sense as "metaphysical" and at the same time psychological, because it does not make knowledge answerable to evidence but rather treats of things 'made' metaphysical by a decision on the part of the agent. It "implies that the person who makes the statement would look upon nothing what- ever as evidence that p is false." He ends by noting, "Ludwig Wittgenstein, in discussion,

gave me the principal idea of this paper-namely, that there is a resemblance in logic between some a priori and some empirical statements” (189).

⁵² Tillich (1957), 116–117. Compare Andrejc (2015), which develops ways of relating Wittgenstein’s grammatical investigation and Tillich’s mature understanding of philosophical theology.

⁵³ Sessions (1994), 68.

⁵⁴ Wittgenstein’s skepticism about this expectation is reflected in his claim that “the chain of reasons has an end” (*PI* §326). In *On Certainty* we often find Wittgenstein discussing the differences between using ‘certainty’ as referring to a credence function, and something else, perhaps ‘certitude’ to refer to faith as an abiding and resilient commitments. Wittgenstein held that we confer normative or empirical status on certain expressions by *using* them in a particular way on a given occasion. He emphasizes this point in terms of his distinction between “criteria” and “symptoms,” which are only partly set by logical differences but partly also by specific uses, practices, and contexts of inquiry. “We can treat certain evidence either as symptomatic (inductive evidence) or as criterial, that is, due to the grammar of the terms involved.” But there is enough objectivity to the study of language-use to sometimes show errors, self-contradictions, and self-deceptions.

⁵⁵ Kitcher (2012), 263-264.

⁵⁶ Wittgenstein by my count uses “hinge” three times, and “river-bed” twice in *On Certainty*; but the more dynamic metaphor of river waters and bed may be the more apt one for philosophy of religion, such that we should prefer ‘river-bed epistemologies’ over ‘hinge epistemologies’ if these are thought to pull in different directions. Although both are active and not static, there remain important differences in the two metaphors, since unlike maturationally natural ideas never to be seriously questioned, the river-bed emphasizes the diachronic flow or progression of ideas. The river-bed metaphor, as the better of the two, allows that active practice in any domain, and thus also theory, changes over time under, though conservatively, under pressure from various forces: “But I distinguish between the movement of the waters on the river-bed

and the shift of the bed itself; though there is not a sharp division of the one from the other” (OC, §97). River banks, waters, and bed metaphors fit better with confirmation holism, and the difference between bedrock commitments ‘made metaphysical’ in Imre Lakatos’ conception of the thus irrefutable “hard core” of a research programme, in contrast to its “protective belt” commitments, and auxiliary assumptions one might allow to be questioned and revised. This indicates to me that resilience and dogmatism are not identical, and views which would identify them are perhaps the most dogmatic and doubtful models for faith. At least they are too specific to function in the way of a general formal analysis of faith. But I will have to wait for another occasion to compare my views to those of Duncan Pritchard and Michael Williams (this volume) on Pritchard’s proposed “quasi-fideism.”

⁵⁷ However, analytic apologetics arguably confuses the defense of reasonable belief with defense of religion-specific knowledge. When this is the strategy, a ‘skeptical fideistic’ compromise capable of supporting religious inclusivism or pluralism is bypassed in favor of each home religion having an equal right to assert particular “knowledge,” the resulting logical incompatibilities between such claims, be damned.

⁵⁸ The inductive risk account of the ethics of belief which I develop in *Problems of Religious Luck* and more recent papers, and my use of the Rawlsian notion of “reasonable pluralism,” is largely neutral to debate over the appropriate role for religion to play in the public square, on the one hand, and to debate between Hickean metaphysical unity. Reasonable pluralism and the study of progressive and degenerative research program (the Lakatosian ‘core and belt’ model) as the implication of holistic evaluation, does not demand its critics claim.

⁵⁹ John Bishop (2007) has also explained how recognition of a right to *moderately* fideistic assumptions is the most philosophically sound and practically effective way to constrain *strongly* fideistic faith ventures. See Axtell (2013) for a complementary account focused on the close connection between “possibility” and “permission” in William James’ ethics of belief.

⁶⁰ It is consistent with Thomas Jefferson’s statement so close to political liberalism that “It does me no harm whether my neighbor believes in twenty gods or no god. It neither picks my pocket, nor breaks my leg, ” and with what Richard Rorty called the Jeffersonian Compromise.

William James argued that unless harm is involved, we ought to respect others as the rightful choosers of their own risk, and that “We ought...delicately and profoundly to respect one another's mental freedom [and]... live and let live, in speculative as well as in practical things,” *The Will to Believe*, 234.

⁶¹ Whitcomb, Battaly, Baehr, and Howard-Synder (2017), 519. The authors suggest more valid ways to measure intellectual humility beyond attentiveness are predictions related to cognitive biases, predictions related to belief regulation, and predictions related to propensity to excessively compare oneself to others intellectually. The authors allow that there is both *deficient* and *excessive* attentiveness, so that “humility lies in the mean between arrogance and servility”, “a mean between the extremes of ignoring and obsessing about one’s limitations” (529). Their paper does not discuss religious ideas specifically, but seems broadly applicable for scholars who do not initially set that domain apart.

⁶² For more contemporary work in religious philosophy which acknowledges risk, see Schwenkler (2020) and the other papers in Lambert and Schwenkler (eds.) 2020.

⁶³ Risk aware permissivism which I elsewhere develop as *zetetic responsibilism* (2022a 2022b; 2022c) acknowledges the normalness of risk –taking, including doxastic risk-taking, in identity fusion. Risks are not only existential –the risk to me of my missing the truth by believing too little – but also epistemic. Risk aware social epistemology means awareness of issues of epistemic injustice in what we believe about others not of our in-group, and what we ascribe to them. There is no instant exception for radically asymmetric trait-ascriptions, on account of their being theologically-cast; rather, such exceptionalism might well be counted as further evidence that a theologically-cast asymmetric insider-outsider ascriptions of virtue, vice, bias, etc. is pseudo-explanatory, and that the best explanation for the radical asymmetry of ascribed traits is known social biases.

⁶⁴ While the disentangling of the ‘historical proof-game’ from Christian belief is what has led many interpreters to identify Kierkegaard as a kind of fideist (Carroll, 143) this certainly does not mean that O’Hara’s intellectualist apologetic makes a clean break from it. Rather, apologetics of an evidentialist still come in after the fact of belief, and testimonial authority

assumption. A bewitchment of intelligence is arguably the judgment we should make when fideistic uptake obscures the ‘mood of faith’ in the dogma, conflating subjective conviction with *epistemic* success in ways that lead insiders to ignore epistemic injustices their attitudes towards unbelievers may do to the latter. Theologians, philosophers, and CSR researchers should align these tensions with study of fundamentalist orientations, and should not falter in censuring as unhelpful certain apologetic projects: those which ‘blunder’ first in their intent to rationalize faith-based beliefs, and then again in not acknowledging the insufficient their arguments to that task.

⁶⁵ Lessing (2005), 55.

⁶⁶ It is not just biblical literalism, but also church or theological inerrantism that fuels Conflict. But Barbour rightly notes that natural theology has been seen by many as a middle-ground between the different objects and methods that Independence theorists uphold. It would be odd indeed that formal argumentation did not apply theism and atheism, since philosophy invites not just reasoned reflection, but also dialogue across domains and disciplines. That criterial uses of language (the grammaticalist account) do not rest on a chain of reasons, and that neither natural theology nor disproof of atheism is proven but rather remain speculative metaphysics, do not imply that natural theology, not philosophical reflections on beliefs in other domains of controversial views, is without value. This would push us into an unsoundly quietist interpretation of Wittgenstein, and it is far from clear that negative apologetics is to be preferred to positive apologetics involving reason and argument. If to treat religious discourse as everyday discourse, or as needing to meet an evidentialist bar of empirical justification is a blunder, then it is something to be avoided by philosopher, theologian, and lay-believer alike. Thus, this source of Conflict coming from skeptical evidentialism is avoided also.

⁶⁷ There is a literature on epistemic akrasia and normative enkratic principles, and another literature on gnostic and agnostic theism, yet these literatures have yet to combine or to explore their intersections. Both sets of terms have some comparative value. I take agnosticism to be not about self-attribution of belief but primarily about self-attribution of knowledge. But since the term too often is given the former interpretation, I would present the categories of gnostic

and agnostic theism (simply dropping the s). These categories suggest a perhaps better, more comparative way to cut the terrain, and to highlight differences which Wittgenstein found important between ‘right bank’ self-attributions of epistemic and alethic and salvific goods (propositional knowledge, doctrinal and salvific exclusivism), and religious assent as understood by ‘left bank’ religious thinkers. The latter do not suffer the tensions of the former, and they remain consistent with the Enlightenment challenge understood as permitting reasonable doxastic faith ventures, but aware of the logical blunders right-bankers and their apologetic strategies, and the very real dangers of religious ‘enthusiasm.’ Agnostic religious fideism is enkratic, and has nothing to apologize for. It is gnostic religious fideism that supports what Choo (2018) terms “unconfirmed superiority debates” over the one wholly true creed or exclusively salvific religious identity, and that is an assumption motivating many or most apologetic projects. In such ‘debates,’ if negative apologetics can be described as such, parties cop the attitude that outsiders are not epistemic peers, yet they lack good reason to determine who is superior. Dormandy describes this as “epistemic elitism—asserting a fundamental epistemic difference between the blessed and everyone else, while advocating epistemic norms that further benefit the former by harming the latter” (2021b, 107). *Contra* Choo, I agree with Wittgenstein that these expressions become ‘ludicrous’ when their expression functions only to assuage the feelings of religious insiders, while outsiders can recognize the signs of bias which they themselves cannot. Choo’s view appears to be a version of Wittgenstein’s second way, and of what I elsewhere term mutualist exclusivism, in that it would have us accept polarized and polemical debate between theistic sects, and between believers and non-believers. See Axtell (2019 and 2020) for extended criticisms of mutualist exclusivism as making only a conceptually incoherent claim about religious superiority.

⁶⁸ Belief-Credence dualists allege that “beliefs and credences are two different epistemic tools used for different purposes.” The importance which Christian philosophers Lara Buchak and Liz Jackson, as self-described “dualists,” attach to distinguishing largely agent-independent C-reasoning from agent-dependent and often value-charged B-reasoning, while giving place to both, shares considerable overlap with Wittgensteinian thought, especially through connections with his own distinction between two different but not unrelated ways of treating evidence: “as

symptomatic (inductive evidence) or as criterial....” (AWL, 90). See Axtell 2022a for a comparison of Wittgenstein with contemporary Belief-Credence Dualism.

⁶⁹ McCauley (2013), 2-3.

⁷⁰ Szocik and van Eyghen (2021), 22.