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Forces by Which We Live

Religion and Religious Experience from the Perspective of a Pragmatic Philosophical Anthropology

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ABSTRACT

This study argues that a pragmatic conception of religion would enable philosophers to make important contributions to our ability to handle concrete problems involving religion. The term ‘philosophical anthropology’, referring to different interpretative frameworks, which philosophers draw on to develop conceptions of human phenomena, is introduced. It is argued that the classical pragmatists embraced a philosophical anthropology significantly different from that embraced by most philosophers of religion; accordingly, pragmatism offers an alternative conception of religion. It is suggested that a conception of religion is superior to another if it makes more promising contributions to our ability to handle extra-philosophical problems of religion.

A pragmatic philosophical anthropology urges us to view human practices as taking shape as responses to shared experienced needs. Religious practices develop to resolve tensions in our views of life. The pictures of human flourishing they present reconstruct our views of life, thereby allowing more significant interaction with the environment, and a more significant life.

A modified version of reflective equilibrium is developed to show how we, on a pragmatic conception of religion, are able to supply resources for criticism and reform of religious practices, so the extra-philosophical problems of religion can be handled. Mainstream philosophy of religion attempts to offer such resources by presenting analogy-arguments from religious experience. Those arguments are, however, unconvincing. A comparison of the two conceptions of religion thus results in a recommendation to reconstruct philosophy of religion.

Keywords: pragmatism, conception of religion, James, Dewey, Mead, philosophical anthropology, views of life, religious experience, Alston, reflective equilibrium, emotions.

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CHAPTER 1
Religion’s Predicament and Its Relation to Contemporary Philosophy of Religion

1.1 An Inevitable Ambivalence

I myself invincibly ... believe, that ... although all the special manifestations of religion may have been absurd (I mean its creeds and theories), yet the life of it as a whole is mankind’s most important function.¹

No one can deny that religion plays an important role in many people’s lives. It helps them to orient themselves in life and to lead what they take to be adequate lives. Even outsiders that do not share the believers’ perspective can recognize this. For now, let us say that religion is taken to say something important about human life and human flourishing, and that this is what makes it significant. In my study, I shall accept this as a basic presupposition: there are certain goods of religion which it is important to preserve in some way:²

At the same time, however, it is clear that some practices sustained and justified in the name of religious orthodoxy, whether of established churches or obscure sects, are abhorrent, and should be abandoned. No one familiar with religion in any of its countless manifestations can be ignorant of the tremendous damage it can cause individuals as well as entire societies.³

¹ From a letter by William James, quoted in Marty 1982 p. xix.
² I shall not be more specific than this on what I mean when I talk about the goods of religion. A full explication of what I take these goods to be will have to await a discussion of religious practices and views of life, to be conducted in chap. 4. As for the justification of taking the step from seeing that something is considered valuable to holding that it is valuable, see my outline of philosophy as criticism in 1.7 below.
³ Now it is certainly true that in many of the so-called religious wars that have haunted humanity, religion is not the only factor to blame. Differences in religious affiliation tend to go together with other differences such as ethnic identity and socio-economic status, and any explanation of why these wars broke out cannot state religious disagreement as the only important factor. Nevertheless, religion’s role should not be underestimated either. It has often worked as a legitimizing and even motivating power in warfare, persecution, oppression, and so on. Hence it is fair to say that religion has been very harmful in certain situations.
It comes as no surprise, then, that today, most people cannot help being ambivalent about religion. I am one of them. Religion manifests itself in so many ways and is responsible for some of the highest achievements as well as some of the darkest chapters in human history. This has, I take it, important consequences for our reflection on religion. While we, who live in the so-called post-modern era, are unwilling to say that the religious life—or any kind of life, for that part—is "mankind’s most important function," it is easy to get the feeling that we would be throwing out the baby with the bath-water if we rejected religion entirely. Practically, this would not be a viable strategy anyway. Religion is, for better and worse, a phenomenon that has been with us since the beginning of human history. All the same, we do not want the recognition of its importance to rob us of opportunities to criticize and reject parts of the religious practices that we encounter today.

The ambivalence towards religion, which is the unavoidable attitude for me and many others who acknowledge the positive as well as the negative sides of religion as a human phenomenon, rules out a dogmatic defense of any particular religion, as well as a categorical rejection of everything that goes under the name of ‘religion.’ But why think that those are the only options available? Gary Gutting puts it well when he writes: “[r]eligious belief is not something which we must simply take or leave. Like science, art and sexuality, religion is a human endeavor of undeniable significance and validity.”

In my view, philosophical reflection on religion has to take our ambivalent attitude to religion seriously. Can philosophy of religion contribute positively to the way religion develops, so that its valuable elements can be retained, while the negative parts are criticized and rejected? I think this is possible, but it demands a reorientation of the way we think philosophically about religion. Hence, as we shall see, our concern about the goods of religion forces us to raise critical questions about philosophy of religion, and the way it has influenced religious practice.

Since religion is such a complex phenomenon, and manifests itself in so many varieties, we cannot, however, assume that the goods of religion look exactly the same regardless of what religious tradition we are talking about. In my study, the religious tradition which I shall mainly be drawing on is Western Christianity. I believe that much of what I have to say about religion in the following chapters extends beyond Western Christianity, but my case is not dependent on whether I am right or wrong. The main reason for making this restriction is that Western Christianity is the religious tradition with which I am

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4 It would be more correct to speak of a family of phenomena here, or of human religiosity as one phenomenon, but for now, speaking of religion (and including religiosity therein), gives us all the precision we need.
5 Gutting 1982 p. 5.
6 This is certainly a religious tradition which is hard to distinguish from other brands of Christianity, but I think the reader gets a fairly good idea of what I mean.
by far most familiar. Not only is it the tradition that I have grown up with; it is also the religious tradition that is still dominant in our part of the world, with a substantial influence on the way we think even in secularized countries like Sweden. It is, furthermore, the religious tradition which most philosophers of religion draw on when they discuss religion and philosophical problems generated by religion.

Another reason for making this restriction is that I do not feel competent enough to judge the extent to which my findings apply to other religious traditions. Fortunately, this is not necessary to address the problems I shall be addressing, because those problems are problems that are experienced in a context where Western Christianity is the dominant religious tradition. I am certainly not saying that similar problems are not experienced elsewhere; the form, however, those problems have taken in our part of the world is clearly dependent on the way that Western Christianity has developed.

The drawback of my restriction is that it prolongs philosophy of religion’s obsession with Western Christianity. On the other hand, this means that I shall be addressing the problems we experience in relation to religion in the shape that they have taken in our part of the world, including contemporary philosophy of religion. Hence my claim that the validity of what I say about religion and the goods of religion does not depend on whether it holds true for every religious tradition.

1.2 Problems of Religion and a Philosophical Response

The subject-matter of philosophy of religion is thus a human phenomenon that has done a lot of harm, but also contains valuable elements. Gradually, this phenomenon has come to look very problematic. More and more people attracted to religion experience that it is no longer possible to preserve the goods of religion. The religious life is just not a live option anymore. As I shall try to show, there is a multitude of reasons for why this has happened, and the predicament is related to a lack of resources to deal fruitfully with religious phenomena in the many contexts where they have to be dealt with. As a rule, we are made aware of our religious commitment once we interact with other people who do not share that commitment. Today, we encounter people adhering to very different creeds, as well as those who adhere to no creed at all. Facing this multitude of perspectives, it is quite natural that we start asking questions like whether we can know something in religious matters, and if there are any good reasons for preferring one religious tradition to another.

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7 Even this is not always enough. To take an example, Wilfred Cantwell Smith traces the origin of the concept ‘religion’ to seventeenth-century Europe (Cantwell Smith 1962 chap. 2). By then, Europeans had lived in almost constant conflict with Muslims for about 1000 years.
Such questions will not only arise for individual religious believers. Since the views of life we hold have marked consequences for the values we embrace and the policies of action we prefer, they inevitably arise on a social level as well: what status should we assign, in public discussion, to beliefs and values that are clearly influenced by and derived from a person’s view of life? And what status can I assign my own beliefs and values derived from my view of life?

Those problems do not first arise in the course of general reflection over religion, but in concrete cases where some religious beliefs or some religious commitments are part of the problematic situation we are in. General reflection starts as we begin to discern recurring patterns in the problematic situations where religion plays some part. It is when those patterns take shape that we get the feeling that religion is a problematic phenomenon today.

There is thus no single problem of religion that general reflection uncovers. Rather, there are several different problems which arise at different levels and in different situations, and which lead us to formulate general problems with religion and religious belief. I shall identify three groups of problems that we are all more or less familiar with. Those are the problems of religion I shall discuss in this study. By saying that they are problems of religion, I am in effect saying that they are not problems for religion, but problems for persons who are either attracted to religion, or want to reflect critically on it. I am also saying that they are not problems in religion, because every religious tradition would probably be able to offer reasons for why it holds the truth and why thinking some way about other religious traditions and unbelievers is appropriate; reasons that, given the tradition’s own presuppositions, would appear perfectly adequate. Again, they are problems which arise and persist due to the desire and practical need to deal with religion in a number of different ways.

We find the first group of problems on the level of the individual facing a multitude of incompatible religious traditions and secular counterparts. Is it reasonable to hold any religious beliefs today, when I know that other religious believers and non-religious people contest them? It seems impossible to preserve the goods of religion unless we offer some reasons for thinking that choices between conflicting perspectives can be made in a reasonable way. At least, this is how more and more people respond today. Here, I want to remind the reader of our present ambivalence towards religion, an ambivalence that many religious believers also experience. We know that religion can be very

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*Is it possible to ignore the perspective of others entirely so that you are not at all bothered by religious plurality? I do not think so. At least, you cannot choose to do so, because doubt is, I would claim, involuntary. My point here is not, however, that plurality must make us doubt our own religious tradition. What it does is to force us to reflect on how to conceive of the relation between different religious traditions, including their truth-claims. What can make us doubt our own tradition is if reflection does not help us to understand the plurality at all, or help us see how there can be reasons for preferring some religious traditions to others.*

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harmful. Well, then, what options do I have to offer a critique of my own religious tradition starting from moral values that I embrace, or from how I think of human flourishing? In what way can I regulate religious beliefs in such a way that the harmful tendencies of religion are kept in check? Or is it impossible?

A second group of problems appear on an interreligious level. When apparent conflicts arise between religious traditions, we wonder whether there are options for rational exchange between these traditions, and the believers adhering to them. Can alternative perspectives challenge and improve my own religious tradition? Can there be criticism of another religious tradition, which is actually well-founded, as opposed to ‘just’ an expression of personal, or tradition-bound, preferences? What would that criticism look like?

The third group of problems I wish to mention is related more directly to the fact that we are human beings who live together in a society where we have to decide on what policies to adopt and how to regulate interaction between its members. Here, the questions of the status of values and beliefs derived from people’s views of life become important. What status should we give to them? Should all values and beliefs be assigned equal status, or can we talk of better and worse without yielding to arbitrariness? If so, on what grounds?

Now the three groups of problems hang together in many ways, and any attempt to resolve one of them will no doubt have consequences for the way in which we would deal with the others as well. Here, I only keep them apart for certain theoretical purposes.

I claim that despite the differences between the three groups of problems (hereafter the problems of religion), there is a concern they all share: is it possible to criticize and regulate views of life and religious traditions in a reasonable way, so that the goods of religion are preserved while not everything in this area has to be uncritically accepted? This question is actualized whenever religion is part of some problematic situation we need to resolve. I think that preserving the goods of religion and answering the question of how to deal with the phenomenon in fruitful ways are intimately related. I believe (and this is an idea I shall keep returning to) that confidence in a view of life is important if it is going to function well. Such confidence involves, I would argue, confidence in the adequacy of any religious tradition which influences it. But how can we be confident in our view of life given the range of alternatives encountered? It will definitely not help to be shown that religious commitment is capricious, or that significant criticism of religious traditions is impossible.

The problems of religion are not new, and people have had to deal with them for quite some time. Therefore, it would be odd to claim that there are no resources for criticism and reform, and that such practices have to be created out of nothing. I believe, however, that we experience those resources to be insufficient to handle the problems of religion, and hence insufficient for giving

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us the desired confidence in our view of life as well. This is part of the predicament religion is in today.

If I am right, the goods of religion can only be preserved if we develop resources for handling the problems of religion in a promising way both at a personal and at a social level. Hence, we need to make contributions to the existing practices of criticism and reform in order to make them function better. If we fail to resolve those problems in a satisfactory way, then this is a signal that we still lack sufficient resources for significant criticism and reform. Lack of such resources means, at least for reflective persons, that religion continues to look problematic, and that the goods of religion appear to be lost.

Philosophers have not been unaware of the problematic status of religious belief. In fact, questions related to what I call the problems of religion have had a prominent position on philosophy of religion’s agenda for centuries. What contributions can philosophy of religion make to the predicament I have sketched? Can it provide resources that will contribute to our striving to develop promising ways of criticizing and reforming religious practices, ways of thinking that help us resolve the problems of religion? Note that I do not think of the problems of religion I have identified as (primarily) philosophical problems. They are practical problems occurring in the midst of our lives, and they force us to reflect philosophically. In the course of that reflection, philosophical problems are formulated and dealt with. Let us look at how philosophers have framed the problems, and some of the strategies they have developed to resolve them.

Philosophical Responses to a Religious Predicament

Since religious beliefs are contested by many competing alternatives, it is not at all surprising that questions of the justification of religious belief, or religious practices, have been given very much attention in philosophy of religion. All the same, the term ‘justification’ has negative connotations for quite a few philosophers of religion. Let me say right away that when I talk of ‘justification’ here, I use that term in a very broad fashion, and I shall not assume that justification must necessarily take any particular form. I think of justification here as that which we take to warrant a continued commitment to a religious practice. Now, what it is that is taken to serve that function will be different depending on how you think of religion; that is, what your conception of religion is like. When the Wittgenstein-inspired philosopher of religion D. Z. Phillips rejects the idea that philosophical argument is what you need to justify religious beliefs, he is, at the same time, rejecting a certain conception of religion (and I shall elaborate on the idea of conceptions of religion in a little while). I take it that Phillips can still raise questions about the justification of religion or religious

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beliefs, though the type of justification he seeks would be quite unlike that of mainstream philosophy of religion’s, and this is because he embraces a different conception of the phenomenon under discussion. So to talk of justification of religious practices need not presuppose any particular view about what the proper type of justification of religious beliefs is like.

Most philosophers of religion have approached the problems of religion by asking whether there are any philosophical arguments that can establish that there is a God, and if so, what that God is like. The idea is that such arguments would offer the resources for critical comparison of different religious beliefs, and they would also function as the justification needed in relation to competing alternatives.

When discussions of justification are framed in terms of the construction of philosophical arguments, what strikes many reflective persons today is the weakness of the arguments which have been presented in support of religious belief. The problems with the arguments of natural theology are familiar ever since David Hume wrote *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion.* Also, even if one, or even all, the arguments of natural theology were shown to be valid and convincing, this would still, as Steven Cahn points out, offer us very little material for dealing with the problems of religion identified above. In fact, “the proofs for the existence of God provide us with no hint whatever as to which actions God wishes us to perform, or what we ought to do so as to please or obey Him.” To get there, we need direct access to God’s will, or accept that some religious tradition has gained access to it through divine revelation. So even if we accept the arguments of natural theology, this would not justify adherence to a particular religious tradition, or adjudicate between the religious beliefs we should hold and those we should reject.” This is obvious once we start asking questions about what consequences the existence of this God has for the policies we should adopt, or the view of life we should hold. As Cahn concludes, “any moral principle is consistent with the existence of God [as conceived of in natural theology].” Natural theology just does not offer us substantial resources for handling the problems of religion.

Over the last decades, the arguments of natural theology have been supplemented with a new and quite different kind of argument for religious belief, namely, the argument from religious experience. Turning to religious experience is quite natural if you think of the important role it plays in many people’s lives. Several philosophers of religion have suggested that it might

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10 I am thinking of the ontological argument, the cosmological argument, and the teleological argument. For expositions of these arguments, see Abraham 1985 chap. 3, Peterson et al. 1991 chap. 5.
13 So, in short, even if the arguments would convince us, religion would still be in a problematic position as long as no further resources are offered.
provide the resources we need to handle the problems of religion. Let us see how those arguments have been formulated.

**Arguments from Religious Experience**

To call the family of arguments to be dealt with here ‘arguments from religious experience’ is actually a bit inaccurate, because that would, according to some of the philosophers using this argument-form, be like saying that we formulate ‘arguments from sense perception’ for this or that everyday belief.\(^{15}\) If I claim that there are two liters of milk in the refrigerator, I would back that claim by saying that I have checked. Sense perception is not used in an argument intended to demonstrate that my belief is justified; in fact, no argument is needed where a perceptual report can settle the matter. The same thing might be true for the way religious experience justifies religious belief. Nevertheless, I think it makes sense to talk of the arguments presented as arguments from religious experience. Even if religious experiences are not used in an argument, but rather to back up religious claims, it is still possible to raise the question whether these experiences are reliable grounds for belief. Do they qualify as experiences that we can justifiably use to back up certain religious claims? Similar questions are conceivable, but much less troubling, with regard to sense perception and claims about the amount of milk left in the refrigerator.

So what an argument from religious experience has to supply is, first and foremost, reasons for thinking that religious experiences can function as the source for a justification of religious belief. If we lack good reasons for thinking so, appeal to religious experience will not help us resolve the problems of religion. On the other hand, once you give good reasons for thinking that religious experiences can be used to back up religious beliefs, it is child’s play to formulate the required argument from religious experience. I shall, accordingly, proceed by referring to the arguments to be examined in my study as ‘arguments from religious experience,’ and look closer at the shape they have taken.\(^{17}\)

Arguments from religious experience normally operate with a rather narrow understanding of what religious experience is. Attention is more or less exclusively paid to *numinous experiences*, understood as experiences of a divine being characterized as “being awesome, being majestic, being overwhelmingly

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\(^{15}\) See, e.g., Alston 1998b.

\(^{16}\) ‘Reliable’ is here taken to mean that most of these experiences generate true beliefs.

\(^{17}\) The relevant alternative phrase would be, I guess, ‘arguments for religious experience,’ but this would overshadow the crucial idea that religious experiences are used for the purpose of establishing that certain religious claims are rationally acceptable. That is, arguments for religious experience are given as parts of an argument from religious experience, an argument intended to justify religious belief. It is the latter kind of argument that is interesting for my purposes, though the main part of my critical scrutiny will concentrate on the part of the argument that is an argument for religious experience.
powerful, being fascinating but dangerous, and the like." The following report illustrates the kind of experiences which interests most philosophers of religion:

I remember the night, and almost the very spot on the hill-top, where my soul opened out, as it were, into the Infinite, and there was a rushing together of the two worlds, the inner and the outer. It was deep calling unto deep,—the deep that my own struggle had opened up within being answered by the unfathomable deep without, reaching beyond the stars. I stood alone with Him who had made me, and all the beauty of the world, and love, and sorrow, and even temptation. I did not seek him, but felt the perfect unison of my spirit with His. The ordinary sense of things around me faded. For the moment nothing but an ineffable joy and exaltation remained. ... The perfect stillness of the night was thrilled by a more solemn silence. The darkness held a presence that was all the more felt because it was not seen. I could not any more have doubted that He was there than that I was. Indeed, I felt myself to be, if possible, the less real of the two.

In this kind of experiences, God is, according to many philosophers, perceived. Numinous experiences are, then, instances of putative perception of God. Just like sense perception presents the features of physical reality for us, numinous experience, or "mystical perception," as William Alston labels it, presents a spiritual reality for us which is not accessible to our ordinary senses. But how is this conceivable? At this point, Alston is only interested in demonstrating that numinous experience can be perception of God, not that it is. To that end, he introduces a distinction between internal and external requirements of perception. The external requirement for something to count as perception is that what the subject thinks she perceives is actually what she perceives. It thus relates to success. The internal requirement of perception is that the subject’s mode of awareness is perceptual, and this means that an experience (phenomenologically) involves the presentation of something the subject takes to be external to her. This idea forms the essence of Alston’s "Theory of Appearing:" "[f]or S to perceive X is simply for X to appear to S as so-and-so.” As such, an act of perception is preconceptual and not further analyzable. Whenever a subject thinks that something (external) appears to her, or presents itself to her, the internal requirement of perception is satisfied.

Alston argues that there are a number of numinous experiences which satisfy the internal requirement of perception. What is remarkable with those experiences is that as God (allegedly) presents herself to someone, no sensory

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20 Yandell 1993 p. 236. Yandell’s emphasis omitted. Yandell’s use of the term ‘numinous’ differs somewhat from Rudolph Otto’s, as Philip Quinn has pointed out. See Quinn 1999 p. 108.
19 Quoted in James 1982 p. 66f. James’s emphasis. In almost every text discussing God, God is referred to as "He," and children, scientists, or what have you, are also habitually referred to in the same way. I have not followed this custom, because I do not take it to be as innocent as it is often thought to be. Instead, I habitually refer to God as "She."
21 Alston 1991 p. 54.
21 Alston 1991 p. 11.
stimulation occurs. To suspicions that the idea of non-sensory perception is incomprehensible, Alston responds:

Many people find it incredible, unintelligible, or incoherent to suppose that there could be something that counts as presentation, that contrasts with abstract thought in the way sense perception does, but is devoid of sensory content. So far as I can see, this simply evinces a lack of speculative imagination. Why suppose that the possibilities of experiential givenness, for human beings or otherwise, are exhausted by the powers of our five senses? To begin with the most obvious point, it is certainly possible that other creatures should be sensitive to physical stimuli other than those to which our five senses are responsive. For that matter, our bodily sensation involves modes of presentation that do not seem to exhibit any of the familiar qualia from the external senses. Then, to push the matter a bit further, why can’t we also envisage presentations that do not stem from the activity of any physical sense organs, as is apparently the case with mystical perception [i.e. numinous experience].

This is not an argument intended to establish that perception of God actually occurs; Alston only wants to show that it is a logical possibility. But he also thinks that his idea is supported by the way we think of God: She is not a physical object that we perceive the way we perceive rocks or computers. Alston writes that “a non-sensory appearance of a purely spiritual deity has a greater chance of presenting Him as He is than any sensory presentation.” Non-sensory perception is thus the mode of perception that is best suited to the object of perception of numinous experience.

Once the idea of numinous experience as non-sensory perception of God is established, you have taken a significant step towards supplying a convincing argument from religious experience. As a matter of fact, even most skeptics have accepted the idea that numinous experience can be viewed as (putative) perception of God. This, in effect, means that we have something like perceptual evidence for God’s existence. Whether perception of God really occurs depends on whether God exists and is actually the object of perception in numinous experience. Are there good reasons to think that (in general) numinous experiences satisfy the external requirement for perception, so that they qualify as perception of God? This is one of the most debated questions in contemporary philosophy of religion. In this study, I shall pay special attention to two separate debates that are relevant for how we answer the question, and I shall examine them at length in chapter 5. Here, I shall just introduce them briefly.

The first debate concerns the question of whether different explanations of numinous experiences show that it is an unreliable mode of perception or not.

23 Alston 1991 p. 17. Alston’s emphasis.
24 For that, it is enough to show that there are numinous experiences that satisfy the internal requirement of perception.
26 An important exception is Gale 1991 chap. 8.
Are there good explanations of numinous experiences which make no reference to God at all, and if so, do they undermine the evidential value of numinous experiences? This is a debate that has engaged researchers in virtually every branch of religious studies, since it involves questions about what status different scientific explanations of numinous experiences have.

A second debate revolves around the more general question: is there any argument, or any good reasons, for thinking that numinous experience is a reliable mode of perception? The most prominent defenders of the idea that such reasons can be offered are Richard Swinburne and William Alston, and their arguments have generated two somewhat different debates. Swinburne claims that all perceptual reports must initially be considered trustworthy, that is, as correct reports about what is experienced. As long as the skeptics cannot offer reasons for thinking that numinous experiences are unveridical, we have every reason to think of them as veridical. This is the upshot of his well-known principle of credulity. Alston shares Swinburne’s basic idea, but frames the argument in a somewhat different way. He thinks that the relevant philosophical question is whether the skeptics can establish that the practice of forming and regulating beliefs by the use of numinous experience is, as a whole, an unreliable practice or not. If they fail, as Alston thinks they do, then numinous experiences are reasonably used as grounds for justified beliefs.

I shall examine and evaluate the arguments carefully in chapter 5. For now, I just wish to point out an important similarity between Swinburne’s and Alston’s arguments. They agree that our most well-developed and well-tested modes of perception are those of our five senses, modes of perception every human being (except those who are deprived of one or more of these senses) makes use of every day. So for both, it is natural to compare numinous experiences with sense perception in order to determine whether they meet standards which, in epistemic respects, would make them relevantly similar to sense perception. This is why I refer to the arguments as analogy-arguments from religious experience. The distinguishing mark of analogy-arguments from religious experience is thus their intention to establish an analogy between numinous experience and sense perception, which will warrant a transfer of positive epistemic status from sense perception to numinous experience.

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27 When I talk of scientific explanations, I think primarily of the psychological, sociological and other kindred explanations of religious experience that you find in different branches of religious studies.

28 Swinburne 1979 p. 254: “I suggest that it is a principle of rationality that (in the absence of special considerations) if it seems (epistemically) to a subject that x is present, then probably x is present; what one seems to perceive is probably so.” Swinburne actually includes sensory presentations of the divine in the group of religious experiences to which the principle of credulity applies, but I will concentrate on the non-sensory instances here.

29 Analogy-arguments are hence incapable of convincing those who are skeptics about the reliability of any mode of perception, as Matthias Steup has pointed out (Steup 1997 pp. 412ff.). I do not take this to be very problematic for analogy-arguments, however (and Steup’s main criticism lies elsewhere), because it is sufficient to establish that numinous experience as a mode of perception is no worse off than our most firmly established modes of perception, viz., sense perception.
Swinburne tries to establish the analogy by showing that numinous experiences can be tested in similar ways as sense perception, while Alston claims that there is an analogy between the way numinous experience and sense perception function in the different practices to which they belong. What unites the arguments, despite their differences, is the way they involve comparisons with sense perception.

**Analogy-Arguments: The Promise, the Failure, and the Consequences**

What makes analogy-arguments from numinous experience interesting for me is that they indicate that there is a fruitful way to approach the problems of religion which I have identified. Their promise, in short, is that the goods of religion can be preserved. Let me explain.

Analogy-arguments offer resources that would help us avoid arbitrariness in regulating beliefs in a religious context. They do this by showing us how certain (but not all) religious beliefs are backed by numinous experiences which we, for good reasons, think of as veridical experiences. Those beliefs have a more positive epistemic status than (religious) beliefs that lack this backing. So here, we are offered a way of justifying some religious beliefs and at the same time, we get resources to criticize other religious beliefs, and to resolve conflicts between competing religious perspectives. The reason why analogy-arguments look more promising than did the arguments of natural theology is that numinous experience contains more information about the nature, will, and plans of God than the arguments of natural theology. Accordingly, even if analogy-arguments are primarily constructed to establish that religious belief is rationally acceptable, at the same time, they offer resources for significant criticism and reform, and those resources are important for our estimation of whether the goods of religion can be preserved or not.

So this is what analogy-arguments promise. The crucial question is: can they hold their promise? To anticipate the results of the evaluation undertaken in chapter 5, the answer is no. The crux is that the epistemically relevant analogies cannot be established in a convincing way. Even if Swinburne’s and Alston’s respective arguments fail for somewhat different reasons, ultimately,

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30 Many advocates of arguments from religious experience combine these arguments with the arguments of natural theology and argue that they support one another in a cumulative case. I shall return to cumulative arguments in chap. 5.

31 I believe that this holds true even for those who, like Caroline Franks Davis, use numinous experiences to establish the rational acceptability of a "broad theism" containing a minimum of tradition-specific features of God. Davis actually moves on, after having established the probability of a broad theism, to sketch its relation to more ramified beliefs about God (Davis 1999 pp. 248ff.).

32 I shall not go into the question of how this would be done in detail, but once we have the capacity to distinguish veridical from unveridical numinous experiences, we also have the capacity to distinguish between beliefs which are supported by veridical numinous experiences and those that are not. This gives us (so the argument would go) all the resources for criticism and reform that we need.
the problem is the same: the analogy which would warrant a transfer of positive epistemic status from sense perception to numinous experience is not established, and there are bleak prospects for significant improvement.

Thus we have another failed argument for religious belief. Certainly nothing new. So why bother? Well, maybe the failure of analogy-arguments taken in isolation should not bother us. I, however, take the failure (together with other failed arguments) to signify something important, namely, that we lack sufficient resources to deal with religious belief and religious practices in the many contexts where we encounter them. I suggested earlier that our resources for dealing with the problems of religion are insufficient, and that philosophy might make a positive contribution to develop those resources. Mainstream philosophy of religion’s contribution is to offer analogy-arguments as grounds for justification as well as criticism and reform of religious beliefs. But since, as I claim, the arguments are unconvincing, no substantial contribution is made, and religion continues to look problematic. Religious commitments still look like an arbitrary affair, and we do not know how to handle cases of conflict and so on.

It is tempting to respond to this situation by saying that this only goes to show that religious practices should be abandoned entirely. But there are several reasons for thinking that things are not quite that simple. First, it is not enough that we abandon religious practices, as long as they prevail in society or anywhere else. There will still be religious people with whom we have to interact, and similar problems will recur. Second, if we accept, as I do, that there are certain goods of religion that are valuable, then rejecting religious practices entirely means losing those goods. Third, there is an important sense in which we cannot choose to reject religious practices either. If we are attracted to religion, then we really cannot help believing, though we find religion problematic. To tell people that they should not believe in God is thus not very helpful in the present situation. Fourth, and most importantly, I believe that the incapacity to resolve the problems of religion is part of a more general incapacity to handle problems about the status of our views of life, as well as of the different practices which influence them. If we abandon religious practices, we would still face similar problems in relation to other practices with a similar influence on our views of life, and conflicts that involve incompatible views of life would not go away. Accordingly, it will not help to abandon religious practices: resources for criticism and reform must still be supplied, lest similar problems will haunt us in the future.
1.3 Why Not a Quick Pragmatic Argument?

When questions about the justification of religious beliefs are discussed, you occasionally run across a pragmatic argument for religious belief, although it is rarely defended. The argument starts from the observation that religious belief tends to enhance the psychological well-being of many people, and claims that this shows that at least some religious beliefs (those that have such positive effects), are probably true. Religious beliefs that have other consequences, on the other hand, are regarded as false, and should be rejected.

Basically, the quick pragmatic argument tells you that if you need to count certain religious beliefs as true in order to lead a satisfactory life, you are epistemically entitled to do so. Is it a good argument? Most philosophers think not, and their objection is that the positive or negative consequences religious beliefs have for different people say nothing about whether they are true or not. They cannot be appealed to in attempts to justify religious belief. False beliefs will probably have the same beneficial consequences as long as we think that they are true. Hence, the feelings of ease, peace, and rest that religious beliefs give cannot be appealed to in an argument for the existence of God.

The negative response to the quick pragmatic argument says something important about how most philosophers of religion think of justification of religious beliefs and religious practices. You find a similar response to the work of a theologian like Sallie McFague. McFague argues that our (inevitably metaphorical) ways of thinking and talking about God should be regulated by how well different metaphors contribute to the shaping of a society where human fulfillment is possible. Mikael Stenmark criticizes McFague by pointing out that “we do not ordinarily think that the truth or the rationality of a belief, model or theory is undermined by its coming into conflict with certain political or moral values.” A metaphor used to talk about God, which has positive effects for the way a society develops, might nevertheless be false (that is, describe God incorrectly), and then, we should not use it. McFague’s criterion for good metaphors is thus mistaken as it rests on the idea that justification of religious beliefs is (at least to some extent) a matter of enhancing political and moral values. According to most philosophers, this is not relevant for the question of whether those beliefs are true or not. Positive consequences say very little about

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33 The argument-type is more or less fairly attributed to James, who reasons in a similar way in James 1995. I believe that it is doubtful whether James would actually have defended the argument as understood in contemporary philosophy of religion.
34 See, e.g., Hick 1990 p. 59.
35 See, e.g., Owen Webb 1995 pp. 66–70, who states the objection in response to those who think that the sanctity of Christian mystics would demonstrate that they probably have had experiences of God.
36 See McFague 1987 chap. 1.
37 Stenmark 2000 p. 190.
that question, just like the positive psychological effects of certain religious beliefs say very little about whether they are true or not.\footnote{It is even possible to argue that since these beliefs are so important for us, the risk for self-deception is very high. For a good discussion of self-deception in religious experience, see Westphal 1992.}

What is striking about the quick pragmatic argument is that it is so odd. How can anyone come up with the idea that the truth of religious beliefs is determined by their consequences? Actually, I think that to understand this, we should acknowledge that the argument is situated in a way of thinking about religion, and what it means to say that a religious belief is true, which is quite unlike that of mainstream philosophy of religion. We encounter, I would say, a conception of religion quite different from the one dominant in contemporary philosophy of religion. As long as we fail to acknowledge this, the quick pragmatic argument will continue to look odd.\footnote{In my view, what is wrong with the argument as it is normally discussed is that religious belief is argued for in a pragmatic fashion, but there is no attempt to understand religious belief or religious practices from a pragmatic perspective. Thus, the pragmatic understanding of religious belief, and the view of justification of religious belief that the argument goes together with, is neglected. Cf. Smith 1978 p. 48.}

My talk of conceptions of religion thus helps us make sense of certain puzzling disagreements about how religious beliefs should be justified. It is important, then, that we look closer at what, more specifically. I am after with the term ‘conceptions of religion’, and how the way we think of justification of religious beliefs and religious practices is embedded in, and conditioned by, those conceptions.\footnote{Being embedded in and conditioned by something are two somewhat different things. What I shall claim is that our ways of thinking about justification of religious beliefs or religious practices is embedded in a conception of religion in the sense that it forms part of it. At the same time, you can view those ways of thinking as conditioned by everything else that goes to make up our conception of religion in the sense that they arise intelligibly out of how we think of religion. Saying that the way we think of the justification of religious beliefs and religious practices is conditioned by our conception of religion is thus different from saying that it is separate from it.}

\section*{1.4 Conceptions of Religion: A First Encounter}

Human phenomena, which are the subject matter of philosophical reflection, are as a rule multi-faceted and very complex, be it art, science, religion, or some part of such a phenomenon. Given this complexity, a certain simplification and systematization will be necessary to make the phenomenon comprehensible. The undertaking has two tasks: delimiting an area of investigation, and identifying important characteristics of the phenomenon to make it manageable. But there is more to it than that, however. It also involves saying something about how the important characteristics are to be interpreted and dealt with for various philosophical purposes. This means also setting the identified characteristics into an interpretative framework where they make sense. The outcome of such reflection on religion is different philosophical conceptions of religion.
Human beings always have some ideas about phenomena like religion, since we have the capacity to reflect on our behavior in different ways. It is not as if there is some 'pure' phenomenon lying in front of us to be studied by the philosopher, a phenomenon no one had ever reflected on before. Consequently, we have certain ideas about religion and what kind of practice it is. But that is not at all like saying that people walk around with a comprehensive philosophical theory about religion. Why should they? It is more likely that we have rather vague and possibly incompatible ideas, which are nevertheless important for the way we deal with religion. Let us call those beliefs and ideas our comprehension of religion, and say that a comprehension of religion is hardly very systematic, nor very specific. Now, what is the relation between these ideas and philosophical conceptions of religion?

I think that there is no radical difference between our comprehension of religion and our conception of religion. By this I mean that I do not think of them as the outcome of radically different activities. A conception of religion, however, is worked out for a more determinate purpose, and with the use of a specific set of concepts. I would also suggest that our comprehension of religion, vague as it is, is part of the phenomenon philosophers deal with. For beings like us, there is no strict division to make between a phenomenon and reflection on a phenomenon. Furthermore, I believe that our comprehension of religion influences the way the phenomenon develops, so to understand the phenomenon, you have to grasp the (dominant) comprehension of it as well.

I want to link the difference between a comprehension of religion and a conception of religion with the purposes for which reflection is undertaken and, mainly, the conceptual apparatus used in reflection. A conception of religion takes shape for the purpose of dealing with certain philosophical problems, and it is thus formulated by the use of certain philosophical concepts, and so on. This does not mean that a philosophical conception of religion cannot affect our comprehension of religion; in fact, I think this happens all the time. That is, insights, which we gain in philosophical reflection, affect the ways we think of phenomena like religion. Not, however, in the sense that we get something we lack but desperately need—a comprehensive conception of religion. It is rather that our attention can be drawn to certain features and we come to see them in a new way. After that, the way we think of religion will be different, and so will the way we deal with and relate to it. Philosophy of religion thus has consequences for the way religion develops, and realizing this is important for understanding how it might contribute to our attempts to preserve the goods of religion.

And when I say this, I mean that there are certain purposes in philosophical practice that makes philosophical reflection special. I do not think that the purpose of philosophical practice is different from that of other kinds of reflection—it, too, is value-laden in the sense that it ultimately strives to make certain goods more secure. More on this in 1.7.
What is the status of my idea of different conceptions of religion? Well, I introduce it as a heuristic device to make sense of certain disagreements which we encounter in philosophical reflection on religion, like that concerning the proper justification of religious beliefs or practices. So please note that I am talking about philosophical conceptions, though I shall not use the qualifier ‘philosophical’ more than necessary. I think D. Z. Phillips is a good example of a philosopher of religion who embraces a conception of religion rather different from that of most mainstream philosophers of religion. Looking closer at his criticism of analytical philosophy of religion will help me clarify what I seek.

Phillips has persistently argued that most philosophy of religion done today is misdirected. He is particularly critical of the tendency to think of religious belief according to the model of everyday beliefs, or scientific hypotheses. This way of thinking proceeds, according to Phillips, from the observation that: "[s]ome people say there is a God and others say there is no God. This seems to involve the assertion and the denial of something or other, an object of some kind." If this is where religious believers and atheists disagree, then it seems natural to raise the question whether there is evidence for the existence of this object, and whether that evidence is good enough to warrant the believers’ commitment. By now we are, according to Phillips, headed for a total misunderstanding of religion.

Phillips is certainly not denying that there are people who believe in God and others who do not. So it is not true that he thinks that religion has nothing to do with belief, as some of his critics assert. The disagreement we begin to trace between Phillips and the philosophers he criticizes is not such that there is substantial disagreement on what phenomenon they discuss; nor is there really significant disagreement about what is contained in the phenomenon. No, disagreement concerns how to understand those elements so that the whole makes sense. It thus essentially involves questions about the proper interpretative framework for understanding the phenomenon.

If we take the idea of interpretation seriously without saying much more about what that process looks like and the purposes it serves right now, we can say that on the conception of religion dominant in contemporary philosophy of religion, religious beliefs are understood as asserting that there exists a supernatural object in a realm that our five ordinary senses cannot give us access to. Taken by itself, this understanding is not enough for modeling religious beliefs on everyday beliefs and scientific hypotheses. For that, we need additional

\[42\] I would reject the idea that different philosophical conceptions hang together with different kinds of spirituality, so Phillips would be advocating another kind of religiosity from that of most other philosophers of religion. While I think that philosophical insights make a difference for religion, I do not think that there is such a clear interdependence between different kinds of religiosity and particular conceptions of religion.


\[44\] The chapter dealing with Phillips in Mackie 1982 bears the title "Religion without belief. "

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assertions. I think they can be found mainly in the idea that there is an essential similarity between the way in which this object exists and the way in which, for instance, the objects postulated by scientific theories are thought to exist. Maybe we can say that they, at least to some extent, share a mode of existence. Therefore, it is possible to use models from other contexts where you want to argue for the existence of some object which shares a mode of existence with God. Then, philosophical arguments like those of natural theology are relevant as attempts to establish that God exists. Given another approach to God’s existence, those arguments may well look completely irrelevant.

I take this to demonstrate that there is a close connection between how we understand a phenomenon (including the interpretative framework we set it into) and the shape discussions about justification of it will take. In fact, views about what the relevant type of justification is form part of conceptions of religion and other human phenomena. In contemporary philosophy of religion, the way you think about justification of religious beliefs and religious practices is shaped after how we would argue for the existence of contested objects in other contexts, such as everyday life. Phillips, on the other hand, holds that if we clarify "the nature of activity" of religious practices, including the making of religious claims, we see that talk about God’s existence cannot be thought of as talk about the existence of an object—in the sense that philosophers normally conceive objects, I would add. Here is how Phillips, from his analysis of religious practices, understands what it is to wonder whether there is a God:

To ask whether God exists or not is not to ask a theoretical question. If it is to mean anything at all, it is to wonder about praising and praying; it is to wonder whether there is anything at all in that.45

Clearly, arguments that would justify religious beliefs given this type of understanding would be rather different from the philosophical arguments which dominate discussions of justification in contemporary philosophy of religion. Philosophers who have framed the question of God’s existence as something to establish by a certain kind of arguments have thus, Phillips claims, misunderstood religion, and are consequently confused over what is really at stake between religious believers and atheists. Note that this is quite different from saying that for Phillips, no arguments can be presented for or against religious belief. Just as was the case for McFague, however, such reasons would have to look very different from the arguments that have commonly been taken to be relevant in philosophy of religion. Perhaps they would point to the way God can transform your life, or something similar. The reason why other arguments

count as relevant for Phillips is thus that he embraces another conception of
religion than that of most philosophers of religion."

Understanding Human Phenomena as an Interpretative Activity

It is not my ambition to resolve the conflict between Phillips and the philo-
sophers he criticizes. I claim, however, that introducing the idea of different
conceptions of religion helps us make sense of their disagreement. Part of what
it is to have different conceptions of religion is to think in different and
incompatible ways about what type of justification of religious beliefs or
religious practices is relevant. Phillips claims that what we need to remedy the
systematic misunderstanding of religion that persists in philosophy of religion
is "not more facts, but an appreciation of the character of what already lies
before us." His comment contains an important insight, namely that identifying
a phenomenon for the purpose of dealing with it philosophically involves an
act of interpretation, and is not simply a delimitation of a field of study with
certain characteristics. Even within this field, you have to interpret and group its
elements in such a way that you have a manageable phenomenon to deal with."

The way you do this looks differently depending on the interpretative frame-
work you set it into.

Phillips claims that his understanding of religion is superior to that of the
philosophers he criticizes, and the grounds for his claim is that he thinks it is
more sensitive to the facts to be accounted for, facts that other philosophers fail
to make sense of. These facts are gathered through observation of the way reli-
gion functions in people's lives, and so on. Now, if we think of this objection as
an argument directed at a dominant conception of religion, I think that it is not
very impressive, and I shall explain why in chapter 2. For now, the important
thing is seeing how the respective positions involved in this kind of disagreement
are understandable once we see them as parts of incompatible conceptions of
religion.

As we shall see, it is a complex affair to argue for and against different
conceptions of religion. It will not do to just point to (allegedly) uncontroversial
facts to settle the matter of what conception of religion philosophers of religion
should embrace. Nevertheless, developing the resources needed to present such
arguments is an important task, since I claim that the conception of religion
dominant in contemporary philosophy of religion has not enabled philosophers
to contribute positively to our attempts to solve the problems of religion. If you are concerned about the goods of religion, as I am, then it is tempting to look to other conceptions of religion to see whether they are more helpful. Hence the main purpose of my study is to answer the question: *can we develop a conception of religion that will enable us to deal more fruitfully with the problems of religion?* That is, can some alternative conception of religion offer the resources for criticism and reform of religious beliefs and religious practices that we need to preserve the goods of religion? Once those questions are raised, a further question naturally arises: *what would the implications of such a conception of religion be for the way we reflect philosophically on religion?*

In this study, I shall argue that the philosophical movement known as American pragmatism can help us develop a promising conception of religion. This means that we first of all have to acquaint ourselves with the pragmatic tradition, and ask what its potential contribution to contemporary philosophical reflection might be.

## 1.5 Recovering Pragmatism Today

American pragmatism (hereafter pragmatism) is a philosophical movement, which took shape during the second half of the nineteenth century, and flourished at the beginning of the twentieth. It includes prominent thinkers such as Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914), William James (1842–1910), John Dewey (1859–1952), and George Herbert Mead (1864–1931).\(^\text{50}\) After a period of flourishing, pragmatism gradually lost ground to a more positivistic philosophical orientation.

Just like any other philosophical movement, pragmatism has vague boundaries, and it is not easy to determine who is to count as a pragmatist. Besides the thinkers mentioned above, there are other influential thinkers, like C. I. Lewis, who arguably qualify as pragmatists.\(^\text{51}\) In addition, we have a number of later and contemporary philosophers who affiliate themselves to pragmatism, such as Nicholas Rescher, Hilary Putnam, and Richard Rorty.\(^\text{52}\) Nonetheless, I shall make a first delimitation of the area of study by simply saying that I take ‘pragmatism’ to stand for the philosophy of the classical pragmatists, that is, Peirce, James, Dewey, and Mead. This way, we can get started without having to specify already now what pragmatists have in common, or what it is that makes someone qualify as a pragmatist.\(^\text{53}\)

After a period of decline, the last decades have witnessed a remarkable revival of the pragmatic tradition.\(^\text{54}\) Quite a few philosophers have declared that


\(^{53}\) An approach also used in Haddock Seigfried 1996.

\(^{54}\) See, e.g., Dickstein 1998.
pragmatism has important contributions to make to contemporary philosophical practice. However, if there is widespread agreement that pragmatism has a contribution to make, there is much less agreement on what that contribution might be. This is to a significant extent a consequence of the fact that pragmatism has always been a movement with rather vague boundaries, and with rather loose connections between the thinkers that formed part of it. Therefore, quite different interpretations of the pragmatic movement are possible depending on where emphasis is put. Another important matter is that it has not been exclusively (some would say not even mainly) a philosophical movement; James studied medicine and was a renowned psychologist, as was Dewey; today, Mead is classified as a social psychologist, and Peirce was a prominent scientist, mathematician, and logician. Nonetheless, what I am interested in here is the contributions they can make to contemporary philosophical practice, regardless of the contexts where their insights originated.

Historically, the development of pragmatism is quite well documented. It emerged during the sessions of the "Metaphysical club," a discussion group in Cambridge, Massachusetts, which met regularly in the early 1870s. Peirce and James were among its members. Some of the ideas discussed were developed and presented in print by Peirce a few years later, and those ideas were taken over and used by James, and later on Dewey and Mead as well. This is the standard way of writing the early history of pragmatism, though there are good reasons for contesting parts of it.

Interesting, though, as the historical dimension of pragmatism’s development may be, it does not tell us very much about what there is in the movement that can be revived today, or why there is a current revival going on. Joseph Margolis has made an interesting attempt to spot the dynamic of the pragmatic tradition, and he points out that what we should seek to revive can hardly be thought of only in terms of identifying and adhering to a set of pragmatic standpoints available on issues in contemporary philosophy, or even adhering to a single standpoint on some central philosophical problem. The pragmatists’ interests were too diverse, and where they overlap, disagreements abound.

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55 See, e.g., Thayer 1981 p. 5.
57 H. S. Thayer points out that much of James’s thought had taken form already before Peirce’s articles were published (Thayer 1981), and J. E. Tiles and Richard Gale stress the importance of James’s work in psychology for the development of Dewey’s pragmatism (Tiles 1988 chap. II, Gale 1997). All this goes to indicate that there is hardly a set of ideas or doctrines presented by Peirce that were simply taken over by the other pragmatists; the relation is much more complex than that. James and the other pragmatists used certain of Peirce’s ideas, developed them for their own purposes, and made original contributions of their own. For more on this, see Hookway 1997.
58 A fact dramatically illustrated by Peirce’s decision to reject pragmatism in 1905 and instead advocate pragmaticism, a name for his ideas that he hoped would be “ugly enough to be safe from kidnappers.” (CP 5.414). When referring to Peirce, I shall follow the standard procedure to refer to the volume number
Moreover, if one or several standpoints is all you get from the pragmatic tradition, then it would be easier simply to accept the standpoints as sound than to involve yourself too much in the pragmatic tradition. There has to be something more, something which we think motivates why those standpoints should be embraced, and which makes them hang together.

The natural way of thinking of this ‘more’ is, of course, in terms of a shared philosophical method. Margolis goes on to consider this option. The obvious candidate for a shared pragmatic method is Peirce’s pragmatic maxim worked out as a method for analyzing meaning in “How to Make Our Ideas Clear”:

Consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object.⁵⁹

Taken by itself, however, this methodological principle is clearly too vague to be very helpful. Apart from giving us a certain anti-metaphysical bias, it can hardly offer substantial orientation about how to deal with problems on the current philosophical agenda, and it will hardly help us distinguish pragmatists from other philosophers. How, for instance, would you distinguish pragmatists from positivists by only using the pragmatic maxim?

Margolis indicates that there is a promising, though vague, alternative to the idea of thinking of the pragmatic heritage in terms of shared standpoints or commonly accepted methods. Discussing what the relation between the different pragmatists’ thought is like, he writes:

No, the linkages are far more attenuated, hospitable perhaps to a common program they never explicitly shared in their near-hundred years of loose family connections, possibly in the way of a "philosophical temperament."⁶⁰

Richard Bernstein, in a similar spirit, writes: "I do not think that there is any ‘essence’ to pragmatism—or even a set of sharply defined commitments or propositions that all so-called pragmatists share."⁶¹ As an alternative, he suggests that we think of the similarities between the pragmatic thinkers as an instance of what Wittgenstein called family resemblance, where no feature is shared by everyone, but there are a number of overlapping features, which, taken together, make pragmatism a distinct movement.⁶² When we try to present what we take to be a promising version of the pragmatic tradition, we shall inevitably make more of certain features than others, so as we present our "argumentative

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⁵⁹ CP 5.402.
⁶¹ Bernstein 1995 p. 61.
⁶² Bernstein 1995 p. 66.
retelling”\textsuperscript{63} of how to understand the pragmatic tradition, we ought to acknowledge that "what we call pragmatism is itself ... constituted by the narrative we tell about pragmatism."\textsuperscript{64} Still, not just anything qualifies as pragmatism, since there is a historical material to account for. Margolis, too, stresses that the appeal of the pragmatic tradition lies in the way it expands, rather than limits, our philosophical options. This leads him to state that it “may be the absence of any single explicit philosophical creed that is responsible for pragmatism’s fresh prospects and palpable energy.”\textsuperscript{65}

I agree with Bernstein and Margolis that there is not much point in trying to distinguish genuine pragmatism in terms of a set of commitments or shared methods. Since local disagreements abound, this would mean that we have to settle for a certain version of pragmatism and dub it the genuine version. But then, we would also have to argue for why other positions are less genuine versions of pragmatism. This would require a lot of effort indeed. Alternatively, you can try to reconcile (putatively) incompatible standpoints pragmatists have held, in my view, a virtually impossible task. The residue would hardly be enough to be very interesting. To make things even worse, both strategies face a further problem: there is no guarantee that the resulting position will be able to contribute significantly to contemporary philosophical practice. Most of the classical pragmatists’ works are nearly 100 years old, and it is inevitable that part of their thinking is hopelessly outmoded. But, and here, too, I agree with Margolis, it is hardly a couple of standpoints, which makes pragmatism an attractive option today. It is more like what Margolis describes as a "common program ... never explicitly shared.” What can we make of this?

I believe that if we want to capture pragmatism’s potential contribution to contemporary philosophy, then a promising start is to claim that what the classical pragmatists share is something like a similar orientation in the way they approach human phenomena and the human subject we are reflecting on. This approach is, I would say, different from the approach dominant in contemporary analytic philosophy. The difference here is a lot like having different conceptions of religion, but the orientation I think of has a more general character, with significant repercussions for philosophical practice. In the terms I shall develop in chapter 2, I claim that the pragmatists share a philosophical anthropology significantly different from the one shared by most contemporary philosophers. As was the case with 'conceptions of religion', 'philosophical anthropology', too, is a term I introduce as a heuristic device to help us discern

\textsuperscript{63} Bernstein 1995 p. 61.
\textsuperscript{64} Bernstein 1995 p. 55. Bernstein’s emphasis. Bernstein, though in many ways critical of the philosophy of Richard Rorty, objects to the idea that Rorty’s philosophy can be rejected because it does not do justice to the pragmatists he claims to be aligned with. Rorty’s position may still be such that he is developing and improving certain ideas found among the pragmatists, and that is a question we cannot answer only by examining the history of pragmatism.
\textsuperscript{65} Margolis 1999 p. 224.
certain agreements (like the one I claim to find among the classical pragmatists) and make sense of certain disagreements (concerning the way we conceive the human subject and human phenomena in philosophical reflection). Here, it serves the function of enabling us to understand what the classical pragmatists had in common, but it also opens fresh prospects for charting the way pragmatism can make an interesting and original contribution to philosophical practice today.

The idea of a shared philosophical anthropology helps us, I take it, to note a tendency in the works of the classical pragmatists, and it may be that not everything they said and wrote will fit the bill. But even though this means that elaboration may be required to explicate a pragmatic philosophical anthropology, and the way it gives direction to philosophical reflection, I believe that the use I shall make of the idea will result in a philosophical position that is recognizably pragmatic.

The idea that what unites the classical pragmatists is a shared pragmatic philosophical anthropology is attractive in another way as well: it enables me to make historical claims while working in a mainly problem-oriented fashion. Another advantage of this approach is that it is helpful for showing what it is that I take to be the significant contribution pragmatism can make to contemporary philosophical practice, and it promises that we can adopt a pragmatic way of thinking without simply taking over the standpoints of the different pragmatists when reflecting on philosophical problems. Nor need we reconcile all the standpoints the different pragmatists have embraced. It is enough for me to show how their thinking displays a certain orientation, and make use of that orientation for the purposes of this study.

The way to proceed, then, is by trying to make clear what the shared pragmatic philosophical anthropology actually is like, and draw on it to develop a pragmatic philosophy to be used in a discussion of religion and views of life. As it turns out, I will argue that given the way I use the term 'philosophical anthropology', these two undertakings must to a significant extent be carried out in conjunction. That is, as we reflect philosophically on different human phenomena and some philosophical topics, a pragmatic philosophical anthropology takes shape, too. I shall undertake this task in a dialogue with what (mainly) James, Dewey, and Mead had to say on the different topics I discuss. This makes up my "argumentative retelling" of the pragmatic movement. I want to emphasize that what I am interested in is a dialogue, because I do not intend to take over slavishly what different pragmatists have had to say, but suggest improvements and clarifications where called for. Also, in the course of this dialogue, I shall not strive after exhaustive overviews of everything a thinker

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66 My intention has not been to eliminate Peirce from my exposition, but more often than not, I have found that in the cases where, e.g., Dewey has taken over and expanded Peirce's ideas, these developments are more accessible for discussion. This is obvious, for instance, in my discussion of inquiry. I do not, however, take this to mean that Peirce does not fit into my idea of a shared philosophical anthropology.

67 An approach also taken in Colapietro 1992. See especially p. 430.
like Dewey had to say on a certain topic. For instance, when I discuss what a reasonable pragmatic view on experience might be, I shall draw heavily on the conception of experience Dewey presents in *Art as Experience*. Dewey had a lot more to say about experience as well; but I shall not discuss how his conception of experience has developed throughout his career, and so on. Such inquiries would take us too far afield, and would also draw attention away from the main purpose with my inquiry into the pragmatic tradition: to find new possibilities for how to deal with the problems of religion today. Hence, I think it is fair to say that my way of dealing with the pragmatic tradition will be quite pragmatic.

1.6 Outline of the Chapters

I shall conclude this chapter with a discussion of my view of philosophy and its role in our responses to problems we encounter. In chapter 2, I shall develop the concept ‘philosophical anthropology’ in order to further clarify the way I think of the pragmatic tradition, and how it is different from other ways of doing philosophy. I shall also introduce an argument-form that I develop throughout this study, an argument-form based on an attitude to philosophical practice I call *metaphilosophical pragmatism*. The basic idea is that we can critically compare different philosophical anthropologies with regard to how well they contribute to our chances of coming to terms with the problematic situations that we turned to philosophy to get some help with. Chapter 3 is devoted to an outline of a pragmatic philosophy centered on the idea of human life as constituted in a number of socially shared *human practices* developed in interaction with the environment for the purpose of coming to terms with a variety of problematic situations. Here, I shall also try to substantiate my claim about a shared pragmatic philosophical anthropology. In chapter 4, I turn attention to religion and religious practices, and suggest that we understand religious practices as worked out to deal with certain tensions that occur in people’s views of life.

In chapter 5, I shall evaluate the analogy-arguments from religious experience which are presented in contemporary philosophy of religion. I shall clarify why analogy-arguments from religious experience are unconvincing, and then demonstrate the relation to our current inability to handle the problems of religion. My conclusion will be that the current conception of religion is unable to preserve the goods of religion in a satisfactory way. Chapter 6 contains the elements of a method of justification and criticism of views of life and religious practices available if we accept a pragmatic conception of religion. It is argued that here, we find resources for significant criticism and reform, which means that we can also find indications of promising ways of approaching the problems of religion. Embracing a pragmatic conception of religion would hence enable philosophers to make a positive contribution to the way in which the problems of religion can be dealt with. In chapter 7, I present a meta-
philosophical pragmatic argument for a pragmatic philosophical anthropology which is based on the findings of chapter 5 and 6, and I claim that the argument shows that we ought to reorient our ways of thinking philosophically about religion.

1.7 Philosophy as Criticism

Philosophical reflection is one of the options available to us when we encounter problematic situations. Sometimes, we have to reflect philosophically in order to make certain experienced goods more secure, and to avoid similar problematic situations in the future. Hence my interpretation of analogy-arguments from religious experience as attempts to preserve the goods of religion. As such, philosophy can make important contributions to our quest for human flourishing. Here, I shall develop these ideas with inspiration from some comments Dewey makes on philosophical reflection.

In the sense that philosophical reflection deals with making certain experienced goods more secure, it is an inherently value-laden activity. That is, different philosophical inquiries are triggered by our experience that some goods are in a problematic situation. We have to reflect to secure their future existence. The importance of acknowledging the value-ladenness of philosophy will be illustrated throughout my study.

Dewey calls this activity criticism, and consequently talks of philosophy as criticism. In our lives, we experience a multitude of goods, or values. But in the world in which we live, ”values are as unstable as the form of clouds. The things that possess them are exposed to all the contingencies of existence, and they are indifferent to our likings and tastes.” Criticism is practiced ”whenever a moment is devoted to looking to see what sort of value is present; whenever instead of accepting the value-object wholeheartedly, being rapt by it, we raise even a shadow of a question about its worth, or modify our sense of it by even a passing estimate of its probable future.” Occasionally, such reflection will show us that some experienced good actually does more harm than good, because it serves as an obstacle to other goods that we also value. The purpose of criticism is thus to gain an understanding of the experienced goods for the sake of answering the question of whether we should try to preserve and reproduce them in future experience. It is an important task, since there is no guarantee that the goods will continue to exist unless we make an effort to preserve them, and it may also be that we have to make choices between different goods, because we cannot have them all.

Answering questions about what an experienced good is like and whether it should be reproduced is a matter of making intelligent judgments about the

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\[68\] Dewey 1958 p. 399.

causes as well as the consequences of those goods. Understood this way, criticism is a natural part of reflection on a phenomenon, and reflection on a phenomenon is a natural part of human life.

Philosophical reflection is to a large extent an instance of this type of criticism. Philosophers, too, are engaged in preserving the goods of human practices using the philosophical tools at hand. They can thus make contributions of a special kind, in accordance with the conceptual and other resources they possess. Let us call this type of (philosophical) criticism \textit{aspect 1–criticism}. I have already suggested that the analogy-arguments from religious experience that I will examine in this study can reasonably be viewed as instances of aspect 1–criticism, intended to make the goods of religion more secure.

Important as aspect 1–criticism is, I think that philosophical reflection has more to offer. Instances of aspect 1–criticism of religion is always, I take it, linked to some particular conception of religion, which orients the way we think of, for instance, the proper type of justification such practices need. But we cannot stop here: we should also reflect critically on our conceptions of different human phenomena, and thus on the form aspect 1–criticism has taken. I call this \textit{aspect 2–criticism}. Aspect 2–criticism is, you can say, a criticism of criticisms—reflection on the shape aspect 1–criticism has taken; an attempt to stand back from a phenomenon and scrutinize it as a whole with special attention to the presuppositions, including the philosophical presuppositions, which shape aspect 1–criticism. We can thus say that it is part of philosophical reflection’s tasks, and maybe much of the special contribution philosophers can make, that we go beyond aspect 1–criticism and reflect critically on it. Nonetheless, aspect 2–criticism ultimately has the same purpose as aspect 1–criticism: that of making experienced goods more secure. It does not have a privileged position from which to judge different ways of doing aspect 1–criticism, but it can to some extent transcend our present ways of thinking about some phenomenon, and thereby, novel insights may emerge.\footnote{The kind of novelty I think is possible in the course of aspect 2–criticism will be outlined in chap. 3.} Dewey puts it this way:

\begin{quote}
An empirical philosophy is ... a kind of intellectual disrobing. We cannot permanently divest ourselves of the intellectual habits we take on and wear when we assimilate the culture of our own time and place. But intelligent furthering of culture demands that we take some of them off, that we inspect them critically to see what they are made of and what wearing them does to us. We cannot achieve recovery of primitive naïveté. But there is attainable a cultivated naïveté of eye, ear and thought, one that can be acquired only through the discipline of severe thought.\footnote{Dewey 1958 p. 37f. Instead of presenting any arguments to demonstrate that this kind of limited transcendence is available, I would say that we are all familiar with situations where it occurs. It is a fact of human life that would be very hard to explain away. See also 3.3–3.4 for more on this idea.}
\end{quote}

So aspect 2–criticism is not a standing back from human life in its entirety, to measure it with a peculiar philosophical yardstick, unrelated to the concerns
which motivated philosophical inquiry in the first place. Rather, it is, Dewey points out, critical examination of some human phenomenon, while everything else is (for the moment) considered unproblematic and used as resources in the process of aspect 2–criticism. Speaking of what I call philosophical reflection, Dewey states:

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Its primary concern is to clarify, liberate and extend the goods which inhere in the naturally generated functions of experience. It has no call to create a world of "reality" de novo, nor to delve into secrets of Being hidden from common-sense and science. It has no stock of information or body of knowledge peculiarly its own ... Its business is to accept and to utilize for a purpose the best available knowledge of its own time and place. And this purpose is criticism of beliefs, institutions, customs, policies with respect to their bearing upon good. This does not mean bearing upon the good, as something itself attained and formulated in philosophy. For as philosophy has no private score of knowledge or of methods for attaining truth, so it has no private access to good. As it accepts knowledge of facts and principles from those competent in inquiry and discovery, so it accepts the goods that are diffused in human experience. It has no Mosaic nor Pauline authority of revelation entrusted to it. But it has the authority of intelligence, of criticism of these common and natural goods.72
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I have argued that the way we think of justification of religious beliefs and religious practices depends on the way we think of the phenomenon in question, that is, our comprehension and our conception of religion. For philosophers, the latter is, of course, the more interesting, but I also want to stress that they influence one another, so that criticism of one always involves criticism of the other. In a situation like the one religion is in today, aspect 2-criticism can help us reflect on and revise the way we think of religion, and a task of such criticism could be to present a new conception of religion, which will enable philosophers to contribute more positively to our attempts to preserve the goods of religion. The yardstick used in such criticism is derived from human experience, and not from a philosophical conception of the good, or something like that. Aspect 2–criticism of a conception of religion is, furthermore, such that its consequences are not limited to philosophical practice; it inevitably influences the way religious practices develop as well.

**Prospects for Criticism of Philosophical Practice**

Even though aspect 2–criticism is not situated in a realm beyond criticism, but is actually one instance of criticism, it still offers resources for critical reflection on philosophical practice. Aspect 2–criticism involves reflection on the way we think of human phenomena, and that includes the way we think philosophically about them. If philosophers can involve themselves in a criticism of criticisms, ultimately intended to make experienced goods more secure, then we can, and should, also reflect critically on how well philosophical practice performs its

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task. Aspect 2—criticism of philosophical practice involves raising questions about whether our current ways of reflecting philosophically are fruitful, or whether there are alternatives that would be more conducive to our purposes. That means that we must constantly raise questions about the adequacy of different ways of doing philosophy. Since I claim that our conceptions of a phenomenon like religion influence the way the phenomenon develops, it is quite natural that we cannot leave those conceptions unexamined. The very task of criticism requires that we examine those conceptions, because criticism, to be maximally conducive to the purposes of criticism, has to be as self-critical as possible.

So this study is also an inquiry into philosophical practice: the form it has taken, and the form(s) it should take. I shall carry out the task in the following way. I think of different conceptions of human phenomena like religion as a result of setting those phenomena into different interpretative frameworks. In the terms to be developed, our conceptions of human phenomena result from the philosophical anthropology we embrace. Criticism of a conception of religion is thus never solely criticism of that conception taken in isolation; it is also criticism of the philosophical anthropology with which that conception is associated.

Throughout this study, I shall argue that it is impossible to establish the superiority of one conception of religion to another without keeping the task of philosophy in mind. A conception of religion, which enables us to handle problems in such a way that the goods we find in religion are preserved in an acceptable way, is superior to one that does not. Something similar goes for critical comparison of philosophical anthropologies: a philosophical anthropology is superior to another if the orientation it gives us results in conceptions of human phenomena that are more fruitful (given the purposes of philosophical reflection) than its rival’s.

Dewey was the first to recognize how scandalous the idea that philosophical practice should be judged in this way is to most philosophers: “[t]he implications of the position which has been taken import a ‘practical’ element into philosophy as effective and verifiable criticism, obnoxious to the traditional view.” The idea is scandalous for philosophers because we are not used to setting philosophical practice in relation to the concrete problems, which, in my view, trigger philosophical reflection in the first place. We are also unaccustomed to thinking of philosophical practice as concerned about the preservation of some experienced goods, and thus as a value-laden activity. The way I see it, it is exactly because philosophy is related to extra-philosophical problems, and a value-laden activity, that it is possible to argue for the superiority of some

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73 I will describe the relation between our conception of, e.g., religion and a certain philosophical anthropology a bit more in chap. 2.
74 Dewey 1958 p. 434.
conception of religion, as well as for the superiority of some philosophical anthropology. It is only if we accept this that we have the material “effective and verifiable criticism” of philosophical practice needs.

There is no better support for the idea that aspect 2–criticism must be directed at philosophical practice than coming to see that philosophical reflection and problematic situations outside philosophy are related. If our way(s) of doing philosophy has consequences for the way human practices and thus human life develops, then we should not make philosophical practice exempt from critical scrutiny, as long as we are concerned about human flourishing. Philosophy as criticism (understood as aspect 1– and aspect 2–criticism) is an activity that will be maximally conducive to human flourishing only if it, too, is continuously scrutinized. What we need now is to develop conceptual resources to make critical comparison of different philosophical anthropologies possible. This is the task of the next chapter.
CHAPTER 2
Philosophical Anthropology and the Prospects of Exchange and Argument in Cases of Anthropological Disagreement

2.1 The Purpose of the Present Chapter

My conclusion from chapter 1 is that there are certain disagreements between philosophers of religion that my talk of conceptions of religion helps us make sense of. The example discussed was the disagreement between D. Z. Phillips and most philosophers of religion in the analytical tradition. It is my contention that to develop resources for exchange and argument in cases where we face such disagreement, we must acknowledge the way in which incompatible conceptions of religion are associated with different (philosophical) interpretative frameworks. The purpose of the present chapter is to look closer at those interpretative frameworks in order to better understand the nature of the disagreements between different conceptions of religion, but also to develop resources for exchange and argument to deal with them.

I noted in chapter 1 that a disagreement involving incompatible conceptions of religion is not quite like a dispute over the elements which make up the phenomenon religion. Rather, it is a dispute over how to conceive the phenomenon, and how its different parts are best understood. Philosophers of religion agree on what it is that makes up religion, but they disagree over how to understand it. Consequently, they formulate different philosophical problems in relation to religion, and treat them in different ways. I hope to be able to show how such disagreements hang together with differences in the interpretative frameworks used to understand human phenomena philosophically. Therefore, I shall introduce the term philosophical anthropology as a heuristic device developed to draw attention to disagreements between different ways of understanding human phenomena, disagreements that I, from now on, shall refer to as anthropological disagreement. This is the kind of disagreement we face when we embrace different conceptions of a phenomenon, and I believe that it is
important that we acknowledge this to allow fruitful exchange and argument in such cases.

Occasionally, it is suggested that there are philosophical arguments available to resolve anthropological disagreement, arguments which derive their premises from philosophical anthropology, that is, inquiry into human nature. I shall pay particular attention to the prospects of resolving anthropological disagreement by use of transcendental arguments. Even though philosophical anthropology is an indispensable part of philosophical practice, I shall show that it is very hard to use its results to formulate arguments with wide appeal, and that this, in itself, teaches us an important lesson about anthropological disagreement.

Transcendental arguments’ inability to resolve disputes which involve anthropological disagreement does not, I believe, force us to conclude that anthropological disagreement transcends the limits of rational discourse. I shall develop another argument-form, derived from metaphilosophical considerations about the fruitfulness of different philosophical anthropologies viewed in relation to a context wider than philosophical practice itself. Towards the end of this chapter, I state the conditions that must hold if such an argument is going to have wide appeal, and what consequences the choice of this argument-form has for the way my inquiry proceeds. The metaphilosophical pragmatic argument which I shall use to establish that we should reorient our ways of reflecting philosophically on religion can only be spelled out once I reach the end of my inquiry.

2.2 Anthropological Inquiry as Interpretative

Richard Schacht defines philosophical anthropology as "philosophical inquiry concerning human nature, often starting with the question of what generally characterizes human beings in contrast to other kinds of creatures and things." He adds that "[s]uch inquiry presupposes no immutable 'essence of man,' but only the meaningfulness of distinguishing between what is 'human' and what is not, and the possibility that philosophy as well as other disciplines may contribute to our self-comprehension." Philosophers doing philosophical anthropology are thus, according to Schacht, inquiring into human life or certain features of it with the intention of supplying us with insights that in some way contribute to our self-comprehension.

From now on, I shall label the kind of inquiry Schacht discusses anthropological inquiry. Anthropological inquiry is philosophical inquiry undertaken in order to say something about the kind of beings humans are. It is, to say the least, very diverse with regard to method and scope. You can find thinkers like

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Mary Maxwell, George Mandler, and Abraham Maslow, who undertake anthropological inquiry from the perspective of evolutionary theory and psychology respectively, all claiming that certain scientific findings are crucial for a proper understanding of human beings. But you also find a philosopher like Charles Taylor, who claims that phenomenological inquiry into human experience reveals important features of human life and the human being.  

Not only is anthropological inquiry diverse; it is also quite hard to distinguish it from other kinds of philosophical inquiry. After all, philosophical inquiry is, most of the time, about some human phenomenon like language, knowledge, science, and so on, and within those inquiries, questions about what kind of being it is that has generated those phenomena will emerge. At least, certain views are presupposed throughout the inquiry. Nevertheless, I think it makes sense to view anthropological inquiry as a separate field of philosophical inquiry, distinguishable by its more exclusive focus on the human being (or human nature, as Schacht puts it).

I suggest that a functional approach to anthropological inquiry will help us remove some of the vagueness pertaining to it. This would involve thinking of anthropological inquiry as a kind of inquiry with a special role to play in philosophical practice. Let us see what that role might be.

**Why Anthropological Inquiry?**

Anthropological inquiry is not uncontroversial. Chin-Tai Kim, for instance, has expressed serious doubts over whether there is anything, which anthropological inquiry can contribute to our self-comprehension, that we cannot gain from the different special sciences studying human beings, or well-established commonsense knowledge. So why undertake it? According to Kim, much anthropological inquiry has proceeded on the assumption that philosophy is the most reliable route to knowledge there is, but when push comes to shove, it is hard to assess the status of the knowledge-claims philosophers present. Anthropological inquiry will either be rather trivial, consisting of a restatement of insights gained elsewhere, or quite controversial, if philosophers claim that their results compete with those of, for instance, psychologists and biologists. In the latter case, it would be quite hard to assess the status of the philosophers’ knowledge-claims, and compare them with other knowledge-claims.

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78 Sami Pihlström suggests that all philosophical inquiry is anthropological inquiry in this sense. See Pihlström 1998.
79 Kim 1998. I will discuss the status of anthropological inquiry’s results when dealing with the postmodern challenge to it.
80 And Kim points out that the special sciences, like psychology and biology, are for good reasons considered to be more methodologically stringent than philosophy. So why, in cases of conflict, trust the philosophers?
Kim’s challenge raises the crucial question of what anthropological inquiry is good for. I think that the answer to this question will help us understand what kind of activity we should take anthropological inquiry to be.\(^1\)

I would like to make two suggestions, which together will indicate the importance of anthropological inquiry. First: anthropological inquiry is an interpretative activity where data gathered elsewhere (that is, not exclusively accessible to philosophers) are reflected on for the purpose of improving our understanding of human beings and human behavior. Second: anthropological inquiry plays an important role in philosophical practice. Kim suggests, as a response to his own challenge, that philosophy is a discipline intended to be as self-reflective as possible, and that anthropological inquiry is a way of clarifying the presuppositions with which philosophers operate.\(^2\) It is helpful, I would say, both for seeing the presuppositions at work in philosophical practice, and for reflecting critically on those presuppositions.

My two suggestions are related. The aim of anthropological inquiry is to clarify philosophical presuppositions concerning human beings (a descriptive task), but also to increase our understanding of human beings (a critical task which involves examining, criticizing, and revising those presuppositions by drawing on sources both within and outside philosophical practice). Understanding is, however, a relational matter (something which I shall return to shortly), and related to a purpose. As I see it, the purpose of anthropological inquiry is to improve philosophical practice both by making some of its diverse presuppositions explicit, and by offering new insights, which might improve philosophical reflection. Let us first look at the activity, and then at how to understand its goals.

Battista Mondin distinguishes between two different phases in anthropological inquiry, and he calls them the \textit{phenomenological} and the \textit{transcendental} phase: ”In the phenomenological phase, all data relative to the being of man are assembled; in the transcendental phase, the ultimate meaning of data is sought, that profound meaning which confers upon the data a meaning and renders this same data, possible.”\(^3\) You can think of the distinction in temporal terms, but it is actually more to the point to think of it as a logical distinction, since the choice and accumulation of what we consider to be relevant data requires that we have some ideas about the phenomenon under inquiry. Consequently, the transcendental phase is important for the phenomenological phase, since it gives us directions about what counts as data, what data are relevant, and so on. Nonetheless, within anthropological inquiry we can, most of the time, uphold the logical distinction between facts and interpretation of facts, even if what counts as facts is not independent of the interpretations we make.

\(^1\) There is a normative aspect to what I have to say here, so when I characterize anthropological inquiry in a certain way, this is also intended to say something about how I think that we should understand it.

\(^2\) Kim 1998.

Mondin’s distinction draws attention to the way that anthropological inquiry always goes beyond the phenomenological phase by setting data into a context where they gain a special significance. It is hence always an interpretative undertaking. In a somewhat different context, Schacht draws an analogy with the way we interpret works of art for the purpose of understanding them better. Such an interpretation (of, for instance, Richard Wagner’s *Lohengrin*) is such that:

> [It] refers to the examination of a work [of art] with a view to establishing something about its nature that goes beyond the level of what might be called its surface description and cataloging. Such interpretations ... are often serious attempts to enhance our understanding of a work—to show that it has certain features which require to be recognized if one is properly to construe it."

So I would say that an interpretation of a phenomenon, be it a work of art, or features of human life, points to important features of the phenomenon, and once we appreciate those features and assign them their proper status, we are able to understand the phenomenon better than before. Anthropological inquiry, too, Schacht suggests, qualifies as an “essentially interpretative discipline,” which attempts to set the different features of human life into a context where they make sense. Therefore, even if empirical data are important for anthropological inquiry, we also have to set them in a context where they make sense. Interpretation, I take it, is thus an activity undertaken for the sake of understanding something, and anthropological inquiry is interpretation of human life and human phenomena, undertaken for the sake of better understanding them. We interpret, then, in order to understand something.

A term, which is closely associated with understanding and interpretation, is *explanation*. I want to say something about why I prefer to talk of interpretation here. When Israel Scheffler scrutinizes G. H. Mead’s so-called stage theory for the development of human society, he criticizes Mead on the grounds that although Mead supplies a reasonable interpretation of the development, he does not explain it. Scheffler adds, however, that “[s]uch an interpretation is possible and plausible even if no explanation is available for the emergence of the various stages in Mead’s account.”

Scheffler’s point is that Mead has not given any causal explanation of the process he describes, an explanation where certain covering laws explain why a development through different stages has occurred. Such an explanation would have strengthened Mead’s case, Scheffler thinks. Now, I think anthropological inquiry sometimes uses covering-law explanations. I do not, however, think that it has to in order to help us better understand human beings. Understanding

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84 Schacht 1984 p. 77. Schacht’s emphasis.
86 Scheffler 1974 pp. 175ff. Scheffler’s emphasis.
87 See, e.g., Nozick 1981 p. 10ff., though Nozick’s purpose are different than mine.
can be enhanced in other ways as well. This is because I take anthropological inquiry to be directed by the purpose of supplying us with an account of human beings to make use of in our philosophizing, and as such, the account of human beings we need depends on the kind of questions we ask. Rebecca Schweder holds that an explanation is always the answer to a "why-question." The demand we make on a reasonable explanation, she claims, is that it should lead the person asking the question to consider it as no longer incomprehensible. If that is the purpose of explanation, it may well be that other kinds of explanations than covering law-explanations will be more relevant in certain cases. Such explanations are, I would suggest, similar to what I refer to as 'interpretation'. Schweder suggests that we think this way of explanation: a person X asking a question is in a cognitive state C that significantly involves puzzlement. An answer A to X’s question is a good explanation in relation to this person and her puzzlement only if the new cognitive state C+A is more coherent than C. It follows that A has to look different depending on what C is like, and the kind of questions we ask. Covering-law explanations answer certain why-questions, but not all.

The reason why I prefer the term ‘interpretation’ to ‘explanation’ is to avoid the risk that explanation will be thought of only as covering-law explanations. Although they are sometimes important in anthropological inquiry, they are not always what we need, so I prefer to talk of interpretation as the activity undertaken for the sake of understanding something.

What is it, then, to understand something, and to understand something better than before? Eberhard Herrmann suggests that a necessary (albeit not sufficient) condition for understanding something is that we are not puzzled by it anymore. To return to Lohengrin, to interpret the opera as a story about the fate of romantic geniuses furthers our understanding of how the plot unfolds, as well as of why Wagner composed the opera in the first place. Elizabeth’s failure to avoid the fatal question whence Lohengrin has come symbolizes non-geniiuses’ attempts to gain control over geniuses, and secure access to the source of their creativity. That, in turn, explains why geniuses have to withdraw from contact with other people to practice their calling. This interpretation casts further light on the different kinds of devastation Lohengrin and Elizabeth display at the time of Lohengrin’s departure. Elizabeth has lost her beloved. So has Lohengrin, but for him, there is even more at stake: his fate is sealed and he is doomed to lead a life in solitude. The fate of Lohengrin is also the fate of great geniuses of all times. The moral is that geniuses must pay a price for their gift: they have to withdraw from ordinary people. Here, substantial tenets of the romantic conception of the genius are expressed.

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89 Schweder 2000 p. 58. For Schweder’s view of coherence, see pp. 58ff.
90 Herrmann 1992 p. 12.
The interpretation of *Lohengrin* as a story about the romantic geniuses’ condition presents features of the opera in such a way that they are set in a new context, and within this context, the sequence of events in the opera takes on another significance than before. Now, we are capable of answering questions about the opera which were previously incomprehensible. Ideally, the opera makes more sense than before, and, in line with the tentative suggestion that to understand something involves not being puzzled by it anymore, you may say that we now understand the opera better than before. All the same, the judgment that we have improved our understanding is always related to the questions we ask: an interpretation helps us to answer certain questions, but other questions may require other interpretations.

If we make use of the idea that we interpret various human phenomena for the purpose of understanding them better, and also acknowledge that we seek understanding to answer certain questions or resolve puzzlement, then we are in a good position to answer questions about the kind of inquiry anthropological inquiry is. It is *inquiry undertaken for the purpose of better understanding human phenomena in relation to certain problems we need to come to terms with*. As such, it should not be viewed as a mere restatement of insights gained elsewhere, since there also occurs the crucial procedure of interpreting these insights in different ways (what Mondin called the transcendental phase) to show their relevance for the way philosophy is done. Inquiry is conducted with other questions in mind than in, for example, the special sciences. Therefore, anthropological inquiry does not compete with psychology or biology, because its aims are different (other questions are asked, and other interpretations are called for). So I suggest that we distinguish anthropological inquiry from other kinds of inquiry, like those of the special sciences, mainly on the basis of the questions asked (and the purposes for which we undertake inquiry), and the uses to which its results are put. The latter, I claim, are related to philosophical practice. Put differently, anthropological inquiry is undertaken to answer a certain set of questions explicitly or implicitly raised by and in philosophical practice.

Does anthropological inquiry conceived in this way contribute to our self-comprehension, as Schacht claimed? I think it does, but that the contribution cannot be separated from the contribution philosophical practice as a whole makes. It is within philosophical practice anthropological inquiry makes significant contributions, and philosophical practice (taken as a whole) can certainly contribute to our self-comprehension.

"Not being puzzled anymore“ is not a sufficient condition for understanding, for a perfectly good reason: we are all familiar with cases where we misunderstood something while we were convinced that we had understood it. If you receive a strange coded e-mail one day and take it to be an invitation to a party while it is actually a warning about a *coup d’état* about to take place in Sweden, then clearly, we have misunderstood the e-mail, even though we are
no longer puzzled. Herrmann goes on to claim that apart from the condition that we should not be puzzled anymore, a further condition for proper understanding is that we should be able to deal with the object of understanding in promising ways. Proper understanding supplies us with the skills we need to deal fruitfully with the phenomenon we claim to understand—whatever that is—if situations arise where this is required. In the case of the cryptic e-mail, misunderstanding shows itself in two ways: we fail to find the party (since there is no party), and the Swedish government is overthrown. Not all cases of misunderstanding are as obvious as this one, however, and I would also like to remind the reader that understanding is a relational matter, and not an "all or nothing"-affair. What the example shows is that there are better and worse ways of understanding, and that such judgments will involve the outcome of future interaction with the phenomenon. This idea is an important element of my argument that a pragmatic understanding of human phenomena is superior to that dominant in contemporary philosophy, because it enables us to critically compare different ways of understanding, for instance, human phenomena.

Postmodern Misgivings

The fiercest criticism of anthropological inquiry comes from the postmodern camp, where anthropological inquiry is thought of as a project intended to uncover the essence of man, or man’s true being. As has been pointed out, the putative essence discovered has more often than not reflected the ideals of white male Westerners. What philosophers have failed to see, according to postmodernists, is that such a picture of the human being underlies most philosophical inquiries, while the philosophers themselves are completely unaware of the parochial nature of their presuppositions.

The postmodern critique is justified when set in relation to how anthropological inquiry has often been thought of in the past. There are certainly thinkers who have taken anthropological inquiry to supply a synthesis of all the available knowledge of the human being, and hence as presenting an ultimate account of human nature.

If postmodernists are determined to abandon philosophical reflection, then there is not much to say to make them change their minds. But if they were to be interested in continuing the dialogue, I would suggest that the way I think of anthropological inquiry, it does not presuppose that the picture anthropological inquiry gives of human beings and human phenomena makes up a 'privileged description' of human nature. In fact, on my view, the idea of there being

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91 Herrmann 1992 p. 30f.
92 See, e.g., Hekman 1990.
93 Kim 1998. I think one exponent of this tendency (though not a professional philosopher) is Abraham Maslow.
something like a privileged description or an ultimate account of human nature rests on certain philosophical presuppositions we should reject. Given what I have said about the functional character of anthropological inquiry and the extent to which it is an interpretative activity undertaken for certain purposes, it follows, I would say, that we should not think of anthropological inquiry as presuppositionless, or as aiming at a privileged description of human nature. On the contrary, anthropological inquiry conceived of functionally is actually a critical project that may help us uncover exactly the presuppositions the postmodern thinkers find problematic. So I conclude that anthropological inquiry is important even given the postmodern insight that it is not the kind of activity some essentialist-minded philosophers have taken it to be.

**Anthropological Inquiry and Anthropological Disagreement**

On my analysis of anthropological inquiry, it turns out to be an important element of philosophical practice, present in any philosophical inquiry. Within philosophical practice, it serves both the function of making the presuppositions of different philosophical positions clear, and of criticizing and revising these presuppositions. If you claim, as I do, that some philosophical disagreements involve anthropological disagreement, then it is tempting to think that those disagreements are generated by the incompatible presuppositions of the different parties of the dispute. On this view, philosophers work with different anthropological presuppositions, which direct inquiry in certain ways. I think that this view is basically correct, although in need of elaboration.

A natural response to the insight about the important role anthropological disagreement plays in these cases is to look for opportunities to criticize and reject the presuppositions which form part of a philosophical anthropology different from our own. This will also give us the opportunity to criticize and reject certain conceptions of religion, once we are able to demonstrate that they are associated with an implausible view of human beings, the beings that generated religion in the first place. Recently, Charles Taylor has attempted to present such arguments against a way of doing philosophy which he thinks is deeply problematic. I think that Taylor is only partially successful, and that this teaches us an important lesson about philosophical anthropologies and anthropological inquiry.

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94 An idea I will return to in chap. 3.
95 There is another, less metaphysically loaded meaning of ‘privileged’, where it stands for the way an account of the human being is privileged because it dominates philosophical practice. This is where the postmodern critique is important for uncovering problematic aspects of privileged accounts of the human being. The important point is that anthropological inquiry is actually helpful for such attempts to reform philosophical practice.
96 Charles Taylor makes a similar point in Taylor 1995a p. 18f.
2.3 Anthropological Inquiry and Transcendental Arguments

Taylor has repeatedly attacked the view of the human subject he claims has been taken for granted in mainstream Western philosophy ever since the 16th century, and in a couple of articles, he makes use of the results of anthropological inquiry for the purpose of overthrowing this view, and the way of doing philosophy with which it is linked.

According to Taylor, the picture of the human being he terms “the monological self” emphasizes “a certain notion of freedom, and the dignity attaching to us in virtue of this [freedom].” The freedom Taylor is talking about is, as I understand him, a freedom of the human subject to transcend the limitations of any particular historical/social perspective, and it is clear that Taylor is sympathetic to this idea of freedom as an ideal. Nonetheless, he thinks that the monological self is a picture of the human being that seriously misrepresents human life. There are, in particular, three views of the human being that together make up the flawed monological conception. Taylor at one point refers to them as “anthropological beliefs,” but I use the more vague expressions “view of the human subject” and “picture of the subject” which he mainly makes use of. I think this is more helpful for understanding Taylor’s argument.

First, we have a “picture of the subject as ideally disengaged, that is, as free and rational to the extent that he has fully distinguished himself from the natural and social worlds, so that his identity is no longer defined in terms of what lies outside him in these worlds.” Second, and somehow emanating from the first view, we have “a punctual view of the self, ideally ready as free and rational to treat these worlds [the natural and the social]—and even some features of his own character—instrumentally, as subject to change and reorganizing in order to better secure the welfare of himself and others.” For Taylor, here is where we find an important part of the fundament of the enormous authority of instrumental reasoning. Third, as a social consequence of the above said, we find “an atomistic construal of society as constituted by, or ultimately to be explained in terms of, individual purposes.”

A number of social contract
Theories have proceeded on this assumption, and construed society as constituted by a number of subjects that are independent of the social process.

These views of the human subject are, according to Taylor, some of the most important elements of the conception of the self as monological. Taylor presents the monological self thus:

We are in contact with an “outside” world, including other agents, the objects we and they deal with, our own and others’ bodies, but this contact is through the representations we have “within.” The subject is first of all an inner space, a “mind” to use the old terminology, or a mechanism capable of processing representations, if we follow the more fashionable computer-inspired models of today. The body and other people may form the content of my representations; they may also be causally responsible for some of them. But what “I” am, as a being capable of having such representations, the inner space itself, is definable independently of body or other. It is a center of monological consciousness.  

To say that the self is monological is to say that it is only in direct contact with itself and its representations. It is even separate from its own body.

It would be too simple to claim that the picture of the self as monological results from a pre-scientific world-view, which is unacceptable today. The philosophers who make use of it are certainly aware of findings in the natural and social sciences that appear to be incompatible with the monological self. I would suggest that they rather think that those findings can be adequately explained in a way which leaves the picture of the monological self intact. Nevertheless, Taylor asserts that we have a good argument against the view of the self as monological once we establish certain indubitable facts about the human being which are incompatible with that view. The argument takes the form of a transcendental argument.

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105 This does not necessarily commit the conception of the monological self here discussed to a Cartesian mind-body dualism. It may just as well be holding the position that the monological self is a function of brain-processes. What is said is just that the sensations of the body are presented in the inner space much as sense experience is.
106 I am thinking, for instance, of G. H. Mead’s view of the self as essentially a social product, a view I shall present in chap. 3.
107 I believe that any conception of the human being will face some scientific results or other important insights with which it at first appears incompatible. A potential criticism can be met, however, by the framing of what Robert Nozick calls philosophical explanations. These are explanations where “each of the apparent excluders [of p, something we hold to be true] can continue to be maintained, while their apparent incompatibility with p is removed, either by close scrutiny showing the reasoning from them to not-p to be defective, or by embedding them in a wider context or theory that specifies how p holds in the face of these apparent excluders” (Nozick 1981 p. 10). Then, as we shall see, you can understand Taylor as claiming that there are certain features of human life which cannot be interpreted in such a way that they are shown to be compatible with a view of the self as monological. Put in Nozick’s terms, no plausible philosophical explanations can be supplied that saves p in face of the apparent excluders.
108 This resembles the strategy for anthropological inquiry outlined by Schacht. He suggests that anthropological inquiry could proceed by raising and trying to answer questions concerning how certain human phenomena are possible. Schacht 1990 p. 172.
Taylor’s Transcendental Argument

Taylor’s starting-point is the claim that “our perception as an experience is such that it could only be that of an embodied agent, engaged with or at grips with the world,” an indubitable fact about human experience that he thinks is incompatible with the view of the self as monological. Through anthropological inquiry into human experience, we can thus find resources to overthrow the monological self. Such anthropological inquiry reveals, Taylor suggests, that experience always has an orientational structure. This is to say that the content of all experiences is ordered in categories like foreground and background, ‘up’ and ‘down’, and so on. Those categories have developed because there is a close link between experience and different types of (embodied) action within the perceptual field. The human perceptual field is thus always structured after its property of being “a field of potential action” for subjects involved in different sets of practice. The human condition is one of “embodied agency,” and “it is essential to our experience and thought that they be those of embodied beings” situated in a world rather than in a realm separate from it. Taylor now has what he needs for his transcendental argument.

Transcendental arguments were, famously, used by Immanuel Kant, and Taylor has used them in several contexts. He presents them thus:

The arguments I want to call “transcendental” start from some feature of our experience which they claim to be indubitable and beyond cavil. They then move to a stronger conclusion, one concerning the nature of the subject or the subject’s position in the world. They make this move by a regressive argument, to the effect that the stronger conclusion must be so if the indubitable fact about experience is to be possible (and being so, it must be possible).

Transcendental arguments thus intend to establish what we have to accept in order to make sense of, for example, human experience. If we start from indubitable facts about human experience, then the necessary conditions for those facts to be at hand are established via a transcendental argument. We can no more deny what those arguments establish than we can deny the indubitable facts they use as their premises.

It is Taylor’s intention to overthrow a conception of the human being via anthropological inquiry and transcendental argument that makes his argument

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110 Remember the outline of anthropological inquiry presented above. Claims like the one Taylor is making here, should be read as referring to ‘certain facts which are taken to be important for the philosophical enterprise,’ and not ‘certain facts which must figure in any ultimate account of human nature.’
112 Taylor 1995b p. 22.
113 For instance, in order to mediate between liberalism and communitarianism. See Huang 1998.
114 Taylor 1995b p. 20.
115 For discussions of the nature and validity of transcendental arguments, see Brueckner 1995 and Arndt 1987. I shall explain how I think of the peculiar status of transcendental arguments later on.
interesting here. If he is successful, the picture of the self as monological should be abandoned, and replaced by a picture of the self that can account for the indubitable facts of human experience. Taylor’s argument goes like this:

(1) It is one of the "undeniable features of experience" that it takes the shape of a perceptual field with an orientational structure.116
(2) It is a necessary condition for human experience to have this orientational structure that it is the experience of embodied agents. Otherwise, it would not have this structure.
(3) Thus, important features of our experience demonstrate that we are "essentially ... embodied agents."117

Since the picture of the self as monological is incompatible with the conclusion of Taylor’s transcendental argument, he claims that it should be abandoned.118

Taylor thus suggests a way to resolve anthropological disagreement that enables significant exchange and argument. If we state indubitable facts about, for instance, human experience, then it should be possible to argue for and against different positions by formulating transcendental arguments.

I shall evaluate Taylor’s argument shortly. First, I want to introduce the reader to pragmatic thought by presenting a pragmatic transcendental argument that parallels Taylor’s argument. This argument, too, intends to establish facts about human life which must be accounted for when we do philosophy. If it looks promising, it would take us a long way towards establishing that we should prefer a pragmatic approach in philosophical reflection.

**A Pragmatic Transcendental Argument**

One very important trait of the classical pragmatists’ writings is the view of human beings as concerned about establishing and upholding equilibrium with their environment. Peirce claims that "the action of thought is excited by the irritation of doubt, and ceases when belief is attained; so that the production of belief is the sole function of thought," by which he means that thought can be viewed as an instrument to regain the equilibrium we frequently lose.119 James stresses the same idea: "what is the task which philosophers set themselves to perform; and why do they philosophize at all?" he asks in "The Sentiment of Rationality."120 His reply is that they "desire to attain a conception of the frame

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117 Taylor 1995b p. 25.
118 Remember that the outline of human experience given here is related to philosophical practice, and there is nothing in it that denies that human experience (for some other purposes) can be reduced to the physiological processes on which it depends. No conflicts need occur between those perspectives.
119 CP. 5.394. Peirce suggests some modifications of this formula, but I think that it is fair to say that the basic point stands.
120 James 1956 p. 63.
of things which shall on the whole be more rational than that somewhat chaotic view which every one by nature carries about with him under his hat.”

But how do we know that we have achieved it? What characterizes a conception we would call 'rational'? According to James, the most important mark is a "strong feeling of ease, peace, rest … The transition from a state of puzzle and perplexity to rational comprehension is full of lively relief and pleasure.” As long as no problems are forthcoming, life runs its course without disturbance, but problematic situations call for attention and action:

> Just as we feel no particular pleasure when we breathe freely, but a very intense feeling of distress when the respiratory motions are prevented,—so any unobstructed tendency to action discharges itself without the production of much cogitative accompaniment, and any perfectly fluent course of thought awakens but little feeling; but when the movement is inhibited, or when the thought meets with difficulties, we experience distress.

Absence of problems goes together with an absence of conscious attention. It is only called for as equilibrium is disrupted.

This way of thinking about the human condition is important in pragmatic thought, and it can serve as the starting-point for a transcendental argument parallel to Taylor’s. Dewey gives us a hint about what that argument could look like in his analysis of esthetic experience in *Art as Experience*:

> There are two sorts of possible worlds in which esthetic experience would not occur. In a world of mere flux, change would not be cumulative; it would not move toward a close. Stability and rest would have no being. Equally, it is true, however, that a world that is finished, ended, would have no traits of suspense and crisis, and would offer no opportunity for resolution. Where everything is already complete, there is no fulfillment. … Because the actual world, that in which we live, is a combination of movement and culmination, of breaks and re-unions, the experience of a living creature is capable of esthetic quality. The live being recurrently loses and re-establishes equilibrium with his surroundings. The moment of passage from disturbance into harmony is that of intensest life. In a finished world, sleep and waking could not be distinguished. In one wholly perturbed, conditions could not even be struggled with. In a world made after the pattern of ours, moments of fulfillment punctuate experience with rhythmically enjoyed intervals.

What is interesting with this passage is the way Dewey identifies two possible worlds where esthetic experience would never occur: the world of random flux and the world where everything is static. They are also, I believe, worlds where thought and purposive action would have no function. However, since thought

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121 James 1956. 63.
122 James 1956 p. 63.
123 James 1956 p. 64.
124 Dewey 1980 p. 16f.
125 This step from the transcendental conditions of esthetic experience to the transcendental conditions of thought and purposive action is natural, given a pragmatic conception of esthetic experience, as well as thought and purposive action. I shall not argue for making this link here, but the reasonableness of
and action both are parts of the human condition, we can draw certain conclu-
sions about the transcendental conditions of human life.

To see this, let us consider why thought and purposive action would have
no place in the two possible worlds Dewey describes. For the sake of simplicity,
I shall talk only about ‘thought’ here, but I ask the reader to keep in mind that
thought is conceived of as essentially related to purposive action in the fol-
lowing remarks.\footnote{The reason why I put so much emphasis on the relation between thought and purposive action is that thought conceived of only as an inner monologue with no bearing on how we act is not shown to be impossible in the pragmatic transcendental argument developed here, but as soon as the crucial link between thought and purposive action is noted, it should be clear that I am not talking about thought conceived that way.}

The first possible world is the world of random flux, where everything keeps
changing and no stable regularities exist. In that world, thought has no function
whatsoever. Why not? Simply because no action is likely to serve my purposes
better than any other action, or even no action at all. Suppose that I am hungry
and put something in my mouth. My hunger is stilled after a while. But the next
time I am hungry and try to eat the same thing (if I can ever find ‘the same
thing’ again), it increases my hunger, or it causes me to vomit. On another
occasion, it is rock-hard; sometimes, it ceases to exist while I am chewing it, and
so on. In a world where things behaved that way, there would be nothing to
learn from past experience, and no point in preferring one action to another. In
the world of random flux, life consists of a series of sensations, some pleasant
and some unpleasant, but there would be no way to restore equilibrium other
than by chance.

The other possible world where thought has no function is the world where
nothing ever changes, and nothing depends on what we do. Imagine that a
benevolent deity were to supply us with everything we need even before an ex-
perience of a lack arises. Lack of equilibrium with the environment is thus
impossible, since, to take one example, we are constantly nourished in a way
that makes hunger an unknown sensation. In the finished world, life would not
even consist of a series of sensations, as it did in the world of random flux,
because sensations occur only as there is some change of our conditions. Hence
Dewey’s comment that in the finished world, ”sleep and waking could not be
distinguished.”

The cash value of distinguishing two possible worlds that are not like the
world we live in, is that we get an idea of some fundamental traits of human
existence in the world we do live in. The being that is capable of thought and
purposive action is an agent situated in a world with some regularities on
which to base intelligent action, a world that is also full of contingency, making
the attainment of equilibrium something we must struggle for. These are traits
of human existence as it appears in our world. Clearly, there is interplay here

\footnote{making it will become obvious as the main ideas of this study are developed. See also Alexander 1987, who, albeit in a different context, makes a similar point.}
between the world in which we live and the kind of beings we are. It is because we are beings capable of thought and action, that prefer certain states of affairs to others, and because the world is a world where equilibrium can be lost and restored again, that human life has come to look the way it does. More stringently put, the pragmatic transcendental argument might look this way:

(1) It is an undeniable feature of human life that we are beings capable of thought and purposive action (intelligent behavior, if you wish).
(2) It is part of the transcendental conditions for human life (as we know it) that we are agents situated in a world where there are stable regularities to depend on as well as contingencies to deal with, and that we are beings who prefer certain states of affairs to others (and so on).
(3) Thus, human beings are beings that we cannot understand properly unless we view them as agents concerned with establishing and upholding equilibrium with their environment in a world where this is possible, but requires struggle.

The argument’s conclusion is too vague to give very precise direction to philosophical practice, but I think that there are certain ways of doing philosophy, which would not sit too comfortably with it. The pragmatic transcendental argument, just like Taylor’s, emphasizes human practice and its importance for the way we ought to interpret and understand human phenomena. The question is: are those arguments convincing? Have we found a method for resolution of anthropological disagreement, and if not, how come?

Transcendental Arguments from Anthropological Inquiry: An Evaluation

The transcendental strategy looks promising as a way of dealing with and resolving anthropological disagreement, and that strategy can have a bearing on which conception of religion we embrace as well. If a conception of religion is shown to presuppose or be associated with (for instance) a monological view of the self, then Taylor’s argument against the monological self also subverts that conception of religion. In this way, transcendental arguments could have profound effects for philosophical practice.

Are the arguments successful, that is, convincing? Before we can answer that question, we need to specify what we mean by ‘successful’ here. Robert Nozick distinguishes "between philosophy that attempts to prove, and philosophy that attempts to explain how something is possible." Depending on the kind of philosophy we do, we make different demands on what is to count as a successful argument. The difference can be illustrated by how we deal with an

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epistemological skeptic. On a strong understanding of what it takes for an argument to be successful, the argument must convince the skeptic that her position is unacceptable, and has to be abandoned. This is the aim of philosophy that attempts to prove that we have knowledge. In principle, every rational person has to be convinced by an argument if it is to qualify as successful. Nozick points out, correctly in my opinion, that very few philosophical arguments are successful in this sense. If the demands on a successful argument are that stringent, not much will be established by way of philosophical reflection. Nozick sketches a weaker standard, which we can actually opt for. For an argument against the skeptic to be successful, what is required is that we, who are not skeptics, recognize that it is a good argument against skepticism, an argument that gives us good reasons to remain non-skeptics without ignoring the skeptic’s challenge. This is the aim of philosophy that attempts to explain how knowledge is possible, and, in the course of that attempt, acknowledges the skeptic’s challenge and seeks to explain how knowledge is still possible. A successful argument against skepticism should, hence, show us how the skeptical challenge can be set in an explanatory framework where we are not forced to become skeptics. Not every rational person has to be convinced by the argument, and definitely not the skeptic herself. Let us, from now on, distinguish the two meanings of ‘successful’ by referring to the arguments that meet the weaker standard of successfulness as W-successful arguments, and to those which meet the stronger standard as S-successful arguments.

Transcendental arguments appear to aspire to S-successfulness. Their first premise is uncontroversial, stating indubitable facts no one is inclined to deny, and the only other premise they need states the necessary (transcendental) conditions for the indubitable facts—what has to be the case given what we all know. If the argument is valid, the conclusion should convince every rational person. Things are not, Taylor concedes, quite that simple. Even if transcendental arguments are compelling and their conclusions cannot be denied once we accept their premises, it may be very hard to formulate the premises in such a way that everyone agrees that the things stated are indubitable and relevant facts:

Transcendental arguments thus have to formulate boundary conditions [of e.g. human experience] we can all recognize. Once they are formulated properly, we can see at once that they are valid. ... But it may be very hard to get to this point, and there may still be dispute. ... For although a correct formulation will be self-evidently valid, the question may arise whether we have formulated things correctly.

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128 Nozick 1981 pp. 197ff. Nozick’s discussion is thus not conducted in terms of arguments, but I see no reason why it should not apply here as well.
130 Taylor 1995b p. 32.
Taylor here attributes the central problem with transcendental arguments to the lack of a language in which to state the indubitable facts; therefore, disagreement is likely to persist. This is so because transcendental arguments have to “articulate what is most difficult for us to articulate,” and thus they are, despite and given their nature, “open to endless debate.”

For Taylor, then, the crucial problem is that of correctly formulating the ‘boundary conditions’ on which to base transcendental arguments. Since this is so complicated, it is extremely hard to make a transcendental argument S-successful. Even so, it may still be W-successful, and be afforded a special status in anthropological inquiry, something I shall return to below.

You may wonder whether the conclusions of the transcendental arguments presented here are really substantial enough to have significant effects for philosophical practice. I think they are. If (one of) the arguments were accepted, philosophers doing anthropological inquiry would probably pay more attention to practice, to take one example. I suggest that the transcendental arguments that are disputable are also the ones which have substantial conclusions (and by that I mean that they rule out certain pictures of the human being as incompatible with indubitable facts, while recommending others). In cases of anthropological disagreement, it looks as if these arguments are incapable of bridging the gap between the parties of the dispute (at least where significant conclusions are at stake), because we cannot reach an agreement on what the indubitable facts to start from are like.

I think Taylor is on the right track when he traces the problems for transcendental arguments to the difficulty of formulating uncontroversial premises. But I also think that this is not primarily because we lack the necessary conceptual resources. Instead, what we have is disagreement over what the relevant facts are, and what those facts are like (once they are set in their proper context). The facts we use as starting-points for transcendental arguments, as well as the transcendental conditions we claim must be at hand if these facts are to be accounted for, are both embedded in, and gain their reasonableness from, the larger interpretative framework in which they are set. Since anthropological disagreement involves incompatible interpretative frameworks used to understand human phenomena, I take it to be clear that transcendental arguments have appeal for those who, at least to a significant extent, share the interpretative framework within which they are formulated. It is within such an interpretative framework that transcendental arguments have a special status, and transcendental arguments formulated from within another interpretative framework are unconvincing.

This is actually the point I made in my discussion of Mondin’s distinction between the phenomenological and the transcendental phases of anthropological inquiry.

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131 Taylor 1995b p. 33. Despite their nature because supposedly, they use only uncontroversial premises and given their nature, because they attempt to formulate what we lack conceptual resources to formulate.
inquiry. There, I claimed that the distinction makes sense as a logical distinction, but that the transcendental phase is important for the phenomenological phase, too. The identification of certain facts as indubitable, and relevant for philosophical practice, is made from the perspective of a particular interpretative framework; that, in turn, means that we lack the common ground transcendental arguments need to resolve anthropological disagreement.

2.4 Philosophical Anthropologies as Interpretative Frameworks

My conclusion from the problems with transcendental arguments is that it is unlikely that further anthropological inquiry will help us resolve anthropological disagreement. This means that we have, as yet, not been offered resources to communicate and argue against, for instance, conceptions of religion associated with an interpretative framework that we do not share. I believe that in order to make further progress, we must turn our attention to the character of the interpretative frameworks involved.

At this point, I wish to introduce the term philosophical anthropology to help us understand and deal with anthropological disagreement. I propose that anthropological inquiries, such as Taylor’s into human experience, are already set in an interpretative framework I shall refer to as a certain philosophical anthropology. The facts Taylor uses to make his transcendental argument are facts that are assigned a certain status (relevant and indubitable) within the philosophical anthropology he embraces. Such arguments, however, are hardly convincing once they are directed against philosophers who embrace an incompatible philosophical anthropology. The common ground we need is missing.

Since I am interested in enabling exchange and argument between philosophical anthropologies, I cannot, however, rest content with indicating what kind of disagreement this is, and examining an unsuccessful way of resolving it. To make progress, we have to turn attention to philosophical anthropologies to clarify the way in which they function as interpretative frameworks. I shall examine two models that may be used to sketch philosophical anthropologies and anthropological disagreement, and I shall use the insights offered to characterize philosophical anthropologies, and explore the way exchange and argument might look.

I want to make a note on terminology here. I speak of ‘embracing’ a philosophical anthropology, and I refer to them as ‘interpretative frameworks.’ These ways of putting things are not intended to suggest that a philosophical anthropology is an entity of some sort; nor will I suggest that it is something we

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132 There may very well be disagreements further anthropological inquiry can resolve. I do believe, however, that such is not the case with the disagreements that interest me in this study.

133 I shall not go into the question of to what extent an interpretative framework has to be shared for transcendental arguments to have bite, but just presume that we need a rather significant overlap.
consciously embrace. I rather wish to underscore the *orientational* nature of a philosophical anthropology, as a way of approaching phenomena for the purpose of dealing with them philosophically. The consequences for how we characterize philosophical anthropologies will get clearer as my study proceeds.

**Basic Convictions: A Foundationalist Approach**

It is rather natural to think of a philosophical anthropology as a set of basic convictions about human beings, which direct philosophical inquiry. Thus, there may be interesting similarities between philosophical anthropologies and *Weltanschauungen* (world-views), if we think of them as involving fundamental convictions about the universe, the human being, and so on. The fundamental convictions of a *Weltanschauung* structure the way we understand and interpret events and phenomena, and something similar might hold true here.

If we think of philosophical anthropologies this way, then the disagreement we face is ultimately a disagreement between basic convictions, something which is often claimed in the case of disagreements between people with different *Weltanschauungen*. Let us call this approach to philosophical anthropologies *foundationalist*, because it holds that our way of philosophizing, including our (philosophical) conceptions of human phenomena, can be traced back to a set of basic convictions. Just like in foundationalism in epistemology, this approach would hold that our philosophical convictions and standpoints are of two kinds: basic and non-basic respectively. The basic convictions would go to make up our philosophical anthropology, and the other standpoints we embrace would be derived from, and justified by, the basic convictions.

Note that comparing philosophical anthropologies to *Weltanschauungen* is different from claiming that disagreement between different philosophical anthropologies would actually be disagreements in our *Weltanschauungen*. It appears that James makes this connection when he introduces his idea of different human temperaments to understand philosophical disagreement:

> I know that you, ladies and gentlemen, have a philosophy, each and all of you, and that the most interesting and important thing about you is the way in which it determines the perspective in your several worlds. ... [T]he philosophy which is so important in each of us is not a technical matter. It is our more or less dumb sense of what life honestly and deeply means. It is only partially got from books; it is our individual way of just seeing and feeling the total push and pressure of the cosmos.

He then goes on to interpret disputes in the history of philosophy as involving a "certain clash of human temperaments." This temperament is not something we

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134 I use that term as it is traditionally understood, and it should not be interpreted as my idea of what a proper conception of a *Weltanschauung* is.
135 For a brief overview of foundationalist theories in epistemology, see Alston 1995a.
accept as good grounds for why a certain position should be held, which is why philosophers seek impersonal arguments and avoid appealing to their temperament. All the same, a philosopher’s “temperament really gives him a stronger bias than any of his more strictly objective premises. It loads the evidence for him one way or the other, making for a more sentimental or a more hard-hearted view of the universe, just as this fact or that principle would.” Now, if we think of philosophical temperaments as different attitudes towards life, they can properly be viewed as part of your Weltanschauung, but also as determining what basic convictions will make up your Weltanschauung (I take it that philosophical temperaments are not, themselves, basic convictions). Different philosophical anthropologies will then be part of different Weltanschauungen, and they will result from different philosophical temperaments.

I believe that James makes an important point about the way we come to see certain standpoints as more reasonable than others, and the unwillingness of philosophers to accept that there is a personal element involved when we assess evidence and arguments. But I also think that James’s talk of ‘temperament’ is intended to help us understand and deal with another type of philosophical disagreement, distinct from anthropological disagreement, a type of disagreement that actually presupposes that people with incompatible Weltanschauungen can share a philosophical anthropology. It is important that we note the difference. In the cases that interested James, a shared philosophical anthropology functions as a kind of background or stage where debate takes place. Temperament will thus dictate which one of two competing standpoints you will embrace. I can think of no better illustration than the debate over the existence of the God of classical theism. As framed by Richard Swinburne and J. L. Mackie, the debate concerns whether philosophical arguments can establish that it is more probable than not that God exists. Mackie and Swinburne hardly share a Weltanschauung given Swinburne’s orthodox Christian beliefs and Mackie’s vigorous defense of atheism. But, importantly, they agree on what kind of practice religion is, how religious belief is to be understood, and what kind of argument it is that would take us anywhere towards establishing that God (probably) exists. Pragmatic arguments like the one discussed in 1.3 are, for instance, judged to be irrelevant for establishing what the theist asserts. The difference between Mackie and Swinburne is that they assess differently the evidence they agree is important. Here, James’s idea of philosophical temperaments may be helpful for seeing how the assessment of evidence is never

\[\text{\footnotesize 137} \text{ James 1995 p. 2.} \]
\[\text{\footnotesize 138} \text{ James 1995 p. 2f.} \]
\[\text{\footnotesize 139} \text{ This is at least the impression you are given after reading James 1995.} \]
\[\text{\footnotesize 140} \text{ See James’s list of competing standpoints such as free will versus determinism in 1995 p. 4.} \]
\[\text{\footnotesize 141} \text{ Swinburne 1977 and 1991, Mackie 1982.} \]
\[\text{\footnotesize 142} \text{ Swinburne 1977 p. 2, Mackie 1982 p. 1. For a discussion of their shared presuppositions, see Stenmark 1995 pp. 91–106.} \]
\[\text{\footnotesize 143} \text{ Mackie 1982. See also Gale 1991 chap. 9.} \]
detached from a subject, or made by following a set of rules. Instead, it is a matter of making informed judgments where personal factors (like temperament) enter the picture.¹⁴

To me, then, it seems clear that people with rather different Weltanschauungen can share a philosophical anthropology. Therefore, I believe that we should avoid connecting anthropological disagreement with differences in Weltanschauungen.¹⁴⁵

In the foundationalist approach to philosophical anthropologies, anthropological disagreement is a type of disagreement where the gathering of more facts seldom if ever will resolve disputes. Actually, it is hard to see any opportunities for dealing with anthropological disagreement at all, other than stating and restating your basic convictions. As such, it looks as if it has little to say about exchange and argument. However, I think that there are also other problems with the foundationalist approach. Anthropological inquiry appears to be an affair of deducing standpoints from your basic convictions. But where did those convictions come from to start with, and when and why were they accepted as basic? I think the relation between philosophical anthropologies and anthropological inquiry is more dynamic, meaning that we should not really think of a philosophical anthropology as proceeding anthropological inquiry. I think this dynamic relation is better captured if we adopt a non-foundationalist approach to philosophical anthropologies.

¹⁴ Those ideas are also reflected in “The Will to Believe” and other essays in James 1956. William Wainwright has made an original attempt to use James’s thought to show that having the right (or proper) temperament is a prerequisite for being able to assess the evidence for God’s existence properly. He presents and defends “the thesis that mature religious belief can, and perhaps should, be based on evidence but that the evidence can be accurately assessed only by men and women who possess the proper moral and spiritual qualifications” (1995 p. 3). Whatever the merits and problems of this position, I would say that the kind of disagreement Wainwright seeks to illuminate is not like the disagreement I am discussing, but more like the disagreement between Swinburne and Mackie. Hence, his discussion presupposes a shared conception of what the potentially relevant evidence to consider might be and, I would say, a shared philosophical anthropology.

I think the same point holds for most of the philosophers and theologians that have appealed to James’s famous “Will to believe” doctrine: “Our passional nature not only lawfully may, but must, decide an option between propositions, whenever it is a genuine option that cannot by its nature be decided on intellectual grounds; for to say, under such circumstances, ‘Do not decide, but leave the question open,’ is itself a passional decision — just like deciding yes or no, — and is attended with the same risk of losing the truth.” (1956 p. 11, James’s emphasis omitted.) These thinkers (e.g., Ramsey 1993, Gordon 1993, O’Connell 1984) also address questions concerning the proper (or acceptable) way of assessing the evidence for the existence of God against the background of a shared philosophical anthropology. Hence, they are not discussing a disagreement similar to the one I seek to illuminate, because it is not related to anthropological disagreement. For interpretations of James’s Will to believe-doctrine critical of the approaches presented above, see Brown 1997, Schlech 1997.

¹⁴⁵ I am certainly not making the strong case that our philosophical anthropologies have nothing to do with our Weltanschauungen. It is possible that they do. But that is not the same thing as claiming that they are actually part of them.
Paradigms: A Non-Foundationalist Approach

To develop a non-foundationalist approach to philosophical anthropologies, I shall make use of some ideas about scientific paradigms presented by Thomas Kuhn in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Just like with *Weltanschauungen*, I am not trying to determine whether philosophical anthropologies are paradigms in Kuhn’s sense of the term. What I am after is an illuminating analogy that might help me clarify philosophical anthropologies and anthropological disagreement. As we shall see, there is an interesting ambiguity in Kuhn’s talk of scientific paradigms, an ambiguity that reveals two slightly different options for how to understand philosophical anthropologies as well.

Kuhn was puzzled by the discrepancy between how scientists think of their discipline and its history, and the way it has actually developed. While they, and we, think of the scientific enterprise as a linear and cumulative affair, Kuhn convincingly showed the history of scientific progress to be one where periods of normal science of a cumulative nature are occasionally interrupted by scientific revolutions, which involve severe breaks in scientific practice and the way we think of the discipline’s subject matter. The breaks are sharp enough to make most of the body of knowledge accumulated before the scientific revolution obsolete. It was for the sake of making sense of these features of scientific practice, that Kuhn introduced his idea of scientific paradigms (hereafter just paradigms).

Kuhn frequently refers to paradigms as constellations of "beliefs, values, techniques, and so on shared by the members of a given community." They direct research by pointing out the most important problems a scientific discipline should deal with, as well as indicating what would count as acceptable solutions to those problems. What is accepted in the course of scientific inquiry becomes part of the paradigm, and serves to direct further research.

Paradigms also direct research by indicating what the proper methods to use are like, thus giving the scientific discipline the methodological consensus needed to make substantial progress possible. All in all, paradigms function as ‘stage-setters,’ which scientists can take for granted, and draw upon in future research.

Paradigms are not normally stated and transmitted as a set of rules for good research. In fact, to so construe them is to distort their character. Kuhn asserts that "[p]aradigms may be prior to, more binding, and more complete than any set of rules for research that could be unequivocally abstracted from them." Especially at the beginning of its development, a paradigm is very vague, and a

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146 This goes regardless of exactly what Kuhn meant by his term. A sympathetic reader has distinguished 21 different senses of the term as it is used in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. See Masterman 1970 p. 61.
147 Kuhn 1970 p. 175.
148 See, for instance, the contrast Kuhn makes between pre-paradigmatic research and research directed by a paradigm in 1970 chap. 2–3.
149 Kuhn 1970 p. 46.
lot of creative effort is required to develop it. So scientists do not develop a paradigm by first stating and then following a set of rules. The rules also take shape as the discipline develops, which means they are not formulable before the paradigm has developed. However, Kuhn is also saying that the rules we can formulate will not exhaust the way a paradigm directs research, so it is clear that he is not thinking of a paradigm as a set of implicitly accepted rules gradually made explicit as the paradigm develops. Here, we begin to discern a second use of the term ‘paradigm’, which stresses the way a paradigm directs research even as we are unable to specify how. Hence Kuhn’s increased emphasis of the importance of exemplars, that is, classical resolutions of problems in the past, which now play an important role in the education of new scientists.

Exemplars help students learn how to—in a creative fashion—‘copy’ or ‘imitate’ good research undertaken in the past. This is quite different from mechanically repeating experiments done by researchers in the past (though this is an essential part of the education), since a great deal of creativity is required to apply the teachings of exemplars to somewhat different subject-matters. These are the skills that exemplars transmit to students that are socialized into the paradigm.

Through a study of exemplars, students gradually grasp the techniques and methods that are considered most useful for solving scientific problems. Even if part of the way a paradigm directs research is by giving us ideas about how it will develop in the future, it should also be clear that those results cannot be deduced from a previously existing body of knowledge. There is some predictive direction, but it is not made up of a set of implicitly accepted beliefs, which is gradually made explicit. It is more a matter of that in the course of inquiry, all elements of a paradigm develop as the other elements develop, and this includes the elements taken to be basic as well. I think it is fair to say that as a paradigm develops, certain things acquire the status of being basic in relation to the rest, but this is different from saying that they were accepted all along.

Kuhn thus oscillates between two (compatible) ways of thinking about paradigms. Most of the time, Kuhn talks of paradigms as a gradually evolving set of beliefs, theories, values, accepted methods and techniques, and so on. A paradigm is then built up through scientific research, and every discovery adds something to the paradigm. I interpret this in a non-foundational fashion, meaning that no element of the paradigm precedes the other. Sometimes, however, Kuhn is more inclined to view paradigms as the orientation that gradually takes form and becomes discernible as we identify exemplars and carry on scientific research. The paradigm, here, is a way of thinking and approaching the scientific subject-matter, which takes shape in scientific research, and is transmitted by a set of exemplars. The main difference to the former way of thinking about a paradigm is that what is generated in scientific research is not

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150 Kuhn 1970 pp. 43ff.
151 See Kuhn 1970, Postscript. Sometimes, Kuhn even talks as if they are the paradigm, like in Kuhn 1970 p. 175.
itself part of the paradigm, but those results are, nevertheless, not accidental. They result from a certain way of doing science and evaluating and interpreting observations, theories and so on.

What ‘paradigm’ refers to in the second sense is actually part of a paradigm in the first sense as well. The kind of direction researchers are given is always something more than the direction given by the beliefs, theories, rules for good research and so on, generated within the paradigm. In fact, if we take Kuhn seriously, we should not think of this orientational element as something we can state as a set of beliefs or theories. I take it then, that the term now refers to an orientation that will direct research in a more profound and complex way than will beliefs and theories generated by the paradigm.152

Here, I am mainly interested in the more narrow use of ‘paradigm’, which means that I shall not understand philosophical anthropologies as consisting of the different standpoints and philosophical methods which philosophers hold and use. It is rather that those standpoints, and philosophers’ ways of thinking about different human phenomena, are functions of different philosophical anthropologies. It is the orientational character of paradigms that I think applies to philosophical anthropologies as well. When I discussed Taylor’s transcendental argument, I suggested that it is from the perspective of a certain philosophical anthropology that some arguments are assigned the status of being transcendental arguments. I think that we can now see that this suggestion does not force us to think of philosophical reflection as starting from, or being built up from, the conclusions of various transcendental arguments. It is rather that when philosophical reflection develops, certain arguments take on the status of being transcendental arguments in relation to a particular way of thinking about philosophical reflection and philosophy’s subject-matter. There is, hence, no need to think of philosophical anthropologies as somehow pre-existent to philosophical practice. Instead, it takes shape in philosophical practice.

My talk of philosophical anthropologies as interpretative frameworks is not intended to reintroduce the foundationalist idea of basic convictions. I think we are better served by viewing philosophical anthropologies in terms such as something that directs philosophical inquiry even if it is not formulated as a set of basic convictions. Instead, I think that it may be illuminating to think of philosophical anthropologies in terms that resemble Taylor’s. Taylor’s suggestion that the monological self is a picture of the human subject draws, I believe, some inspiration from Ludwig Wittgenstein. The point of talking about pictures here is, I would say, to show how something can guide our ways of thinking and acting without having propositional form, and without being something

152 When I say that the two senses of ‘paradigm’ are compatible, I mean that both acknowledge the importance of the orientational character of paradigms, even though they may not agree on exactly what it is that gives us the orientation in question.
we state and consciously assent to. I think this is essential for understanding the way philosophical anthropologies orient philosophical inquiry.

A philosophical anthropology is thus a picture of the human subject that orients our ways of thinking philosophically about the human being and human phenomena. It directs philosophical practice, and influences the conclusions that we will reach, though we should not think of those conclusions as part of some philosophical anthropology. For example, different conceptions of religion are not part of different philosophical anthropologies, but a philosophical anthropology makes us think a certain way about human phenomena (including religion), and in the course of reflection, a conception of religion takes shape. So we can say that a certain conception of religion is associated with, and results from, a certain philosophical anthropology. Here, the dynamic relation between philosophical anthropologies and philosophical reflection should be stressed. A certain conception of religion can be seen as arising from a particular philosophical anthropology, but the philosophical anthropology, too, has developed in the course of philosophical reflection.

My talk of philosophical anthropologies is, as we will see, helpful for understanding what the classical pragmatists share. We need not think of it as a number of shared standpoints or a method they all used. Instead, let us view it as a rough agreement concerning how to approach philosophy and philosophy’s subject-matter, which means that they share a pragmatic philosophical anthropology. This leaves plenty of room for disagreement on a number of topics. If I am right, such disagreement will not, however, be connected to anthropological disagreement.

2.5 Exchange and Argument: Two Models

Introducing philosophical anthropologies helps us to better understand what is at stake when philosophical disputes involve anthropological disagreement, and why further anthropological inquiry will not, normally, resolve these disputes. Let us, now, look at the prospects there may be for communication and argument between competing standpoints here. It is easy to get the impression that even though we can understand the standpoints of others, it is impossible to argue against them, or for your own standpoint. It is certainly tempting to ask: why should it? Why not use the insights obtained to map the limits of philosophical discourse? Philosophical anthropologies are, if you adopt this approach, such that critical discussion of them is impossible, because any argument you can present presupposes a philosophical anthropology, and is hence infected by a vicious form of circularity. Everyone should accept that,

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When talking of exchange and argument, I shall suppose that what we strive for is an exchange where understanding of the other position obtains, and where arguments can have a bearing which is not limited to those who share your philosophical anthropology.
and do philosophy from the perspective of the philosophical anthropology they embrace, while respecting that others work with a different perspective.

This suggestion is appealing, and I will embrace it in a modified version in chapter 7. As it stands, however, it licenses a philosophical status quo where certain questions I take to be important for philosophical practice are not discussed. With my view of philosophy as criticism, philosophy can make a difference in our striving to make certain experienced goods more secure than before. Now, if we want philosophical practice to play that role, then we should also reflect critically on the shape of philosophical practice, and this involves critical reflection on different philosophical anthropologies. That option is particularly attractive if you embrace a philosophical anthropology which is not very fashionable in contemporary philosophy. The search for resources for exchange and argument does not boil down to a desire to dominate the philosophical arena and oppress every alternative; it is necessary in order to reconstruct philosophy in ways that might increase its ability to contribute to human flourishing.

Here, I shall consider two ways of thinking about arguments between philosophical anthropologies. The first one draws on Kuhn’s discussion of the relation between scientific paradigms, the second is from Alasdair MacIntyre’s discussion of intellectual traditions in Whose Justice? Which Rationality?.

Kuhn
Kuhn claims that researchers adhering to different paradigms actually live in partially different worlds, and that they use conceptual schemes that are to some extent incommensurable.\(^{154}\) We cannot be compelled by “logic and neutral experience” to move from one paradigm to another, since there is no such thing as “neutral experience,” or facts to be formulated in paradigm-independent terms.\(^{155}\) Just like I claim is the case for philosophical anthropologies, there is no agreement between paradigms about what the relevant facts are like, or how they should be interpreted.

The way a paradigm defeats another is more like a process where anomalies arise within one paradigm, problems that gradually make continued commitment to it virtually impossible. Anomalies do not fit into the paradigm, and the paradigm’s suggestions for how to deal with problems are not helpful when we try to resolve the anomaly. They are always, importantly, identified from within a paradigm—that is, something is an anomaly only in relation to a paradigm where it is taken to pose problems. Something that looks problematic from the perspective of a competing paradigm does not automatically qualify as an anomaly.

\(^{155}\) Kuhn 1970 p. 150.
Anomalies attract the scientific discipline’s sharpest brains during periods of normal science. Most of the time, they are resolved in the sense that scientists manage to show how they actually fit into the paradigm. When anomalies are thus resolved, the paradigm’s prestige increases. But occasionally, anomalies resist repeated attacks even from outstanding scientists, and then, the discipline enters a stage of extraordinary science, where the paradigm slowly loses its hold on the way we approach the scientific subject-matter. There occurs a “consequent loosening of the rules for normal research.” If the anomaly is still unresolved, we enter a state of crisis where we look for another paradigm to overcome the state of crisis. In due course, a new paradigm is accepted as a more promising candidate for future research. A paradigm shift occurs, though this is a process that takes many years. When a new paradigm is established, there has occurred “a further and partially destructive change in the problems and standards legitimate for science.” Kuhn is saying, in effect, that it does not have to be the case that a new paradigm resolves the problems that functioned as anomalies within the old paradigm: it is more often the case that they are no longer thought of as genuine (scientific) problems at all, or that they are not judged to be interesting problems for the discipline in question (this, of course, from the perspective of the new paradigm). Such changes of the status of problems is an effect of Kuhn’s claim that a new paradigm will not succeed the old one by a linear development, but through a radical break in scientific practice.

If we apply Kuhn’s view to philosophical anthropologies, it looks as if the only way you can argue against a philosophical anthropology is by pointing to anomalies it cannot resolve. If the argument is going to be convincing, those anomalies must also be acknowledged by the philosophers who embrace the rival philosophical anthropology. Perhaps you can think of Taylor’s transcendental argument as intended to identify anomalies within a philosophical anthropology which involves a picture of the self as monological.

It seems very hard to make that kind of argument convincing. Not only would you have to take it to be a good argument yourself; you must also convince philosophers who embrace the philosophical anthropology you wish to reject that they face an anomaly which they cannot resolve.

One important reason for Kuhn’s pessimism about exchange and argument between paradigms is, I suggest, that he thinks the problems they identify and

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156 Kuhn 1970 p. 84.
157 Kuhn even claims that more often than not, an old paradigm is succeeded as its adherents die or retire.
159 See, e.g., Kuhn 1970 p. 107f.
160 This is the point at which charges have been brought against Kuhn that paradigm shifts are ultimately motivated by non-rational factors, and something comparable to a leap of faith. Kuhn’s reply has been to point out that once a new paradigm directs research, the shift will appear rational since the new paradigm looks more promising than the old one (1970 pp. 205ff.). I think that there is a more promising approach to the charges of relativism, and it involves acknowledging the relation to problems outside scientific practice. I will make an outline of that approach in the next section.
address are not really shared. They cannot be, since they are formulated with paradigm-specific concepts, and presuppose certain paradigm-specific views of the scientific subject-matter. Hence Kuhn’s claim that a new paradigm need not resolve the anomalies, which led the previous paradigm into a state of crisis: it is enough to show that they were not correctly formulated, or that they rest on certain mistaken views. Thus we can, from the perspective of the new paradigm, confidently leave them behind. Something that looks like an anomaly for someone who adheres to another paradigm (as well as another philosophical anthropology) may be unproblematic for someone adhering to the paradigm in question (or the philosophical anthropology). I shall try to show that what we need, to overcome Kuhn’s pessimistic views, is a clarification of the sense in which the problems different philosophical anthropologies deal with are shared.

**MacIntyre**

In *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* MacIntyre identifies and discusses a number of traditions within Western thought. Traditions are conceived in a very broad fashion, such as the Aristotelian tradition and the Liberal tradition, and towards the end of his book, MacIntyre addresses questions about whether, and if so how, significant exchange between traditions is possible. As it turns out, exchange and argument is complicated, and the reason is that different traditions develop different conceptions of rationality and justice, conceptions which are deeply embedded in their thought-structures. Hence, any argument intended to show that another tradition’s view on some issue is irrational will be quite impotent as long as it presupposes a conception of rationality that your adversary rejects.

Many people would interpret MacIntyre as headed either for relativism (traditions cannot communicate with and influence one another, and you cannot claim that one tradition is better than another, since criteria for rational or ethical acceptability will always be tradition-specific), or perspectivism (different traditions give “very different, complementary perspectives for envisaging the realities about which they speak to us”). The reason is that once you give up “the Enlightenment conceptions of truth and rationality,” and, in particular, the idea that canons of rationality are universal and fixed apart from any tradition, relativism and perspectivism appear to be the only remaining options. In fact, MacIntyre thinks both options are mistaken.

In order to show us an alternative to absolutism, relativism, and perspectivism, MacIntyre points to resources within the different conceptions of rationality traditions have developed. A tradition’s conception of rationality has

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161 MacIntyre 1988 p. 352.

162 MacIntyre 1988 p. 353.
typically evolved through a three-stage process in which traditions have gradually matured. The three stages are:

1. A first in which the relevant beliefs, texts, and authorities [taken as authoritative by adherents to that particular tradition] have not yet been put in question; a second in which inadequacies of various types have been identified, but not yet remedied; and a third in which response to those inadequacies has resulted in a set of reformulations, reevaluations, and new formulations and evaluations, designed to remedy inadequacies and overcome limitations.  

As an example, MacIntyre mentions that Thomas Aquinas thus resolved problems that had emerged in the Medieval Christian tradition, which acknowledged both Aristotle and Augustine as important authorities. The members of a tradition that has matured by going through these stages "are then able to look back and to identify their own previous intellectual inadequacy or the intellectual inadequacy of their predecessors by comparing what they now judge the world, or at least part of it, to be with what it was then judged to be." The tradition has overcome an epistemological crisis where it failed to make progress.

To overcome an epistemological crisis, adherents to a tradition has to deal with it by framing theories, which meet three conditions:

1. They must resolve the epistemological crisis in a way that could not previously be done.
2. The theories should also enable us to "provide an explanation of just what it was which rendered the tradition, before it had acquired these new resources, sterile or incoherent or both."
3. The theories have to be continuous with (but all the same improve) the tradition that ran into the epistemological crisis. In other words, the solution, although novel with respect to the tradition, has to be extractable from the tradition, thus avoiding a break of continuity.

Theories that fail to meet these conditions are not continuous with the tradition; accordingly, the tradition has not shown us that it is capable of overcoming the epistemological crisis.

MacIntyre suggests that epistemological crises show us the way traditions can defeat and succeed other traditions, and this is possible since a tradition’s standards of progress can always be turned on the tradition itself. As a tradition faces an epistemological crisis it fails to resolve, its adherents may look to other

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165 MacIntyre 1988 p. 358.
166 MacIntyre 1988 p. 358.
167 MacIntyre 1988 p. 362. It may, of course, be hard to determine whether a break has occurred or whether an alleged solution to an epistemological crisis is really in line with the tradition. Those problems are not important for my present purposes.
traditions for resources that would help them resolve the crisis. Now, if those resources can be imported into the current tradition so conditions (i)–(iii) are met, the crisis is resolved without severe consequences for the epistemological tradition. But if this is impossible, the alien tradition has defeated the tradition that faced an epistemological crisis, and its adherents have to, given their own standards of progress, admit that. The problem with relativism and perspectivism is that both fail to see that traditions can be defeated according to their own standards of progress.

Kuhn and MacIntyre share many views about argument between paradigms and traditions, but one difference is that MacIntyre is more optimistic about the ways in which different traditions can have fruitful exchange and take up elements from one another. MacIntyre claims that a tradition can find, in another tradition, the resources to come to terms with its own problems. For Kuhn, a paradigm shift involves reformulating problems to such an extent that it looks unlikely that you find the resources to solve your problems within a competing paradigm; what you get is rather that you stop asking those questions, or ask them in a context where they have a rather different meaning, and can be dealt with from a very different perspective than before.

Typically, a tradition’s failure to make progress shows itself in a number of problems it cannot resolve. What kind of problems are we talking about? Are they internal, or specific, to a tradition, or can different traditions share a problem? For MacIntyre, this is not really the most interesting question; for him, the important thing is whether another tradition can contain the resources which a tradition in a state of epistemological crisis need. I think this implicitly involves the admission that the problems different traditions deal with are not shared. Even though MacIntyre shows that there may be room for exchange and argument in such cases, too, I believe that it is considerably easier to allow exchange and argument in cases where the problems we address are shared.

I shall argue that it is possible to think of the problems we deal with by drawing on different philosophical anthropologies as shared, but it requires that we acknowledge the problems which motivated us to reflect philosophically in the first place, the concrete everyday problems of various problematic situations. Those are the problems that are shared, not the philosophical problems we formulate as responses to them. This means that critical comparison of the ability of different philosophical anthropologies to help us resolve such problems is what we need to allow significant exchange and argument.

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168 MacIntyre 1988 p. 364f.
2.6 Introducing Metaphilosophical Pragmatic Arguments

I suggested in chapter 1 that philosophical reflection is triggered by concrete problems that we encounter in different situations. Hence, I agree with Karl Popper’s suggestion that “[g]enuine philosophical problems are always rooted in urgent problems outside philosophy, and they die if these roots decay.”¹⁶⁹ On my view of philosophy, philosophical reflection aims at making experienced goods more secure. Its purpose is thus related to our concern about human flourishing. I want to introduce a distinction between philosophical problems and problems outside philosophy that motivate us to institute philosophical problems. The relation between the two types of problems is what makes philosophical reflection relevant outside philosophical practice.

Problems formulated in a philosophical context, and by use of philosophical concepts, are not created ex nihilo; they are responses to problems we encounter in different situations. Let us call the latter type of problems extra-philosophical problems. Extra-philosophical and philosophical problems are, for me, not quite the same problems. As we start philosophical inquiry into a problem, we frame it in a certain way depending on how we think of the human phenomena and practices involved in the problematic situation. Thus, I take it to be clear that the form philosophical problems take is not independent of the philosophical anthropology you embrace. Therefore, even if philosophers identify and discuss rather different philosophical problems, those formulations may be different responses to similar extra-philosophical problems, which they try to resolve in the way they think is appropriate.

As an illustration, think again of the disagreement between D. Z. Phillips and most analytical philosophers of religion.¹⁷⁰ Phillips rejects the idea that determining the likelihood of God’s existence is the central task for philosophy of religion. In my terms, we can understand Phillips as saying that this idea is based on a mistaken conception of religion. If we attend more carefully to religious practice, we would see that religion is not at all like what analytical philosophers of religion think that it is. Therefore, the problem with mainstream philosophy of religion is not that attempts to justify belief in God’s existence are unconvincing; the problem is that the wrong problem was instituted from the beginning. Nevertheless, I think (as I stated in chapter 1) that Phillips’s work is also a response to the problems, which motivated philosophers to formulate philosophical arguments for the existence of God. His work, too, can be understood as concerned about the preservation of the goods of religion. Accordingly, we can say that he shares an extra-philosophical problem with the philosophers he criticizes, but they hold different views of what philosophical

¹⁶⁹ Popper quoted in Herrmann 1995 p. 15.
¹⁷⁰ Presented in 1.4.
problems philosophy of religion should deal with.\textsuperscript{171} I think the same thing goes for the pragmatic approach to religion that I shall develop in this study.

The relevance of a distinction between philosophical and extra-philosophical problems is that it gives us options for exchange and argument between philosophical anthropologies. The extra-philosophical problems we need to solve may function as the common ground convincing arguments need. I shall examine a way of using this argument-form, and outline the conditions that must hold if it is going to be convincing.

\textit{Dewey’s Critique of the Epistemological Tradition}

In \textit{The Quest for Certainty}, Dewey launches an attack on what he calls “the epistemological tradition.” The epistemological tradition, which includes philosophical standpoints as different as idealism, empiricism, and realism, has failed to contribute to the resolution of one of the most pressing and persistent problems of Western civilization: what the relation between the “beliefs which scientific inquiry vouchsafes,” and the “beliefs about the values which should regulate [human] conduct” is like.\textsuperscript{172} Dewey sees this as what I call an extra-philosophical problem (or rather, a group of problems), but philosophical reflection may help us deal with it. When philosophers have addressed the problem, the philosophical problems they institute look different depending on the philosophical anthropology they embrace. The different standpoints discernible within the epistemological tradition agree, according to Dewey, about what the relevant philosophical questions are, though their answers look different. Let us say, then, that they share a philosophical anthropology giving philosophical reflection a certain orientation.

Dewey famously categorized the competing epistemological theories of the epistemological tradition as “spectator theories of knowledge.”\textsuperscript{173} Spectator theories of knowledge share the unquestioned assumption that “what is known is antecedent to the mental act of observation and inquiry, and is totally unaffected by these acts.” The objects of true or genuine knowledge (the only objects with ultimate or objective—as opposed to subjective—existence) are hence “fixed and unchangeable,” waiting to be discovered by the reflecting

\textsuperscript{171} Someone may object that Phillips cannot be compared to other philosophers of religion because he rejects their normative approach. Faithful to Wittgenstein’s dictum, Phillips holds that philosophy must “leave everything as it is” and this would make him very different from the normatively oriented philosophers trying to determine whether belief in the existence of God is rational/justified or not. However, what they \textit{do} share is a concern to preserve the goods of religion. Phillips’s way of reasoning is normative in the sense that he thinks that his way of understanding religion is more adequate than the ones he is criticizing. Once we accept it, Phillips suggests that we also see that most philosophers of religion deal with philosophical pseudo-problems. That is quite different from saying that the extra-philosophical problems they respond to are pseudo-problems.

\textsuperscript{172} Dewey 1984 p. 15.

\textsuperscript{173} Dewey 1984 p. 19.
Hence, spectator theories of knowledge conceive of knowledge on the model of visual perception, and only things that can be so perceived can be objects of knowledge.

As we have learned to accept scientific inquiry as the most reliable mode of knowledge-acquisition, spectator theories of knowledge have put values, and our beliefs about what is valuable, in a problematic position. Science has not managed to detect values, neither as separately existing entities, nor as properties of certain objects and states of affairs. This has lead philosophers to conclude that values have some other mode of existence than the objects of scientific inquiry; a conclusion which follows naturally from the presuppositions of the epistemological tradition.

Regardless of this, we need to relate to and deal with values and value-judgments, and an important element of this is that we need resources to adjudicate between conflicting values. Which resources can philosophers within the epistemological tradition offer? There are two different main responses.

In the first response, values are elevated into a transcendent or metaphysical realm beyond the limits of scientific inquiry. As such, they can still be objects of knowledge, but other methods than those of the scientific community are needed to detect and adjudicate between values. This response, however, is not very promising, because it is unable to show us fruitful ways of dealing with values. How can we gain access to the metaphysical realm where values dwell? Using our intuitions will definitely not lead to consensus, and no convincing method to resolve conflicts is presented. Furthermore, why should this mysterious realm influence our behavior? According to the second response, values are nothing but subjective preferences without real existence. They can thus not be objects of knowledge. This response avoids some of the first response’s shortcomings, but in the end, it is equally incapable of helping us to deal with values and value-conflicts. The status of deeply held moral convictions comes to look a lot like the status of our view that strawberries taste better than raspberries.  

Even if the two responses hold opposite views on the philosophical question of whether values exist, they both presuppose that either they exist independently of us in a transcendent realm, or they are purely subjective. Tertium non datur. That shared presupposition causes severe problems for philosophers when they try to sketch what rational discussion of values might look like. Either we discuss states of affairs in a transcendent realm, and we cannot even establish agreement on whether we can have access to this realm, or we discuss cases where subjective preferences stand against one another. And how can we determine whether strawberries should be preferred to raspberries?

175 The exposition here oversimplifies the two positions in certain ways, but it hopefully succeeds in drawing attention to certain problematic tendencies discernible in both.
Dewey concludes that "[w]ithout the introduction of operational thinking, we oscillate between a theory that, in order to save the objectivity of judgments of values, isolates them from experience and nature, and a theory that, in order to save their concrete and human significance, reduces them to mere statements about our own feelings." Regardless of which position we prefer, it looks impossible to draw any promising conclusions about how to frame a rational discussion of values.

If the question about how to resolve conflicts between values was only a philosophical question, then neither position would be problematic, since they are not, as far as I can see, philosophically absurd. Their shortcomings are obvious only as we turn to the extra-philosophical problems that triggered philosophical reflection in the first place. Since neither position has anything promising to say about how to conduct rational discussion where conflicts between values occur, they cannot contribute to our ability to resolve the problematic situations, to which they are responses. Dewey traces the shortcomings of both positions to the philosophical presuppositions about knowledge and objects of knowledge that they share, presuppositions which underlie all spectator theories of knowledge:

The problem of reconciliation [of scientific knowledge and human values] arises and persists for one reason only. As long as the notions persist that knowledge is a disclosure of reality prior to and independent of knowing, and that knowing is independent of a purpose to control the quality of experienced objects, the failure of natural science to disclose significant values will come as a shock.

Dewey goes on to develop an alternative picture of knowledge-acquisition as itself an already value-laden activity that always "takes place at a time, in a place, and under specifiable conditions in connection with a definite problem." If we think of knowledge-acquisition as an activity which stands in relation to different human interests, then we also realize that it cannot, not even in its most 'refined' forms (like scientific inquiry), be a process where reality is observed from a God’s-eye point of view. Objects of knowledge are constituted in human practices, and that goes for values as well. There is nothing which prevents that values become objects of knowledge as we manage to solve some problem. If we were to accept this picture of knowledge-acquisition as an alternative to spectator theories of knowledge, then our conception of science would also change in significant ways:

177 Or rather: for the kind of argument I am interested in, the question whether they are philosophically absurd or not is uninteresting.
178 Dewey 1984 p. 35.
179 Dewey 1984 p. 82. The picture hangs together with the approach outlined in the pragmatic transcendental argument spelled out earlier. This way of thinking will be clarified during the course of my study.
180 See the outline of inquiry in 3.2.
Only when the older theory of knowledge and metaphysics is retained, is science thought to inform us that nature in its true reality is but an interplay of masses in motion, without sound, color, or any quality of enjoyment and use. What science actually does is to show that any natural object we please may be treated in terms of relations upon which its occurrence depends, or as an event, and by so treating it we are enabled to go behind, as it were, the immediate qualities the object of direct experience presents.\footnote{Dewey 1984 p. 84.}

On Dewey’s alternative picture “the actual procedures of knowledge, interpreted after the pattern formed by experiential inquiry, cancel the isolation of knowledge from overt action.”\footnote{Dewey 1984 p. 38f.} Knowledge-acquisition is one way of interacting with the environment, and we should acknowledge the role values play within this interaction, which is always directed by some concrete problem.

I take Dewey’s thesis in \textit{The Quest for Certainty} to be that if we would adopt a pragmatic view of knowledge, values, and knowledge-acquisition, we avoid the seemingly forced choice between conceiving values as metaphysical entities or as subjective preferences; accordingly, we can develop other ways of dealing with value-conflicts than the ones suggested by the epistemological tradition.

It would take us too far afield if I were to present a complete exposition of Dewey’s alternative to the epistemological tradition’s way of handling the relation between values and scientific knowledge, and it is not necessary either. Suffice it to say that Dewey suggests that the alternative would help us lay the foundations for new ways of conceiving of values and knowledge, and this, in turn, would open fresh prospects for how to deal with, for instance, cases where values conflict. As such, Dewey’s rejection of spectator theories of knowledge is motivated by their incapacity to contribute positively to the resolution of the extra-philosophical problems that motivated philosophical reflection in the first place. His approach can only be shown to be superior to that of the epistemological tradition if the relation to extra-philosophical problems is acknowledged.

Let me emphasize again what Dewey is not saying. He is not saying that the problems value-conflicts generate are pseudo-problems. They are real enough in a non-philosophical context where we constantly have to make decisions about how to prioritize between values, and handle cases of conflict with values embraced by other people. However, the philosophical responses that are made have not been helpful in our struggle to resolve those extra-philosophical problems. The inability is, according to Dewey, linked to (shared) philosophical conceptions of knowledge, values, and reality.

Dewey’s ‘argument’ candidly relates ways of doing philosophy to an extra-philosophical context, and evaluates them with an eye to whether they contribute to our chances of resolving problems we encounter. But it is not an argument for why we should prefer one philosophical standpoint to another in the same way that the cosmological argument is intended to make us prefer theism to
atheism. I take the argument-form to be relevant in the cases where we share an extra-philosophical problem (or a set of problems), but disagree over how to frame those problems in a philosophical setting; in other words, where anthropological disagreement is involved. In my view, this enables us to argue that a philosophical anthropology is superior to another on the grounds that it enables more successful problem-solutions than its alternative.

The argument-form hinted at here also takes us back to Herrmann’s views about what it is to understand something. According to him, the judgment whether we have properly understood something or not depends on whether we are capable of dealing with it intelligently or not. Understanding gives us skills to use in interaction with the object of understanding. With this in mind, we can say that the argument is intended to establish that a particular understanding of a human phenomenon like religion is superior to another because it makes more significant and fruitful interaction with that phenomenon possible. A philosophical anthropology as an interpretative framework can be assessed, then, in relation to the purposes for which the interpretative framework took shape. Let us reflect further on what it would take to make such an argument convincing.

**Conditions for Metaphilosophical Pragmatic Arguments**

The distinction between philosophical and extra-philosophical problems thus makes arguments for and against philosophical anthropologies possible, and I want to introduce the term *metaphilosophical pragmatism* as referring to an attitude we should adopt when reflecting on the adequacy of different philosophical anthropologies. It is a metaphilosophical attitude in the sense that it connects philosophical reflection to purposes which lie outside philosophical practice. I do not take the qualifier ‘meta’ to indicate, however, that this kind of reflection should be distinct from philosophical practice. Reflection on the adequacy of different philosophical anthropologies is an instance of what I call aspect 2–criticism, directed at the way we think philosophically of human practices and phenomena. It is a pragmatic attitude (I deliberately use ‘pragmatic’ in a non-technical fashion here) since it urges us to evaluate philosophical anthropologies with an eye to the consequences they have for how well we can handle problematic situations we have to deal with. Accordingly, proper understanding, for a metaphilosophical pragmatic attitude, shows itself in the capacity to interact more fruitfully than before with the phenomenon under reflection. I also think that such arguments can be convincing even for those who do not

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183 I explain what I mean by “intelligently” and “intelligence” in 3.2.
184 ‘Metaphilosophical pragmatism’ is a term from Pihlström 1998, though he uses it for a slightly different purpose. See, for instance, p. 240, pp. 125ff.
share your philosophical anthropology. In this way, they (potentially) have wider appeal than the transcendental arguments I discussed in 2.3.

It may be objected that a metaphilosophical pragmatism is part of a pragmatic approach to philosophy, and anyone who is not a pragmatist can thus confidently reject it. If the objection is correct, metaphilosophical pragmatic arguments will not have the rather wide appeal I believe they have. I would reply, however, that I do not think you have to be a pragmatist to find metaphilosophical pragmatism to be a sound attitude to philosophical practice. Philosophers are, after all, human beings, and we can assume that they are interested in contributing as best they can to the resolution of pressing extra-philosophical problems. Let us look closer at the conditions for convincing metaphilosophical pragmatic arguments.

A first condition is that we must acknowledge the relation between philosophical and extra-philosophical problems, and come to view philosophical problems as responses to extra-philosophical problems. I think this condition is met most of the time. What might be controversial is the further idea that the relation says something about the way philosophical practice should look. Here, two things must be noted. First, metaphilosophical pragmatic arguments are not aimed at particular philosophical standpoints. They are always directed against philosophical anthropologies, and thus interpretative frameworks directing philosophical reflection. Second, if you share my view of philosophy as criticism, the opposite standpoint (that the ability to contribute to the resolution of extra-philosophical problems has no import for the acceptability of different philosophical anthropologies) looks stranger still.

A second condition that must be met if a metaphilosophical pragmatic argument is going to be convincing is that we have to demonstrate that the different philosophical standpoints and arguments, which we wish to compare, can reasonably be viewed as responses to the same extra-philosophical problem, a shared problem that we can identify.

Even though it is true that no human phenomenon develops independently of our comprehension of it, and philosophical reflection influences our comprehension of a phenomenon, I still think that we can uphold the distinction between philosophical and extra-philosophical problems. As long as we uphold it, it is also possible that we can come to see different philosophical standpoints as responses to the same extra-philosophical problem. This is, I think, the case with the different attempts to justify religious beliefs and religious practices which we encounter in philosophy of religion.

Whether condition two is met or not is a question that has to be decided in relation to the concrete instances where we want to use the argument-form. In my case, the extra-philosophical problems, which my pragmatic approach shares with other ways of doing philosophy of religion, are the three problems of religion I presented in 1.2. Those problems, to recapitulate, have the feature in
common that they indicate that our resources for significant criticism and reform are insufficient. Analogy-arguments from religious experience are reasonably viewed as responses to these problems, responses which are natural, given a certain conception of religion.

A third condition a convincing metaphilosophical pragmatic argument should meet is that there has to be significant overlap between our views of what the goods of, for instance, religion, are. Consensus is not necessary, but without significant overlap, it is unlikely that we will agree on what the extra-philosophical problems to deal with are like, and what a satisfactory solution might be.

Conditions one, two, and three are closely related. If we did not agree at all about what the goods of religion are, then it is unlikely that we would share extra-philosophical problems either. Simply agreeing that the goods of religion are threatened will not give enough overlap in cases where we disagree on what those goods are like.

If these are the conditions that have to be met if a metaphilosophical argument is going to be convincing, what my study must demonstrate is that we share an extra-philosophical problem, and that we agree to a significant extent on what a satisfactory solution of that problem would be. This requires that our views of the goods of, for instance, religion, overlap. Significantly, too, the argument involves critical comparison of two or more philosophical anthropologies. The strength of the argument depends not only on how promising your own position is; the potential of relevant alternatives is equally important.

Metaphilosophical pragmatic arguments always have a double bearing. In themselves, they are limited to a particular extra-philosophical problem or group of problems, and what they establish is that if we would accept another conception of a human phenomenon like religion, we would be in a better position than before to handle this or that problem (or group of problems). But since I claim that a conception of religion is associated with a philosophical anthropology, it seems as if successful metaphilosophical arguments are also arguments against the entire interpretative framework from which a particular conception of religion results. Though it sounds implausible that a single convincing argument would overthrow an entire philosophical anthropology, it is equally implausible to claim that it has no implications for the question about what philosophical anthropology we should embrace. I shall return to the question of what bearing a successful metaphilosophical pragmatic argument has in chapter 7. Suffice it to say for now that I believe a metaphilosophical pragmatic argument can draw attention to problematic features of a philosophical anthropology, which demand further inquiry. I also think that my study gives some indications about what such inquiry might look like.
2.7 Conclusion: How to Develop the Argument

I take the present chapter to show that if we accept my view of the relation between philosophical and extra-philosophical problems, and we think that philosophy should contribute to human flourishing, then metaphilosophical pragmatic arguments have an important function in philosophical practice. I trace the force of metaphilosophical pragmatic arguments to the purposes for which we try to understand something, that is, for the sake of improving our capacity to interact with it in promising ways. A certain philosophical understanding of human phenomena can be superior to another if it enables us to deal better (for some purpose or in relation to some problem) than its rival with those phenomena. As mentioned, a metaphilosophical pragmatic argument will always involve critical comparison of relevant alternatives, so besides the project of developing my own understanding of how we may handle the problems of religion, I must also evaluate the responses of other philosophers to the same extra-philosophical problems.\footnote{This is the topic of chap. 5.}

The argument-form I have chosen determines the way I will proceed. The first important step is to develop a pragmatic alternative to the more common ways of doing philosophy, which dominate contemporary philosophy of religion. Second, I must show the way this approach can contribute to the resolution of the extra-philosophical problems involving religion that we wrestle with. Finally, my metaphilosophical pragmatic argument can be spelled out in a critical comparison of what my pragmatic approach and the approach in mainstream philosophy of religion contribute to our ability to deal with the shared extra-philosophical problems.

One consequence of my strategy is that I see no need to justify the elements of a pragmatic philosophy piece by piece to someone who does not embrace the interpretative framework I take a pragmatic philosophical anthropology to be. Not only would that be an insuperable task; it is also unnecessary. The relevant justification of my pragmatic approach will, instead, be achieved in two steps: first, showing how the different parts of a pragmatic philosophical approach offer one another mutual support, and second, showing that it enables philosophers—better than available alternatives do—to contribute positively to our attempts to come to terms with the extra-philosophical problems, which motivated philosophical reflection in the first place.
CHAPTER 3
Philosophical Inquiry from the Perspective of a Pragmatic Philosophical Anthropology

3.1 My Objectives

In chapter 2, I raised the question whether a pragmatic transcendental argument starting from the conditions of human life can establish that we should adopt a pragmatic philosophical approach. The necessary conditions for esthetic experience that Dewey outlines in *Art as Experience* are also, I claimed, necessary conditions for there to be intelligent human beings. Hence, these conditions say something important about the kind of beings we are, and the environment we live in.

My conclusion was that viewed as an argument intended to establish certain facts about the human being that no rational person can deny, it is not successful. I suggested that what we accept as valid transcendental arguments depends on the philosophical anthropology we embrace. The premises take on a certain shape depending on the way we think of human life and human practices.

What still makes transcendental arguments interesting is, from my point of view, that they help us clarify the pictures which I claim make up different philosophical anthropologies. Transcendental arguments establish conclusions that, from the perspective of a particular philosophical anthropology, are of fundamental importance for properly understanding human life. Thus, they also say something important about the proper direction of philosophical practice. Even if we do not think of the conclusions of transcendental arguments as elements of a philosophical anthropology (since these pictures are non-propositional), we can still take transcendental arguments to express important traits of different philosophical anthropologies.

This chapter is intended to sketch a pragmatic way to understand human life and human phenomena, an understanding that will underlie the way I approach phenomena for the purpose of dealing with them philosophically. The principal idea is that human beings are biologically and socially constituted organisms
concerned about upholding a state of equilibrium between themselves and the environment. In this inquiry, the conclusion of the pragmatic transcendental argument will serve a heuristic function to give my inquiry a certain direction, which I take to be characteristic for a pragmatic way of doing philosophy.

Even if we acknowledge that the pragmatic transcendental argument sketched in chapter 2 is valid, there is still plenty of room for disagreement between pragmatists. To qualify as a pragmatist on my argumentative retelling of what pragmatism is, you only have to share the orientation a pragmatic philosophical anthropology gives, and as the history of pragmatism shows, it does not produce consensus on every philosophical topic. My present concern is to develop philosophical standpoints that can be shown to be reasonable, and hang together in such a way that they afford one another mutual support. This task, however, will be undertaken mainly in relation to relevant pragmatic alternatives, and not in relation to other philosophical approaches. In this sense, the defense of my way of reasoning is ‘internal’ to a pragmatic philosophical anthropology, and not intended to convince those who embrace other philosophical anthropologies. I shall not discuss the way I think a metaphilosophical pragmatic argument can justify a pragmatic philosophical anthropology here.

The exposition I make here can be seen, then, as proceeding by adding piece after piece to what I claim is a developing coherent whole. I shall start with an anthropological inquiry where I discuss the roles played by instinct, habit, and intelligence in our lives, and argue that we can make sense of these features if we think of human life as constituted within a number of practices where we share certain purposes and goals. After I have presented my pragmatic practice-approach, I will outline a pragmatic way of thinking about certain philosophical topics such as perception, truth, realism and antirealism.

3.2 Instinct, Habit, and Intelligent Behavior

Under normal conditions, the behavior of living beings is teleological. The kitten sucks her mother’s breast, the rat escapes fire, and so on. No reasoning is involved in these activities, and no one teaches the kitten what to do in order to survive the first few days. We can think of such behavior as regulated by instinct. James defines instinct as "[t]he faculty of acting in such a way as"]

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What does it mean to say that different philosophical standpoints hang together and support one another? Let me suggest that we think of this relation as similar to the relation Göran Hermerén calls pragmatic implication. This is not a logical relation, it is a relation between propositions which may be relevant for a subject inclined to accept a proposition \(X\). Hermerén explains the relation thus: "If \(X\) pragmatically implies \(Y\), it would be odd—and in need of some special explanation—to accept \(X\) and at the same time reject \(Y\)." (Hermerén 1972 p. 31: "Om \(X\) pragmatiskt implicerar \(Y\), så gäller att det vore egendomligt – och skulle kräva en särskild förklaring – om man godtog \(X\) och samtidigt förkastade \(Y\).") Even if Hermerén’s interest lies in the relation between propositions, I believe that it applies to standpoints as well. The standpoints we take on a certain issue will inevitably make some other standpoints look reasonable, even if there is room for disagreements and incompatible interpretations here as well.
produce certain ends, without foresight of the ends, and without previous education in the performance.” Unlike habits, instincts are not acquired, but something we are born with. The behavior of many organisms, especially those we tend to call ‘lower,’ is entirely ruled by instinct. This means, significantly, that these organisms are incapable of modifying their behavior to adapt to changing conditions.

Human life, too, is to a significant extent directed by instinct. James notes that the newborn baby clasps, sucks, bites, cries, smiles and imitates other facial expressions. No one teaches the baby to do this; she just performs those acts. The influence of instincts is not, however, limited to infancy. There is a lot of human behavior that we can hardly understand without reference to instinct, such as that an unexpected sound startle us, or that a sudden flash causes us to close our eyes.

Even though instincts play a role in human life, it is equally clear that by themselves, they offer very little guidance. Human behavior is much more complex than it would be if it was entirely directed by instinct. Furthermore, there is some indirectedness in the responses we think of as instinctive. For instance, an unexpected sound right behind you may startle you, but it is much harder to think of your continued responses, like turning around or running away, as instinctive. They seem to involve something more. As Jerome Paul Soneson comments: “Instincts become responses only as they are shaped and guided by cultural modes of response.” In themselves, they are too rudimentary to direct human behavior, and what we call responses are normally too complex to be explicable only in terms of instincts.

If we think of instincts this way, then we can say that human instincts are rudiments of different responses, and they will result in different concrete responses as they occur in a society where they are given a certain direction. It is thus impossible to distinguish a realm of universally shared human instinctive responses, which would direct human behavior to a significant extent, but it is equally impossible to neglect instincts entirely if you want to understand the human being.

The so-called ‘higher’ animals behave in ways that indicate that their lives are not entirely directed by instinct. Here, habits, or habitual responses to certain stimuli acquired throughout life, play a large role. For the human being, there is no sharp distinction between instinctive and habitual responses, since instinctive responses, too, are “shaped and guided by cultural modes of response.” Nevertheless, I think that it is quite easy to discern responses that are

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187 James 1910b p. 383.
188 James 1910b pp. 403–441. James also counts emotions such as being jealous, frightened, and ashamed as human instincts. As we will see later, it may very well be that emotions have an instinctive basis, but that is not the whole story. Hence I deliberately keep emotions out of the present discussion.
189 CP 5.511.
190 Soneson 1993 p. 40. My emphasis.
more clearly instances of habitual behavior and where instinct plays virtually no role. Thus, the distinction may still be useful for certain purposes.

The human being has a large number of habits, which greatly reduce the amount of effort required for certain tasks, and make our actions more accurate with regard to their purpose. They are thus, as James claims, indispensable for simple as well as complex patterns of behavior:

Man is born with a tendency to do more things than he has ready-made arrangements for in his nerve-centres. Most of the performances of other animals are automatic [instinctive]. But in him the number of them is so enormous, that most of them must be the fruit of painful study. If practice did not make perfect, nor habit economize the expenses of nervous muscular energy, he would therefore be in a sorry plight.¹⁹¹

Other animals acquire habits as well, like the lion taught to hunt and kill prey, and the domesticated dog, taught to ‘shake paw.’ In human behavior, virtually any activity is shot through with habit. If this were not the case, even tying your shoelaces would be an almost insuperable task.

Habitual responses resemble instinctive in the way that in both, there is an organic relation between stimulus and response. Certain stimuli immediately call out a response from us, and no reasoning is involved. The responses we make to a stimulus can, in turn, call out new responses, and so, we can have a chain of habitual responses.¹⁹²

This way of thinking about habit may well be taken to imply that there is some behavior that is habitual and some that is not, but should be thought of as intelligent behavior. The difference between habitual and intelligent behavior would be that intelligent behavior is marked by conscious attention to what we are doing, and it is also directed by a specific purpose we have in mind and strive to achieve. Then, it is tempting to conclude that in intelligent behavior, habit plays no role. But made this way, the distinction between habit and intelligent behavior is quite problematic. You can hardly uphold it once you reflect on behavior such as the performance of music, where habits play a significant role (becoming a good musician requires a lot of practice), but at the same time, performance is an art. Dewey significantly takes artistic performance to be one (though not the only)¹⁹³ paradigmatic instance of intelligent behavior. He presents us with the example of a violinist performing at a concert:

¹⁹¹ James 1910a p. 113.
¹⁹² Dewey has shown that the concepts ‘stimuli’ and ‘response’ are functional concepts identifiable only within a certain activity, and also that how we specify what the stimulus is in some situation depends on contextual factors. See Dewey 1896. Here, I will not go into those discussions more than necessary.
¹⁹³ For instance: “The intelligent mechanic engaged in his job, interested in doing well and finding satisfaction in his handiwork, caring for his materials and tools with genuine affection, is artistically engaged. The difference between such a worker and the inept and careless bungler is as great in the shop as it is in the studio.” Dewey 1980 p. 5.
If each act has to be consciously searched for at the moment and intentionally performed, execution is painful and the product is clumsy and halting. Nevertheless the difference between the artist and the mere technician is unmistakable. The artist is a masterful technician. The technique is fused with thought and feeling. The “mechanical” performer permits the mechanism to dictate the performance. It is absurd to say that the latter exhibit habit, and the former not.\footnote{Dewey 1922 p. 71.}

Dewey goes on to propose a distinction between routine and intelligent habit, a distinction I would say makes best sense if it is taken to refer to the execution of habit, rather than to habits themselves, or some inherent traits in some of them.\footnote{Which is also how I think Dewey would make the distinction. See Dewey 1922 p. 71.} We can talk of routine habits in the situation where we respond to certain stimuli without paying virtually any attention to what is happening (which is different from saying that we did not notice what went on). This is probably true of most of the acts we perform. But it is equally true that we can attend to what we do even when our actions to a large part are directed by habitual responses, and then, you can talk of intelligent habits. The execution of intelligent habits involves conscious attention, and it is the reasoning and the consequent modification of future behavior which sets intelligent behavior apart from routine habits. The human being is capable of delaying and suppressing responses when she thinks that this is necessary to achieve certain purposes, but even here, habit is always present.\footnote{See, e.g., Mead 1934 p. 99f.}

I thus suggest that when we think of behavior as intelligent, this is not because it belongs to a certain class of actions which are always intelligent. Instead, ‘intelligent’ refers to behavior that is consciously and wisely modified for the sake of achieving some purpose we want to achieve. Intelligent behavior is thus adapted to the peculiarities of the particular situation, as well as to the purpose it is supposed to achieve. It draws heavily on habit, but the habitual responses can always be suppressed if that is what the situation demands. Hence, there is no absolute distinction between habitual and intelligent behavior, but there is still a point in talking about some behavior as intelligent, and contrast it with habitual.

This also shows that there is no situation where there is a guarantee that someone will behave intelligently, rather than habitually. To return to the violinist, she can have bad days as well, when she will not give an artistic performance. Maybe she is told right before a concert that her husband is having an affair with another woman. This piece of news can affect her performance in a number of ways, but one which is conceivable is that she would perform in a technically flawless, but not artistic (that is, intelligent) way, since she cannot make herself focus on the performance.
The way to distinguish intelligent behavior from habitual is thus that in intelligent behavior, our activities have a goal we consciously work to achieve, and we modify behavior with that goal in mind. In the words of H. S. Thayer, pragmatists think of “intelligent action as a deliberate anticipation and realization of selected modes and possibilities of experience.” However, there is even more to intelligent behavior, which is clear if you contrast it not with habit, but with unintelligent behavior. Intelligent behavior may not always be successful, but it is nevertheless such that the strategies adapted are wisely, rather than randomly, chosen. Hence, to act intelligently, you have to possess the necessary competence to be able to modify behavior in ways that help you achieve your purposes. Since our purposes may be very different, the kind of competence required in different contexts will be quite different as well.

**Intelligence and Inquiry**

Intelligent behavior thus requires competence, and the presence of some purpose which directs us. It is not hard to see that intelligence (or, rather, the capacity to behave intelligently) thus understood is very important for human life. It is intelligence that enables us to reform habits in ways which are not randomly chosen, meaning that we can adapt quickly to changing circumstances. Now, the number of different purposes, which direct human behavior, is potentially infinite, since there are so many situations we find ourselves in, and so many different interests, or purposes, that we can have in all those situations. I suggest, however, that for now, we think of the multitude of purposes as parts of a more general purpose of human behavior, namely attaining and upholding equilibrium with the environment.

The pragmatists label the process where we struggle to restore equilibrium with the environment *inquiry*. In its most general form, it is the form that intelligent interaction with the environment takes. The outlines of inquiry Peirce and Dewey have made thus point to general traits of intelligent attempts to restore equilibrium with the environment. They are, accordingly, based on various concrete cases where we have successfully achieved some purpose, which was part of the general purpose of attaining equilibrium. Even though an account of inquiry is primarily intended to describe the phases of inquiry, it also has normative force, since, as Richard Bernstein writes, “its aim is to isolate, appraise and evaluate those standards that are most successful in achieving warranted knowledge claims.” So an account of inquiry tells us what kind of behavior it is that qualifies as *intelligent*, and that is the behavior which,

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198 Bernstein 1966 p. 102.
in previous inquiries, has proved to be a reliable way to resolve encountered problems.\(^{199}\)

Any general account of inquiry will be quite vague, since it covers so many different types of problems and problem-resolutions. After all, inquiry must be adapted to the context as well as to the purposes for which it is undertaken.\(^{200}\) Hence, I shall not make much of the normative component of accounts of inquiry here. The interesting thing for our present purposes is the link to intelligent behavior, where inquiry is an intelligent way of handling problems. A closer look at inquiry thus helps us to understand human intelligence better.

Everything a human being does involves some sort of interaction with the environment. Environment, for Dewey, is everything that we interact with, and have transactions with.\(^{201}\) It is thus the totality of things, persons, states of affairs, and so on, that surround us. What the human being strives for is “a fairly uniform integration with the environment” or “a fairly unified environment.”\(^{202}\) As we struggle to achieve this, the environment may expand, when new ways of interacting with it emerge. The environment in which we live is thus dynamic, and develops when our interaction with it develops.

The starting-point of inquiry is an experience of imbalance in the ongoing transactions between the subject and her environment.\(^{203}\) We are in a problematic situation.\(^{204}\) The experience of imbalance is precognitive, which means that it takes no reasoning to see that a situation is problematic. The first intelligent step is to realize that the situation calls for inquiry, that a new adjustment must be made. To get started, we have to institute a problem. We try to specify which of our purposes that were frustrated, which habits that failed to perform their function, and what, more specifically, it was that surprised us and caused the problem.\(^{205}\) At the same time, we perform the important task to fix (preliminary, and for the sake of this inquiry) all the unproblematic elements of the situation. It is useless to call those elements into question unless reasons to do so occur within the ongoing inquiry. Instead, these ‘fixed’ elements of the situation constitute the background against which inquiry is carried out. Here, then, we have another way in which inquiry is context-bound: what is unproblematic, too, depends on the situation and the purposes for which inquiry is undertaken.

\(^{199}\) Cf. Peirce’s comparison of different methods of settling beliefs, like the method of authority, the a priori method, and the method of scientific inquiry in CP 5.377–387.

\(^{200}\) Dewey 1986 p. 26f. See also p. 39.

\(^{201}\) Dewey 1986 p. 32.

\(^{202}\) Dewey 1986 p. 33.

\(^{203}\) Dewey’s account of inquiry should not be read as presupposing that inquiry goes on in solitude. Inquiry is always a social affair with social implications. This will become clearer as I develop my pragmatic practice-approach.

\(^{204}\) See Dewey 1986 p. 72, where Dewey defines a situation in terms of a contextual whole, including the entire environment as well as ourselves.

\(^{205}\) Dewey 1986 p. 112. Talk of expectation and surprise should not be taken to imply that we consciously formulate such expectations, but they are still important for understanding why we behaved in a certain way. An action without purpose or goal can hardly fail.
Once a framework for the inquiry is set, and a problem is instituted, the crucial phase of reasoning follows. We try to come up with a number of possible solutions that would solve the instituted problem. The kind of thinking involved is such that it cannot, Cornelius Delaney remarks, "be reduced to strict formulae or rules of procedure." It requires that we are imaginative, and some people are better at it than others when facing a problem.

Instead of choosing randomly between the different possible solutions we have come up with, we try to evaluate them to see which one is most likely to resolve the problematic situation in a satisfactory way. That is, we want to solve the problem in a way that will not generate a lot of problematic situations elsewhere. Hence, we normally prefer a solution which requires a minimum of changes of our belief-system, although this must be weighed against how much effort is involved in testing whether it actually works, and the likelihood that it is going to work. If one is much easier to try than another, then this will often count in favor of it. How to prioritize in cases of conflict is something we have to determine from case to case.

In the final phase of inquiry, we put the solution we have chosen to the test to see whether it helps us resolve the problematic situation or not. If it does, we have acquired knowledge, or, in Dewey's terms, warranted assertions. If the solution does not work, it is discarded, and at the same time, the problematic situation is reconstructed. The failure thus casts further light on what the problematic situation is like, and this may cause us to institute a partially different problem. Inquiry has to start over, but this time, we are in a better position than before to resolve the problematic situation, because inquiry has improved our understanding of it.

What is interesting for my purposes is that inquiry captures what it is for behavior to qualify as intelligent behavior. Intelligence thus requires that we possess capacities like being able to identify problems, delaying or completely suppressing habitual responses, and figuring our alternative actions, all for the sake of realizing some purpose of ours. Since human beings are capable of attaining equilibrium through inquiry, it is clear that they (at least potentially) possess those capacities.

206 Delaney 1993 p. 15.
207 And, of course, training is important as well.
208 James (1995 pp. 23ff) emphasizes conservatism, while Peirce (See Delaney pp. 15ff) emphasizes simplicity.
209 Dewey preferred 'warranted assertion' to 'belief' for the reason that belief is often understood as "something that the human being entertains or holds, a position, which under the influence of psychology, is converted into the notion that belief is merely a mental or psychical state" (Dewey 1986 p. 15). But the outcome of inquiry does not only, as we will see, involve the reconstruction of our mental states: it involves reconstruction of the ways in which we interact with the environment, and a reconstruction of the environment itself. I shall talk of the outcome of inquiry as settled belief, and a reconstructed set of funded meanings, but it is important that we avoid to think of belief, then, as "merely a mental or psychical state."
Intelligence should not be thought of as a free-floating entity or capacity of the human being. Instead, it develops in a social process where we are constituted as beings with mind and a sense of self. My suggestion is that to understand how human beings can be intelligent, we must take the social aspect of human life into consideration.

3.3 Mind, Self, and Meaning in a Social Setting

I thus propose that mind and self (to be distinguished later in this section) are important for staging intelligence in a more comprehensive philosophical outline of human life. By this I mean that we will be able to understand intelligence better if we think of it as a number of capacities acquired by a being with a mind, and so on. At the same time, the fact that human beings are intelligent shows that they are beings with minds. So the different elements of my anthropological inquiry support one another. Let us, now, look closer at G. H. Mead’s analysis of mind and self, as they manifest themselves in human life.

Significant Symbols and the Rise of Mind

For Mead, the original social act is the gesture. A gesture is an act that calls out a response in some other organism, which is part of its environment, a response that is an adjustment to the act of the first organism (in other words an adjustment to the changes in the situation that results from the gesture). Since we share the context where we live, we constantly have to adjust to the changes our environment undergoes due to the acts of other organisms. A simple example of a conversation of gestures is a dog-fight. This is a conversation of gestures, because the "act of each dog becomes the stimulus to the other dog for his response." One dog responds to the other dog’s growling, and that response calls out yet another response, and on it goes. A conversation of gestures is carried on in terms of the responses made, responses which serve as stimuli that, in turn, call out further responses.

The gestures in the dog-fight are, however, different from those in the human conversation of gestures because they are not significant. Why not? Because the meaning of their own gestures is not present to the dogs themselves. The dogs have no intention of expressing rage, or evoking fear in the other dog (even if a human spectator might describe the dog-fight in such terms), and they are not aware of what responses their behavior is likely to call

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210 Mead 1934 p. 13 n. 9.
211 Mead 1934 p. 42.
212 Can you be sure of this? More or less, because dogs do not generally behave in a way which suggests that they are beings with minds, capable of inquiry, and so on, and that is a prerequisite for being capable of discerning meanings.
The conversation of gestures in the dog-fight is thus in a primitive state, and to explain the behavior of the dogs, we need not refer to intentions or something similar. Hence, there is no point in saying that thinking is involved in this type of conversation of gestures.

The human conversation of gestures is different from the dog-fight, although it displays similar features. As a rule, human beings are aware of the responses their acts call out in other human beings, and they are also aware of them as responses to their own gestures; that is part of how we understand the gestures. Mead does not explain why gestures have become significant in the course of human interaction, but clearly, it has something to do with the physiological make-up of human beings. Humans have thus at some point become capable of detecting the meaning of their gestures, if we, preliminarily, think of the meaning of gestures as the responses they call out. A person detects the meanings of her gestures by taking the position of the other, and it is crucial that I come to understand the other person’s gestures as responses to my own gestures. When we start doing this, a more significant type of communication is possible, one where the meanings of gestures are present to those involved in a conversation of gestures:

When, in any given social act or situation, one individual indicates by a gesture to another individual what this other individual is to do, the first individual is conscious of the meaning of his own gesture—or the meaning of his gesture appears in his own experience—in so far as he takes the attitude of the second individual toward that gesture, and tends to respond to it implicitly in the same way as the second individual responds to it explicitly.

When this happens, our gestures are significant, or, as Mead also says, significant symbols:

Gestures become significant symbols when they implicitly arouse in an individual making them the same responses which they explicitly arouse, or are supposed to arouse, in other individuals, the individuals to whom they are addressed.

It follows, importantly, that the meaning of significant symbols is always shared by those who participate in this kind of conversation of gestures:

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213 Mead 1934 p. 44.
214 And not only humans, but also other living organisms, as well as physical objects, and so on. I shall return to this in my discussion of meaning in a while. Right now, I am interested in social acts, which is why I focus on the responses of other human beings.
215 Morris 1934 p. xxiii. Other organisms that live in communities have not developed this capacity anywhere near the level to which the human conversation of gestures has developed.
216 Mead 1934 p. 47.
217 Mead 1934 p. 47.
In this way every gesture comes within a given social group or community to stand for a particular act or response, namely, the act or response which it calls forth explicitly in the individual to whom it is addressed, and implicitly in the individual who makes it; and this particular act or response for which it stands is its meaning as a significant symbol.\textsuperscript{218}

If the meanings were not shared, then we could not come to see the other person’s gestures as responses to our gestures. Therefore, a conversation of significant symbols presupposes that we respond in similar ways; otherwise, the conversation of gestures would be at the same level as in the dog-fight.

The claim that responses are shared in a human conversation of gestures might sound odd. If you yell at another person, you are not frightened yourself. On the other hand, as Mead stresses, we “must be constantly responding to the gesture we make if we are to carry on successful vocal conversation.”\textsuperscript{219} This means that we have to know what kind of responses our behavior can give rise to, and that involves responding the same way ourselves, even though our own responses may be implicit.\textsuperscript{220}

I do not think that Mead is saying that anger is a phenomenon that comes into existence only as mind develops. It makes perfect sense to call the dogs in a dog-fight angry. But in the human conversation of gestures, anger has come to signify something more, because we are aware of the fact that we are angry, and this means that we can act to express or conceal anger depending on what is suitable.\textsuperscript{221} It is when we have developed these capacities that we are capable of modifying our behavior with certain purposes in view, and intentional and intelligent behavior become possible.

Accordingly, an organism has a mind “when the organism is able to point out meanings to others and to himself.”\textsuperscript{222} Those are the meanings discernible in the development of significant symbols. Therefore, I suggest that we think of mind as a capacity to discern meanings, a capacity that enables us to modify behavior to better achieve some purpose.\textsuperscript{223} Hence, it is a capacity we need to act intelligently. Note, however, that we are not born with that capacity. Mead insists: “[m]ind arises through communication by a conversation of gestures in a social process or context of experience—not communication through mind.”\textsuperscript{224} Mind is thus essentially a function of a social process, but the social process gains, when its participants develop minds, a new level of significance.

\textsuperscript{218} Mead 1934 p. 47.
\textsuperscript{219} Mead 1934 p. 67.
\textsuperscript{220} Mead 1934 p. 47.
\textsuperscript{221} Although this is not always possible with anger, it is still true that in many situations, you can reflect on your anger and evaluate it in different ways.
\textsuperscript{222} Mead 1934 p. 132.
\textsuperscript{223} Cf. Owen Flanagan’s interpretation of James’s views on consciousness in Flanagan 1997.
\textsuperscript{224} Mead 1934 p. 50.
The Meaning of ‘Meaning’

Meaning plays an important role in the developing pragmatic picture of the human being. As Mead stresses, the meaning of a gesture lies in the responses it gives rise to. The concept ‘social act’ is important here, since “the existence of meaning depends upon the fact that the adjustive response of the second organism is directed toward the resultant of the given social act as initiated and indicated by the gesture of the first organism.” A social act is any act that serves as a stimulus to which a response is made by a “living form that belongs to the proper environment of the living form whose impulse it is.” Meaning, too, depends on those responses being shared, and hence, it presupposes an "agreement in practice.”

Mead limits his analysis of meaning to social acts. I want to expand that analysis and apply it to events and things we encounter, in fact to the entire environment, which implies that everything that is part of our environment has meaning. Thus, the concept applies not only to what is humanly produced, like gestures, vocal and otherwise. It also applies to things, events, and processes in our environment. The meaning of anything can, Dewey suggests, be understood in terms of their potential consequences: "when an event has meaning, its potential consequences become its integral and funded feature.” He gives some examples:

A creature might accidentally warm itself by a fire or use a stick to stir the ground in a way which furthered the growth of food-plants. But the effect of comfort ceases with the fire, existentially; a stick even though once used as a lever would revert to the status of being just a stick, unless the relationship between it and its consequences were distinguished and retained.

It is thanks to mind a phenomenon like fire acquires a meaning like "being something we can warm ourselves by.” When it has that meaning, it is also possible to behave towards fire in a more significant way than before. But there are other meanings that fire acquires in human experience as well, and all of them are relevant for the way we behave towards fire. The purposes we strive to achieve at present decide what meanings will be most important, which lead Dewey to claim: “Meanings are rules for interpreting things; interpretation being always an imputation of potentiality for some consequence.” That is, we behave differently towards fire if we want to warm ourselves or destroy a

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225 See also Mead 1934 p. 77f.
226 Mead 1934 p. 80.
227 Mead 1934 p. 7 n. 7. So a social act is something more than just an act of a single person: it is also the response which it calls forth in some other person.
228 Soneson 1993 p. 41.
229 Dewey 1958 p. 182.
231 Dewey 1958 p. 188.
compromising document. Nevertheless, the whole range of meanings is always potentially present, because as the situation changes, other purposes may come into existence and direct behavior.

The analysis of meaning made here shows, I believe, that our environment is not made up of a set of pre-existing objects with fixed properties. Rather, objects come into existence as events with constant meanings which can be drawn upon in future interaction with the environment; it is as such they become residents in the humanly constituted world. Meaning is a prerequisite for intelligent behavior, but intelligent behavior expands the environment by revealing new meanings, which enable more significant interaction with the environment.

Now, if you can encounter and deal with anything in an infinite number of ways for an infinite number of purposes, this sounds as if there is no limit to the meanings objects can have. Dewey points out that it is arbitrary to make some meaning the intrinsic meaning, or essence, of an object:

The same existential events are capable of an indefinite number of meanings. Thus an existence identified as “paper” because the meaning uppermost at the moment is “something to be written upon,” has as many other explicit meanings as it has important consequences recognized in the various connective interactions into which it enters. … There is no conceivable universe of discourse in which the thing may not figure, having in each its own characteristic meaning. And if we say that after all it is “paper” which has all these different meanings, we are at bottom but asserting that all the different meanings have a common existential reference, converging to the same event.232

Now it looks as if so far, nothing is said about how it is possible that gestures can be significant, and the source of worry is the fact that there is such a multitude of potential purposes which can direct behavior. If we do not share certain purposes, then we will probably lack the “agreement in practice” required for symbols to be significant. Anything can be a response to my gesture, if just any purposes can direct behavior. For a person, there is clearly a lot of different responses to things, including the gestures of some other person. To take the simple example of a horse, the way we behave towards it will be very different if we are interested in buying it, riding it, eating it, taking a picture of it, or something entirely different. Apart from these recognizable purposes, there may also be billions of other purposes directing interaction with the horse. A conversation of significant symbols demands, however, that we are capable of discerning the purposes of the social acts of others. But where do we find the “agreement in practice,” that is, the commonality of purposes we need to be able to carry on the conversation? Problems like this lead Israel Scheffler to the conclusion that viewed as a project of social behaviorism intended to reduce the meaning of gestures to the overt responses they evoke, Mead’s project is a

failure. There are a number of available responses to choose between in different situations, and all of them are still recognizable as responses to one and the same gesture. When someone yells at you, you may become frightened, but you may also react defiantly and ridicule your adversary, or you may become angry yourself. These different responses are surely possible, but most of the time, we will only make one of them.

Whether Mead’s project fails as a project of social behaviorism is not interesting here. What is interesting is that just as with horses, there is a number of possible responses to anger, some of which might be so unexpected, that we could not even view them as responses to anger. In the end, this threatens to lead to a communication-breakdown, if the number of possible responses to my gestures is infinite.

I think that the fact that human interaction most of the time functions fairly well shows that this worry is unjustified, and I would suggest that this is due to the way we are constituted as beings with mind in a social context, where our impulses are given a certain direction, which depends on the social context. To be sure, there are several possible responses to any gesture, and in theory, they are unlimited. But that is different from saying that we will actually make just any response in a particular situation. What it takes for meanings to be shared is that our responses are given shape within shared practices directed at the satisfaction of certain shared needs. It is within those practices that our purposes take shape, and so, they are (to a significant extent) shared.

Saying this is not the same as saying that responses (and hence, purposes) are universally shared; it is to say that the impulses we have are given a certain direction as we are socialized into human practices. This limits the number of purposes and makes them recognizable to other people who share, or are familiar with, the practices in question. Thus, I wish to stress the close connection between meaning, as constituted in a social setting, and the shared practices, which make up that social setting. It is within that shared framework we have the necessary commonality of responses needed to come to see other people’s gestures as responses to our gestures, and understand what purpose it is that lies behind someone else’s behavior.

\[^{233}\] The term ‘social behaviorism’ comes from Morris 1934 p. xvi. See also Scheffler 1974 pp. 152–155.
\[^{235}\] I wish to add that even though we have certain shared responses within different practices, it is hardly the case that in general, there is a single response available. All it takes for responses to be shared is that there are some paradigmatic responses. That is all the commonality we need. Besides the paradigmatic responses, there is also the option to expand the current realm of paradigmatic responses by making a novel response. For this to work (i.e. be seen by others as a response), there are still certain limitations we have to observe. Such expansive responses cannot be produced by following a set of rules, and their success depends upon the reception in the practice where it is made.
The Self and the Generalized Other

Just like mind, the self is constituted in the social process described above. To be a self, which is to be self-conscious, we have to develop minds. But the self involves more than that, and this “more” is best illustrated by the game, where you are forced to take the roles of a number of other players at the same time, and synthesize them into what Mead calls the generalized other:

The attitudes of the other players which the participants assume organize into a sort of unit, and it is that organization which controls the response of the individual. The illustration used was of a person playing baseball. Each one of his own acts is determined by his assumption of the action of the others who are playing the game. What he does is controlled by his being everyone else on that team, at least in so far as those attitudes affect his own particular response. We get then an “other” which is an organization of the attitudes of those involved in the same process.

The organized community or social group which gives to the individual his unity of self may be called the “generalized other.” The attitude of the generalized other is the attitude of the whole community.

The emergence of mind is logically prior to that of the emergence of selves, since the latter process requires that we are already capable of taking the role of the other, but it is nevertheless a result of the same social process. The difference is that the important type of interaction here is not interaction with this or that individual, but with a community of some sort. Being a self essentially involves the capacity to become an object to oneself, and thus to view one’s own actions and undertakings from the perspective of a community. The self arises in social processes which bear a structural resemblance to games. For such processes to be possible, we have to be involved in socially constituted activities where we share certain purposes. That is, interaction has to be cooperative:

This getting of the broad activities of any given social whole or organized society as such within the experiential field of any one of the individuals involved or included in that whole is, in other words, the essential basis and prerequisite of the fullest development of that individual’s self: only in so far as he takes the attitudes of the organized social group to which he belongs toward the organized, co-operative social activity or set of such activities in which that group as such is engaged, does he develop a complete self or possess the sort of complete self he has developed.

Being a self means being capable of evaluating your own actions and responses the way others would. It is within such shared social structures I come to think of myself as an individual.

In my view, the most reasonable way to think of the human self is not as constituted in relation to a single generalized other or a single group, but in relation to a multitude, just as there are a multitude of purposes in life. George

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236 Mead 1934 p. 154.
237 Mead 1934 p. 155.
Cronk suggests that human societies can fruitfully be viewed as made up by a multitude of “games” that are “played,” where individuals interact with a plurality of generalized others.238 There is no overarching generalized other, but a number of generalized others constituted by the different groups to which we belong, and the different purposes we share. This is an important element of the pragmatic practice-approach to human life I shall develop in the next section.

Even if evaluation and response require that we take the attitude of a generalized other, this is not to say that the individual’s behavior is completely determined by the form of the generalized others of the groups she belongs to. She can react to, and to some extent modify, the attitude of the generalized other. Still, we have to have the “me” if we are going to be members of a community at all: “[t]he ‘me’ is a conventional, habitual individual. … It has to have those habits, those responses which everybody has; otherwise the individual could not be a member of the community.”239 In other words, without the “me” we would not have minds or be selves. All the same, we are not robots:

But an individual is constantly reacting to such an organized community in the way of expressing himself. … The attitudes involved are gathered from the group, but the individual in whom they are organized has the opportunity of giving them an expression which perhaps has never taken place before.240

So while the “me” reflects the attitude of the generalized other, the “I” is “that phase [of the self] which responds to the attitude of the generalized other.”241 Novelty is, consequently, a kind of mismatch between the expectations of the “me” and the responses of the “I”, and the responses are never completely determined by those expectations. The “me”, however, sets limits to the kind of responses that are even conceivable, so there is a limit to novelty as long as we belong to a community (and that includes having a “me”). If we are going to recognize the novel response as a response at all, there has to be some continuity with the expectations of the “me”. There are no clear rules for what kind of expansions are possible, and the success of a particular response depends on the reception of other people who belong to the same group.

The “I” is a phase of the self we cannot observe, but it is possible to trace its influence by noticing and remembering responses which involved novelty. By then, however, the “I” has already become part of a reconstructed “me”.242 You hardly need an argument for why to introduce the “I” as an important phase of the self; we are familiar with it, and the limited transcendence it makes possible, from our own experience.243

238 Cronk 1987 p. 53.
239 Mead 1934 p. 197.
240 Mead 1934 p. 197f.
241 Cronk 1987 p. 36. Cronk’s emphasis.
242 Mead 1934 p. 177.
243 See also Colapietro 1998 p. 126.
Anthropological Inquiry and the Pragmatic Transcendental Argument

Anthropological inquiry from the perspective of a pragmatic philosophical anthropology has thus far resulted in a picture of the human being as constituted in a social context of practice. The pragmatic transcendental argument has served the purpose of giving direction to the ongoing inquiry.

My inquiry shows that instinct and habit are important for human behavior, but that we also have to acknowledge that human beings are intelligent, and thus capable of modifying behavior to achieve certain purposes. In my view, the picture of the human being as a being with mind and a sense of self enhances our understanding of these features of human life. It helps us fit human intelligence into a coherent whole.

I want to remind the reader that to get to these conclusions, it is not necessary to formulate and follow the conclusions of a pragmatic transcendental argument. On my conception of philosophical anthropologies, the orientation given is much more subtle than that. Here, the argument has served the purpose of giving the reader some idea of what that orientation is like, and where inquiry is headed.

The direction my inquiry has taken thus far indicates, I believe, that we can fruitfully think of human life as constituted in a number of shared human practices. Here is the origin of the different generalized others that we internalize, and here is also where responses and purposes are shared to such extent that a conversation of significant symbols is possible.

3.4 The Primacy of Human Practices

To view mind and self as capacities of intelligent beings involves, on a pragmatic approach, viewing them as generated in social processes. The relevant social processes are the ones where we interact with other persons in different ways. The model used thus far is that of different games, and Mead discusses examples like boxing and baseball. It should be clear, though, that basically, the relevant social processes are cooperative:

The process out of which the self arises is a social process which implies interaction of individuals in the group, implies the pre-existence of the group. It implies also certain cooperative activities in which the different members of the group are involved. ... Thus, there is a social process out of which selves arise and within which further differentiation, further evolution, further organization, take place.

This means that intelligent human beings take shape in the contexts where they cooperate with others to achieve various purposes. Since the contexts will differ

\[244\text{And, of course, they also depend for their existence on the physiological makeup of the human being.}\]

\[245\text{Mead 1934 p. 164. Of course, even games that involve competition are at bottom cooperative activities, since we participate for the purpose of playing the game.}\]

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and there will be a multitude of purposes directing cooperative activities, I suggest that we think of human beings as participating in a plurality of human practices.

When you think of human practices as cooperative activities, it might be tempting to draw an analogy with business corporations. The parallel would be that just as people with money form business corporations to better achieve some purposes, people have come together in different practices to improve their chances of gratifying some of their experienced needs. The problem with the analogy is that it still makes the existence of intelligent human beings somehow prior to the social processes in which I have claimed they are constituted. The sheer fact that the activities are cooperative does not establish that they were engaged in for the sake of cooperation. Another problem with making the existence of intelligent human beings prior to the social process is that such a view assumes that the experienced needs we have come together to gratify existed prior to the formation of practices. I believe that it is more reasonable to think of these needs, too, as being formed in social processes.

We have social processes whenever people interact in activities directed at the achievement of certain goals, regardless of whether we are aware of those goals or not. It follows that social processes are originally pre-reflective, because they are a necessary condition for the existence of intelligent beings. For Mead, social processes had their origin in behavioral patterns directed at certain physiological needs:

The behavior of all living organisms has a basically social aspect: the fundamental biological or physiological impulses and needs which lie at the basis of all such behavior—especially those of hunger and sex, those connected with nutrition and reproduction—are impulses and needs which, in the broadest sense, are social in character or have social implications, since they involve or require social situations and relations for their satisfaction by any given individual organism; and they thus constitute the foundation of all types or forms of social behavior, however simple or complex, crude or highly organized, rudimentary or well developed.

I do not think that we should understand this as a reductionist theory of human behavior, stating that every human activity is directed at the satisfaction of one of the needs of nutrition and reproduction even today. If you think of human beings as intelligent beings capable of reflection, then it should come as no surprise that they can develop other kinds of needs, which, in turn, may be the basis for other human practices. New forms of interaction are always possible, and may be necessitated in the course of human experience.

See Mead 1934 p. 233f., where he discusses and rejects that interpretation.

Vincent Colapietro, for instance, writes: “The full fact from which all human reflection originates and to which it appeals is our agency-in-the-world, our cumulative yet precarious, essentially purposive yet often unwitting, striving for some concrete good.” Colapietro 1992 p. 428.

Mead 1934 p. 227f.
A Pragmatic Approach to the Individuation of Human Practices

The suggestion made thus far is that human interaction goes on in a number of practices developed in a social context and directed at the gratification of different needs. It is thus regulated by the multitude of generalized others I introduced earlier. Depending on purposes and context, it is possible to individuate practices in a number of ways, and I would suggest that we can think of the difference as a function of the level at which individuation is made. These levels are discernible if we note the ambiguity of the term ‘experienced needs’.

You can claim that there are only a few human practices, since there are, in fact, very few human needs. This approach individuates human practices at a high level, and it might be inspired by the work of Abraham Maslow, particularly his list of basic human needs. For Maslow, what is special about the basic needs is that we cannot go behind them to identify them as functions or manifestations of some other “more fundamental aims of the individual,” like we can with most desires. The basic needs (which Maslow thinks are of an instinctive or hereditary nature) must be gratified to a certain extent if we are going to function well, and the frustration of one basic need can never be compensated for by the gratification of another basic need; something which also sets them apart from non-basic needs. The basic (deficiency) needs which Maslow has listed are physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness needs, and self-esteem needs. According to Maslow, we never experience the basic needs in themselves. What we experience is always some manifestation, which can be shown to depend on one of the basic needs. The form these manifestations get depends, presumably, on cultural as well as personal factors.

If you adopt Maslow’s view of needs, you can claim that there are only a few human practices, and that they are universally shared, since human beings everywhere have the same basic needs. The basic need that individuates the

250 Thorsén 1983 p. 34. See also Leyba 1968. There is a certain asymmetry between the different basic needs Maslow lists. For instance, according to Håkan Thorsén, among the physiological needs, we find needs for food, liquid, sleep, sex, and activity of the body. In the category belongingness needs, we find needs of affectionate relations with people, such as to have a spouse, children, friends, and so on. Now it is much easier to think of the latter as one basic need, while the different physiological needs are not so easily thus understood. For instance, having a number of close friends probably means that the need for a spouse is less intensely felt. Certain physiological deficiencies, though, cannot be compensated for even by unlimited access to something else. A lack of sleep, for instance, is not compensated for by excessive amounts of food. Therefore, it seems that the physiological needs are actually a number of basic needs, while the belongingness need (and also the safety need) is more reasonably construed as one basic need that manifests itself in different ways. Since this is an approach I shall not be using, let me just say that I shall understand a Maslow-inspired approach as saying that every basic need listed above is the origin of a single practice. This rather one-sided way of thinking only serves the purpose of being a helpful contrast to my own thinking.
252 I do not think that it is really a problem for this position that we only experience manifestations of the basic needs. You could still hold that the basic needs are the needs that give rise to different experienced
practice in question would be the common denominator that directs the large number of activities found within it. If, for example, you think of different Weltanschauungen as responses to the safety or belongingness needs, the conclusion is that they all belong to the same practice, a Weltanschauung-practice, if you like.

The other extreme position on the individuation of experienced needs would maintain that consciously felt desires is the proper ground for individuation of practices. The resulting number of human practices would be innumerable, since there are so many desires we experience every day. For instance, the desire for meat and the desire for potatoes give rise to different practices, and they cannot be reduced to a common, relatively speaking more basic, practice.

I am not sure whether it is possible to make the positions I have outlined plausible or not. They certainly require elaboration. But for me, they are useful for the purpose of identifying two extreme views which illustrate the scope of available levels for individuation of human practices. I claimed earlier, that what the proper level of individuation of human practices is, depends on the purposes for which individuation is made. Let me, therefore, remind the reader of my present purpose. It is, put briefly, to develop a pragmatic conception of human practices that can function as an analytical tool when I turn attention to religion. My evaluation of different ways of individuating human practices is directed by that purpose, and I have no intention of claiming that this is the only reasonable way to think of human practices.

There are drawbacks as well as advantages with both the positions I have identified. To start with the latter, pluralistic view of human practices, as I will call it, it has the advantage of being sensitive to the complexity and diversity of human life. The major drawback is that it is not really helpful for the purpose of understanding human life, because when we attempt to understand something, we often try to reduce diversity by drawing attention to common features of different phenomena. Here, the pluralistic view is not so useful. Another problem is that it is not very well suited for the object of my inquiry, that is, religion. On the pluralistic view, religion is not really a discernible phenomenon at all; instead, what we find is a vast number of practices within religion.

The appeal with a ‘Maslowian’ approach lies in the way it stresses that human practices must be understood in relation to the kind of beings we are. It is thus much better suited for the purpose of understanding human life than the pluralistic is. What is problematic, though, is that it is not sensitive enough to the concrete differences of human life. To think of all religious practices as developed as responses to a single need overlooks the way experienced needs are shaped in the course of developing practices. My purposes are, I would say,
better served by an approach which acknowledges that different religious practices have developed as responses to somewhat different needs.

Consequently, I opt for a middle position that makes use of the insights of both the extreme views, and is suited for my purposes. I shall use the term ‘experienced needs’ in a way that does not presuppose that they are reducible to a corresponding basic need. Those experienced needs are, however, different from conscious desires, and situated on a somewhat higher level, so it is possible to reduce the number of human practices (compared to the pluralistic view), but reduction should stop before we are left with the very few practices we get on the Maslowian approach. In other words, behind different conscious desires and needs, you can trace certain relatively speaking more basic needs, which different human practices are developed to help us gratify. The needs are basic in relation to the level of desires, but we need not think of them as basic needs the way Maslow thinks of them. This is the level of individuation that is most fruitful for my purposes, because it allows me to view religious traditions as different religious practices with more or less vague boundaries.

A valuable feature of the Maslowian approach which should be retained is its insistence that we should understand human behavior in relation to the kind of beings we are. I do not think this means (as it may have meant for Maslow) the kind of beings we really, or ultimately, are, as if anthropological inquiry were to give us a privileged description of the human being. Nonetheless, it is clear that the interpretative framework we set human phenomena into, that is, the picture of human life which directs philosophical practice, will influence the way we understand those phenomena. So let me suggest that different human practices say something about the kind of beings we are, and also, the other way round: seeing what kind of beings we are helps us understand different human practices.

What are the consequences of my middle position for the way we understand the experienced needs which generate religious practices? Well, I do not think that all religious practices have developed to meet the same experienced need. There may be certain differences even if they all have something to do with experienced needs. It is important, though, that I do not take it to be the case that a religious practice is the same thing as a church, or some other religious institution. I would rather say that churches and other religious institutions are generated (in a logical, not necessarily temporal sense) by religious practices. It is thus conceivable that there would be religious practices without any social institutions like churches, a clergy, and so on. Someone may object that this goes against the entire social approach I use to understand intelligence, mind, and self. Surely, the objector claims, we need social institutions to understand mind and self. That, I would reply, depends on what we mean by social institutions. To be sure, the rise of religion would, from my perspective, have something to do with people coming together and constituting a religious practice with a generalized other, and so on. That generalized other exists, however, independent of a church or a clergy. As a matter of fact, the generalized other will not normally take the form of an actually existing umpire, like the analogy with games might suggest, but is something we internalize. We can well imagine that all Christian institutions (like churches) would disappear but that there would still be a Christian practice (of course, the tradition would still have to be transmitted in some ways). In such a case, you can still say that there are (religious) social institutions.

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with the human condition. Neither do I think that the need for religion is a universally shared basic need. The experienced needs that I use to individuate different religious practices have taken shape as religious practices have developed. This is not the same as saying that those needs are constructed out of nothing. Certain impulses and tendencies to respond take shape in certain ways as different practices develop, just as was the case with instinct. It means, though, that there is no point in speaking of a pre-existent, or universal, human need for religion. I propose that religious practices must be understood in relation to the kind of beings we are, but we also have to be sensitive to the different experienced needs that the human condition can give rise to.

I shall not be much more specific here. My discussion of religious practices in chapter 4 will, I believe, throw further light on what the proper level of individuation of human practices is, given my purposes.

Anthropological inquiry from a pragmatic perspective thus presents human life, as well as the environment, as constituted in a large number of shared practices, which have developed for the purpose of gratifying different experienced needs. Let me continue, now, by looking closer at some philosophical topics to see how the position presented can be further developed.

3.5 Some Philosophical Topics Pragmatically Considered

I have no intention of giving a complete exposition of pragmatic philosophical thought here. The purposes of this section is to clarify for the reader how you may deal with certain philosophical topics from a pragmatic perspective, but also to give us the tools we need to develop and grasp the argument I shall be developing. The topics I discuss as well as the standpoints I consider are chosen with those purposes in mind. As regards the question of what philosophical practice might look like if a pragmatic philosophical anthropology is embraced, I think this study as a whole answers that question better than any brief exposition.

To claim, as I do, that our environment is constituted in different human practices, is quite different from saying that it is constructed in or by these practices. It makes no sense to claim that there would be nothing left if all human beings were to die tomorrow, or that we are free to decide what the environment is like. If everyone died there would still be a world, just as there was a world before human beings came into existence. Our world, however, referring to the environment in which intelligent beings lead their lives, is constituted in shared human practices. Changing those practices means changing the environment in which we live. This is a world made up of objects, states of affairs, events, and so on with meanings, which influence our behavior towards them. Furthermore, it is in these practice-constituted contexts and in relation to the activities going on in them that our talk of things as real or unreal, existing
or non-existent, part of our environment or not, has its origin and proper home. Whether we count something as part of our environment or not depends on the shape that our practices take, and such judgments will be made by taking the perspective of the generalized other of different practices.

All the same, we are never slaves under the generalized others of different practices. Even though we internalize them (the “me”), novelty is still possible. In fact, it is an undeniable feature of human life, and Mead postulated the “I” as a phase of the self to make sense of this. Once we are constituted as intelligent beings, critical reflection on the practices to which we belong is possible, and this means that criticism is conceivable in any practice.

**Human Practices and Conceptual Relativity**

I think of human practices as containing different *conceptualizations*, a term which I, for reasons given later, prefer to the more familiar *conceptual scheme*. H. S. Thayer argues that adopting a conceptual scheme-approach to philosophical reflection is a natural consequence of the insight that the human being is a being with a lot of interests or needs. They give rise to a variety of human activities (practices), and it is within these different ways of interacting with the environment concepts are developed and get their meaning:

> We say “here is a pen,” pointing or otherwise expanding the directive for ‘here.’ A geometer, with purely professional interests for the moment, might report his observation of a cylinder; geometry knows no pens. A psychologist will see a stimulus object or perhaps a phallic symbol. …

> [W]hat is of importance pragmatically is not a futile declaration of probity or superiority between contexts, but the grounds and validation of judgments within the respective contexts. The contexts thus acknowledged do not have to be taken as mutually competitive attempts to dominate the market of reality.\(^{254}\)

Thayer concludes: “[w]e can make our choices among the conceptual schemes that have evolved and proved effective in different contexts, the schemes of common sense, geometry, psychology, and the like.”\(^{255}\) More recently, a similar idea, that of *conceptual relativity*, has been developed by Hilary Putnam as part of his internal or pragmatic realist alternative to metaphysical realism.\(^{256}\)

Putnam’s favorite example of conceptual relativity is the case where you get different answers to a trivial question like how many objects there are on a table. Suppose that on the table, there lies a red, a blue, and a green ball. In normal discourse, we would say that there are three objects on the table. Someone who also counts mereological sums as objects claims to find seven

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\(^{254}\) Thayer 1981 p. 353f.

\(^{255}\) Thayer 1981 p. 354.

\(^{256}\) I will return to this in the section on truth and reality.
According to Putnam, these two answers do not contradict one another, since the concept ‘object’ is used in two different senses. Just like Thayer, Putnam rejects the idea that one answer will be correct in itself, without a specified relation to a conceptual scheme:

I believe there are different uses of “object” and no metaphysically privileged use (and no “universe of all objects”). In particular, the idea that there is a fixed, philosophically established notion of “object” (or “entity”) in which it makes sense to ask “Are mereological sums objects?” … is an idea I reject. But I do not reject the idea that in an ordinary sense of the phrase “state of affairs” the “same state of affairs” can be described either by saying that “There are three objects on the table” or “There are seven objects (counting mereological sums) on the table.”

I think Thayer and Putnam are right when they claim that once we acknowledge that conceptual schemes form part of the practices we have developed in response to certain interests (or needs), then we also realize that there is no privileged description of the world to be had. Different descriptions result from different purposes, which give rise to different practices, and there is no reason to think that one practice is better suited than all the others for describing the world as it is really is. Hence I propose that in a practice, we conceptualize the environment in a certain way that is a function of the kind of practice it is. Thus understood, a conceptualization is an essential part of any human practice.

To say that conceptualizations are part of different human practices shows how intimate the relation is between participating in a practice and mastering the practice’s conceptualization. You cannot participate in a practice unless you are a competent user of its conceptualization. Understanding concepts involves knowing how to use them, so if you want to understand claims that are made in a particular conceptualization, you also have to be familiar with the practice where the claims are made.

The intimate relation between a practice and its conceptualization is what makes me prefer the term ‘conceptualization’ to ‘conceptual scheme’. The latter might, in my opinion, more easily give the impression that conceptual schemes are entities we can identify and deal with in isolation from the practices where they belong, and then say that a practice has or uses a particular conceptual scheme. There is a significant risk that we thereby make the relation between practices and conceptualizations too weak. There just could not be practices without conceptualizations, just as there could not be conceptualizations without practices. Talk of conceptual schemes also, in my opinion, increases the risk that we think we can make choices between them. That, too, means that we make the link between human life (practices) and our conceptualizations too weak. Nevertheless, it is still possible to sometimes make the point Putnam

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257 So the objects A, B, and C also make up the objects A+B, A+C, B+C, and A+B+C.
makes above, that there are different ways of describing a situation, ways which depend on the purposes for which the description is made.

I also think that nothing said thus far indicates that criticism of a conceptualization is impossible. Hilary Putnam comments that if some people "were foolish enough to pick a conceptual system that told them they could fly and act upon it by jumping out of a window," these people would "if they were lucky enough to survive," have to admit that there are better and worse conceptualizations.259 This, in turn, goes back on my idea that practices have developed to serve certain purposes, and these purposes dictate the way practices can develop in the environment where we are situated. Clearly, a critique of the conceptualization is also a critique of the practice of which it is part. Practices (and conceptualizations, as part of practices) are liable to criticism if we can show that they are inadequate in relation to the purpose for which they were worked out; that is, to gratify certain experienced needs in a satisfactory way in the kind of environment we interact with.

If you acknowledge that there are different conceptualizations, then you also have to acknowledge that concepts, which figure in more than one conceptualization, will be used in different ways. To what extent is there overlap between these ways? The answer to that question depends, I think, on the way we individuate different practices. Put bluntly: we will find less overlap if we think that there are only a few human practices, and more overlap if we think that there are many human practices. Since I have chosen a middle position, I think that we can expect rather significant overlap among certain practices, but less overlap with others. A case of significant overlap may be the way 'real' is used in different theistic religious practices when the claim is made that God is real. We have less overlap in relation to claims such as 'Peter's worry is real enough,' or 'He is not a real poet, but a fraud.' Once you think of the different practices where such claims belong, it is not surprising that you find certain differences in the way such concepts are used.

The Habitual Nature of Perception: The Importance of Funded Meanings

Perception normally requires no effort on our part. We immediately see what is before us, and so on. In that way, sense perception is generally habitual; most of the time, we immediately orient ourselves in our environment without surprise or hesitation.

Nevertheless, perception is, from a pragmatic perspective, an achievement. It is something you learn to do as you are socialized into different human practices, just as was the case with learning how to use the concepts that make up a practice’s conceptualization.260 Perception and action are intimately related

259 Putnam 1981 p. 54.
260 A point succinctly made in Gillett 1988, who uses a Wittgensteinian perspective.
ways of interacting with the environment, and both take place in a practice-constituted environment, where perception is a way of anticipating adjustments we should make. Just like with other ways of interacting with the environment, the human being learns, in time, to take habits in perception. According to Dewey, what I call perception always involves "a complex apparatus of habits, of accepted meanings and techniques."[^261] These accepted meanings, which I shall call funded meanings, are, of course, the meanings that things, persons, and events have acquired in different human practices. In my discussion of meaning, I suggested that the meaning of something is what we expect from it, and the uses to which it can be put.[^260] This is, for instance, the way a gesture has meaning: it signals some intention and evokes certain responses in us. The same thing goes, I suggested, for objects and events as well. This gives a clue to how to think of perception: perceiving means discerning meanings in order to interact with what we encounter to achieve certain goals. Dewey writes:

> When an event has meaning, its potential consequences become its integral and funded feature. When the potential consequences are important and repeated, they form the very nature and essence of a thing, its defining, identifying, and distinguishing form. ... Thus we become capable of perceiving things instead of merely feeling and having them. To perceive is to acknowledge unattained possibilities; it is to refer the present to consequences, apparition to issue, and thereby to behave in deference to the connections of events.^[264]

‘Funded meanings’ is a term that refers both to capacities of perceivers (they are funded in us and direct perception) and to features of the environment (anything which is perceived has meaning). That is, the perceiver draws on a set of funded meanings, and they are also the meanings funded in the things, persons, events, and so on she encounters in a practice-constituted environment. The two meanings of the term are thus intimately related.

I think that now, we see even clearer the important role practices play in human life, since belonging to a practice is necessary for being a competent perceiver (giving you a set of funded meanings), and if you are not a competent perceiver, you have no environment that you can deal intelligently with. So when I claim that practices constitute our environment, I am suggesting that the environment in which we find ourselves as intelligent beings, is an environment of funded meanings, meanings given by the different practices to which we belong.

This is not to deny that what we perceive is made up of things like hammers, pens, people, flowers, and so on. But these things are what they are for us as parts of a practice-constituted environment where they have certain meanings for us, which are generated in interaction with the environment, and which

[^262]: The term comes from Dewey 1980.
[^260]: See 3.3.
[^264]: Dewey 1958 p. 182. Dewey’s emphasis.
direct future interaction. This is the sense in which perception is an achievement, for it is something we must learn to do, and learning to perceive is an essential part of what it is to become a human being capable of acting intelligently. To perceive, we need to be competent, and the necessary competence is acquired as we are socialized into different human practices.

Even if most perception is habitual, this is not always the case. Dewey makes a useful distinction that I suggest can be used to discern two kinds of perception: primary and reflective. Primary perception is the dominant form of perception, and it requires virtually no conscious effort. It holds sway as long as there are no surprises or challenges calling for conscious attention:

The familiar does not consciously appear, save in an unexpected, novel, situation, where the familiar presents itself in a new light and is therefore not wholly familiar. Our deepest-seated habits are precisely those of which we have least awareness. When they operate in a situation to which they are not accustomed, in an unusual situation, a new adjustment is required. Hence there is shock, and an accompanying perception of dissolving and reforming meaning.

If you, for example, go to work taking the familiar route, almost no conscious effort is required. It is only when something unexpected happens that you get a shift from primary to reflective perception. As Frank Ryan puts it:

The familiar arrangement of furniture in a room, the hypnotic passage of lines on a highway, the egg-salad sandwich grabbed on the run, are what they are in a familiar context. It is the interruption of this integrated whole—the chair discovered mysteriously overturned, the suddenly onrushing barricade, the crack of a tooth on an eggshell—that marks the transition to cognitive focus, the conscious discrimination of "myself" and "other," and the recognized need for a plan.

Reflective perception replaces primary perception as we realize that there is need for inquiry. However, as Ryan’s examples above demonstrate, reflective perception also occurs in situations where we would not say that inquiry is called for, like the case where our teeth bite into an eggshell. The cases of reflective perception of interest for us, however, are those where there is an experienced insufficiency of primary perception, signaled by an insecurity about what to expect, and what to do. The need for inquiry is thus in part a need for a reconstruction of primary perception, and hence a reconstruction of funded

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265 But of course, perception also requires that the subject has certain capacities, including physiological ones, and we may well admit that rudimentary forms of perception are manifested by infants and some non-human species as well. However, adult human perception is much more complex than that.

266 Dewey talks of primary and reflective experience, but the distinction applies equally well to perception as I use the term here. I shall distinguish between perception and experience in 4.4.


269 Even so, our cognitive focus is directed to that event, and concluding that no inquiry is called for, requires the making of an intelligent judgment.
meanings. The problem we institute is, however, never limited to the funded meanings of primary perception: it concerns the way we interact with the environment generally, and thus our ways of acting, as well as our ways of perceiving.

The connection between reflective perception and inquiry should not be taken to imply that reflective perception is something other than perception of meanings. What we strive for is to expand and reconstruct the funded meanings we have previously drawn on in a way that will enable us to handle the problematic situation we have encountered. This does not mean that the realm of meanings is abandoned.

Once the problem encountered is resolved, a new equilibrium is established. We now draw on a reconstructed set of funded meanings, modified in accordance with the outcome of inquiry. Our ways of interacting with the environment, including perception, become more diversified and fruitful than before, and this also means that the environment expands.

**Truth as Agreement with Reality**

Pragmatic theories of truth are well-known, and heavily criticized. The pragmatists were discontent with traditional correspondence definitions of truth, where truth is defined in terms of a pictorial correspondence-relation between a belief or a proposition, and a state of affairs, and where a true belief is thought of as *picturing* states of affairs in an independent reality. Even if the definition has intuitive appeal, it cannot be accepted as a general characterization of truth, and the reason is that there are just too many cases where it hardly makes sense. Thus James:

> Shut your eyes and think of yonder clock on the wall, and you get just such a true picture or copy of its dial. But your idea of its ‘works’ (unless you are a clock-maker) is much less of a copy, yet it passes muster, for it in no way clashes with the reality. ... And when you speak of the ‘time-keeping function’ of the clock, or of its spring’s ‘elasticity,’ it is hard to see exactly what your ideas can copy.

More recently, Paul Moser has pointed out that similar problems attach to any correspondence theory of truth which asserts that there is some pictorial isomorphism between a proposition and reality: there are too many propositions that we call true where the alleged isomorphism does not make sense.

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271 I shall simply assume that beliefs express propositions, and that propositions are “truth-bearers.” Having said that, I shall talk of true beliefs, as well as true propositions. For a discussion of what to count as truth-bearers, see Alston 1996.
272 James 1995 p. 77. See also p. 82.
Moser suggests, however, that we do not have to discard correspondence theories of truth entirely. A defensible correspondence theory of truth should not attempt to specify what the supposed correspondence relation between true propositions and states of affairs is like. A "minimal" correspondence theory of truth merely states that "[t]he claim that a proposition \( P \) is true means that things are as they are stated to be by \( P \)."\(^{274}\) A proposition which does not meet this requirement cannot be called true.\(^{275}\) What makes this a correspondence theory of truth is that it still acknowledges that truth depends on what reality is like, and it is "a function of a representational relation between the two sides of a proposition/world duality."\(^{276}\) Put this way, I see no problem with saying that truth can be characterized in terms such as "agreement with reality."\(^{277}\) But then, it is important that the "world," or "reality," which true propositions agree with, is the practice-constituted environment within which we lead our lives.

Simply characterizing truth in terms of correspondence, or, as I prefer, agreement with reality, says very little about what criteria we can use to determine whether a certain proposition is true or false, since it does not specify what the relation between true propositions and states of affairs is like, or how to tell when it obtains. James made the provocative suggestion that the only criterion we can have for checking agreement with reality is satisfaction, or utility.\(^{278}\) Truth is not independent of our purposes, and what true beliefs have in common is that they pay.\(^{279}\) They thus serve our purposes well and can be relied on when we act. False beliefs are those which, when acted upon, lead to frustration and failure.

The connection between truth and our purposes can be more or less direct, though. If you think of the relation as direct, then all you have to do to determine whether a proposition is true or not, is to check whether it serves our purposes, and leads to satisfaction. This is, however, a problematic criterion of truth, because it makes the truth-value of propositions unstable, and dependent on our present purposes. Is a proposition really true on the days when it serves our purposes, and false on the days when it does not? That idea is incompatible with an important property of propositions, namely, that they have stable truth-values.\(^{280}\)

I prefer to think of the relation between the criteria for truth and our purposes as an indirect relation. It would be strange to claim that the purpose of different practices had no implications for the way we determine whether propositions made within it are true or false. This is important, and it means

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\(^{275}\) For the relation between Moser’s minimal correspondence definition of truth and Alfred Tarski’s schema T, see Moser 1989 p. 27f.

\(^{276}\) Moser 1989 p. 26f.

\(^{277}\) The term ‘agreement’ is used in James 1995.

\(^{278}\) For detailed treatments of James’s view of truth, see Chisholm 1992, Putnam 1997.

\(^{279}\) James 1995 p. 84.

that to get a grip on the way people judge propositions to be true or false in a practice, you should have some idea about the purposes the practice serves.281

A consequence of making the relation between truth and our purposes indirect, is that we should not apply the test of satisfaction of purposes on the level of individual propositions. There are practice-specific criteria at work as we determine whether a certain proposition is true or false. These criteria have not, however, developed independently of the purposes for which the practice was worked out, and the shape its conceptualization has taken. We have to take those things into account to understand why the criteria used in a particular practice look the way they do. For instance, if your goal is to understand religious practices, it will be helpful to consider the way religious believers think you can determine whether it is true that God is real. Here, I think we can learn important things about what people mean when they say that God is real, and what to expect of a God that is real and not an illusion, and so on. Understanding the way participants in a practice determine whether a proposition is true or not is thus an important step towards understanding the practice’s conceptualization, as well as the purposes for which the practice has been worked out. There is an intimate relation between these tasks.

Pragmatic Realism

To further elucidate my pragmatic view on truth, I want to make some remarks on the notorious philosophical debate over realism and antirealism. As we will see, the upshot of a pragmatic approach to this debate is that both sides are equally problematic.

According to Hilary Putnam, the metaphysical realist philosopher adheres to the following theses: (i) "the world consists of some fixed totality of mind-independent objects." (ii) "There is exactly one true description of 'the way the world is.'" (iii) "Truth involves some sort of correspondence relation between words or thought-signs and external things and sets of things."282

The antirealist’s response to metaphysical realism is to reject one or several of these theses. The pragmatic position developed here could perhaps be understood as a brand of antirealism in the following way. You may interpret it as claiming that (i) and (ii) must be rejected (remember the plurality of conceptualizations we draw on). Thesis (iii) is acceptable only if we modify the meaning of terms like 'correspondence', 'external', and so on; otherwise, (iii), too, must be rejected. In all, it looks as if pragmatism (as I understand it)

281 My discussion of a direct and an indirect relation between truth and our purposes is inspired by Nicholas Rescher’s distinction between two kinds of pragmatism, thesis pragmatism and method pragmatism. Method pragmatism asserts that there is an indirect relation between truth and satisfaction, and urges that we employ the methods of determining truth and falsity that have proved useful in the past. See Rescher 1977 chap. IV–V.
opposes all of metaphysical realism’s theses. I, however, think that this is not
the right way to approach the question of realism. It is important that we
distinguish between rejecting metaphysical realism in favor of some kind of
antirealism on the one hand, and rejecting a picture which metaphysical realists
and antirealists share, on the other. Let me illustrate by looking at one of the
routes to an antirealist position, and see what is problematic with it.

Many opponents to metaphysical realism focus on the problems it has with
truth. Typically, the critics point to the inability of metaphysical realists to
specify what the alleged correspondence between propositions and independent
reality is like. Douglas McDermid labels this critique of correspondence theories
of truth the comparison objection, and presents it thus:

If truth were a correspondence with the facts, then we could verify our belief that \( p \) only if
we could somehow confront \( p \) with the relevant portion(s) of reality and confirm that the two
"fit" or "agree." Since we cannot possibly perform such a comparison, the intuitively ap-
pealing idea that truth is correspondence with reality ironically results in something virtually
no-one wants to accept—namely, skepticism. Unless we are prepared to concede that
knowledge of the external world is an impossibility, we must give up the correspondence
theory in favor of some conception of truth that can do justice to our claims to know.\(^{283}\)

Actually there are two different objections here which try to establish that
correspondence theories result in skepticism.\(^{284}\) First, it is the objection that
nothing enlightening is said about what the correspondence relation they assert
between propositions and reality is like. Since I have already indicated how to
deal with that problem, I shall not discuss it again here. Second, we have the
objection that nothing is said about how to determine whether there is a corre-
spondence relation between a proposition and independent reality. That objection
has to be met if we want to avoid skepticism.

The comparison objection thus points to problems with metaphysical real-

isim, but it still grants that the metaphysical realist picture of truth and reality is
intelligible. The problem with metaphysical realism is, according to the com-
parison objection, that since we are beings with limited epistemic capacities,
any confrontation of, or comparison between, propositions and an independent
reality is out of the question. If you still claim that this is the way to test
whether propositions are true or not, you must concede that we shall never be
in a position to determine the truth or falsity of any proposition.\(^{285}\) We lack the

\(^{283}\) McDermid 1998 p. 776.

\(^{284}\) According to McDermid, classical pragmatists like Peirce, James and Dewey, as well as allegedly pragmatic
contemporary philosophers like Putnam, Richard Rorty, Nicholas Rescher and Nelson Goodman, all
endorse the comparison objection. See also Bontekoe 1990 for a similar characterization of Rorty’s
critique of metaphysical realism.

\(^{285}\) The substitute for a correspondence theory of truth is an account of truth in terms of verification.
McDermid claims that the correspondence theorist can overcome the comparison objection (1998 pp.
797ff.), but whether he is right or not is unimportant for my purposes, since I am not using that kind of
argument against metaphysical realism.
access to independent reality which metaphysical realism needs to avoid skepticism.

The comparison objection is a good example of a response to metaphysical realism which rejects it, but all the same views it as an intelligible position. I, on the other hand, think that the problem that metaphysical realists and most of their adversaries share is that it is hard to make theses (i) and (ii) intelligible, and thus something to accept or reject at all. To think that the world consists of a set of mind-independent (and practice-independent) objects, and to think that there is one and only one true description of it, presupposes that there exists a conceptualization disconnected from any practices, and thus any human purposes. Most antirealists (tacitly) accept that presupposition, but they immediately add that we lack access to that conceptualization, so we should understand truth in some other way to avoid skepticism. But where would that conceptualization come from, and how could it be relevant for human beings? To further illustrate the problems with a simple rejection of metaphysical realism’s theses, let us look closer at some themes which figure in the ongoing exchange between Putnam and Richard Rorty.

Rorty frequently complains that metaphysical realism asks of us to “step outside our skins” and thus transcend the limitations of culture or tradition, something he thinks is impossible.286 The God’s eye-view of the world metaphysical realism wants to attain is simply unavailable to beings like us. Rorty concludes that we face a forced choice: either revive and defend metaphysical realism, or alternatively, in the words of James Conant, ”give up on the (naive) idea that beliefs can be justified by how things stand in the world (and opt for either some sort of coherence theory or some form of skepticism).”287 Putnam has retorted that Rorty is still in the grips of a metaphysical realist picture, although his conclusion is that we are secluded from reality as it is in itself. All we have is the different cultural traditions we have developed. We have to make do without knowledge of the ”way the world is,” knowledge that, if we had it, would help us judge how close different culturally conditioned ways of describing the world come to the way it really is.288 As this knowledge cannot be had, solidarity is the proper substitute for objectivity.289

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286 Rorty 1982 p. xxiv.
287 Conant 1994 p. xxviii. Rorty’s suggestion is that truth is not something we can have interesting philosophical theories about. Rorty 1982 pp. 162–166.
288 See, e.g., Rorty 1982 p. xxxvii. As James Conant shows (1994 p. xxxi), this is not the only strategy Rorty uses when arguing against metaphysical realism. In some of his later writings, he is more concerned with claiming that we should discard the metaphysical realist picture as one that is not fruitful for our purposes (like in Rorty 1993). I leave those arguments aside here.
Rorty’s position is, I believe, more sophisticated than it sometimes appears, and I am not out to refute him. What is important for me is the way he, in some of his writings, exemplify a tendency to remain in the grips of the metaphysical realist picture.

Putnam agrees with Rorty that the idea of standing outside language for the purpose of comparing it to something else (like “the world”) is an idea we must reject. But, he goes on, “if we agree that it is unintelligible to say, ‘We sometimes succeed in comparing our language and thought with reality as it is in itself,’ then we should realize that it is also unintelligible to say, ‘It is impossible to stand outside and compare our thought and language with the world.’” And Putnam continues:

Rorty’s real worry is this: How can one say that sentences are “made true” by objects if objects aren’t “what they are independent of my way of talking”? And my reply is that Rorty’s very vocabulary contains philosophical assumptions that one should not accept. Talk of “independent existence” makes little sense when what is at stake is neither ordinary causal nor ordinary logical independence. … In any sense of “independent” I can understand, whether the sky is blue is independent of the way we talk.

That is, Rorty, to make his point (that we can never compare our language, conceptualization, conceptual scheme, or what have you, with an independent reality to see whether language really hooks on to the world or not), stretches the meaning of the term ‘independent’ until we no longer know what the term means. It is suddenly supposed to refer to a quality which is quite different from what it ordinarily refers to in the contexts where we know how to use it. Both metaphysical realists and antirealists have to thus stretch the meaning of ‘independent’ to state their respective positions. But in fact, this is what, according to Putnam, makes both positions unintelligible (rather than false). For example: is the sky blue independent of our conceptualizations even in principle? There are conceptualizations where the concept ‘blue’ does not figure, in which certain scientific descriptions of the atmosphere are made. Those descriptions, too, belong to conceptualizations generated in human practices, and there is nothing problematic about that. Problems emerge only if we ask whether one of those conceptualizations describes the world as it is independently of any perspective, or if we claim that they cannot describe the world the way it is, since the conceptualizations which are available to us are humanly constituted. As soon as you acknowledge that conceptualizations are embedded in practices, and that practices are developed for certain human purposes, you realize that

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290 Jeffrey Stout draws attention to Rorty’s unfortunate use of (carelessly formulated) “pithy little formulae” which tends to polarize discussion and conceal some of the nuances of his thought. Stout 1989 p. 246. For different suggestions about what it is that Putnam and Rorty disagree over, see Case 1995, Hartz 1991, Lee Jackson 1988, Forster 1992. For an original defense of Rorty, see Nielsen 1996.


the idea of a conceptualization which describes the world as it is independent of any perspective is something like a fantasy. It is not so much that we cannot formulate that conceptualization; it is rather that we have no idea what it means to say that there is a conceptualization that is the world’s own conceptualization.

All the same, Putnam goes on, nothing prevents us from saying true things about an independent reality once we use terms like ‘independent’ in ways that make sense: “If the notion of an absolute point of view is unintelligible, then not being able to speak from the absolute point of view is no incapacity.” Meta-

physical realist and antirealist positions go together with a view of reference and meaning far removed from my position, and that is why I believe that a pragmatic approach to the philosophical discussion of realism should be dis-

tinguished from the antirealist’s position. If you agree that terms like ‘independent’ have meaning within our practices, a meaning related to the uses to which they are put, then you should also agree that asking questions like ‘But what is the reality which lies beyond and is independent of all our practices like?’ involves stretching the meaning of ‘independent’ so we are hard put to even imagine what an answer to that question might look like. All the same, we are not forced to give up the idea that our language represents reality, or that truth can be understood in terms of agreement with a practice-

constituted reality.

The way to get out of the metaphysical realist picture’s grip is thus to deny its intelligibility. Let us not suppose that there is a more profound use of terms like ‘independent reality’ than the ones generated in our practices, which the metaphysical realist/antirealist positions can draw on to state their positions. I want to call this position pragmatic realism, because it is realist about the environment in which we actually live, the practice-constituted reality in which talk of true and false, real and unreal, has its proper home. There is no point in thinking about the human being as shut off from a reality that, if accessible, would help philosophers to evaluate different human practices to see how good they are at depicting that reality. I also see no point in claiming that we are cut off from the truth about what kind of being the human being really is, a truth which, if available, could help us judge which of all the human practices that are responses to genuine human needs. Just as there is no single correct

294 As a final remark on the Putnam-Rorty debate, can we say that their different standpoints make a real difference anywhere? In many ways, they are united in their struggle against a metaphysical realist perspective, with its often reductionist commitment to natural science as our only source of knowledge. But I believe that it makes a certain difference whether you remain in the grips of a picture or if you reject it entirely, especially as regards alternative philosophical approaches. I will not go into those possible differences here, however.
295 What I mean is this: if there was a single correct description of the human being as she really is, you could use that description to distinguish the genuine human needs from the illusory. The genuine needs are the needs that organisms with that (physical and mental) constitution have to gratify to function well; all the others are illusory. Practices that are generated by illusory needs are, consequently, less valuable.
description of the world, there is no single correct description of the human
being. The normative force of philosophical reflection is not, for a pragmatic
realist, dependent on the assumption that there is such a privileged description
draw on.\textsuperscript{296}

### 3.6 Summary: Understanding Human Practices

In 1.5, I claimed that even though my study is problem-oriented and not pri-
marily concerned with the history of philosophy, my idea of a shared pragmatic
philosophical anthropology enables me to make some historical claims about
pragmatism. What, exactly, are those claims?

As should be clear by now, the main idea is that the classical pragmatists
do not share a set of standpoints, and hardly even a philosophical method.
Instead, they share an interpretative framework which gives their philosophical
reflections a certain orientation. On my view, that interpretative framework,
namely, a pragmatic philosophical anthropology, is not propositional, but
somewhat like a picture gradually taking shape in the course of philosophical
reflection. A pragmatic philosophical anthropology presents human beings as
biologically and socially constituted organisms, with the capacity to act
intelligently in order to attain and uphold equilibrium with the environment in
which they live. The orientation given by that picture of the human condition is
what the pragmatists share.

My brief outline far from exhausts the picture, but it gives us a fairly good
idea about its basic form. The agreement you get from sharing that philosophical
anthropology gives no guarantee that all pragmatists develop identical philo-
sophical positions; the history of pragmatism inexorably falsifies such claims.
Nevertheless, I believe that it is possible to come to see that such agreement
exists between different thinkers, and that this can help us understand them
better. At the same time, we also gain a deeper understanding of the movement
to which they belong.

From the perspective of the pragmatic approach taken here, people who
participate in different practices live in partially different environments. All the
same, those differences should not be exaggerated. I think that it is possible to
understand a practice which you are not part of, and I also think that once you
have gained that understanding, you are able to understand claims made within
the practice.

The philosophical method for individuating and understanding practices
which I advocate here, suggests that we approach practices by trying to see
what experienced need they respond to. That way, we can detect the purposes

\textsuperscript{296}I believe that this approach runs a significant risk of legitimizing cultural imperialism. Anyway, it
rests on unacceptable philosophical presuppositions, and is thus not an option for pragmatic realism.

\textsuperscript{296}As should be clear from my discussion of philosophy as criticism in 1.7.
for which the practice was developed. This means that you now understand the practice better than before, because you are not puzzled by it anymore. In the process of trying to understand human practices, we should be aware of the orientation that our philosophical anthropology gives us in the way we think of the human being, as well as of different human practices.

There is certainly a risk that we occasionally misunderstand some practice, especially if we are unfamiliar with it. Misunderstandings will show themselves in an incapacity to make sense of certain features of the practice, and in an incapacity to deal with it, and its elements, in fruitful ways. On the other hand, understanding is essential for coming to terms with cases of conflict and disagreement. It is also rewarding since it might enrich your own perspective in a number of ways.

I now want to make use of the proposed method in an analysis of religious practices. The results of that analysis will play an important role in the development of my metaphilosophical pragmatic argument.

\footnote{See my discussion of understanding in 2.2.}

\footnote{In Winch 1970, Peter Winch criticizes influential cultural anthropologists for their inability to understand primitive societies, and especially practices involving magic and witchcraft. Even sophisticated researchers can be misled by superficial similarities between our society and theirs, so attempting to understand an alien life-form is certainly no easy task. On the other hand, Winch thinks that we can understand alien life-forms by seeing similarities with our own, though relevant similarities are more subtle than most cultural anthropologists think.

The kind of understanding Winch seeks is, I would say, the understanding which arises as we come to see the point of a practice. If we are interested in that kind of understanding, I believe that a promising start is to ask what experienced need a certain practice is a response to (provided that we make use of an adequate view of what we mean by ‘experienced need’). This will involve certain views about the kind of being humans are, and what it is in the human condition that makes us experience certain needs. You do not have to become part of the practice or even the society where the practice is embedded to be able to ask this kind of questions. I do not, however, think that it is always easy to understand practices which are familiar to us (i.e., exist in our own society), and virtually impossible to understand alien practices (that have perished, or exist in societies rather different from our). Caution is required in both cases.}
CHAPTER 4
A Pragmatic Analysis of Religion and Religious Experience

4.1 Introductory Remarks

So far my inquiry indicates that there is a strong connection between the function a certain practice performs in human life, the goods we find in that practice, and the way in which claims made within the practice should be understood. In order to identify the goods of religion and to understand claims made within a religious practice, like the claim that God is real and not an illusion, we need to attend to the function religious practices perform in human life.

Developing my argument thus requires that we also develop an understanding of the function of religious practices. Hence, the larger part of this chapter supplies what you may call a functional analysis of religious practices. To undertake it, I shall make use of the method for individuating and understanding human practices outlined in chapter 3. Here, as elsewhere, the discussion is mainly centered on Western Christianity. I start with a discussion of views of life as conceptions of human flourishing. Then, I spell out the special function a religious practice can serve in human life, a function which, I take it, is related to the fact that we are beings with views of life. I will pay special attention to the role religious experience plays in religious practices, and develop a pragmatic conception of experience (with emphasis put on religious experience), drawn from the context of esthetic experience.

Once we have a picture of the function of religious practices in human life, we are also capable of specifying what the goods of religion are. Before the chapter is drawn to a close, I shall also discuss in what sense the present position can be said to be reductionist, and in what not. This is important, since it is a common view that pragmatic conceptions of religion are reductionist, and that reductionist conceptions of religion are incapable of preserving the goods
of religion. Therefore, it is crucial for my developing argument to show why my conception of religion is not vulnerable to such charges.

I am well aware that religious practices have many functions in the individual’s life as well as in a social context. Without denying their significance, I want to draw attention to a function I believe is important for a philosophical discussion of the role religion plays in many people’s lives. This is the kind of function which is important for my developing argument.

4.2 Views of Life Outlined

When approaching views of life, there are three separate albeit related questions we can ask:

1. Why do people have views of life? This is not a question about why a certain person has a certain view of life. Rather, it focuses on the conditions of human life, which are important for understanding why people have views of life at all, or why we are beings with views of life.
2. What function do views of life have in our lives? What are they good for?
3. What is a view of life? What does it consist of?

These three questions suggest three different approaches to views of life. While the first question concentrates on what you may call the conditions of origin, or the transcendental conditions, of views of life, question (2) addresses the function of a view of life, and question (3) is oriented towards the substance of views of life. The order in which you deal with them probably makes a difference for what the answers will be like. If you start out with a clear idea of what a view of life consists of, then this will determine, to a significant extent, the way you think of views of life in other respects as well. In this chapter, I shall not deal with the questions in complete isolation from one another, but my inquiry will proceed in the order I have given these questions above. Towards the end of this section, I shall return to the questions to indicate how I believe they should be answered.

I shall assume that views of life are a function of the kind of beings we are, and the conditions under which we find ourselves in a world that is not entirely predictable, and where the outcome of events and actions undertaken make a difference for us. We are contingent beings, that cannot help reacting to things going on around us, and attaching value to some of them. In other words, we care about what happens. This is part of what it is to have developed as beings with minds in a world where equilibrium with the environment is possible, but something which we must struggle to attain. We do not just respond instinctively or habitually to what happens; we also reflect on different courses of events and

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296 At least in their current shape.
assess them in relation to what we value, or care about. In the course of such reflection, I would claim that we develop views of life.

This development would not take place unless it was true that things, persons, and events carry meanings for us, and that some of these meanings are related to the fact that we care about certain things and experience them to be important and valuable. There is thus a close relationship between the transcendental conditions for intelligent thought and action and the transcendental conditions for views of life. It is in a world like ours, and for beings like us, that views of life are important. In the world of constant flux, they would make no difference because they would not improve our ways of interacting with the environment. In the world where everything is finished, there is no need to act and direct your life in any particular way. In our world, however, we need to orient ourselves in order to enable fruitful interaction with the environment and thus make a more significant life possible. Part of this is done by developing views of life, which offer guidance concerning how to understand and act in different situations. The guidance consists of the way they help us identify certain values that we feel should be preserved and promoted.

Views of Life and a Primary Determinant of Existential Meaning

Vincent Brümmer is one of the philosophers of religion who have drawn attention to the close link between our views of life and our values. In fact, he defines a view of life as "the total set of norms, ideals, and eschatological expectations in terms of which someone directs and assesses his way of life."300 According to Brümmer, these norms and ideals stand in a relation of dependency to an ultimate value, and it is in relation to the ultimate value other things and states of affairs are properly assigned different values.

The ultimate value of a view of life is identified in the following way. Every view of life recognizes an entity, a person, or a state of affairs (for instance God, yourself, a charismatic leader, the classless society) as distinct from everything else because it impresses us as being more important/valuable than anything else. This 'something,' which I take to stand for whatever is viewed as ultimately valuable, is the view of life’s primary determinant of meaning. It is the only ultimate value the view of life will recognize, and it determines the way we value everything else: "the attitude we ought to adopt to any other thing, or situation or event etc., is ultimately determined by its relation to [the primary determinant of meaning]. The meaning of all things is therefore determined by their relation to [the primary determinant of meaning]."301

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300 Brümmer 1982 p. 132f.
301 Brümmer 1982 p. 133.
Brümmer can be understood as making a *causal* claim, namely that we would not experience things as valuable unless we identified an ultimate value in relation to which everything else takes on values. I, however, prefer to read him as making a *normative* claim concerning the way a view of life should look: it ought not to acknowledge more than one ultimate value, and every other value we acknowledge should be justified by its relation to the ultimate value. Brümmer adds that “the unity and consistency of one’s view of life are determined by some basic conviction on which it is based.” The basic conviction states what is ultimately important in life. It thus involves reference to the primary determinant of meaning acknowledged by the view of life. The basic conviction also, I would suggest, has a normative form. Hence, the basic conviction of a Christian view of life is not: ‘The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob exists,’ but rather ‘Living in accordance with God’s (the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that is) will, and thus in communion with Her, is the *summum bonum* of human life.’

Brümmer thus holds that everything we value should stand in a relation of dependence to the primary determinant of meaning in the view of life. This is in fact what the view of life’s basic conviction tells us. But there is an important distinction to be made here between two ways in which other things derive value from a primary determinant of meaning. First, something can be ascribed an *intrinsic value* by the primary determinant of meaning. This means that we properly count it as valuable, because the primary determinant of meaning tells us that it is valuable. For a Christian view of life, human life can be said to have intrinsic value. In addition, there is everything that we properly assign an *instrumental value*, because it can be used to bring about states of affairs with intrinsic value. Food, for instance, serves purposes which give it an instrumental value. Of course, nothing precludes that something can have both intrinsic and instrumental value.

The way we justify assigning intrinsic and instrumental value to things differs somewhat, but in both cases, the chain of justification ends with your commitment to the ultimate value stated by the view of life’s basic conviction. In fact, for Brümmer, it is essential for a view of life’s ability to function well...

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302 A simple reason for why Brümmer’s position is implausible as a causal claim about how we come to value anything is that his own model requires that we recognize something as valuable (i.e., the primary determinant of meaning). So Brümmer would hardly deny that we have an ability to experience value (logically) prior to having a view of life.

303 Brümmer 1982 p. 133. Brümmer’s emphasis. Unity and consistency are, for Brümmer, important virtues of a view of life.

304 We should not take this to mean that Brümmer is denying that someone holding a view of life is also making factual claims (whatever that means in the particular context). Maybe we can say that certain claims (such as ‘God is real’) are implied by a view of life’s basic conviction.

305 A distinction not explicitly made by Brümmer.

306 Then, it has instrumental value in relation to some other intrinsic value acknowledged by the primary determinant of meaning.
that it acknowledges a primary determinant of meaning. It is also, Brümmern thinks, a prerequisite for rational choice where values are concerned.

Henceforth I shall insert the term ‘existential’ into Brümmern’s expression “primary determinant of meaning.” This means that God or something else functions as a view of life’s primary determinant of existential meaning. I make this addition to underline that a primary determinant of meaning is directed at the existential aspects of human life—that is, for the meaning which something has for how we understand what it is (existentially) to be a human being, and what human fulfillment consists of.

Although everyone necessarily has a view of life in the sense that they occasionally ask themselves questions like ‘what should I do?’, and ‘what is the meaning of everything?’, Brümmern believes that far from every person has a unified view of life with only one primary determinant of existential meaning. You may go through life without having to decide what the primary determinant of existential meaning is, but most of us will run into situations where we have to make up our minds. Apart from the practical need to determine what the primary determinant of existential meaning of your view of life is, there are also people “who strive to keep their lives ‘whole’ by making one master the primary determinant of [existential] meaning.”

What is appealing with Brümmern’s approach is its sensitivity to the intimate relation between our views of life and the way we direct and assess our lives. I disagree, however, with Brümmern’s normative suggestions, particularly with the idea that a view of life, to function well, has to specify a single primary determinant of existential meaning. I shall argue that a view of life can be coherent and capable of dealing with cases of conflict without acknowledging a single primary determinant of existential meaning, though my case for this cannot be spelled out in full until chapter 6.

Brümmern’s normative reasoning makes much of potential conflicts between different things we value. When conflicts occur, we have to make up our minds about what is most important for us. Maybe we cannot have the job of our dreams and be a good mother/father at the same time. Sometimes, we have to make choices between things and states of affairs we value. Nevertheless, I reject Brümmern’s idea that rational choice requires that we identify something as the ultimate value of our view of life, that from which everything else derives its value. Imagine a religious believer with a unified and consistent view of life in Brümmern’s sense. For her, God is the primary determinant of existential meaning, and everything else ultimately derives its value from Her. It would be very odd to hear this person justifying her love for her children, or her faithfulness to her spouse, by appealing to God’s commandments. In fact, there would be something seriously wrong about this person if she said it and

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really meant it.” Is it not rather that our ideas about what is valuable in life accords with much of what religion teaches, and this is why religion is an attractive option for certain people? This makes more sense than saying that our love of our spouse stands in need of some justification from a primary determinant of existential meaning.

An example may be helpful here to show what I take to be problematic with Brümmern’s thinking. Consider the well-known story from Genesis chapter 22, where Abraham is commanded to sacrifice his first-born son Isaac to God. Even though the text tells us nothing about Abraham’s feelings towards the commandment, what makes the story humanly interesting is that there is a genuine conflict between two things, which are both important for Abraham: his son and his God. No matter what we think of the choice he makes, the tragic part of the story, as it is initially presented, is that there seems to be no way he can keep both. I believe that many moral dilemmas in real life as well as in dramas, fiction, and so on, contain a similar moral: there are several things that we value, and you cannot promote them all at the same time.

How, then, is Brümmern’s idea of a primary determinant of existential meaning supposed to be of help in a situation like the one Abraham was in? Supposedly like this. In a case of conflict between values, we should check what is most important according to the primary determinant of existential meaning of our view of life. Conflicts about values resemble, then, cases where we hesitate over what value to assign to things. In Abraham’s case, God’s commandment will override the value he ought to assign to his offspring, so the right thing to do is to sacrifice Isaac. But I do not think that this is a fair representation of what is at stake when we have to resolve conflicts where different values have to be weighed against one another. Choice is more complex than that, and it involves genuine loss.

Brümmern supports his idea of a primary determinant of existential meaning with functional considerations. He argues that having a unified and coherent view of life is a prerequisite for rational choice, and we can only attain a unified view of life if we identify a primary determinant of existential meaning. This is.

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308 Sometimes religions teach in this vein, and their advocates make that kind of statements, but I just cannot take them seriously. Children should be loved for their own sake, and faithfulness towards a spouse should result from mutual love, not a commandment. In what way is loving your spouse made more rational, or justified, by appealing to God’s commandments, than it is by just saying that your spouse impresses you as being extremely valuable, and that your love simply prohibits you from doing anything that would hurt her? I think the problems Brümmern’s position faces here go back on his tacit acceptance of a certain foundationalist conception of justification, a conception I think we should reject.

309 It would be something different to claim that after you have become a religious believer, your love of other people, including your children and your spouse, has deepened and gained new dimensions. That is a perfectly understandable suggestion, but it does not imply that we should accept Brümmern’s ideas.

310 Nussbaum 1990 (passim).

311 The criteria Brümmern presents for judging whether a view of life is well-functioning or not are freedom from contradiction, unity, relevance, universality, and impressiveness (1982 pp. 139ff.). The way Brümmern understands the criteria, it is unity and freedom from contradiction, that most clearly require of a view of life that it should have only one determinant of existential meaning.
the kind of view of life that will function well, and any view of life which acknowledges more than one (primary)\textsuperscript{312} determinant of existential meaning runs the risk that conflicts will recur. If we are unwilling to prioritize between the different determinants of existential meaning, then these conflicts will prove irresolvable. The upshot is that some choices will be capricious, meaning that we cannot give good reasons for why we prefer one way of acting to the relevant alternatives.

Here, too, Brümmner presents important insights, which should be preserved. I agree that a view of life that functions well does not involve us in contradiction and incoherence, and that it does not leave us without guidance. But I do not think that we have to go along with Brümmner’s idea of a primary determinant of existential meaning. Instead, I believe that what we need is an outline of views of life that takes seriously the experiences of value that we make in the course of our lives, and shows how they can be integrated into a conception of human flourishing. I shall argue that this is what we need to make rational, as opposed to arbitrary, or capricious, choices.

**Views of Life as Conceptions of Human Flourishing**

What I intend to show is thus that a view of life does not have to acknowledge a primary determinant of existential meaning to function well. If we think of a view of life as a conception of human flourishing (taken in a broad sense), that is, as a systematization of the norms, ideals, and values we use to assess and direct our lives, we can avoid the problems Brümmner runs into. Instead of thinking of rational choice as concerned about assigning proper value to different things we value, let us think of it as a weighing of the goods encountered in human experience. To do this in an intelligent way, we need to integrate our experiences of existential significance. Integration does not demand of us that we elevate something to the status of being our view of life’s primary determinant of existential meaning. Instead, it is a matter of acknowledging different experienced goods, and allowing them space in a comprehensive framework. Justification will then be a matter of showing how something we value fits into a coherent whole, and how actions are motivated by reference to this coherent whole. I shall elaborate by drawing a parallel with moral deliberation.

Martha Nussbaum criticizes the tendency of contemporary moral philosophers to construe moral deliberation according to the model of grading different and seemingly incompatible goods using a single scale of some kind. For hedonistic utilitarianism, for instance, this scale exclusively measures the amount of pleasure we can expect from the alternative universes that would result from our different actions. The morally right, and hence rational, thing to

\textsuperscript{312} The term “primary” should not really be kept once you abandon Brümmner’s foundationalist perspective. Hence, I shall drop it from now on.
do is to choose the action or state of affairs available that produces the maximum amount of pleasure.313

It can be claimed that the problem with any such conception of moral deliberation is that it rests on a faulty psychology. In the case of hedonistic utilitarianism, it is not hard to see that it conflicts with our conception of the right thing to do in very many circumstances—we do not always act to increase our happiness, or the happiness of other people (understood the way hedonistic utilitarianism thinks of happiness).314 We also want to do what is right. That problem, however, might be resolved by the introduction of more sophisticated versions of the kind of scale to use, so that it includes features which were previously left out.315

There is, however, a somewhat different problem here, and that is that the view of moral deliberation as the grading of different goods on a single scale seems to presuppose that it is fairly easy to make trade-offs between the different things we find valuable. Supposedly, they are commensurable, which means that they can be graded on the single scale we need to make rational choices. This, Nussbaum thinks, cannot be done. We acknowledge a lot of different values, many of which are such that "a life that lacked this item would be deficient or seriously incomplete, in a way that could not be atoned for by the presence of other items, in however great a supply."316 Nussbaum is talking, here, of different sorts of "excellent activity" and her thinking goes back on Aristotle’s idea that we cannot compensate the lack of one virtue with having another in excessive supply. I believe the same point holds for human flourishing. Many of the different goals we pursue are incommensurable: we cannot give one up entirely, even if that would mean that we get something else in excessive supply. The lack of something we find valuable will overshadow the excessive amount of goods provided elsewhere. Deliberation in cases where incommensurable values conflict is more about making a choice where a genuine loss of some good is inevitable, and this is what makes it complex.317

As for views of life, Brügger’s claim that a unified view of life must have a single primary determinant of existential meaning, certainly looks committed to a metric conception of rationality similar to the one Nussbaum criticizes.318

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313 Nussbaum 1990 p. 56.
314 The utilitarian may be tempted to reply that this is a result of the lingering vestiges of religious ethics displayed in, e.g., Kantian ethics. We may wonder whether it is not actually the other way round: these ways of thinking are still with us because we make certain responses, which make them look reasonable. I shall not, however, go into this discussion, since it is not interesting for my purposes.
315 I use ‘might,’ because whether it can really be done remains to be shown.
316 Nussbaum 1990 p. 60.
317 Genuine is here taken as the opposite of ‘illusory.’ A genuine loss is one where the values or goods involved are incommensurable, so that choosing one means losing something not compensated for in the direct sense it is in the case of commensurable values. As we will see, the inevitability of genuine loss in many cases of conflict does not imply that choice has to be arbitrary, once we abandon a foundationalist perspective.
318 The term ‘metric’ is Nussbaum’s.
The primary determinant of existential meaning would thus serve the same function as happiness does for hedonistic utilitarianism: providing the scale by which we can measure and grade everything else. The motive (that of making rational choice possible) is the same, as well as the picture of what rational choice is like. Rational choice and action is only possible if all the goods we choose between are commensurable (which, for Brümmers, means that everything we value derives its intrinsic/instrumental value from the primary determinant of existential meaning). Here, we find a tacit acceptance of a foundationalist conception of justification, where decisions and standpoints are justified by an ultimate commitment. Without such full-blooded commitment, our view of life cannot be unified and consistent. If the different things we value are actually incommensurable, choice turns out to be capricious.

My claim is that we ought to abandon the idea that the different things we attach value to can be graded and traded in relation to a primary determinant of existential meaning, and the foundationalist conception of justification along with it. At the same time, we abandon the kind of thinking typical for metric conceptions of rationality: that it is a prerequisite of rational choice that we assign something like a numeric value to different actions/states of affairs in order to choose the one maximizing some value. This way of thinking underpins the hedonistic utilitarian’s view of rational moral choice, as well as Brümmers’s conception of a well-functioning view of life, and it essentially involves embracing commensurability. Let us, instead, take Nussbaum’s suggestion to heart, that different goods can be incommensurable in the sense that losing one could not be compensated for by getting more goods somewhere else. She comments: “[t]his is what it means to judge that something is an end, not simply a means to an end: there are no trade-offs without loss.” In Nussbaum’s terms, I would say that a view of life taken as a conception of human flourishing acknowledges several incommensurable ends, or values, and to choose between them, we cannot have recourse to the single scale which the primary determinant of existential meaning presumably offers. If we accept my idea about views of life, then the inevitable conclusion that a view of life will not have a primary determinant of existential meaning, is a fact of life. It also means that we have to supply a more coherential substitute for the foundationalist conception of justification and rational choice, which I suspect that Brümmers shares with many moral philosophers.

What would a view of rational choice, which rejects the commensurability-assumption of metric conceptions of rationality, be like? There is no short answer to that question, and most of chapter 6 can be seen as an attempt to answer it. Here, brief remarks will suffice. First, I believe that the absence of a single scale does not imply that there is a number of free-floating determinants

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319 The distinction between intrinsic and instrumental value should be retained, though.
320 Nussbaum 1990 p. 60.
of existential meaning we can view in isolation from one another. In my view, we can reasonably think of them as together making up our conception of human flourishing by identifying what is important for us, the things we believe have to be present to some extent if human flourishing is to be at all possible. It is this comprehensive framework, where our different experiences of values are integrated, which makes rational choice possible. Second, they are not free-floating, because they may affect one another in certain ways. Becoming a religious believer will mean that you adopt a different perspective on your entire life, so that your religious commitment influences how you think about every aspect of what it is to be a human being. Third, in order for rational choice to be possible, I believe that what we need is a rather stable, though not fixed, idea of the proper balance, or the proper relation, between the different things we value. I think we can express it as a conception of what the good human life consists of, taken in a broad and general sense. This means that we also include considerations such as what the environment required for human flourishing is like. Fourth, and finally, rational choice requires that the agent is competent, and in possession of certain skills to be outlined in chapter 6.

I am thus suggesting that we think of a view of life as a unified conception of human flourishing, where different experienced values are integrated and accounted for as they are set in a coherent whole. As such, there will be many incommensurable goods acknowledged in it. To be sure, conflicts will occur, and they may involve insecurity about what this proper balance amounts to. Such conflicts will not demonstrate that something is wrong with our view of life, but rather that a careful and responsible choice between incommensurable goods has to be made, a choice informed by, and with reverberations for, our conception of human flourishing. Here, the agent’s ability to make informed judgments on the basis of relevant experiences as well as careful reasoning is important.

My Questions Revisited
I started this inquiry into views of life by posing three questions: (1) Why do people have views of life?, (2) What function does views of life have in our lives?, and (3) What is a view of life?. Now, we see that (1) views of life originate from the human condition, which contains experiences of values, as well as experiences of gain and loss of these values. To turn to (2), the function a view of life performs is to give a certain orientation in our environment, especially with regard to the different things which we value, and the choices of existential significance to make. Orientation involves both the way we understand and

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321 I repeat that this is not the same as saying that it will completely determine how you think of other things.

322 See, e.g., Nussbaum 1990 pp. 60–75.
assess situations, and the way we act and direct our life. I suggest (3) that rather than talking about a primary determinant of existential meaning as determining what the orientation the view of life gives us will be like, we should think of a view of life as a more or less unified conception of human flourishing. As such, it essentially involves views about the proper balance of several incommensurable values.

So we can summarize the results in the following schematic picture. We are beings with certain experiences of loss, fulfillment, and so on. The experiences are linked with the fact that we value certain states of affairs over others. In the course of our lives, these experiences lead to the formation of a conception of human flourishing. In a logical sense, the experiences are prior to having a view of life, since if we did not have such experiences, we would not need a view of life. On the other hand, it is implausible to hold that these experiences are unaffected by our view of life. When discussing experienced needs, I suggested that they would not look the same regardless of the practices which have developed, the contexts where certain impulses have been given a definite form. The same thing holds, I think, for experiences of value: they are modified and given a certain form as a view of life develops.

Do we really need a view of life? Why not simply follow the impulses to act and assess situations that occur in the experiences logically prior to views of life? I have two answers to such questions. First, I think that it is wrong to claim that we can choose not to have a view of life. Like habit, a view of life is something we acquire as a kind of systematization of the responses we make in different cases. That is, the responses we have made in similar situations in the past, are at work as we identify the present situation. Second, due to previous experience, we know that occasionally, we come to think of certain responses as inadequate. There are also cases where responses conflict with one another. Hence, we can hardly make ourselves trust those responses without reflection even if we decided to. A view of life is needed for intelligent interaction with the environment.

Moving on to the area of the contents of a view of life, I suggest that a view of life is a conception of human flourishing that makes up part of the funded meanings with which we encounter and understand our environment. So primarily, we should not think of a view of life as set in propositional form, or as made up by a set of beliefs. To perform its function, it need not be given that shape at all. Neither should we really think of a view of life as something that has to be adopted. It is rather something we find ourselves with, though we should not take this as saying that criticism and rational choice are impossible.

The fact that views of life do not have propositional form does not mean that they have nothing what so ever to do with beliefs. It may well be that we sometimes feel a need to formulate beliefs which we take to express our view of life. Then, I would stress the term ‘express’, since I do not think of views of life
as made up by a set of beliefs. Nevertheless, it is a fact that our view of life will make us inclined to assent to certain beliefs while rejecting others, so views of life are not disconnected from beliefs.

The functional perspective operative here should, in addition, be taken to be important as we attempt to understand these beliefs. When we analyze what a religious person means when she says that God is real, we must take into account the function that a religious practice can have for a person’s view of life. Typically, too, the beliefs, which we take to express our view of life, cannot be beliefs that we accept in a detached manner; after all, they express some of your deepest commitments. Norman Malcolm has put it well:

If a man did not ever pray for help or forgiveness, or have any inclination toward it; nor even felt that it is “a good and joyful thing” to thank God for the blessings of this life; nor was ever concerned about his failure to comply with divine commandments—then, it seems clear to me, he could not be said to believe in God. Belief in God is not an all or none thing; it can be more or less; it can wax and wane. But belief in God in any degree does require … some religious action, some commitment, or if not, at least a bad conscience. 323

Accepting that there is a divine power at work in your life will, hence, be related to ordering your life in a way different from if you did not accept the suggestion.

As regards matters of justification, it is important to note that my thinking is not intended to throw out a metric conception of rationality through the front door, just to let it in through the back door. I do not think that a conception of human flourishing plays the same role for justification of a view of life as the primary determinant of existential meaning does for Brümmer. According to him, the primary determinant of existential meaning of a view of life is the only ultimate value we should acknowledge. In relation to this value, certain other values take on the property of being intrinsic values. Their relation to the primary determinant of existential meaning is what justifies assigning value to them. As an alternative, I suggest that a conception of human flourishing does not actually introduce a value beyond the values encountered in human experience. It only systematizes them, and integrates them into a whole, which is not ontologically different from the goods and values acknowledged in human experience. Furthermore, a conception of human flourishing should not be taken to provide the single scale required for rational choice on a metric conception of rationality. What it does, is to suggest what the proper balance between the encountered values are. This means embracing incommensurability, and I have already indicated reasons for rejecting metric conceptions of rationality, and the accompanying claim that a view of life that lacks a primary determinant of existential meaning cannot function well. An alternative picture of justification of views of life is sketched in chapter 6.

By now, I think the role which views of life play in people’s lives as conceptions of human flourishing in terms of which we understand and orient our lives, is clearer. Understood this way, we can say that every normally functioning human being who is part of a human community has a view of life. We need it to act in a more or less understandable and intelligent fashion. I say ‘more or less,’ because I believe that a view of life can be fragmented on my analysis too, but not in the way Brümm her thinks. Rather, fragmentation would be a result of the fact that we have not reflected on the proper relation or balance between different things which we find important in life, and we are unwilling to do so even where choices have to be made. Then, the integration that characterizes a balanced conception of human flourishing is lacking.

4.3 Tension and Resolution: The Function of Religious Practices

My discussion of religious practices here will assume that there is an intimate relation between the goods of religion briefly discussed in chapter 1, and the function it fills in human life. I have already suggested that we understand the function in relation to our views of life.

When is a view of life actually a religious view of life? I have given reasons for why we should reject Brümm her’s requirement of a religious (theistic) view of life, that God be our primary determinant of existential meaning. Let me suggest that a view of life is a religious view of life if substantial elements of its conception of human flourishing, including views about the proper goal of human life, are derived from, or heavily influenced by, the pictures and teachings of a religious practice. We would certainly expect this to be the case when it comes to ideas about the proper relation to the divine, for instance, but also when it comes to how you relate to other human beings, and so on.

We have every reason to think that there will be vague boundaries between religious and non-religious views of life. How much, exactly, of our conception of human flourishing has to be drawn from a religious practice in order for it to count as a religious view of life? The lack of a very specific answer to that question poses, however, no problem for the present inquiry. We are still able to identify clear instances of religious views of life, the views of life of people for whom religion “exists not as a dull habit, but as an acute fever rather.” Conversely, it will not be too hard to find clearly non-religious views of life, involving no ideas about the divine or about any proper or improper relations to it.

Why are there religious people? Given the link between the function of a practice, and the goods of that practice, we have to address this question if we want to identify the goods of religion. Merold Westphal proposes that in order

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to answer such questions we must “be able to describe and interpret it [for instance, religious commitment] in terms of the agent’s motives, intentions, wishes, desires, purposes, goals, reasons, and so on.” Understanding will then mean showing how religious commitment arises intelligibly out of the agent’s situation. In this sense, even critics of religion like, David Hume and Sigmund Freud, have presented attempts of their own to understand why there are religious people.

As we set out to achieve this kind of understanding, it is clear that we are not compelled to accept the explicit motives a religious believer would present for why she is religious. In other words, the religious person’s view of her own commitment is not sacrosanct. There may, for instance, be suppressed motives, which pass unacknowledged. Furthermore, the analysis, though necessarily starting with how religious believers understand their faith, can move beyond that level. If we use analytical tools which are not available to a religious subject, we can present answers that account for, while all the same go beyond, any motives for being religious that believers themselves would present. That is, by the way, different from saying that they would not accept them.

Tension and Resolution for Two Types of Religious Believers

In his The Varieties of Religious Experience, James urges that we should not oversimplify “the enormous diversities which the spiritual lives of different men exhibit.” Being sensitive to this diversity, we soon realize that we are dealing with “really different types of religious experience.” All the same, he suggests a rough typology of religious believers that identifies two types of religious believers: the healthy-minded/once-born, and the sick soul/twice-born.

To start with the healthy-minded religious believers, they are people whose “religious life is developing straight and natural with no element of morbid compunction or crisis.” They have a basically bright outlook on human life and the world, and believe that its evils can be remedied if we have the divine on our side. Healthy-minded people approach and relate to the divine by giving up “the hereditary habit of relying on [their] personal strength.” Instead, they learn to rest in and rely on a higher power:

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325 Westphal 1987 p. 5. Westphal’s emphasis.
327 I am thinking about the attempts to write a natural history of religion as in Freud 1961 and Hume 1970. It does not matter that the purpose of presenting natural histories of religion was to discredit religion.
329 For James, it is clear that the type of person you are gives you a disposition for a certain type of religiosity as well.
330 James 1982 p. 82.
331 James 1982 p. 87.
Give up the feeling of responsibility, let go your hold, resign the care of your destiny to higher powers, be genuinely indifferent as to what becomes of it all, and you will find not only that you gain a perfect inward relief, but often also, in addition, the particular goods you sincerely thought you were renouncing. This is the salvation through self-despair, the dying to be truly born, of Lutheran theology, the passage into nothing of which Jacob Behmen writes. To get to it, a critical point must usually be passed, a corner turned within one. Something must give way, a native hardness must break down and liquefy; and this event … is frequently sudden and automatic, and leaves on the Subject an impression that he has been wrought on by an external power.

Whatever its ultimate significance may prove to be, this is certainly one fundamental form of human experience.322

For healthy-minded believers, there is no serious conflict between their own orientation and the one religion offers. The step to becoming a religious believer is thus not so big, and the change can mainly be understood in terms of regeneration, where people receive new energy as they take up the religious life, energy which enables them to deal with their tasks better than before.333

If the healthy-minded believers are inherently strong persons, with a basically bright outlook on life, the sick souls are in many respects their opposites. James actually regarded the spirituality of sick souls as more profound, and honest to the empirical facts of the world.334 Sick souls develop towards a life of faith in quite different ways than the healthy-minded, because while healthy-minded believers get help from God to carry out their different tasks, sick souls feel a much stronger need to reorient their priorities. There can be a variety of reasons for this. Some people can experience their lives to be pointless. Other people take themselves to be such perverted sinners that they are forever doomed to rejection by God. Sick souls may also be vividly aware of the presence of limitless evil and suffering in the world:

Not the conception or intellectual perception of evil, but the grisly blood-freezing heart-palsying sensation of it close upon one, and no other conception or sensation able to live for a moment in its presence. How irrelevantly remote seem all our usual refined optimisms and intellectual and moral consolations in presence of a need of help like this! Here is the real core of the religious problem: Help! help! No prophet can claim to bring a final message unless he says things that will have a sound of reality in the ears of victims such as these.335

322 James 1982 p. 110. James’s emphasis.
333 It is a characteristic of James’s approach to religion in the Varieties that he almost exclusively discusses it by referring to people who have undergone some kind of conversion. The reason why James does this is probably a consequence of his method of studying the extreme cases while tacitly despising more regular believers (1982 p. 6). Nonetheless, there is reason to think that his analysis applies not only to converts in that it is directed at identifying religion as one of the forces by which we live. That is the important feature which religious believers have in common according to James.
334 James 1982 p. 163. It is also the kind of religiosity James felt would have been his, had he been able to embrace religion whole-heartedly. For discussions of James’s personal relation to religion, see Marty 1982, Bixler 1926.
335 James 1982 p. 162.
What sick souls have in common is that in one or several of these ways, their "original optimism and self-satisfaction get leveled with the dust."\textsuperscript{336} Clearly, sick souls experience their present existence as deficient in a much more radical way than healthy-minded believers do, and this is a tension which might take on enormous proportions.

The sick soul’s only route to faith goes via conversion. On this topic, James writes: "[t]o say that a man is ‘converted’ is to say that religious ideas, previously peripheral in his consciousness, now take a central place, and that religious aims form the habitual centre of his energy."\textsuperscript{337} Sick souls break in a relatively radical way with their previous life, and their religious commitment will never quite resemble that of the healthy-minded believers. Speaking of John Bunyan and Leo Tolstoy, two of his favorite examples of sick souls, James writes:

But neither Bunyan nor Tolstoy could become what we have called healthy-minded. They had drunk too deeply of the cup of bitterness ever to forget its taste, and their redemption is into a universe two stories deep. Each of them realized a good which broke the effective edge of his sadness; yet the sadness was preserved as a minor ingredient in the heart of the faith by which it was overcome. The fact of interest for us is that as a matter of fact they could and did find something welling up in the inner reaches of their consciousness, by which such extreme sadness could be overcome. Tolstoy does well to talk of it as \textit{that by which men live}; for that is exactly what it is, a stimulus, an excitement, a faith, a force that re-infuses the positive willingness to live, even in full presence of the evil perceptions that erewhile made life seem unbearable.\textsuperscript{338}

James’s rough typology presented here shows that there is not just one kind of religious believer to discuss, but rather a number of different types. Differences will be a function of the kind of person we are, as well as the experiences we have made throughout life.

This does not necessarily imply that religious practices would perform radically different kinds of function in different people’s lives. Instead, I suggest that we think of these two types of believers as situated near or at the extremes of a continuum. Religious people display more or less of the healthy-minded’s or the sick soul’s type of religiosity respectively, but they need not fit neatly into either category.

Despite the differences between healthy-minded believers and sick souls, James proposes that they have two characteristics in common (and I think this makes most sense if we think of types of religiosity as a continuum):

\textsuperscript{336} James 1982 p. 161.
\textsuperscript{337} James 1982 p. 199. Conversion can also occur in many other circumstances, including that when a person turns \textit{away} from religion. See James 1982 Lecture IX.
\textsuperscript{338} James 1982 p. 187. James’s emphasis.
1. An uneasiness; and
2. Its solution.
1. The uneasiness, reduced to its simplest terms, is a sense that there is something wrong about us as we naturally stand.
2. The solution is a sense that we are saved from the wrongness by making proper connection with the higher powers. 

Of course, the tension in question is experienced as much more urgent by sick souls than by healthy-minded believers, but it is present to some degree in both types of religiosity. You can say that the tension is religion’s diagnosis of the human condition, and that the resolution is what it suggests as the proper antidote to the predicament we face.

I propose that we think in the following way about tension. Your life, and the values that direct it (your view of life), come to look insufficient in some way. Goals, which we previously acknowledged, now look problematic, and we are genuinely insecure about what a good human life is, and how it should be realized. Put in my pragmatic terms, we are in a state of doubt. Our conception of human flourishing is found to be insufficient, and confidence in our view of life is undermined, since it fails to integrate our experiences of values in a satisfactory way. I think that quite often, the teachings of a religious practice can be the trigger of such an experience of tension, where our present life, and the values directing it, are called into question, and we are urged to look at them in a different way than before. Thereby, we may reach the conclusion that there is “something wrong about us as we naturally [up till now] stand.”

Tension thus signals that we are in a problematic situation, and that our present view of life needs revision. As long as doubt persists, we are insecure about how to understand and assess what goes on around us, and we do not know how to act. Tension, as identified by James, is thus one instance of doubt, and that explains why it is so frustrating. Doubt arises from a failure to integrate our experiences in a satisfactory way, but it also extends to future interaction with the environment: it paralyzes us, since we do not know what course of action to choose.

There is, however, also a promise of resolution in religion. Religious practices offer us pictures of human flourishing, and thus values we should adopt in order to lead a more significant life than before. For many people, becoming a religious believer means that the tension is resolved as a partially new view of

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340 Does this mean that the tension which religion claims it can remedy would not exist unless religious practices had once come into existence? I think so. In a sense, religion helps create the tension which is sets out to resolve. But religious believers would also be inclined to say that the resolution offered by religion is such that the new equilibrium is much richer than any alternative. So if we were left unaware of tension, something very important would be missing.
341 If we think of a view of life as an intellectual piece of luxury, then tension within it would not trouble anyone but the reflective-minded philosopher. But tension, as I understand it, is more troublesome than that, since it is an instance of doubt.
life takes shape. There is a partial reconstruction of our conception of human flourishing. Not everything changes in the course of reconstruction, however. Many values previously embraced are still acknowledged after conversion, though set in a partially different context, and understood in a somewhat different way. Other things may come to look much less important than they used to. What makes religious believers (especially sick souls) claim that they have radically broken with their previous life is, I would suggest, mainly the fact that as a new equilibrium takes shape, everything is affected by the transition to this new equilibrium.

I have already made numerous references to experience in the process of discussing tension and resolution. I suggest that to get further in our analysis of the function of religious practices, we need to look closer at the role religious experience plays in these practices.

### 4.4 Religious Experience as an Experience

Our discussion of religious experience requires us to address two issues. First: what is it to undergo an experience? Sometimes ‘experience’ and ‘perception’ are used synonymously, but I wish to keep them distinct. The way I presented perception in 3.5, as the processing of sensory input, it is certainly part of any experience. But I take ‘experience’ to stand for a wider activity of taking part in, and being affected by, courses of events going on around you. In contrast to perception, then, experience is taken to involve the effects on the subject of experience as well. This is, I believe, well captured by the meaning the term ‘experience’ has when qualifiers like ‘religious,’ or ‘esthetic,’ accompany it.

This leads us to the second question: What do we mean when we refer to an experience as a religious experience? Is it that it occurs in a certain setting, that it has a certain bearing on a person’s life, or something else? I shall start with the first question, and then move on to the second.

### A Pragmatic Conception of Experience

In *Art as Experience*, Dewey suggests that if we want to properly understand human experience, we should turn to esthetic experience, "for it is experience freed from the forces that impede and confuse its development as experience; freed that is, from factors that subordinate an experience as it is directly had to something beyond itself."\(^{34}\) According to Dewey, esthetic experience is related to human experience as the mountain-peak is to the ground that surrounds it: even though it stands out from the background, it is continuous with it, and could not exist in isolation from it. It is the continuity between esthetic

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\(^{34}\) Dewey 1980 p. 274.
experience and ordinary experiencing that makes a study of esthetic experience valuable as a study of human experience.\textsuperscript{343}

The reason why the continuity between esthetic experience and ordinary experiencing is normally hard to discern is that in the midst of life, experience is rarely allowed to run its course. We use the information supplied to realize some purpose of ours, but we rarely give experience a chance to actually transform us.

Here, we should distinguish between two elements present in experience, recognition and discrimination. The distinction is inspired by Dewey,\textsuperscript{344} and resembles that between primary and reflective perception, but here, I use it to distinguish two elements in human experience. Recognition is a habitual identification of what is before us:

Recognition is [discrimination] arrested before it has a chance to develop freely. In recognition there is a beginning of an act of [discrimination]. But this beginning is not allowed to serve the development of a full [discrimination] of the thing recognized. It is arrested at the point where it will serve some other purpose, as we recognize a man on the street in order to greet or to avoid him, not so as to see him for the sake of seeing what is there.

In recognition we fall back, as upon a stereotype, upon some previously formed scheme. Some detail or arrangement of details serves as cue for bare identification. It suffices in recognition to apply this bare outline as a stencil to the present object.\textsuperscript{345}

In contrast to recognition, Dewey presents discrimination:

Sometimes in contact with a human being we are struck with traits, perhaps of only physical characteristics, of which we were not previously aware. We realize that we never knew the person before; we had not seen him in any pregnant sense. We now begin to study and to “take in.” [Discrimination] replaces bare recognition. There is an act of reconstructive doing, and consciousness becomes fresh and alive. This act of seeing involves the cooperation of motor elements even though they remain implicit and do not become overt, as well as cooperation of all funded ideas that may serve to complete the new picture that is forming.\textsuperscript{346}

Dewey suggests that the difference between recognition and discrimination lies in the degree to which the subject of the experience is involved, and actively participates in the experience. In typical cases of recognition, there is virtually no challenge to our funded meanings. When, however, some challenge occurs, experience takes the form of discrimination, and our interest is aroused. It is, according to Dewey, in the situations where discrimination dominates that we are most intensely alive.\textsuperscript{347}

Dewey stresses the relation between challenges in our experience, the reconstruction challenges bring about in our ways of understanding and acting,
and the way we are transformed, as persons, by certain experiences. Their relatedness makes him unwilling to say that experience is something passive. We should rather think of it as having a transactional character, as signifying “active and alert commerce with the world.”348 In this commerce, what is at stake is the shape of the funded meanings we draw on in our interaction with our environment. While we want a stable set of funded meanings to facilitate interaction with the environment, we also want to expand these meanings, since such expansions make life more significant than before.

The distinction between recognition and discrimination helps us see two elements of human experience. Most of the time, we should expect experience to consist of a mix of these elements. There are few experiences where you are left completely unaffected. On the other hand, there cannot be experiences where no recognition occurs; if nothing is familiar, novelty cannot be identified either. Nevertheless, the distinction points to something important.

Experiences where discrimination dominates are, according to Dewey, instances of an experience. Two features make an experience stand out from the background of experiencing. First, they make up unified wholes, and second, the subject takes them to be important. Dewey presents us with some examples in the following passage:

It may have been something of tremendous importance—a quarrel with one who was once an intimate, a catastrophe finally averted by a hair’s breadth. Or it may have been something that in comparison was slight—and which perhaps because of its very slightness illustrates all the better what is to be an experience. There is that meal in a Paris restaurant of which one says “that was an experience.” It stands out as an enduring memorial of what food may be. Then there is that storm one went through in crossing the Atlantic—the storm that seemed in its fury, as it was experienced, to sum up in itself all that a storm can be, complete in itself, standing out because marked out from what went before and what came after.

In such experiences, every successive part flows freely, without seam and without unfilled blanks, into what ensues. … In an experience, flow is from something to something. As one part leads into another and as one part carries on what went before, each gains distinctness in itself. The enduring whole is diversified by successive phases that are emphases of its varied colors.349

It is not so much that these experiences are pleasant: the rupture of an intimate friendship or a storm at sea is hardly pleasant, even in retrospect. More important is the way in which they stand out as wholes, where the parts hang together and color one another. Also, an experience is significant for the subject: it made a difference in our lives, even if the difference is only with regard to how we think of food. They involve an element of reconstruction of our funded meanings.

349 Dewey 1980 p. 36. Dewey’s emphasis.
Dewey suggests that we think of esthetic experiences as instances of the kind of experience termed an experience. They start in seizure. We are frequently captured by “events and scenes that hold the attentive eye and ear of man, arousing his interest and affording him enjoyment as he looks and listens.” In this stage, we are mainly passive observers, but “absorption in a work of art so complete as to exclude analysis cannot be long sustained. We interrupt our yielding to the object to ask where it is leading and how it is leading there.”

The stage of reflection follows as a natural consequence of seizure, and here, we try to make sense of what is before us by bringing it into a coherent pattern. This is not easily achieved:

Without internal tension [between the experience and our funded meanings] there would be a fluid rush to a straightaway mark; there would be nothing that could be called development and fulfillment. The existence of resistance defines the place of intelligence in the production of an object of fine art. The difficulties to be overcome in bringing about the proper reciprocal adaptation of parts constitute what in intellectual work are problems.

Reflection quite often ends with a reconstruction of funded meanings. It, is Dewey stresses, the result of intelligent dealing with the work of art encountered:

The perceiver as well as the artist has to perceive, meet, and overcome problems; otherwise, appreciation is transient and overweighted with sentiment. For, in order to perceive esthetically, he must remake his past experiences so that they can enter integrally into a new pattern. He cannot dismiss his past experiences nor can he dwell among them as they have been in the past.

The perceiver of art cannot dismiss her past experiences because she needs these experiences (or more properly her funded meanings) as the context where the new developing experience is to be situated and integrated. On the other hand, this means that her past experiences, hence her funded meanings, are reconstructed in order to properly integrate what we have gained from this new experience. Mutual adjustment of our funded meanings and the experience is called for.

Esthetic experience as an experience is thus a process in which funded meanings are challenged and reconstructed as we strive to bring them into equilibrium with the novelty introduced to us by some work of art. Through reflection, the experience is also transformed in certain ways as a new equilibrium of funded meanings takes shape. In the process, no element has an absolute

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352 Dewey 1980 p. 138. Seizure and reflection are, then, equally important phases of an esthetic experience, and we need not think of either phase as what really constitutes esthetic experience.
353 Often enough, “the outcome of discrimination will ... be to convince us that the particular thing in question was not worthy of calling out the rapt seizure,” like when it results from “cheap means employed upon meretricious stuff.” Dewey 1980 p. 146, 145.
status. When equilibrium is finally attained, the experience stands out as a significant, unified whole, and the work of art we encountered now makes sense to us in a way it did not before.

Esthetic experiences (and thus art, too) are important in human life since they are instances of the kind of experience which Dewey calls an experience. First, they illustrate in general the way in which experience is a matter of interaction between the experiencing subject and the material experienced. Second, they help us overcome the prejudice that "objects have fixed and unalterable values." Esthetic experience concretely challenges and reconstructs some of our funded meanings; in addition, it reminds us that human experience may always take this form. As such, art encourages openness to novelty in experience, an openness which makes possible a more significant life.

To see how esthetic experience can bring about reconstruction of funded meanings, consider the following example, an example we today may find problematic in certain aspects, but which will work for my present purposes. Dewey refers to Renoir’s paintings of naked women, and argues that they show us that there is a difference between erotic art and pornography:

The nudes of Renoir give delight with no pornographic suggestion. The voluptuous qualities of flesh are retained, even accentuated. But conditions of the physical existence of nude bodies have been abstracted from. Through abstraction and by means of the medium of color, ordinary associations with bare bodies are transferred into a new realm, for these associations are practical stimuli which disappear in the work of art. The esthetic expels the physical, and the heightening of qualities common to flesh with flowers ejects the erotic.

Dewey is not denying that he finds the paintings erotic, as you might expect. Rather, he is saying that the paintings, once attended to, show that this is different from saying that they are pornographic. On the contrary: had they been pornographic, they would not have been as erotic as they now are. Furthermore, the erotic character of the paintings is what makes them works of art. The difference Renoir’s works help us discern between the erotic and the pornographic is, Dewey thinks, much like the difference between good and bad art: while the former challenges and reconstructs our funded meanings, the latter leaves them intact. What Renoir’s paintings do, is to change our view of nudity from something sinful to something natural, while all the same erotic. The erotic is then a natural element of human life, just as nudity is. Pornography’s attraction, on the other hand, depends on making the most of the sinfulness and unnaturalness of nudity. Remove this feeling, and pornography loses much of its attraction.

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Religious Experiences as Instances of an Experience

The term ‘religious experience’ appears in a multitude of contexts: theology, religious studies, and philosophy of religion (not to mention within religious practice). The multitude of contexts where it is used also means that there are several different understandings of the term, and depending on what we mean by it, we may be referring to rather different phenomena.

Wayne Proudfoot distinguishes two different ways in which the term ‘religious experience’ is often used. The difference between them lies not in what is experienced, but in the quality of the different experiences. We can either take the term to stand for particular psychologically intense experiences of an unusual kind, like a strong numinous experience. On the other hand ‘religious experience’ can refer to an enduring element of human life. Here, to talk about religious experience is to talk “about the different ways in which individuals find, feel, or experience themselves to stand in relation to whatever they consider the divine.”

It is, for instance, a religious experience to sense the presence of God’s guiding hand in your life, or to come to see events within your life as making sense in a way they did not before. Proudfoot also talks of this kind of religious experience as an “attitude towards life.” Such religious experience might, but need not, have as a result that the subject undergoes psychologically intense religious experiences of the former kind. The subject can be deeply religious without undergoing any such experiences. If we understand ‘religious experience’ in the second sense, it refers more to the way we understand life, and the attitude we have to it, than to particular events in life.

Ulf Hanson makes a rather different distinction. He distinguishes between the use of the term ‘religious experience’ in an object analysis and an adverbial analysis. According to the object analysis use of the term, an experience is a religious experience when the object of the experience is a religious object. Paradigm cases of religious experiences, on the object analysis, are experiences where someone claims to have encountered God, or another supernatural being. It thus picks out the religious experiences used in analogy-arguments in contemporary philosophy of religion. On an adverbial analysis, ‘religious experience’ signifies that some experience of ours has a religious dimension. This is the case when we experience life as a gift from God, or an illness as a sign of the wicked state God’s creation has fallen into. The important thing is that religious concepts are used to describe the experience. For Hanson, it is clear that manifestations of at least the adverbial analysis kind of religious experiences need

357 Proudfoot 1997 p. 68. See also p. 69.
358 Proudfoot 1997 p. 67.
359 For a similar view, see Smith 1981.
360 Hanson 1973 p. 99f. According to the object analysis, experience is always of something, so there is no experience where there is no “object of experience.”
not be of the psychologically intense kind, but can also be much more like Proudfoot’s “attitude towards life.”

Whether distinctions are adequate or not depends on the purposes for which they are made. There is no reason to evaluate Hanson’s and Proudfoot’s distinctions, and I think both help us draw attention to important instances of religious experience. They are, furthermore, compatible. Let me suggest that we think of Hanson’s distinction as a distinction within the type of experiences Proudfoot refers to as psychologically intense experiences. Call these experiences type–1 religious experiences. This is not entirely fair to Hanson, but it makes his distinction useful for my purposes. I thus understand Hanson’s distinction as distinguishing different types of experiences discernible within the class of type–1 religious experiences. They can be experiences of a religious object such as God, but they can also be such that something else, like a poem, is taken to have religious significance. What they have in common is a religious dimension and the feature that they are intense and short-lived.

Let me suggest, further, that the quality of human experience that is religious be called type–2 religious experiences. I would suggest that we think of the relation between type–1 religious experiences and type–2 religious experiences in the following way. Type–1 religious experiences occur mainly within the course of type–2 religious experiences. They may certainly appear among non-religious persons, but then, I would say that either there is some struggle with religion going on, or else, one is triggered. For a type–1 religious experience to have a lasting importance, I believe that some relation to type–2 religious experiences is crucial.

When James initiates his discussion of religious experience in *Varieties*, he urges us to note their solemn character. The solemn character of religious experiences signals, I take it, that we can reasonably view them as instances of what Dewey called an experience. They are experiences where our set of funded meanings are reconstructed. Religion reconstructs our conception of human flourishing by altering the way we understand human life. The result is a set of funded meanings which is taken to be more adequate than previous sets, thereby offering prospects for a more fruitful interaction with the environment. This means that we are enabled to lead a richer life than before. Tension is removed as integration appeases doubt. I think this holds regardless of whether we are talking only about type–2 religious experiences, or if we also include type–1 religious experiences set within the larger framework of type–2 religious experiences. In both cases, the solemn nature signals the occurrence of a reconstruction of funded meanings.

I would propose that we think of tension-resolution not only as a process that many converts go through, but also as a general characterization of type–2 religious experiences that are very common in religious people’s lives, actually

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\[362\] James 1982 p. 38.
not only among converts. Depending on your relation to a religious practice, the experience may look different, and be accompanied by different (or no) type–1 religious experiences. To understand the function of religious practices in human life, then, you must take into account type–2 religious experiences. It is via that kind of experience the religious believer’s set of funded meanings is reconstructed, so that a more significant life is possible.

I claimed that type–2 religious experiences have a kind of logical priority over type–1 religious experiences. Let us look a little closer at the relation there is between different type–1 religious experiences and the type–2 religious experiences I characterized in terms of tension-resolution.

The Relation Between Type–1 and Type–2 Religious Experiences

I shall start with a discussion of conversion experiences. The psychologists of religion Daniel Batson, Patricia Schohenrade, and Larry Ventis identify four typical stages of conversion processes. The stages parallel a four-stage model for creative problem solving. Creative problem solving and religious conversions share, according to Batson, Schohenrade, and Ventis, the trait that in both, we obtain a new perspective on things, which enables us to overcome previously insuperable problems.

In stage one, some problem emerges for our present system of funded meanings. Equilibrium is ruptured, and we experience a dissatisfaction on an existential level. In a second stage, we struggle to overcome the existential crisis in some way, while keeping our present system of funded meanings more or less intact. Sometimes we are unsuccessful, and then we gradually enter stage three, that of self-surrender. The failure to overcome the problem leads the subject “to a point of despair and hopelessness.”

For conversion to occur, the process cannot stop here, though. Conversion occurs in stage four, where a “new vision” is supplied, and “cognitive transcendence” occurs, essentially a process where funded meanings are reconstructed. Batson, Schohenrade, and Ventis vividly describe the stage thus:

Into this “dark night of the soul” may blaze the light of new vision. This new vision is analogous to Wallas’s illumination. It transcends the old ways of thinking based on the old cognitive structures (e.g., one’s desire to live versus the inevitability of one’s own death) and permits a new way of looking at the elements of the crisis (e.g., one has already died to the old life and is living an eternal life); new truth is revealed.

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364 Batson/Schohenrade/Ventis talk about “cognitive structures” here, but I believe that this comes to about the same thing as funded meanings.
This also has consequences for how we conduct our lives: “the new vision allows the religious individual to return to the world of the everyday with a new assurance and a new perspective; these, in turn, enable him or her to deal more positively and effectively with a wider range of experiences and people.”  

I take this outline to describe the type–2 religious experience of someone converting to religion. It need not involve a single type–1 religious experience. Perhaps this is true of Leo Tolstoy, who describes his own conversion in the following way:

I was alone in the forest, lending my ear to its mysterious noises. I listened, and my thought went back to what for these three years it always was busy with—the quest of God. But the idea of him, I said, how did I ever come by the idea?

And again, there arose in me, with this thought, glad aspirations towards life. Everything in me awoke and received a meaning. ... Why do I look farther? a voice within me asked. He is there: he, without whom one cannot live. To acknowledge God and to live are one and the same thing. God is what life is. Well, then! live, seek God, and there will be no life without him.

... Just how or when the change took place I cannot tell. But as insensibly and gradually as the force of life had been annulled within me, and I had reached my moral death-bed, just as gradually and imperceptibly did the energy of life come back.  

After a long period of despair, Tolstoy gradually recovers the strength to live as a "new vision" of life breaks through. The Apostle Paul expresses it neatly in one of his letters: “Old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” (II Cor. 5:17) This, and other passages from the Bible and theological traditions, expressing a similar point, clearly function as paradigms for what we take conversion into a Christian practice to be, and they shape the way in which conversions are experienced, as well as described. Here are two reports of type–1 religious experiences explicitly drawing on Paul’s imagery:

I was taken to a camp-meeting, mother and religious friends seeking and praying for my conversion. My emotional nature was stirred to its depths; confessions of depravity and pleading with God for salvation from sin made me oblivious of all surroundings. I plead for mercy, and had a vivid realization of forgiveness and renewal of my nature. When rising from my knees I exclaimed, 'Old things have passed away, all things have become new.' It was like entering another world, a new state of existence. Natural objects were glorified, my spiritual vision was so clarified that I saw beauty in every material object in the universe, the woods were vocal with heavenly music; my soul exulted in the love of God, and I wanted everybody to share in my joy.

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369 Quotation from James 1982 p. 185.
I fell on my face by a bench, and tried to pray, and every time I would call on God, something like a man’s hand would strangle me by choking. Finally something said: ‘Venture on the atonement, for you will die anyway if you don’t.’ So I made one final struggle to call on God for mercy. … I don’t know how long I lay there or what was going on. … When I came to myself, there was a crowd around me praising God. The very heavens seemed to open and pour down rays of light and glory. Not for a moment only, but all day and night, floods of light and glory seemed to pour through my soul, and oh, how I was changed, and everything became new. My horses and hogs and even everybody seemed changed.

Reports of type–1 religious experiences tend to give them a rather isolated character, but I think that we should acknowledge their relation to some ongoing type–2 religious experience where there is a significant reconstruction of funded meanings, to some extent triggered by the type–1 religious experiences of the subject. As such, they can play an important role in a process of type–2 religious experience, where a new equilibrium takes shape.

It will hardly come as a surprise to anyone that conversion experiences, although very significant for many people, are not the most common religious experiences. After all, most religious people are brought up to be believers, and among them, (type–1) religious experiences are quite common as well. In fact, as the sociologists of religion Charles Glock and Rodney Stark point out, most religious experiences “occurred in social situations where, far from being unusual, such experiences were considered normal. Indeed, in many such situations, failure to manifest religious experience would have been deemed atypical, perhaps even bizarre.” Only discussing conversion experiences would mean that we are not very fair to the rich and varied phenomenon religious experience, taken broadly, is. It is neither possible nor necessary to develop a complete typology of type–1 religious experiences, or the corresponding differences in type–2 religious experiences they hang together with here. A couple of instances will have to suffice.

Consider first the confirming experience. This is a religious experience where a religious believer is reassured in her faith; the experience somehow confirms

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370 Both reports are quoted in James 1982 pp. 249–250.
371 For some empirical data, see, e.g., Glock/Stark 1965. Most likely, the numbers would have been even greater had Glock and Stark used the here suggested broader understanding of religious experience.
372 Glock/Stark 1965 p. 152. Glock and Stark criticize previous studies of religious experience for having “applied a rhetoric of abnormality to religious experience … without first distinguishing persons for whom such behavior could be considered ‘unusual’ from those for whom such behavior must be classed as ‘normal’ (i.e., norm-governed).” (1965 p. 152f.) I think this is an important point, and the rhetoric of abnormality has created a tendency to view religious experiences as odd and unusual; a phenomenon we can only understand if we postulate the agency of supernatural forces. Taken as such, the understanding of religious experience underpinning the “rhetoric of abnormality” has served certain apologetic purposes in different branches of religious studies, including philosophy of religion.

The tricky part here is that I, too, am inclined to say that religious experiences are abnormal (even though most of the time norm-governed). An experience is abnormal from the subject’s point of view, since it is significant in a way most experiences are not. That is what makes it stand out as significant and identifiable. Note, however that this is not the type of abnormality Glock and Stark criticize.
"the validity of his religious perspective." A Methodist reports the following (type–1) experience classified as confirming by Glock and Stark:

I took the 4:30 a.m. time at our church for World Day of Prayer. I was about to step up to the altar, and it was as if I was walking on Holy Ground. I had to back up and walk around it. That Hour of Prayer was one of the most wonderful and meaningful I have ever experienced.375

About 50% of Americans belonging to Christian congregations of some kind claim to have had one or several confirming experiences.

Another significant kind of religious experience is the responsive experience. Many people, especially in charismatic congregations, report experiences where they are assured that "the divine has chosen to count them among his own."376

Here is one typical example:

At the age of 11, as a result of home environment, Bible study, and religious services (preaching, Sunday School, etc.,) I came to feel a heavy sense of guilt. I went forward in a revival service, prayed a prayer of repentance, confessed my wrongdoings to my parents, etc., and accepted Christ as my Savior and Lord. I felt a great release and peace which has remained constant except for brief intervals when I have slipped and yielded to willful desires.376

I believe that the form that these experiences take can best be understood if we view them in relation to type–2 religious experiences of tension and resolution. Both the confirming and the responsive experience are considered quite normal in certain religious settings, because they are part of what it means to develop as a religious believer. The reason for not classifying them as conversion experiences is, of course, that conversion does not really take place, the person already counting herself as a religious believer. Nevertheless, I would argue that they involve reconstruction of funded meanings. Sure enough, they may not bring about significant changes in your belief-system the way conversion experiences do, but they may still be important for your view of life: the experiences make what you claim to believe really come home to you, as reconstruction of funded meanings occur. It is in that process religion becomes one of the forces by which you live. James writes about the faith-state: "various dogmatic beliefs suddenly … acquire a character of certainty, assume a new reality, become an object of faith."377

The common denominator of different

373 Glock/Stark 1965 p. 45.
374 Glock/Stark 1965 p. 44.
375 Glock/Stark 1965 p. 46.
376 Glock/Stark 1965 p. 47f.
377 James 1982 p. 247. Here, I am presenting a normative account of what it is to be a religious believer, stating that it is not enough that you say that you believe in God; this must also show itself in the way you orient your life. Otherwise, something is lacking. The ground for this normative account is the function I take it that religion can perform in human life, so it rests on the plausibility of the functional analysis of religion provided in this chapter.
religious experiences is that a significant reconstruction of funded meanings occurs, and this means that you now think that certain beliefs, creeds, stories, and so on adequately express your view of life.\textsuperscript{378}

In the course of a life of a type–2 religious experience of tension and resolution, we need not assume that there is a single type–1 religious experience that is really significant. On the contrary, such experiences may keep occurring, and they may be important for the upholding of your religious view of life. The believer needs an ongoing interaction with the divine. As Martin Luther puts it: "Christus will die Koste sein, und speiset die Seel allein. Der Glaub' keins andern leben."\textsuperscript{379} Nevertheless, to understand why these experiences are important, we need to view them in relation to a type–2 religious experience.

I would suggest that tension/resolution is a model of the workings of religious practices which applies to other religious traditions than Western Christianity, but I also think that tension is different in different religious practices, and so is resolution. Different religious practices are thus not really responses to the same need, and hence, different type–2 religious experiences will occur in different religious practices.

4.5 The Goods of Religion and a Pragmatically Real God

I believe that the goods of religion are linked to the way religious practices help people to reconstruct their views of life so that they are experienced to be more adequate responses to human life, with its potential and its limitations. They make possible equilibrium where more experiences are better integrated than before; consequently, they make possible a more significant life. This is the result of a type–2 religious experience, and it means that religious practices enable certain people to integrate what they find significant into a conception of human flourishing. Their views of life are experienced as adequate in relation to the experiences of existential significance they make, as well as in relation to how we lead our lives. An important mark of adequacy is the absence of tension, or doubt. However, not even the most religious person draws only on religion when developing a conception of human flourishing. We already start out with experiences of value and so on, experiences we need to account for. A religious practice can offer a view of what is valuable in life that is felt to accord with how you experience it. The stories told, the pictures presented, and so on, capture much of what we take to be important in life, and also make us aware of new things important to take into account. They help us bring about integration. A religious view of life is hence not such that a religious object, like God, functions as its primary determinant of existential meaning; instead, a substantial

\textsuperscript{378} It is important to see that a critique of a view of life is always also a critique of the way you have been leading your life so far, and a reconstruction of your view of life involves a reconstruction of your life.

\textsuperscript{379} From the chorale "Christ lag in Todesbanden."
part of your conception of human flourishing is derived from or influenced by
the pictures and teachings of a religious practice.

So a religious practice tells believers something important about human life,
and without it, and without the communion and communication with God, life
would in some respects be defective. It is this function of making our view of
life into a response to life which is adequate, directing, and integrating that I
take to make up the goods of religion. Religion offers resolution where a
previously experienced tension is overcome. The result is a more adequate view of
life, and a more significant life. This reconstruction is also naturally reflected in
the way we lead our lives. As I have already argued, this is what we need from a
view of life, and that is what certain people get by becoming religious subjects.\textsuperscript{380}

How is it that not all people respond the same way? Some people experience
a need for resolution that can only be had from God, while others do not. Dif-
ferent ideologies, religions, and so on, influence our conceptions of human
flourishing, and are taken to be essential for the development of an adequate
view of life. Sometimes, the differences between the conceptions of human
flourishing we take to be adequate are substantial. Why is that? I think it has to
do with the way our responses take shape as responses when they are given di-
rection within different shared human practices. Since these practices have
developed in different directions, there is disagreement on how to understand
human life and human flourishing. Hence, the plurality is not really surprising,
but we must keep it in mind as we discuss what a reasonable view of the justi-
fication of religious practices might be like.

\textit{Religious Practices and a Pragmatically Real God}

I have two purposes with the remainder of this chapter: first, to clarify what
kind of practice I take a \textit{religious} practice to be, and what it means to claim that
God is real, and not an illusion; second, to discuss whether the position is
reductionist in a way which makes it unable to preserve the goods of religion.

Martin Riesebrodt has suggested that we approach the question of what
religion is like from the perspective of \textit{logically implied core assumptions}, without
which religious practices would not make sense. He discerns three assumptions:

\begin{enumerate}
\item There exist superhuman personal or impersonal powers.
\item These powers control dimensions of human life not controllable by
ordinary people.
\item We can gain access to these powers.\textsuperscript{381}
\end{enumerate}

\textsuperscript{380} Although this will be closely related to experiences of adequacy, I believe that it is important that the
function religion performs in human life is not that of giving a psychological feeling of ease, peace and
rest. That occurs as a result of the function (you could even say a sign), which I have identified here, and
should not be taken to be the function itself.

\textsuperscript{381} Riesebrodt 2000 pp. 35–50.
It is tempting to add a fourth core assumption as well: that it is important to make proper contact with these powers, or that the truly good human life is possible only if we make proper contact with these powers. Perhaps, however, that is already stated by (2) and (3) taken in conjunction, which makes the addition of a fourth core assumption unnecessary.

I shall go along with Riesebrodt’s suggestion, and say that religious practices accept/imply these three core assumptions. They make up a distinguishable field of human practices, worked out to deal with the need for resolution the tension identified in 4.3 triggers. To say that they are human practices is to emphasize that to understand them, we must set them in relation to the kind of beings we are, and view them as responses to different experienced needs. With the core assumptions in mind, we see that what makes religious practices special is that in order to fulfill their function, they have to recognize the reality of a divine power which can come into your life and transform it (here, I concentrate on theistic religious practices). Viewing religious practices as one type of human practices further means that what I have had to say about practices in chapter 3 applies to religious practices. Most important here is that I will assume that religious practices have conceptualizations of their own, conceptualizations we draw on to constitute part of our environment.

Now when I have clarified the function religious practices perform in human life, and also what I take to be special about religious practices, let me suggest what it means, in this kind of practice, to claim that God is real, and not an illusion. Towards the end of Varieties, James presents the following highly interesting analysis:

Yet the unseen region in question is not merely ideal, for it produces effects in this world. When we commune with it, work is actually done upon our finite personality, for we are turned into new men, and consequences in the way of conduct follow in the natural world upon our regenerative change. But that which produces effects within another reality must be termed a reality itself, so I feel as if we had no philosophic excuse for calling the unseen or mystical world unreal.

... I only translate into schematic language what I may call the instinctive belief of mankind: God is real since he produces real effects. 382

What it means to say that God is real and not an illusion can thus only be understood with regard to the difference She makes in people’s lives. I have traced the difference to the way a religious practice challenges and reconstructs our funded meanings to resolve tension and restore equilibrium. The religious believer who claims that God is real thus claims that God (as understood in a particular religious practice) has the power to transform your life to make it more significant. You may say that a religious view of life is viewed as the most adequate response to the conditions under which we live.

I take this to have marked consequences for the way we conceive of justification of religious belief. Justification of a belief, or of an entire practice, cannot be discussed in isolation from the practice to which the belief belongs, and the function this practice has in human life.

Understanding at the Cost of Reduction?

More than one reader might classify the position taken on the reality of God as an instance of reductionism. Reductionism is not always a bad thing, but here, you may object that we have gained an understanding of religious practices and their goods, which has lead to an inevitable loss of those goods. Why? Because I have already accepted Riesebrödt’s idea that one core assumption of religious practices is that superhuman powers exist. Now, it looks as if on my analysis, that power is reduced to a human capacity to undergo a certain type of experiences. Here, we have an objection that ultimately threatens to make my pragmatic approach to religious practices unconvincing.\textsuperscript{383} To see why, and how I think the objection can be met, I like to draw a parallel with developments in the debate between religious realists and religious non-realists in contemporary philosophy of religion.\textsuperscript{384}

The past decades have witnessed lively discussion on realism and non-realism concerning how to understand religious beliefs and truth-claims. The debate is inspired by debates over realism in philosophical disciplines like the philosophy of science and ethics, but is also triggered by developments in twentieth-century theology. On one side, we find realists such as John Hick, William Alston, Roger Trigg, and Brian Hebblethwaite. Even though there is no consensus about what realism in religion amounts to, they agree that belief in God, or having faith, if you prefer that term, requires a view of God as existing independently of human conceptualizations and practices.\textsuperscript{385} According to religious realists, our talk about God refers to a radically independent being, a being that for Her existence and nature is entirely independent of the conceptualizations we develop and the epistemic abilities we have.\textsuperscript{386}

\textsuperscript{383} There is a related objection often made against positions taken to be reductionist, namely that they misconstrue the faith of religious believers as it manifests itself in their lives. They simply fail to do justice to the faith of ordinary religious believers. Philosophers inspired by the thinking of the later Wittgenstein frequently reply that it is contemporary analytical philosophy of religion that is reductionist, because it refuses to see that religious belief is not some kind of hypothesis that believers hold to be rationally acceptable. See, e.g., Eriksson 1998 pp. 239ff.

\textsuperscript{384} The opposition is sometimes described in terms of realism versus antirealism, but I will operate with the wider concept non-realism.


\textsuperscript{386} Which is different from saying that our cognitive capacities have nothing to do with the way we conceive God. A religious realist need not hold that we have unproblematic access to this transcendent chunk of independent reality. See, e.g., Runzo 1993b p. xiii.
On the opposite side, we find religious non-realists, who reject the realist position as superstitious and immoral.\textsuperscript{387} At the same time, however, non-realists are eager to preserve religious practices. Consequently, they argue for a revision of our current religious practices, a revision intended to preserve religious practices while liberating them from the metaphysical ballast of religious realism. Our talk about God has to be construed in such a way that it does not fall into the superstition of religious realism.

The debate involves two main issues that are to some extent separable, namely, those of \textit{philosophical reasonableness} and \textit{religious adequacy}. The first concerns, as the label indicates, whether religious realism or non-realism is more philosophically reasonable than its opponent. I shall leave that question aside here.

The second issue, that of religious adequacy, concerns whether the different interpretations of religion and religious belief can actually serve as the ground we need for a continued commitment to religion. Here, the realist claims that her position is superior to that of the non-realist, who is accused of being unable to explain why religious practices should (or, alternatively, if they really could) be retained once we have identified what these practices are 'really' about. Preserving the goods of religion in their current form requires of us that we present a non-reductionist account of religious belief, and this, according to the realist, is what the non-realists fail to do. Erica Appelros identifies one version of this objection, and labels it \textit{the referential objection}:

\begin{quote}
The referential objection put forward by the realist against religious non-realism can be formulated as follows: in religious non-realism ‘God’ is deliberately not taken to refer to a God who exists independently of our human conceptualizations of God. In fact ‘God’ does not refer at all, or refers at the most to an imaginary construct. However, religious practices, such as prayer, conceptually presuppose that God exists and can be referred to; they also presuppose psychologically that the religious believer believes so. Thus, since religious non-realism fails to refer to the real God required for true religion, it is religiously inadequate.\textsuperscript{388}
\end{quote}

Of course, you may feel free to suggest that religious practices should be revised in some way, for instance in a non-realist direction. Then ‘God’ might refer to the sum of our human values, and you could retain God-talk since it inspires us to lead better lives, or reflect more thoroughly on questions about what kind of life we ought to lead. Such a revision would still appear to be reductionist, because we cannot help feeling that accepting it would mean that we would radically revise our current religious practice, so that it is no longer really religious. How come? Well, we would more or less explicitly deny what Riesebrodt identified as the core assumptions of religious practices. Many non-realists are in fact saying that there is no God, and that religious practices do not

\textsuperscript{387} For instance Cupitt 1993, Verheyden 1993.
\textsuperscript{388} Appelros 2002 p. 9.
need one either. Then, we may wonder whether it is possible to distinguish religion from secular ideologies, and it is easy to get the feeling that something is left out, something which is peculiar for religious belief and religious practices. So there definitely seems to be something to religious realists’ complaint that religious non-realism (of the type presented here) is reductionist, and ultimately intends to radically revise, rather than preserve, religious practices. That would mean that it is—given our present view of religion and the goods of religion—unsatisfactory.

However, there is a further complication here. Reductionism is always identified as such from a certain perspective, and that perspective influences the judgment that non-realism is reductionist. Thus, from the standpoint of a religious metaphysical realism, any position, which does not assert that religious practices presuppose belief in the radical independence of God, is reductionist. An important part of the judgment that a certain position is reductionist is, I take it, that it cannot preserve the goods contained in the practice under discussion. The religious realist holds that any interpretation of religion and religious belief, which is unwilling to ascribe a metaphysical mode of existence to God, fails to preserve these goods, and is hence religiously inadequate. This accusation, however, should hardly stop those not inclined to metaphysical realism to do philosophy of religion, since it is very likely that from their standpoint, reductionism is understood in some other way.

From the perspective of my pragmatic practice-approach, I think of reductionism in the following way. I have already identified the goods of religion. I have further suggested that there is an intimate relation between these goods and the core assumptions of religious practices. Hence, I would say that an interpretation of religion and religious belief, which explicitly or implicitly denies one or several core assumptions of religious practices, is reductionist, and this also means that it is unable to preserve the goods of religion, as we think of them presently. Nothing prevents, however, those inclined towards reductionism from giving another account of the goods of religion. They accordingly suggest that religious practices should play a significantly different role in human life than they do at present. This is not the route I shall choose (even though I am not claiming that philosophical reflection will or should leave religious practices exactly the way we found them). What I take to be peculiar for religious

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I want to make an important note on terminology here. I think that most religious realists and non-realists share a conception of religion. Accordingly, I would not say that there is something like a metaphysical realist conception of religion pitted against a non-realist conception of religion in the present debate over realism and non-realism. Non-realists, too, agree that religious belief, normally, is taken to assert that God exists independently of us. In other words, people used to think that God exists the way the metaphysical realists claim, but today, they should reject that idea. As an alternative to atheism, non-realists suggest that we should revise religion so that we deny that assertion while still retaining religious practices. This is, I would say, a non-realist interpretation of religious belief, which is candidly revisionist (and sometimes reductionist). Nevertheless, it presupposes a conception of religion similar to the one of the metaphysical realists.
practices and religious belief, something which non-realism leaves out, is the idea that God is at work in our lives, and transforms them. This is also one of the core assumptions of religious practices Riesebrodt identified above. I suggest that we link the issue of reductionism to that of religious adequacy, and say that an interpretation of religion is reductionist if it is unable (or uninterested) to preserve the goods of religion identified in this chapter. This is not intended to be the final word on reductionism, but only a statement about what reductionism comes to from the perspective used in this study.

You may still get the impression that given my view of reductionism, only a metaphysical realist interpretation of religion can avoid it, since it looks like the only position that truly recognizes God as a supernatural power. According to the metaphysical realist, the referential objection would apply to my way of thinking as well, since on a pragmatic conception of religion, when we talk about God, we are actually referring to a human capacity to undergo experiences of a peculiar kind. Thereby, we implicitly deny that God exists and can make a difference in our lives (core assumptions (1) and (2) above). Consequently, a pragmatic conception of religion is religiously inadequate, and thus incapable of preserving the goods of religion.

If someone would raise the referential objection against my pragmatic conception of religion, I would respond by contesting the view of reference on which it is based, a view that is actually shared by many religious non-realists as well. That view is, in my opinion, the root of many of the problems associated with non-realist interpretations of religious belief. The referential objection presupposes that a speaker making a claim about, for example, God, is referring to (or at least intends to refer to) something independent of the context (including the practice) where the utterance is made. This goes together with the view that what it means to say that something exists or is real is understandable without specification of the practice where the utterance is made. Terms like ‘independent existence’ have a fixed meaning specifiable apart from the contexts where such terms are used. This is a view of reference which goes together with a philosophical anthropology quite unlike the pragmatic philosophical anthropology I embrace.

I want to stress the close relation there is between practices and conceptualizations, and the fact that reality is constituted within the practices of which we are part. Clearly, this means that reference cannot be isolated from the context where an utterance is made, and it always takes place within a practice, where the terms get their meaning. 390 Thus, we need not assume that the claim that God is real must be understood the way (religious) metaphysical realists think we should understand it; instead, we should look to religious practices to get an idea of the meaning of that claim.

390 This is also how Appelros suggests that the referential objection can be met. See Appelros 2002 chap 2–3.
The referential objection is not devoid of force, however. If you reject the
metaphysical realist’s claims about God as false (as many non-realists have),
rather than not making much sense, then your own position may well be reduc-
tionist, and hence religiously inadequate. It makes a difference whether you
accept the presuppositions of a metaphysical realist position and then reject the
claim that God is real, or reject the presuppositions of religious realism and
non-realism, and present an alternative view of what meaning terms like ‘real’
have in religious practices.

I conclude that a pragmatic conception of religion need not be reductionist,
because it need not deny any of the core assumptions of religious practices. This
is the way I have chosen to characterize reductionism, and it is linked to my
view of the relation between the goods of religion and the core assumptions of
religious practices. There is no need to deny that God is real. Instead, we should
make an attempt to understand what it means to say (in a religious practice)
that God is real, and that is what I have done by drawing attention to the dif-
fERENCE it makes for the subject to become a religious person. I think no one has
put it better than James, in the following passage:

[T]he unseen region in question is not merely ideal, for it produces effects in this world.
When we commune with it, work is actually done upon our finite personality, for we are
turned into new men, and consequences in the way of conduct follow in the natural world
upon our regenerative change.391

The quotation pinpoints the kind of effects we would expect from a pragmatically
real God: effects in terms of a reconstruction of funded meanings, and hence a
transformation of ourselves. God is real (as opposed to an illusion), because a
religious view of life can be an adequate response to human life, which allows
more significant interaction with the environment, and ultimately, a more signi-
ificant life.

The conception of religion developed in this chapter will hardly strike
every philosopher of religion as superior to the one which is dominant in
contemporary philosophy of religion. That was not to my intention. I am not
claiming in any sense that religious belief is inevitably distorted in con-
temporary philosophy of religion; this is not the kind of argument I shall use.
Determining whether we have understood something or not must take account of
whether the alleged understanding enables us to interact with the phenomenon
in fruitful ways. Therefore, I now want to raise the question of whether philo-
sophers of religion working within the conception of religion accepted in
mainstream philosophy of religion can supply the resources we need to come to
terms with the problems of religion. We need to be able to handle them to deal
with the problematic situations where religion is involved, and thus deal with
religion in fruitful ways. How much help does contemporary philosophy of

religion offer us in our attempts to handle them? This question goes right to the heart of our shared concern to preserve the goods of religion.

In chapter 1, I identified analogy-arguments from religious experience as the most promising attempt of mainstream philosophy of religion to supply the resources for criticism and reform we need to preserve the goods of religion. It is time to evaluate these arguments to decide just how promising this strategy actually is.
CHAPTER 5

The Epistemology of Religious Experience: The Arguments Evaluated

5.1 Background and Aims of the Current Debate

Accepting my view of philosophy as criticism involves accepting that philosophical practice is value-laden. Human beings do philosophy, and the purpose of philosophical inquiry is, at least most of the time, to make certain experienced goods more secure. This view of philosophical practice will color my approach to the debate over the evidential value of religious experience going on in contemporary philosophy of religion. I believe that it is reasonable to see the philosophers who argue that religious experience makes religious belief rationally acceptable, as making an attempt to preserve the goods of religious practices in human life. So to achieve the purpose that motivated philosophical inquiry, they present arguments intended to demonstrate that religious believers are in their full epistemic right to hold religious beliefs.

What are the goods of religion those philosophers intend to preserve? I propose that they overlap to a significant extent with the goods of religion I identified in chapter 4. Even if the goods were to be described by the use of other concepts, it is still arguable that they would look more or less the same if a philosopher of religion with another conception of religion outlined them. We do not have to think that there is complete consensus here; neither within the group of philosophers I will discuss, nor with my position. All that is required, I think, is that there is significant overlap in what we take to be the goods of religion. In chapter 7, I shall discuss how we may deal with cases where there is less overlap as well.

Besides the overlap, I also think that we share a desire to preserve these goods, and the acknowledgment that they are in a problematic situation today. Importantly, I believe that there is also a rough consensus on what the extra-

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\[392\] Normally, this is not acknowledged, because it is taken to be unimportant for the status of the arguments that are presented. See, however, Swinburne 1994, where Swinburne explicitly claims that one of the goals of his philosophical work is to defend religion against its critics, and thus to preserve the goods of religion.
philosophical problems of religion are, even if we might formulate them somewhat differently. Further, we have all turned to philosophical reflection to get help to find the means that would enable us to preserve the goods of religion in an acceptable way. I think that it is fair to say that we struggle to supply some kind of justification of our commitment to the religious practices which are important in our own, as well as other people’s lives.\footnote{I have given an outline of what I mean when talking about ‘justification’ in this way in 1.2.}

However, as should have become increasingly clear throughout this study, the ways we conceive (philosophically) of human practices in general, as well as the way we conceive of religious practices in particular, differ in significant respects. To make sense of such disagreement, I introduced the idea that we embrace incompatible philosophical anthropologies. Hence, as you would expect, we do not agree on what the proper way of justifying religious practices is. I find it rather uncontroversial to claim that your view of what it takes to justify religious beliefs as well as religious practices is influenced by (and actually part of) the way you conceive, philosophically, of these phenomena. Consequently, the conception of religion, which is dominant in contemporary philosophy of religion, defines what the relevant arguments are like if you want to justify religious belief, or religious practices.

It is tempting to distinguish the current debate on religious experience on the grounds that what is striven for is an epistemic justification of religious belief. Justifying religious beliefs by showing them to be (epistemically)\footnote{Religious beliefs could be rationally acceptable for other purposes than epistemic ones, but that goes nowhere towards making them justified in the sense that we would be more inclined towards calling them true than we were before. When I speak of rationally acceptable, I use the term in this epistemic sense, which is, by the way, the dominant use in contemporary philosophy of religion.} rationally acceptable beliefs, is thus the proper way to preserve the goods of religion. But that is only partially correct.\footnote{It is correct if you view this position in opposition to a reductionist antirealism, holding that there is no God, and that no epistemic justification of religious belief is possible or desirable. Such a position, however, still accepts the same view of what epistemic justification amounts to. This is a view I reject.} You could very well do philosophy with a different conception of religion and still think that the proper way to preserve the goods of religion goes via some kind of epistemic justification. However, the epistemic justification you seek may be quite unlike the one most other philosophers consider relevant. The way I see it, there is no context-independent meaning of ‘epistemic justification’.

The conception of religion dominant in contemporary philosophy of religion will become clearer in the course of this chapter. What is important for our present purposes is to see that when it comes to constructing models for the justification of religious beliefs, these beliefs have typically been construed according to the model of everyday beliefs (or scientific hypotheses).\footnote{There are, of course, no dramatic differences between everyday beliefs and scientific hypotheses when it comes to how we would justify them, for instance. Whether you construe the justification of religious beliefs on the model of the justification of everyday beliefs or scientific hypotheses depends on the kind of argument you want to supply. The arguments from natural theology more easily lend themselves to a}
have enough in common to motivate such a parallel. Consequently, justification of religious beliefs is modeled on paradigmatic instances of how we justify everyday beliefs, or classes of everyday beliefs. Accordingly, either religious belief has to pass the checks and tests we apply to contested claims in an everyday setting, or we have to establish that religious beliefs as a class of beliefs are not epistemically inferior to other classes of beliefs we count as reliable. Unless this is done, religion and religious belief will continue to be problematic.

Construing religious belief and justification of religious belief according to the model of everyday beliefs makes religious experience a very attractive source of justification. It appears that here, you can justify religious beliefs by appeal to perceptual evidence much in the same way as you justify everyday claims. The idea of numinous experience as a mode of perception, outlined in 1.2, plays a crucial role for this way of reasoning.

There are two separate debates that dominate the agenda in contemporary philosophy of religion. Both involve discussion of similarities and differences between religious experiences and other experiences, and how we sometimes ‘explain away’ experiences as unveridical or hallucinatory. First, there is debate over the implications of non-religious explanations of religious experiences, like those generated in religious studies. Can the occurrence and form of various religious experiences be adequately explained without appeal to God’s agency? What are the consequences of a positive and a negative reply respectively?

Second, we find a debate over whether analogy-arguments from religious experience can establish that belief in God is rationally acceptable. The debate has become highly complex, and it has engaged a number of philosophers. I shall, however, concentrate on two prominent analogy-arguments, put forward by Richard Swinburne and William Alston.

What I will do in this chapter then, is to discuss and evaluate what I take to be the best attempts in contemporary philosophy of religion to use religious experience as a source of justification of religious beliefs. The arguments are framed within the conception of religion dominant in mainstream philosophy of religion. I shall not, for the sake of the critical comparison to be made between different philosophical anthropologies, question that conception. Nor shall I question the philosophical anthropology supplying the shared background of the debate in its current form. I shall, instead, enter the debate on its own terms, leaving the interpretative framework in which it is embedded unproblematized, to see whether these arguments can be made convincing or not.

397 See 1.2 for a characterization of analogy-arguments from religious experience.

398 Analogy-arguments have also been presented in, e.g., Gellman 1997, Wall 1995, Yandell 1993. However, those arguments do not mark a significant improvement on the arguments I will consider here. Discussing Swinburne and Alston is hence enough to make an assessment of the status of analogy-arguments.
My strategy is not, however, to ask whether the arguments are convincing once their premises are accepted. The relevant question is whether Alston’s and Swinburne’s arguments are convincing once we accept the interpretative framework (rather than the particular premises) they embrace.

Whether the analogy-arguments put forward are convincing or not is important for my discussion, because according to my analysis of contemporary philosophy of religion, these are the most promising arguments intended to supply the resources for criticism and reform of religious practices we need. So by assessing the arguments we are, in effect, asking: have the philosophers who attempt to justify religious belief by appeals to religious experience managed to come up with a way to preserve the goods of religion? I believe my evaluation will show that the answer to this question is a definite no. The arguments will not perform their task, since there are too serious problems with the analogies to sense perception they draw on. I shall discuss what consequences this has for the goods of religion towards the end of the chapter.

5.2 The Relevance of Reductionism

Scientific study of religion has developed rapidly during the last 100 years. Theories and methods developed in various special sciences have been modified and employed for scientific inquiry into different religious phenomena, including religious experience. The progress made in religious studies has caused researchers and philosophers to raise the question: how are we supposed to think of the different explanations of religious experiences that are presented in religious studies? Can religious experiences be adequately explained without reference to supernatural explanatory models, like God’s agency? And what are the implications of different answers for the use of religious experiences to justify religious belief? Exactly what is meant by an explanation here is seldom made clear, but let me suggest that most of the time, ‘explanation’ is understood in a rather orthodox way, as stating the necessary and sufficient conditions for why religious experiences occur.

When we discuss explanations of religious experience, we should distinguish between explanations taken to involve methodological reduction and explanations taken to involve ontological reduction. António Barbosa da Silva makes the distinction in the following way: “[w]e say that x is methodologically reducible to y if the method adequate for the description of y can also be used to describe x, without, however, excluding other possible ways of describing x. … Ontologically speaking x is reducible to y if it is possible to show that x is nothing else but y.” Barbosa da Silva makes the distinction in terms of description, but I think that it works equally well for explanation. Psychological
accounts of religious experiences, for instance, may draw attention to the similarity between familiar psychological processes and the development a religious person undergoes.\footnote{An instance of this strategy can be found in my discussion (in 4.4) of Batson/Schoenrade/Ventis’s suggestion that there are significant similarities between conversion and the creative thought-process.} That may well be taken to show that some religious experiences are methodologically reducible to psychological processes. It is, to take an example, uncontroversial to work out methodologically reductionist explanations of revivals and individual conversions. Does this say anything about whether the explanation in question is also ontologically reductionist, thus stating that there is nothing more to that which is explained than what the explanation suggests?

Wayne Proudfoot points out that within religious studies, many researchers think that methodological reduction implies ontological reduction, and hence, they present understandings of ‘religious experience’ that exclude methodological reductionism as illegitimate from the outset. The explicit motive is that an experience is a private event, and that we should aim to describe and understand it from ‘inside’ the subject. Proudfoot agrees that taking the insider perspective is possible and interesting, but claims that this is compatible with presenting methodologically reductionist explanations of religious experiences.

Religious experiences should, according to Proudfoot, be understood and described in terms familiar to the experiencing subject. Therefore, we cannot avoid references to the religious practice to which she belongs. Furthermore, the identification of an experience as a (genuine or veridical)\footnote{I will return to what I mean by ‘veridical’ later on.} religious experience gives the subject an explanatory commitment. Describing an experience in religious terms normally commits the subject to the view that a proper explanation in some way involves God.\footnote{One exception is the irreligious subject who rejects the experience as bogus.} This is true even if the experience is not really of God, as when someone discerns God’s agency in an unexpected display of goodness by a complete stranger. Proudfoot takes this to show that what we should avoid is descriptive reduction:

Descriptive reduction is the failure to identify an emotion, practice, or experience under the description by which the subject identifies it. This is indeed unacceptable. To describe an experience in nonreligious terms when the subject himself describes it in religious terms is to misidentify the experience, or to attend to another experience altogether.\footnote{Proudfoot 1985 p. 196. Proudfoot’s emphasis omitted.}

Descriptive reduction would thus prevent us from understanding the subject that undergoes the religious experience. Nevertheless, achieving that understanding does not rule out explanatory reduction:
Explanatory reduction consists in offering an explanation of an experience in terms that are not those of the subject and that might not meet with his approval. This is perfectly justifiable and is, in fact, normal procedure. The explanandum is set in a new context, whether that be one of covering laws and initial conditions, narrative structure, or some other explanatory model. The terms of the explanation need not be familiar or acceptable to the subject. ... But that poses no problem. The explanation stands or falls according to how well it can account for all the available evidence. 404

Proudfoot stresses that religious studies need explanatory reduction to make progress, and this involves the construction of explanatory models of religious experiences, which are not used, or approved to, by the subject. The explanations required, to qualify as explanations, take the form classified as methodologically reductionist by Barbosa da Silva:

Why did Stephen Bradley identify his accelerated heart rate as the work of the Holy Spirit? ... Why did Schleiermacher apprehend the moment that precedes thought as a sense of the infinite and discern a feeling of absolute dependence which accompanies all consciousness of the polarity of self and world? For Bradley, we would need to know something about Methodist revivalism in early nineteenth-century New England, about the particular meeting he attended earlier in the evening, and about the events in his life up to that moment. ... To explain Schleiermacher’s sense of the infinite, his feeling of absolute dependence, and his apprehension of all events as miracles one would need to know more about his early years among the Moravians, his study of Spinoza, and the circle of friends for whom he wrote *On Religion*. Each of these instances requires acquaintance with the Christian tradition and with the particular forms of that tradition which shaped the person and his experience. 405

If you deny that religious experiences can and should be explained in this way, you are in fact withdrawing them from scientific inquiry. That would indicate that we take there to be an irresolvable conflict between religious explanations of religious experiences, and the methodologically reductionist explanations which are presented in religious studies. Religious and atheistic philosophers of religion have both asserted that there is such conflict.

**Methodological Reduction and the Current Debate**

Philosophers of religion tend to think of different explanations of religious experiences as competing with one another. Then, the important question is: what is the best explanation of religious experiences? Much attention has been paid to numinous experiences. Does the best explanation of numinous experiences involve reference to God/God’s agency or not? Explaining them without any appeal to supernatural causes would, most philosophers think, rob the experiences of any evidential force. 406 On the other hand, if those explanations

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404 Proudfoot 1985 p. 197. Proudfoot’s emphasis omitted.
405 Proudfoot 1985 p. 223f.
406 For instance, Davis writes that while no “reductionist accounts of religious experience can disprove theism,” the problem with them, for the theist, is that they “allow the possibility that religious experiences
are unconvincing, the strategy to construct arguments from religious experience is still an option. Here, clearly, the religious explanation a subject presents of her experience (the “explanatory commitment” of Proudfoot) and the different non-religious explanations researchers present, are taken to conflict. Therefore, it is important for the philosophers who wish to defend religious belief that religious explanations of religious experiences come out as more plausible than the alternatives.407

Just as you would expect, philosophers such as Alston and Caroline Franks Davis express severe skepticism about the adequacy of the non-religious explanations of numinous experiences that psychologists and sociologists of religion (among others) have presented. Here is what Alston has to say about the severe difficulties involved in a scientific study of religious (particularly numinous) experiences:

The first thing to consider is whether mystical experience can be given an adequate explanation in terms of purely natural causes. If we consider the actual attempts to do this, we must judge them to be highly speculative and, at best, sketchily supported by the evidence. Mystical experience poses severe problems for empirical research. In addition to the difficulties in determining when we have a case thereof, it is something that cannot be induced at the will of the researcher and so is not amenable to experiment. … Since the states are usually short-lived, the researcher must rely on autobiographical reports; we can’t expect a researcher to hang around a person on the off chance that he might happen to have a mystical experience. Hence the data are subject to all the well-known problems that attach to such reports. Moreover, the most prominent theories in the field invoke causal mechanisms that themselves pose thus far insoluble problems of identification and measurement: unconscious psychological processes like repression, identification, regression, and mechanisms of defense; social influences on belief and attitude formation. It is not surprising that theories like those of Freud, Marx, and Durkheim rest on a slender thread of evidential support and generalize irresponsibly from such evidence as they can muster. Nor do the prospects seem rosy for significant improvement.408

By now, you feel far removed from Glock and Stark’s claim that there are many situations where having a religious experience is considered to be the normal reaction of a subject.409

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407 The terms ‘religious’ and ‘non-religious’ used about different explanations of religious experiences should not be understood in the way that a non-religious explanation automatically undermines the religious significance of the experience. I shall argue that this is a false assumption. I use the terms to distinguish explanations using terms from a religious practice (like ‘Christ entered my heart and stilled my worries’) and those who use non-religious terms to explain the experiences.


409 Someone might object that what is expected in certain settings is some religious experience, but hardly a numinous experience. I think, however, that the objector is wrong. In the Eucharist, for example, it is not considered extraordinary to claim to have experienced communion with the risen Christ. This is an experience which is quite common in a Christian person’s life, and I would classify it as a numinous experience. All the same, it clearly falls within the scope of what Glock and Stark called norm-governed religious experiences.
Alston’s lack of confidence in the prospects of constructing non-religious explanations of religious experiences has led Evan Fales to respond:

Indeed, it is ironic that the theistic literature on the subject [religious experience] has tended to rely heavily upon reports of isolated, often long-past experiences, whereas it is scientists who have acquainted themselves with these phenomena first-hand in the field. Perhaps theistic philosophers need to be reminded that the phenomena they seek are no further away than the next Sunday and the nearest Pentecostal church or Quaker meeting.  

Fales has, in two articles published in Religious Studies, made an ambitious attempt to outline parts of what he calls “scientific explanations of mystical experiences.” The goal is to explain why religious experiences occur without invoking God or God’s agency. He draws chiefly on the work of the cultural anthropologist I. M. Lewis, but admits that no single explanatory model is sufficient for such a complex and multi-faceted phenomenon as religious experience. Fales’s attempt to explain religious experiences may be taken to be only methodologically reductionist, but he insists that it has implications for the evidential value of religious experiences. If “purely naturalistic” (that is, non-religious) explanations of religious experiences are available, then it is unwarranted to claim that there are veridical experiences of God. Hence, a potential source of justification of religious beliefs would be eliminated.

To understand what it is to explain an experience we can, Fales suggests, reflect on ordinary instances of explanation of perception. He draws particular attention to the causal theory of perception, and uses it to suggest criteria for when we have adequately explained the occurrence of a perception of something. For numinous experiences, the upshot is this. For an experience to be of God (in an epistemically relevant way), 411 God must figure among the causes of the experience. This requirement, according to Fales, is no different from perception of physical objects: “[w]hen I see a chair, the chair figures relevantly in the explanation of my visual experience; if it did not, the perception would not be veridical.” 412 This applies even if a chair was really there, but concealed in some way, and what we saw was actually a hologram not causally related to the chair actually present. 413 Once we adopt the causal theory of perception, we see that adequate non-religious explanations of religious experiences, which leaves God out of the causes of the experiences, is all you need to undermine any argument from religious experience. Both the religious and the epistemic value of

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410 Fales 1996b p. 302.
411 We must make this addition since according to classical theism, everything which happens is caused by God as the creator and sustainer of the Universe. Michael Levine has pointed out that this is not an epistemically relevant way of figuring in a causal chain. In fact, it cannot be, since that would lead to unacceptable theological results, like that the experiences, where the Yorkshire Ripper thought he heard God command him to kill women, would have to be considered veridical. See Levine 1990, 2000.
412 Fales 1996b p. 342 n.2.
413 We can sidestep the thorny question of whether the hologram’s causal dependence on the chair present would turn perception of the hologram into a veridical perception of that chair.
religious experiences are eliminated once you show that they occur regardless of whether there is a God or not.

There are two standard responses to Fales’s challenge in contemporary philosophy of religion. You can cast doubt on the empirical adequacy of the current non-religious explanations of numinous experience by drawing attention to the methodological and empirical problems related to research in this area.\(^{414}\) The classical reductionist explanations of religion and religious experience which Freud and Durkheim offer, are certainly supported by rather weak evidence. Second, you can present falsifying instances, that is, experiences, which the non-religious explanatory models are unable to explain.\(^{415}\)

It is impossible to determine whether a religious experience or entire classes of religious experiences have been (or may be) non-religiously explained or not. Still, we have every reason to think that the responses to Fales’s challenge that were presented above are slowly losing ground. Systematic study of religious experience is only about 100 years old, and Fales wonders how anyone can confidently assert now that there will never be adequate non-religious explanations of every religious experience.\(^{416}\) In a review of Franks Davis’s *The Evidential Force of Religious Experience*, Grace Jantzen points out, correctly in my opinion, that the existence of non-religious explanations of religious experiences, which cannot be rejected (which is different from being unproven), puts arguments from religious experience in a problematic position:

> Even if we grant that no reductionist challenge conclusively proves that religious experiences have a non-supernatural source, it cannot be the case that they can be so easily dismissed. … A reductionist theory (or a variety of them) can, without being conclusively proved, raise doubts about the provenance of religious experience. And these doubts might well be serious enough so that even if the provenance of the experiences might still remain an open question, at least they cannot be taken as evidence of the truth of religious claims. Unless it is clearly shown that reductionist theories of religious experience are misguided (not just unproven), they must be taken as casting grave doubts on the evidential value of religious experience.\(^{417}\)

So according to Jantzen, an evaluation of the consequences of non-religious explanations of religious experiences must look beyond the current standing of such explanations, and include an evaluation of the prospects for their future development. Since scientific study of religious experiences has come a long way in a relatively short time, this makes the responses to challenges like Fales’s look even less promising than they otherwise would. It is likely that as religious studies make further progress, the number of numinous experiences

\(^{414}\)See e.g., Davis 1999 chap. VIII.

\(^{415}\)See, e.g., Gellman 1998. Of course, both strategies can be employed simultaneously, so that you claim that the explanations offered are not very good, and even if they are correct, they are not complete, leaving many religious experiences unexplained.

\(^{416}\)Fales 1996b p. 311.

that philosophers can draw on to construct arguments will diminish, until there is nothing left.

Nevertheless, there is an alternative response to Fales’s challenge. You can deny that religious and non-religious explanations compete at all. After all, ontological reduction is never warranted by methodological reduction, no matter how successful it is. Instead, non-religious explanations can be taken to chart the way God reveals herself to Her creatures. Discussing Freud’s attempt to explain numinous experiences in terms of infantile regression, Alston comments:

Why suppose that this is not the mechanism God uses to reveal Himself to our experience? Because it seems very odd that God would choose such a means? But much of what happens in the world seems to us to be not the sort of thing the Christian God would choose. 418

Critics accuse this position of violating the dictum of Occam’s razor to avoid multiplying entities beyond what is necessary. Adding God to the causes of numinous experiences the way Alston suggests does not improve the explanatory power of Freud’s theory. Alston is aware of that, and indicates that this is something like a last resort for the philosopher constructing an argument from religious experience.

Contrary to what philosophers like Alston and Franks Davis think, I would suggest that the best thing to do if you want to construct an analogy-argument from religious experience is to stress the distinction between methodological and ontological reduction. This implies that you reject the idea that religious and non-religious explanations of religious experiences actually conflict. If you hold on to the idea of conflict, you always face the objection that the experiences you base your argument on can be adequately explained by religious studies. As religious studies progress, this objection gains more and more force.

If you adopt the attitude I am recommending, the current and future status of non-religious explanations of religious experiences has no influence on the evidential force of those experiences. 419 This cuts both ways: the inadequacies of current non-religious explanations of religious experiences, which Franks Davis and Jerome Gellman have identified, do not support their arguments, and the promise of future improvement of those explanations will not undermine them.


419 This position may still be problematic, because it may be objected that epistemological reduction, if really successful, becomes an instance of ontological reduction. In other words, if we make stunning progress in explaining numinous experiences with the help of sociology and psychology, this would show that they are nothing but sociological and psychological processes. However, I think that this situation will not really arise in religious studies, because the explanandum is such that it is quite hard to determine just how satisfactory an explanation is. Numinous experiences are experiences by subjects, and typically, we cannot make exact predictions of the behavior of subjects, including what experiences they will undergo. This is not something which discredits psychology and sociology; it is just to say that given their object of study, we should not expect very exact predictions on the level of individual behavior. Consequently, I do not think that we will be in a position to judge that epistemological reduction is so successful that it becomes an instance of ontological reduction in the branches of religious studies I am discussing here, and I think that is what a skeptic like Fales need to make his case convincing.
either. Those who want to accumulate evidence for the existence of God and those who want to undermine such attempts both have to look elsewhere to make their case. Here is where analogy-arguments from religious experience are interesting.

5.3 Swinburne and the Principle of Credulity

Let me remind the reader of what an analogy-argument from religious experience is like. It is an argument that seeks to show that religious experience makes belief in God rationally acceptable, and it involves appeal to alleged analogies between religious experience and some other mode of perception. The analogy warrants a transfer of positive epistemic status from a mode of perception that we trust to a mode of perception, where perceptual claims are contested. The two-fold task of an analogy-argument is hence to establish the analogy and show that it is epistemically significant. The analogy-arguments I shall discuss both try to establish an analogy between numinous experience and sense perception.

Richard Swinburne is one of the most well-known advocates of an analogy-argument from religious experience. Swinburne frames his discussion of the way experience justifies certain claims in general terms, and asks: when is a perceptual claim (of whatever kind) rationally acceptable? The remarkably simple answer is summed up in the well-known principle of credulity:

I suggest that it is a principle of rationality that (in the absence of special considerations) if it seems (epistemically) to a subject that \( x \) is present, then probably \( x \) is present; what one seems to perceive is probably so.

There are many people who believe that they have experienced God. To construct an argument from these experiences, Swinburne supplements the principle of credulity with the principle of testimony. It states: "other things being equal, we think that what others tell us that they perceived, probably happened." The principle of testimony eliminates the evidential asymmetry between our own experiences and the experiences of others, so even if you have never experienced God yourself, you may use the testimony of others to justify your religious

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420 When talking of perceptual claims, what I have in mind are the claims we would back up by saying that we perceived things to be the way the claim states them to be. In this way, a person believing in God even before a numinous experience, can still make a perceptual claim that there is a God, even if the belief was not generated by her numinous experience.

421 Swinburne 1979 p. 254. By using 'seems' epistemically, Swinburne is drawing on a distinction made by Roderick Chisholm between epistemic and comparative uses of terms like 'seems' and 'looks'. To use 'seems' in an epistemic sense is to "describe what the subject is inclined to believe on the basis of his present sensory experience" (p. 246). If I use 'looks' in a comparative sense, I am saying something about my present sense impression, like when I say that the stick half-immersed in water looks broken, even though I know that it is not. Chisholm makes the distinction in Chisholm 1957 chap. 4.

422 Swinburne 1979 p. 272.
beliefs. The onus of proof is put on the skeptics: they have to supply reasons for why we should distrust the reports of numinous experiences.

Swinburne’s principles tell us that we should count reports of numinous experiences as honest reports of what people experienced, and that we should think of the experiences as supplying evidence for the claim that there is a God. This is the basic shape of his analogy-argument from religious experience.

However, things are not quite that simple. Swinburne lists four different ways in which skeptics can challenge a (religious) perceptual claim, and he derives the challenges from the “ways in which we or others challenge ordinary perceptual claims.” To strengthen his case, he tries to show that the challenges will not undermine very many perceptual claims based on numinous experiences. It is worth looking closer at Swinburne’s (and Franks Davis’s) responses to the different challenges.

The first two challenges are designed to question, on inductive grounds, a perceptual claim by inference from the demonstrated unreliability of perceptual claims made in similar situations in the past. First, we are rightly inclined to doubt perceptual claims if “the apparent perception was of a kind with others which proved in the past not to be genuine perceptions.” For instance, the experience may have occurred under the influence of LSD, and drugs like LSD are known to generate hallucinatory states. Apart from this, certain properties of the experiencing subject can function as good grounds for thinking that she is unreliable. Unreliability may take a number of forms. The subject is perhaps known to lie a lot, have a poor memory, or suffer from a disease which affects her perceptual capacities.

The challenge is not very strong when applied to numinous experience. Most people who undergo numinous experiences are “men who normally make reliable perceptual claims, and have not recently taken drugs.” Also, we have no reason to think that they suffer from many more diseases than other people do; nor that they lie very often.

The second challenge on Swinburne’s list tells us: “one may show that the perceptual claim was to have perceived an object of a certain kind where similar perceptual claims have proved false.” It applies when, for instance, someone claims to have read ordinary print from a distance of 500 meters. Swinburne remarks that apart from that, sometimes we may show that the perceiver is not

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423 Swinburne 1979 p. 264.
424 The challenges have been further elaborated by Caroline Franks Davis (1999 chap. V). Most of the time, Swinburne’s briefer account suffices for our purposes.
425 Swinburne 1979 p. 260.
426 Franks Davis 1999 p. 106. The case where someone is a pathological liar is actually a case limiting the principle of testimony rather than the principle of credulity.
427 Swinburne 1979 p. 265. See also Davis 1999 p. 131ff., where she points out that it may well be the case that experiences that succumb to this challenge are veridical, but they have very little evidential force, given the fact that they occurred in situations which are considered dubious.
428 Swinburne 1979 p. 261.
competent to give the kind of report she gives. She can lack the necessary ability or training required to discern whatever she claims to have discerned.429

This challenge is not, Swinburne thinks, too damaging for his analogy-argument. For one thing, we are often able to identify something we have not perceived before by drawing on descriptions. This explains how we can know that we encounter God, and not just some ghost.430 Furthermore, as Davis claims, we do not know what training or competence is required to experience God:

We have little idea of the sort of training which might enable one to have veridical experiences of God or other spiritual forces, and the kind of training which might seem appropriate—theological training, engaging in religious rituals, the cultivation of virtues, and guidance in meditation by a spiritual master or guru—does not by any means guarantee that one will have experiences of God, if he exists. Theists agree that genuine religious experiences may occur spontaneously to theologically naïve and even irreligious subjects. … On the other side of the problem, there are people who are highly trained in theology and are fine examples of virtue and brotherly love who have never experienced apparent contact with the divine.431

So it would appear that this challenge does not apply to numinous experience, since it is part of the way we think of God that there is never a guarantee that you will encounter Her, and never a guarantee that She will not be encountered either. Consequently, a subject’s failure to have a numinous experience can never function as counter-evidence to the trustworthiness of the numinous experiences that do occur.

The third and fourth challenges discussed by Swinburne are object-related challenges, relating to the object of the particular experience, and the possibility of raising doubts about its presence or existence. Perceptual claims would, then, be discredited on the grounds that what the subject takes herself to have experienced was most probably not what was experienced at all.

The third challenge states that a perceptual claim is probably unreliable when it is shown (taking “background evidence” into account) that probably, the object allegedly observed was not present.432 If I claim to have met Salman Rushdie in central Uppsala, this is a claim a skeptic can question by checking Rushdie’s movements. If he was not in Uppsala at the time of my alleged encounter with him, then my report is rightly judged unreliable, and the experience is thus unveridical. That is, however, different from saying that my experience was unveridical tout court. This requires clarification. To say that an experience

429 Swinburne 1979 p. 261. As when someone who knows nothing of art claims to have seen two impressionistic paintings in the hallway. We would certainly trust this person to be able to identify paintings, but we would be much less confident about her claim that the paintings are impressionistic.

430 Swinburne 1979 p. 268. This is a disputed claim in contemporary philosophy of religion, because doubts have been raised about whether it is possible to experience someone as omnipotent (as opposed to powerful) and omniscient (as opposed to very wise), and so on. The question is thus if an experience can be (phenomenologically) of the God of classical theism at all. See Forgie 1994 and Pike 1992 chap. 7.

431 Davis 1999 p. 128.

432 Swinburne 1979 p. 263.
is veridical is to say that it is an experience where the object which the subject thinks she perceives is also the object actually perceived, so the report she will give is basically correct. Veridicality, as I understand it here, is thus intimately related to the beliefs the subject forms on the basis of the experience. When we challenge a subject, what we normally question is the report, and not that the experience occurred. For example, if we prove that Salman Rushdie was in Amsterdam on the day of my alleged encounter with him, then we would say that I mistook someone else for Rushdie, and not that I was hallucinating. If the report is modified, the experience can be considered veridical.

The third challenge on Swinburne’s list does not, as a matter of fact, apply to a single numinous experience. The God of classical theism is, after all, omnipresent (that is, present everywhere, all the time). Consequently, challenges akin to the Rushdie-case never apply, because you cannot show that God was somewhere else than at the place where someone claims to have encountered Her. The challenge only has bite if we show with a high degree of probability that the God of classical theism does not exist. Then, any claim to have experienced God is discredited for the simple reason that there is no such being. The case for God’s non-existence would, however, have to be very convincing if it is going to override the perceptual evidence numinous experiences provide in favor of God’s existence. Needless to say, there is no such convincing case for atheism.

The fourth challenge, finally, goes like this: “the claim to have perceived $x$ may be challenged on the grounds that whether or not $x$ was there, $x$ was probably not a cause of the experience of its seeming to me that $x$ was there.” Here, non-religious explanations of numinous experiences are relevant, if understood as attempts to supply ”a causal explanation of why it seemed to me that $x$ was there, which does not involve $x$ at any stage.” While Swinburne and Davis are inclined to claim that such explanations are (as yet) unsatisfactory, I have stated my reasons for suggesting that the most promising strategy available to them is to hold that the existence or non-existence of such explanations makes no difference for their argument. I take this to be an improvement of their position.

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433 Swinburne 1979 p. 269. This kind of challenge is more effective if we have two experiences of a supernatural being not considered omnipresent, like the Virgin Mary, which are supposed to have occurred simultaneously, but that is not the kind of religious experiences at the center of attention here.

434 Swinburne 1979 p. 263f.

435 Swinburne 1979 p. 264.

436 Swinburne does not take the challenge posed by reductionist explanations of numinous experiences seriously, because he claims that the God of classical theism is the cause of everything, including my experiences, and is present everywhere, including in my mind, and as such, She is part of the causal chain of any experience (including, then, numinous experiences). The problems with that approach is that it does not respect Levine’s distinction between God’s being the cause of an experience in a theological sense, and in an epistemologically relevant sense. See Levine 1990.
Swinburne concludes that none of the challenges he has listed forces us to judge that numinous experiences as a rule are unveridical. The perceptual claims based on numinous experiences are, especially with the backup from other arguments for God’s existence, thus rationally acceptable claims.\textsuperscript{437}

\textit{The Crucial Problem with Swinburne’s Analogy-Argument}

I see a very problematic tendency in Swinburne’s (and Franks Davis’s) defense of perceptual claims based on numinous experience. It is the tendency to confuse ‘passing a test’ with ‘not being a proper candidate for a test.’ Their response to an objection made by Michael Martin illustrates this well.

Martin thinks the principle of credulity is a basically sound principle of rationality. Consequently, he is prepared to grant perceptual claims based on numinous experiences a status of \textit{prima facie} rational acceptability. The principle of credulity taken by itself, however, is too permissive, and the challenges on Swinburne’s list are not sufficient to help us weed out all the dubious perceptual claims which people make.\textsuperscript{438} To remedy this weakness, Martin suggests that we supplement the principle of credulity with a \textit{negative principle of credulity}. According to this principle, “[i]f it seems (epistemically) to a subject S that x is absent, then probably x is absent.”\textsuperscript{439} If other people cannot see what I see, this counts heavily against the rational acceptability of my perceptual claims. Applying this to numinous experience, Martin suggests that the failure of atheists as well as many devoted religious believers to experience communion with God lends strong support to the claim that there is no God. In sum, then, numinous experiences cannot be used to support religious beliefs, because their evidential force is cancelled by the uneven distribution of numinous experiences among those we would consider to be competent perceivers.

When contrasted with what has already been said, Martin’s objection sounds stupid. After all, “God is not available to voyeurs,” as Alston puts it.\textsuperscript{440} God is free to choose when to reveal or not reveal herself. Therefore, there is a difference in evidential status of the positive and the negative principles of credulity where God is concerned. The difference is due to what Richard Gale calls “a difference in the categorial nature of the apparent object of sense and religious experience.”\textsuperscript{441} God cannot be perceived unless she chooses to be perceivable, and this explains why experiences of the absence of God will not function as counter-evidence to the claim that God exists. Swinburne is prepared to admit that this difference weakens his argument somewhat:

\textsuperscript{437} For Swinburne’s use of numinous experiences in a cumulative case for the existence of God, see Swinburne 1979 chap. 14.
\textsuperscript{438} Martin 1990 pp. 177ff.
\textsuperscript{439} Martin 1990 p. 170.
\textsuperscript{440} Alston 1992 p. 302.
\textsuperscript{441} Gale 1991 p. 318.
If we do not know what experience would count against some perceptual claim (because we do not know which observers could have been expected to have had an experience apparently of \(x\) if \(x\) had been there), that somewhat lessens the evidential force of an apparent perception—but only somewhat. This is because in that case we cannot have the confirming evidence of failure to find evidence which counts against the claim.\(^{442}\)

What diminishes the force of the argument is thus that in numinous experience, perceptual disconfirmation is impossible. Had it been possible, though absent, analogy-arguments would have more force.

Martin’s objection is met by showing that it does not apply where God is the object of perception. Numinous experiences are too unlike sense perceptions in the sense that there is potential counterevidence to sense perceptual claims that we cannot have when it comes to perceptual claims based on numinous experience. Taken by itself, the defense makes sense. The problem is that the same strategy is employed over and over again to ward off skeptical challenges. The unfortunate consequence is that while defending perceptual claims based on numinous experiences against the challenges which (potentially) apply to ordinary perceptual claims, Swinburne and Davis undermine the analogy they must establish to make their argument convincing. Richard Gale’s critique is very much to the point:

The in-principle impossibility of disconfirming the veridicality of a religious experience by appeal to the testimony of other observers, rather than just lessening the probability of its veridicality, calls into question the very applicability of the agreement test to it. If religious experience cannot flunk the agreement test, then the test is not applicable to them. ... Swinburne seems to have forgotten that he is supposed to be justifying the extension of the principle of credulity to religious experiences on the ground that they are sufficiently analogous to sense experience, especially in regard to their respective defeating conditions. For this purpose, it is not sufficient to show that religious experiences cannot flunk some test that sense experiences can, for this is to admit that this test does not apply to religious experiences, thereby undermining his analogical argument.\(^{443}\)

As mentioned, Swinburne and Franks Davis think that it is enough to show that the challenges they list do not apply to numinous experiences, but as a matter of fact, this is very different from passing the tests. Even where the tests are supposed to apply, there is no convincing discussion of how they apply. Consequently, we are told that we do not really know how to apply the challenges to numinous experiences (special considerations one and two), or that they can never apply when the alleged object of perception is a being like God (special considerations three and four). How is this a defense at all? I would suggest that the reason why we think of perceptual claims as trustworthy is because we know that we have the resources to weed out the unveridical experiences by

\(^{442}\) Swinburne 1979 p. 263. Swinburne’s emphasis.

\(^{443}\) Gale 1991 p. 318.
use of a battery of checks and tests. Such checks and tests are not available in numinous experience.

A possible exception might be the challenge stating that a perceptual claim is not rationally acceptable if the subject has, for instance, ingested LSD. But we cannot really tell whether this affects reliability where numinous experience is concerned, so the challenge is somewhat arbitrarily injected into the religious sphere. Thinkers as diverse as Michael Martin and William James make the point that extreme psychological states or the use of drugs might function as catalysts for the intrusion of a higher reality into our mundane consciousness. “The point is that we do not know who is right, and we do not know how to settle the matter either.

We see now that Swinburne’s treatment of special considerations one through four makes no difference between ‘passing a test’ and ‘not being a proper candidate for a test.’ But where evidential value is involved, this is a crucial difference. To show that the tests of sense perception do not apply to numinous experience is to undermine the very analogy necessary for the argument. If we were to make use of Swinburne’s principle of credulity and the challenges he lists, we would, in effect, be incapable of distinguishing veridical from unveridical numinous experiences. Positive epistemic status is, I suggested, a function of a perceptual claim’s capacity to pass tests designed to weed out unreliable perceptual claims, and Swinburne offers nothing similar. I discuss the consequences for the goods of religion in 5.5.

The principle of credulity is, however, not the only strategy available to make analogy-arguments from religious experience. You can settle for a more indirect analogy, intended to establish that sense perception and numinous experience as modes of perception play a similar logical role in the practices of which they are part. This is the case made by William Alston.

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444 Martin 1990 p. 184, James 1982 p. 15. James writes: “[w]hen we speak disparagingly of ‘feverish fancies,’ surely the fever-process as such is not the ground of our disesteem—for aught we know to the contrary, 103° or 104° Fahrenheit might be a much more favorable temperature for truths to germinate and sprout in, than the more ordinary blood-heat of 97 or 98 degrees.” I would suggest that our skepticism about drug-induced, or sickness-related, religious experiences is due to the fact that quite often, such experiences occur in isolation from ordinary life, and as we come to our senses, the experiences no longer work to transform our lives in the way that I have argued religious experiences typically do. They are not part of the larger framework of type–2 religious experiences I identified in 4.4. Sometimes, though, such experiences transform your life; there are several examples of conversion experiences which occurred under the influence of alcohol, where the conversion had a lasting impact on the person’s life, and enabled a new equilibrium to take shape. It would be odd to claim that such experiences are probably not veridical, since they occurred while the subject was under the influence of a drug known to sometimes generate hallucinations.
5.4 Alston’s Reformed Doxastic Practice-Approach

Although Alston recognizes Swinburne as an ally, their analogy-arguments are notably different. Alston’s argument is heavily influenced by the thought of philosophers within the movement known as Reformed epistemology. So by way of introduction, let me give a brief overview of some central ideas of Reformed epistemology, here represented by Alvin Plantinga.

Reformed Epistemology: Undermining Classical Foundationalism

Classical and contemporary philosophy is, according to Plantinga, immensely influenced by what he calls classical foundationalism. Foundationalist theories of justification (the ones important for our present purposes) distinguish between basic and non-basic beliefs. Non-basic beliefs are the beliefs which are epistemically supported by other beliefs that I hold: “I believe that 72x71=5112. This belief is based upon several other beliefs I hold: that 1x72=72; 7x2=14; 7x7=49; 49+1=50; and others.” In contrast to coherentists, foundationalists hold that there are beliefs that do not need that kind of support, namely the basic beliefs. These are the beliefs

I accept but don’t accept on the basis of any other beliefs. ... I believe that 2+1=3, for example, and don’t believe it on the basis of other propositions. I also believe that I am seated at my desk, and that there is a mild pain in my right knee. These too are basic for me; I don’t believe them on the basis of others.”

The basic and non-basic beliefs I hold, plus the relations of support there is between them, make up a person’s noetic structure. Basic beliefs form the noetic structure’s foundation, and from this foundation, complex chains of interrelated non-basic beliefs grow. Classical foundationalism is a normative theory (or group of related theories) about the structure of a rational person’s noetic structure, and it has something to say about which beliefs to count as properly basic as well as which relations of support that are epistemically significant.

Classical foundationalism’s criteria for proper basicity are such that a "proposition p is properly basic for a person S if and only if p is either self-evident to S or incorrigible for S or evident to the senses for S." Hence, properly basic beliefs are the beliefs we immediately see are true, like the basic laws of logic and simple arithmetical truths. Here is also included the information

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446 Plantinga has, more recently, given a thorough presentation of his position in a trilogy on warrant and warranted Christian belief (Plantinga 1993a, 1993b, 2000). For our purposes, looking at his earlier writings suffices, because they are the ones which have inspired Alston.
447 Plantinga 1983 p. 46.
448 Plantinga 1983 p. 46f.
of immediate sense experience. Religious beliefs do not, according to classical foundationalism, qualify as properly basic beliefs. Therefore, they stand in need of support from basic beliefs, an assumption which is tacitly accepted in most discussions of the epistemic status of religious belief.

Plantinga claims that it is relatively easy to show that classical foundationalism’s criteria for properly basic beliefs are unreasonable. First, accepting them means accepting that "enormous quantities of what we all in fact believe are irrational." Let us, however, suppose that the classical foundationalist can live with that. Plantinga then mounts a second challenge by asking what ground the classical foundationalist can offer for accepting her own criteria for properly basic beliefs. They do not look properly basic. Well, are there arguments that support them? Plantinga says he knows of no such argument. Thus, the classical foundationalist faces a dilemma:

[The principle stating criteria for proper basicality] is either false or such that in accepting it the foundationalist is violating his epistemic responsibilities. For [the foundationalist] does not know of any argument or evidence for [the principle]. Hence, if it is true, he will be violating his epistemic responsibilities in accepting it. So [the principle] is either false or such that [the foundationalist] cannot rationally accept it.

Plantinga’s conclusion is that philosophers of religion have been mistaken in their search for grounds that would satisfy the classical foundationalists. There is no need to supply those grounds, because classical foundationalism is not a viable philosophical theory at all.

Plantinga makes the important choice not to accept antifoundationalism. We need reasonable successor criteria to replace classical foundationalism’s criteria for proper basicality. In order to formulate them, we should proceed inductively, and start from beliefs we actually accept as properly basic in different areas:

Accordingly, criteria for proper basicality must be reached from below rather than above; they should not be presented _ex cathedra_ but argued to and tested by a relevant set of examples. But there is no reason to assume, in advance, that everyone will agree on the examples. The Christian will of course suppose that belief in God is entirely proper and rational; if he does not accept this belief on the basis of other propositions, he will conclude that it is basic for him and quite properly so. Followers of Bertrand Russell and Madelyn Murray O’Hare may disagree; but how is that relevant? Must my criteria, or those of the Christian community, conform to their examples? Surely not. The Christian community is responsible to its set of examples, not to theirs.

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450 That is, sense data or protocol sentences.
454 Plantinga 1983 p. 77. Plantinga’s emphasis.
The Christian community will count "God created all this," "God forgives me," and certain other beliefs, which arise in a religious setting, as properly basic beliefs." Non-Christians will disagree with the Christian community's judgment, but that should not bother Christians too much.455

**Alston: Our Unfounded Modes of Belief-Formation**

In contrast to Swinburne and Franks Davis, Alston refuses to subject religious experiences to the checks and tests of sense perception. Much in line with Plantinga's Reformed approach, he rejects the idea of using context-independent tests to decide whether perceptual claims are rationally acceptable. Instead, he draws attention to how different modes of perception/experience play analogous roles in different practices. I shall concentrate on Alston's attempt to show that there is an epistemically significant analogy between the logical role numinous experience plays in religious practices, and the role sense perception plays in everyday practices.

Alston's defense of the analogy is most succinctly presented in *Perceiving God*. Here, Alston advocates an externalist conception of (epistemic)justification.458 A person is justified in believing that \( p \) if she is in a strong position (with regard to \( p \)) for "realizing the epistemic aim of getting the truth."460 Pace internalism, Alston holds that the person need not take herself to be in a strong position, or be able to explain why she is in that position. All it takes for a belief to be justified is that the subject forms the belief under favorable circumstances. To take an example, most of our sense perceptual beliefs (that is, beliefs which spontaneously arise in sense perception) are justified, even if we never stop to think of whether sense perception is a reliable source of beliefs or not. The same goes, according to Alston, for numinous experience. Someone who never reflects on the reliability of numinous experience may still form justified beliefs about God. All it takes is that numinous experience actually is a reliable source of beliefs. The question is: can we establish that it is? For a mode of perception to

455 But see Grigg 1990 for an interesting critique of Plantinga's idea that belief in God is properly basic.
456 This means that Plantinga's defense of the Christian faith is entirely *internal* in one sense, but not in another. It is internal in the sense that only Christians will accept Christian religious propositions as properly basic. But even non-Christians can be made to see that Christians are in their epistemic right to count such experiences as properly basic. There is nothing else for a critic to do than present her own views of what should count as properly basic beliefs, and to that extent, it is not a kind of justification that is entirely internal to Christian practice. For a critique of Plantinga on this point, see Silver 2001. Alston's work on the epistemology of numinous experience is, I would say, an attempt to show skeptics why numinous experience is rightfully counted as a reliable source of beliefs.
457 For Alston's purposes, 'perception' and 'experience' are synonymous terms.
458 The kind of justification under discussion here is, of course, epistemic justification, so I will drop the qualifier 'epistemic' from now on.
459 In his work on epistemology, however, Alston mixes his externalism with certain internalist elements. See the articles collected in Alston 1989.
460 Alston 1991 p. 73.
be reliable, "it must be the case that the belief [formed as the output of numinous experience] is very probably true, given that it was formed on that basis." Justification is thus intimately linked to the epistemic aim of attaining true beliefs and avoiding falsehood.

Alston proposes that we think of human belief-formation as going on in a number of doxastic practices. He individuates doxastic practices according to the input they deal with, and "some commonality in the functions that make up the constituent mechanisms." I take him to mean that within a doxastic practice, roughly similar ‘organs’ process roughly similar ‘input.’ Sense perception (SP) is, according to Alston, best thought of as a single doxastic practice, since its mechanisms (our sense organs) work in a roughly similar way to process roughly similar input. Besides SP, Alston also identifies and sketches the features of a "Christian Mystical Doxastic Practice" (CMP). CMP is used to form beliefs about God: Her actions, Her relation to us, and so on. According to Alston, CMP is employed in most mainstream Christian congregations.

Doxastic practices all have a pre-reflective genesis; we find ourselves employing them rather than set out to construct them. The practices are (normally) socially established, which means that a significant number of people use them, and that they develop over time. Learning and employing doxastic practices is a social affair, where I am subject to scrutiny and potentially criticism from my epistemic peers employing the same doxastic practice.

Doxastic practices, furthermore, contain not only belief-forming mechanisms, they "also involve distinctive ways of assessing and correcting the beliefs so formed." Learning to use the practice-specific evaluation-procedures that have developed to distinguish the rationally acceptable perceptual beliefs from the unacceptable, is an important part of learning to use a doxastic practice.

The evaluation-procedures may resemble the challenges to the rational acceptability of perceptual claims which Swinburne listed, but there is one important difference. According to Alston, they are internal to, and specific for, a particular doxastic practice. We cannot state general criteria that would apply to all perceptual claims. These practice-specific evaluation-procedures together make up each doxastic practice’s overrider system. A belief formed in a doxastic practice is, by virtue of being that kind of belief, prima facie justified, and if the

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463 Though we should understand terms like ‘organs’ and ‘input’ in a rather wide sense, since memory, for instance, also counts as a doxastic practice, where we form beliefs on the basis of what we remember.
464 It could well be argued that already here, Alston is setting the stage in a way suited for his apologetic purposes. Had he claimed that there are actually five different doxastic practices dealing with physical stimuli, then, these practices would support one another (what can be seen can also be touched, smelled, and so on). This would appear to put them in another epistemic position than numinous experience. Such an objection against arguments from religious experience is used in O’Hear 1984. I will, however, not pursue this line of criticism here.
doxastic practice’s overrider system does not give us reasons for distrusting the claim, then we are rational in counting it to be a justified claim. Passing the practice-internal tests is all it takes for a belief to be justified, unless we have very good reasons for thinking that the entire doxastic practice is unreliable.

As for the epistemic standing of CMP, Alston claims that “a person can become justified in holding certain kinds of beliefs about God by virtue of perceiving God as being or doing so-and-so.” Employment of CMP leads to the generation of religious beliefs that we have no reason to distrust. But there is still a reservation: can you show that CMP is a reliable doxastic practice? If not, why should we trust its output?

Alston approaches the issue indirectly, and asks what grounds we can give for considering any doxastic practice to be reliable. He argues that there are no arguments available that will absolutely guarantee that a doxastic practice is reliable. This is true even for sense perception. Philosophers in the past have, according to Alston, presented a priori and transcendental arguments intended to establish the reliability of sense perception. After a discussion of those arguments that we need not go into here, he concludes that none of them is successful. Most of them are unconvincing, and if they are not, this is because they at some point fall into “vicious circularity.” That is, the argument at some point relies on the assumption that the output of sense perception is reliable, the very conclusion they want to establish.

So according to Alston, any convincing argument for the reliability of SP must appeal to SP’s track-record: predictions based on SP are normally confirmed by future sense perception, and SP is helpful in your undertakings with a physical environment. Alston suggests that we have every reason to suspect that the same thing is true of other doxastic practices. We cannot establish that they are reliable unless we take under consideration how well they function to perform certain tasks for us.

Alston’s Analogy: The Logical Roles of SP and CMP

Alston suggests that the only rational response to this situation is to adopt the inductive approach to proper basicality Plantinga suggested as a successor to classical foundationalism’s criteria for proper basicity. Since non-circular demonstrations of the reliability of our doxastic practices are not available, the only rational thing to do is to commit ourselves to the reliability of doxastic practices that perform an important function in our lives. What to count as

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467 Alston himself understands reliability of doxastic practices thus: “[A] doxastic practice is reliable provided it would yield mostly true beliefs in a sufficiently large and varied run of employments in situations of the sorts we typically encounter. Alston 1991 p. 104f. Alston’s emphasis.
468 Alston 1991 chap. 3.
469 Even if he does not phrase it quite that way.
properly basic is thus decided within the doxastic practices that are important in our lives, and it would be insane to give those practices up if they work well. Part of their working well is that they afford themselves “significant self-support,” which means that the practices are supported by their own output in a non-trivial way. SP, for instance, supports itself by (among other things) making it possible for us to predict future experience. CMP, according to Alston, also enjoys significant self-support, “by the way in which spiritual development constitutes a fulfillment of promises that, in the practice, we come to believe are made by God.”470 People engaged in CMP develop as religious persons, in the direction the practice prescribes and predicts.

Both SP and CMP are candidates for being considered reliable. Prima facie, we have no reason to think that CMP is unreliable and SP is reliable. On the contrary, every full-fledged doxastic practice that performs an important function in human life should initially be considered reliable. Alston’s version of an argument from analogy thus goes like this:

Any argument from analogy depends on certain points of resemblance and not on others. The analogies between CMP and SP that are needed to yield the conclusion that CMP is rationally engaged in and rationally taken to be reliable if SP is, are the ones just noted: being a full-fledged socially established doxastic practice with distinctive input-output functions, having a functioning overrider system, the lack of sufficient reasons to take the practice as unreliable, and a significant degree of self-support. ... If these analogies hold, then CMP enjoys basically the same epistemic status as SP, though it may well be less firmly established, less informative, and its output may well enjoy a lesser degree of justification.471

Unlike Swinburne, Alston grants religious practices a significant degree of autonomy. Numinous experiences are not subject to the checks and tests of SP. That demand is an instance of epistemic imperialism (using SP’s overrider system to evaluate CMP; thus assuming that SP’s tests apply everywhere).472 Instead, CMP has its own ways of assessing numinous experiences: “CMP takes the Bible, the ecumenical councils of the undivided church, Christian experience through the ages, Christian thought, and more generally the Christian tradition as normative sources of its overrider system.”473

Clearly, the tests we get from these sources are quite different from those we use in SP. But that will not damage Alston’s analogy-argument, because for him, the point of importance is that there is an overrider system at work in CMP, an overrider system suited for CMP, and CMP’s subject-matter. The overrider system occasionally makes us raise doubts about the veridicality of particular numinous experiences. It cannot, however, cast the entire practice in question, no more than SP’s overrider system can. The most crucial tests CMP

472 Three examples of epistemic imperialism are given in Alston 1991 p. 249.
will use are faithfulness to orthodox doctrine, and the demand that the experiences receive significant self-support by lending subjects the strength to improve spiritually. Those fruits are, importantly, the ones that orthodox doctrine identifies as the fruits of the religious life. To take an example, the way you think of saintliness is determined by a religious tradition’s view of what saintliness is. So the second criterion is, for Alston, in important respects secondary to the first. Both the doctrine- and the fruits-test, as we can call them from now on, are internal to CMP, which means that they are formulated within CMP and only applicable to numinous (and other religious) experiences. That, however, is no legitimate ground for criticism of CMP. Internal tests are the only tests we can have if we are going to avoid epistemic imperialism, or the employment of double standards (demanding more from CMP than from SP).\(^{474}\)

Alston’s claim that internal tests are the only tests available means that he is not much troubled by Gale’s objection to Swinburne’s analogy-argument, that numinous experience cannot be subjected to the tests used in sense perception.\(^{475}\) Alston’s analogy-argument is more indirect than Swinburne’s—based on his theory of doxastic practices as it is—and is hence less vulnerable to objections that point to differences in the way we test beliefs in different doxastic practices. For Alston, Gale’s objection is another instance of epistemic imperialism, and as such, an objection we need not worry about.\(^{476}\)

CMP is thus an autonomous doxastic practice, and it is rationally engaged in unless it is demonstrated that it is unreliable. Here, Alston hands over the burden of proof to the skeptics. They have to present reasons for thinking that the analogy between SP and CMP will not hold. What can they come up with?

Well, a doxastic practice’s internal tests can never demonstrate that the doxastic practice as a whole is unreliable. Those tests are designed to weed out some of the perceptual claims as dubious because of some feature of the experience, the subject of the experience, or the kind of claim that is made. CMP can still, however, be questioned if its output conflicts with (the output of) another doxastic practice we take to be more reliable. If CMP constantly generates beliefs which contradict beliefs generated in SP, this would call for a revision of the overrider system of CMP, to eliminate such conflicts. In fact, such revisions have occurred in the history of CMP.\(^{477}\) These conflicts have not, however, been severe enough to establish that CMP should be rejected as unreliable. As a matter of fact, Alston holds that there is no convincing attempt to establish the unreliability of CMP. This includes the by now familiar challenge

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\(^{474}\) Alston 1991 p. 198. Alston does not deny that, e.g., SP is rationally taken to be more reliable than CMP. SP is, after all, universally established in a way which CMP is not. Hence, CMP faces competing doxastic practices in other religions. There may also be other reasons for thinking that CMP is inferior to SP. Even so, Alston holds that it has not been shown that CMP ranks so much lower than SP that it cannot reasonably be held to be a reliable doxastic practice.

\(^{475}\) Gale subjects Alston to the same criticism in Gale 1991 p. 318.


\(^{477}\) Alston 1991 p. 173. CMP has to be revised rather than SP, because SP is more firmly established.
from reductionist explanations of numinous experiences, a challenge Alston does not find too threatening,\(^478\)

The skeptics have thus failed to show that probably, CMP is unreliable. At best, they can force Christians to withdraw some peripheral religious beliefs and admit that CMP is less, though not much less, reliable than SP.

Alston himself believes that the most troubling challenge to his analogy-argument is that you find a number of incompatible religious doxastic practices in the world religions. Some of those doxastic practices even claim that numinous experiences are illusory, and a kind of obstacle on the path to enlightenment. Then, we have all the people who employ no religious doxastic practice at all. How can I believe that my own religious doxastic practice is reliable when I face such a plurality? Alston’s suggestion is that we should stick to our own religious doxastic practice as long as we have no practice-independent reasons to give it up, and it affords itself significant self-support.\(^479\) As long as this is the case, we have no reason to substitute it for one of its competitors.

### Problems with the Alleged Analogy between SP and CMP

Alston’s conclusion is that Christian beliefs are generated in an autonomous doxastic practice with its own ways of forming and regulating religious beliefs. Within a Christian practice, CMP plays the same, or a very similar, logical role, as does SP in various everyday practices. It is the source of beliefs about God, and it also functions as a confirmation that the practice’s way of thinking about God is not completely wrong. The relevant analogy for Alston is thus linked to the similar roles CMP and SP play in the respective practices where they are important. It is rational to count doxastic practices with such important roles in our lives as reliable, at least as long as they do not conflict with other established doxastic practices. Alston concedes that we have good reasons to think that CMP is less reliable than SP (such as the existence of competing religious doxastic practices), but they are not serious enough to force us to the conclusion that CMP should be abandoned.

I think Alston is right when he claims that the evaluation of religious experiences (including numinous experiences) must be made by criteria which are internal to a religious practice, and that those criteria will be different from the ones we use in sense perception. This is perfectly in line with my idea that different practices have their own conceptualizations, so that in order to understand a claim made on the basis of religious experience, we have to know what

\(^{478}\) Alston 1991 chap. 6.

\(^{479}\) See Alston 1991 chap. 7. The problems religious pluralism creates for Alston’s position is, I think, part of the problems of religion sketched in 1.2. I think it is pretty clear that his recipe is not very helpful for resolving those problems, because what he has to say will hardly restore confidence in our religious tradition. I will return to this in 5.5, and again in chap. 7.
kind of claim it is, and any attempt to evaluate the claim must take this into account.\footnote{In chap. 6, I will make some comments on how I think questions of veridicality should be addressed in relation to religious experiences.}

Alston’s indirect analogy to sense perception helps him avoid the problems which Swinburne’s strategy gave rise to. Similar problems, however, come back to haunt his position as well. The analogy he manages to establish is, I shall argue, too weak to warrant the transfer of epistemic authority from sense perception to numinous experience that Alston needs.

I shall not raise the question whether it is really so hard as Alston thinks it is to present considerations that would warrant the conclusion that CMP is much less reliable than SP (though this should not be taken as saying that I am convinced that Alston is right here). There is an even more serious problem with Alston’s approach, and it has to do with his claim that CMP and SP play a similar logical role in the practices to which they belong. That is a claim I shall contest. Let me elaborate my objection starting with the attack John Dewey launched on what he calls liberal theology in *A Common Faith*.\footnote{I am not sure whether Dewey’s term ‘liberal theology’ is a happy one. Maybe ‘modern [albeit orthodox] theology’ is a better choice, since he contrasts it with the theology of the Middle Ages. Here, I shall stick to Dewey’s term.} Dewey writes:

> The modern liberal version of the intellectual content of Christianity seems to the modern mind to be more rational than some of the earlier doctrines that have been reacted against. Such is not the case in fact. The theological philosophers of the Middle Ages had no greater difficulty in giving rational form to all the doctrines of the Roman church than has the liberal theologian of today in formulating and justifying intellectually the doctrines he entertains. … The fundamental question … is not of this or that article of intellectual belief but of intellectual habit, method and criterion.\footnote{Dewey 1934 p. 33f.}

What liberal and ancient theologians have in common is that they distinguish two kinds of knowledge, scientific and religious. ”The implication is that in one territory the supremacy of scientific knowledge must be acknowledged,” while in the case of religious knowing, ”other methods and criteria hold sway.”\footnote{Dewey 1934 p. 34.}

Dewey notes that some theologians assert that the constant flux of what counts as accepted theories in natural science somehow indicates that science is an incomplete, and possibly even unreliable, source of knowledge. In comparison, the stock of accepted beliefs in a theological tradition are much more stable over time. But it is the very stability of what counts as accepted beliefs in religion that is problematic, because it shows that in religious matters, there is no room for development and progress:
Even if the alleged unreliability [of scientific method] were as great as they assume (or even greater), the question would remain: Have we any other recourse for knowledge? But in fact they miss the point. Science is not constituted by any particular body of subject-matter. It is constituted by a method, a method of changing beliefs by means of tested inquiry as well as of arriving at them. It is its glory, not its condemnation, that its subject-matter develops as the method is improved. There is no special subject-matter of belief that is sacrosanct. …

For scientific method is adverse not only to dogma but to doctrine as well, provided we take "doctrine" in its usual meaning—a body of definite beliefs that need only to be taught and learned as true. … The scientific–religious conflict is a conflict between allegiance to this [scientific] method and allegiance to even an irreducible minimum of belief so fixed in advance that it can never be modified."\(^4\)

In my view, Dewey points to the weak spot of Alston’s analogy-argument. According to Alston, the really significant source of tests in CMP is orthodox doctrine. Even if we, after Kuhn, would certainly agree that Dewey has an (in some respects) overly optimistic view of scientific method, a comparison of SP with CMP suffices to show that SP’s subject-matter is not the source of the practice’s overrider system the way it is for CMP. The difference has serious consequences for Alston’s claim that SP and CMP play similar logical roles in the human practices of which they are part.

We can put the problem this way: SP presupposes the existence of physical objects in a different way than CMP presupposes the existence of the Christian God. Within SP, we can always discover that a certain object probably does not exist when competent perceivers cannot detect it even in the circumstances where they should be able to detect it. We can even discover that all physical objects (except our bodies) have vanished. Something similar will never be true for CMP, as is shown by the response to Martin’s negative principle of credulity.\(^5\) Here, what is a veridical numinous experience is always determined by its content, and God’s absence will never count as good reasons for thinking that God does not exist.

Numinous experience cannot even be drawn upon to reform our idea of God. This is because what counts as a veridical numinous experience (that is, perception of God) is determined by the way God is presented (its content), rather than the conditions under which the experience takes place, or what other competent perceivers have to say. Novelty is always a good reason for categorizing a numinous experience as unveridical. This is because the doctrine-test is the most important test in CMP, and that test basically tells us that any numinous experience, which presents God in a way that does not agree with orthodox doctrine, is unveridical. Hence, numinous experience cannot play the critical role that sense perception can.

The difference between SP and CMP I have pointed to here is important, because it shows that the analogy between the way SP and CMP function in the

\(^4\) Dewey 1934 p. 38f.

\(^5\) See 5.3.
practices they are part of is much weaker than Alston thinks. CMP cannot have the critical function SP can. Alston actually comes close to admitting that there is a lack of analogy here when he discusses the difference between what we count as competent perceivers in different doxastic practices:

With CMP and other religious perceptual practices ... there are sharp differences in expertise, with most participants at a low level. Hence authority plays a much larger role here, not just on theoretical matters, as in science, but even on the perceptual level. Most of us must look outside our own experience to the tiny minority that qualify as masters of the spiritual life, both for some intimation of what mastery of the practice is like and for an answer to the question of whether this enterprise proves itself by its fruits. ... The testimony of the experts is that CMP does prove itself by its spiritual fruits in the sanctification of the individual. This is abundantly brought out by the writings of the saints, officially so designated or not. It may be objected that I have loaded the dice here by restricting my witnesses to those from whom I can confidently expect a positive answer. But, in the nature of the case, what is the alternative?486

Now the problem here is that the persons that Alston counts as experts are those who, according to the doctrine-test, have had veridical experiences of God. If their experiences had not conformed to the teachings of orthodox doctrine, they would never have qualified as experts in the first place! Critical input from CMP (and other religious doxastic practices) is hence made impossible.

It would be foolish to claim that sense perception always works to overturn established belief; the important thing is that it can. It is the potential, though concrete, capacity to disconfirm our present beliefs that give observations made in SP positive epistemic status. That is, the epistemic authority of sense perception is derived from our capacity to test it in ways that do not presuppose what is called into question. This is why it makes sense to talk about sense perception as reliable. Numinous experiences, on the other hand, must, to qualify as veridical, conform to orthodox doctrine, and they are hence unable to make us revise or reject substantial parts of what we thought we knew. My conclusion is that SP and CMP do not play the same or even a (in epistemic respects) similar logical role in the practices to which they belong. This is a lack of analogy that has devastating consequences for Alston’s version of an analogy-argument from religious experience.

What this goes to show is not that there is a metaphysical guarantee that SP is reliable, a guarantee that CMP lacks. Alston is right that no such guarantees can be had. However, that is different from saying that all doxastic practices have more or less the same epistemic status. In fact, the ways in which the overrider systems of SP and CMP differ show that they cannot be assigned the same epistemic status. To remind the reader of the relation I made between being a competent perceiver and being capable of acting intelligently, we can say that SP is a mode of perception that enables us to act intelligently, and modify

behavior for some purpose. An important part of this is that SP itself is dynamic, since it, and its overrider system, develops as our interaction with the environment develops. In comparison, CMP is hopelessly inflexible.

To put words in Alston’s mouth, he might reply that he can explain why this lack of analogy is unavoidable: this is due to the differences in the “categorical nature” of SP’s and CMP’s subject-matter. God is free to reveal Herself to someone when She wants, so it is unrealistic to expect of CMP that it should be able to revise itself in the way I demand. That reply is reasonable given the way Alston thinks of God and God’s agency, but it means that he has to give up on the analogy he seeks to establish.

To show that there is a lack of analogy does not prove that CMP is unreliable, but it prevents you from claiming that it is rational to think of CMP as a reliable doxastic practice because it plays a similar logical role as SP. Thus, Alston has not made a convincing case for his idea that numinous experience is a reliable mode of perception. To see the full importance of this, remember Alston’s affiliation to Reformed epistemology. Plantinga argued that in the aftermath of the collapse of classical foundationalism, we need a new set of criteria for proper basicity. I understand Alston as saying that we find those criteria within the different doxastic practices we commit ourselves to. In that sense, Alston’s defense of religious belief, just like Plantinga’s, is internal to a Christian practice, because only Christians will be inclined to count the output of CMP (which has passed the checks and tests of its overrider system) as properly basic beliefs. You can thus view Alston’s analogy-argument as an attempt to transcend a purely internal perspective, by showing that CMP functions in a way that makes an epistemically relevant analogy to sense perception possible. If his argument is successful, then even skeptics would have to admit that Christians are entitled to count the output of CMP as properly basic beliefs. Alston’s failure shows that the skeptics need not at all grant Christians the right to count those beliefs as properly basic.487 The lack of (the relevant) analogy between CMP and SP makes it possible, maybe even reasonable, to reject CMP while continuing to view SP as a reliable doxastic practice.

Before I move on, let me point to another problem with Alston’s analogy-argument.488 It emanates from the failure to establish that CMP plays a similar logical role as SP. Once that attempt fails, it is clear that we are left without resources for significant criticism and reform of religious orthodoxy. In fact, if we accept Alston’s way of thinking about the autonomy of religious practices, we face a situation where religious orthodoxy is the only resource we have to assess and criticize the adequacy of religious orthodoxy.

This is not problematic if you hold a conservative religious position, because orthodox doctrine is based on revelation, and revelation is held to be

487 Cf. the assessment made of Alston’s position in Meeker 1994.
488 Though I am certainly not saying that Alston would find it very problematic.
infallible and (so many would say) completed. But if you, for instance, believe
that revelation is an ongoing process, and that it is always received and inter-
preted by human beings living at a particular time and place, then the lack of
resources for significant criticism and reform will be very troubling indeed.⁴⁸⁹

I shall not use these considerations to formulate a further argument against
Alston, because I think that I have already established that his position is
depressingly problematic. Furthermore, it is possible that Alston would not at all be
troubled by such an argument, but object that this is a natural part of what it is
for a practice to be a religious practice. I want, however, to ask the reader to
keep this problematic feature of Alston’s thinking in mind, because in my view,
it is crucial, for the purpose of preserving the goods of religion, that we give a
more substantial answer to the question about what criticism and reform of
religious practices might be like.

5.5 Conclusions from Two Failed Analogy-Arguments

The important conclusion of the chapter, which is now drawing to a close, is
that the analogy-approaches used in arguments from religious experience are
unconvincing. They have not established an analogy which would demonstrate
that anyone who counts sense perception as a reliable source of beliefs is forced
to admit that numinous experience is also a reliable source of beliefs.

Now, of course, arguments are never unconvincing in themselves, but only
in relation to the standards we think convincing arguments should meet. What
standard is at work here? To demand S-successfulness, that every rational
person be convinced, is unreasonable. Almost no philosophical arguments meet
those standards. Even the demand that the argument should be very strong (albeit
of a W-successful nature) would display a lack of understanding of the pre-
suppositions of the current debate. Philosophers who argue in favor of religious
belief are not interested in establishing God’s existence with absolute certainty.
What they strive for is to show that there is a significant likelihood that there is
a God, but to have faith in God, we need a commitment that goes beyond the
available evidence.⁴⁹⁰ Hence, I think D. Z. Phillips is a bit unfair when he writes:

⁴⁸⁹ See, for instance, the feminist critique of contemporary philosophy of religion’s blindness to the masculine
bias of the Christian tradition’s way of defining mysticism presented in Jantzen 1995. Jantzen draws
attention to the ambiguous status of mysticism for religious traditions; in one sense, mystics are highly
devoted to God, and thus to the church, but on the other hand, they tend to become rather unorthodox in
their ways of thinking about God or the transcendent. The solution for the medieval church was to brand
unorthodox mystics as heretics influenced by the Devil, while acknowledging the experiences of those
conforming to orthodox doctrine as veridical experiences of God. In this way, the potential threat mysti-
cism posed to those in possession of religious power was neutralized. At the same time, women were, in
the name of religious orthodoxy, systematically deprived of influence over Christian doctrine, and Christian
denominations.

⁴⁹⁰ To take one example, Swinburne holds that there would be something wrong with a proof of God’s exis-
tence that everyone had to accept. That would, indeed, mean that turning to God would not be an act of
faith. See Swinburne 1981.
"[o]n its own admission, the most evidentialism [for instance, Swinburne’s approach] can say about God’s existence is that it is highly probable. This pur-
ports to be an account of faith. Few bother to ask what has happened to belief in
a God with whom there is no variableness or shadow of turning?" 491 Phillips’s
objection is that philosophers like Swinburne leave no room for the religious
certitude some believers exhibit. Hence, they misconstrue faith. I think this
objection overlooks the distinction many philosophers would make between
rational belief in God and faith in God. 492 Perhaps the distinction shows that
most philosophers of religion are not really orthodox evidentialists, or that they
have a confused conception of what it is to have faith; this is not important for
my present purposes. What is important, however, is that the distinction implies
that we should not make too severe demands on arguments for God’s existence
like the analogy-arguments examined here.

The problem for Swinburne, Franks Davis, and Alston is that even if we
avoid making the standards for successful arguments too stringent, my con-
clusion stands. Once we see that the analogy-thinking that underlies the argu-
ments is flawed, they are robbed of almost all force. The tests we use in
religious experience are not at all like the tests we use to evaluate sense
perceptual experiences, and religious (including numinous) experience does not
play a similar logical role in a religious practice as sense perception does in
everyday practices. On my view they cannot. The practice-specific tests of a
religious practice, at least the way Alston construes them, are derived from
orthodox doctrine, and will thus prevent numinous experience from ever being
a source of criticism and reform of orthodox doctrine. This is the crucial point
where the analogy-arguments fail. As a consequence, the skeptics need not
accept the burden of proof at all. 493

One question remains: would the verdict be different if analogy-arguments
from religious experience were to be positioned in the framework of a cumulative
case, where they are supplemented with the arguments of natural theology, as
well as arguments from miracles, providence, consciousness, and so on? The
point of a cumulative case for God’s existence is that taken in conjunction, the
arguments might make belief in God rationally acceptable, even if they are un-
convincing taken in isolation. 494 For our present purposes, this means that even
if analogy-arguments are unconvincing, they might contribute to a cumulative
argument which establishes that God probably exists. I have three comments on
such a project. First, there are severe problems with all the arguments that have

492 See, for instance, Alston 1991 p. 277. For the idea that a religious commitment that is stronger than the
available evidence is rational, see Stenmark 1999.
493 This is not to say that there may not be interesting things to learn about religious experience by com-
paring it to sense perception for certain purposes (see, e.g., Unger 1976). All I am saying is that as for
epistemic purposes, such a comparison will mainly demonstrate that there are decisive differences between
sense perception and numinous experience.
been presented to support belief in God. As a consequence, analogy-arguments would have to make a significant contribution to the cumulative case, and, as the present chapter shows, they do not. Second, once you construct a cumulative case for the existence of God, you should, to be fair, include atheistic counter-arguments as well. The strongest atheistic argument is some argument from the vast amount of evil and suffering in the world. This argument looks at least as forceful as all the arguments for God’s existence, taken together. Third, and most importantly, even if it (counterfactually) was the case that a cumulative case would make belief in God rationally acceptable, this would still not solve the crucial problem with the analogy-arguments: that they make no positive contributions to our capacity to criticize and reform religious practices. We would still be unable to distinguish veridical from unveridical experiences, and religious experience would not function as the source of criticism and reform of religious practices. This means that a cumulative case would still not help us to come to terms with the problems of religion. All in all, then, a cumulative approach to the arguments for God’s existence will not do much good for the analogy-arguments evaluated here.

Consequences for the Goods of Religion

Analogy-arguments from religious experience thus fail to supply resources for significant criticism and reform. What are the consequences of this conclusion? I argued in chapter 1 that, regardless of whether we are religious persons or not, we need to relate to religious practices in a number of ways, and that at present, there are three groups of problems which make religion look problematic. Those problems are, first, the problems religious individuals experience when they face a plurality of competing religious and non-religious perspectives, second, the problems that religious traditions experience when they encounter other traditions which question their truth-claims. Third, and finally, we have the problems that arise in a social context, where we need to make collectively based decisions, and the standpoints different people take are clearly influenced by their views of life. These are the problems of religion we need to come to terms with, and our incapacity to resolve problematic situations whereof religious beliefs and views of life are part indicate that we have insufficient resources for criticism and reform to draw on.

Analogy-arguments from religious experience would, if convincing, contribute positively to those resources by giving us the means to distinguish between the veridical and the unveridical numinous experiences people have had. If we had those resources, we would be able to handle conflicts between different religious traditions, and also make a well-founded religious commitment of our own. That way, the goods of religion could be preserved.

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I think primarily of the evidential argument from evil. For one version of such an argument, see Rowe 1992.
The evaluation of the arguments that I have made in this chapter shows, however, that the analogy-arguments cannot supply those resources, since they are unconvincing. If someone uses numinous experience to support her own position, she will find that she is incapable of criticizing others when they appeal to other numinous experiences to support an opposite standpoint, and there is a significant risk that discussion can come no farther. Here, the contributions philosophers of religion have made are not helpful for attempts to handle and resolve such conflicts. We still have insufficient resources for criticism and reform of religious practices.

Philosophical reflection has thus failed to contribute positively to our chances of preserving the goods of religion. I interpret this as a shortcoming of the conception of religion dominant in contemporary philosophy of religion. Philosophical reflection is one of the means we use as we try to resolve problematic situations we encounter, but where the problems of religion are concerned, philosophers have not had much to contribute. I think this has a lot to do with how they think of religion in general and of the justification of religious beliefs and religious practices in particular. Justification is, remember, that which is taken to warrant a continued commitment to, for instance, a religious practice. The view of justification predominant in contemporary philosophy of religion has had the consequence that religious beliefs and religious practices continue to look problematic. An important part of this is that the problems of religion are still with us.

From the perspective of philosophy as criticism, this means that the philosophical conception of religion, which is dominant in contemporary philosophy, is very problematic. Nonetheless, anyone acquainted with analytical philosophy of religion is aware of the inability I have pointed to. Why, then, is the conception so persistent?

First of all, philosophers are not used to assessing the adequacy of conceptions of religion in relation to the purpose of preserving experienced goods. That type of assessment is not viewed as part of philosophical practice. Second, since there is no sharp boundary between philosophical practice and religious practice, reconstruction of philosophical practice necessarily has repercussions for religious practice as well, and those repercussions may be painful. Third, a conception of religion is, I have argued, associated with a larger interpretative framework which I call a philosophical anthropology. Hence, a particular conception of religion is not the accidental outcome of philosophical practice; it is shaped by your way of thinking about human practices generally. Changing your conception of religion may have serious reverberations for the way you do philosophy, and involves a change that resembles a paradigm shift.

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496 I have framed the discussion in terms of numinous experience here, but the same thing goes, I would say, for religious experiences in general.

497 See 1.2 above.
A fourth reason, which is related to the above mentioned, is that many philosophers hold a conviction that has received the status of a dogmatic truth in contemporary philosophy of religion: if we were to give up the current conception of religion, including the type of justification it finds proper for religious belief, religious relativism is the only remaining option. But is that conviction really true? Alston, to take one example, leaves virtually no room for criticism and reform of religious practices, and the position his Reformed thinking leads to is definitely reminiscent of relativism. So it is far from clear that the current conception of religion is the stronghold against relativism philosophers think it is.

I shall try to show that there are resources for criticism and reform we can use if we adopt a pragmatic conception of religion. If we avail ourselves of those resources, then we will be in a better position than before to preserve the goods of religion. This is the promise a pragmatic approach to views of life and religious practices makes. Let us see what that promise is worth.

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Relativism may not be the correct term, because the believer, irrespective of which religious tradition she belongs to, should, according to Alston, make an absolute commitment to her own tradition, while acknowledging that others are equally entitled to make absolute commitments to their respective traditions. Ulf Jonsson, in a discussion of Richard Rorty, labels this type of position *monistic relativism*. It is monistic because it rejects the pluralistic spirit of most relativists. As a consequence, there is also a significant risk that it will lack the tolerance we associate with relativism. See Jonsson 1999 p. 296.
6.1 The Connection Between Criticism and Justification

I have suggested that our problems with preserving the goods of religion today are connected to a lack of resources for criticism and reform of religious practices. Analogy-arguments promised to give us such resources, but as I showed in the previous chapter, they cannot keep their promise. In the end, criticism becomes a matter of religious orthodoxy being the sole judge of the adequacy of religious orthodoxy. Let us not overemphasize philosophy of religion’s importance by claiming that the current standing of philosophy of religion is the cause of the problematic situation religion is in today. It is, however, bad enough that philosophers of religion have not managed to contribute to the development of fruitful models for criticism and reform of views of life and religious practices.

Of course, we are not completely devoid of means to communicate, and deal with the problematic situations where religious beliefs and views of life play a part. Those are practical problems that we have to deal with, regardless of whether the contributions philosophers make are helpful or not. So the situation is not one where society stands in need of an entirely new theory of criticism and reform of religious practices. When I speak of a lack of resources for criticism and reform, what I have in mind is a lack of philosophical contributions to ways of criticizing and reforming your view of life. But even if there is no need to rebuild models for criticism and justification from the bottom, I believe...

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499 See 1.2 for more on this.
500 A critique of the way mainstream philosophers of religion think of criticism and reform could well start from the claim that they are incapable of doing justice to the practices of criticism and reform we can actually find at work in the handling of concrete problematic situations. A pragmatist can claim that once we attend to those concrete instances of criticism, what we see at work makes more sense on a pragmatic conception of criticism and reform than on the conception of religion dominant in mainstream philosophy of religion. I think this line of argument is interesting, but to develop it, we would have to examine (for instance) a number of public debates over policy-making carefully, and there is not enough space to pursue that project here. Instead, I will concentrate on the ability of philosophy of religion to contribute positively to the way we handle concrete instances of the problems of religion.
that in our undertakings with concrete problems, we need help from many quarters. Philosophy of religion is one. Our conception of religion influences the development of religious practices, and the way we deal with them in different contexts. My claim is that the influence of the dominant conception of religion in contemporary philosophy of religion has not worked for the benefit of the goods of religion. It is more likely that it has contributed to a growing insecurity over whether it is possible to handle the problems of religion in an intelligent way at all. Acting intelligently means, from a pragmatic perspective, directing thought and action towards the resolution of some problem, but also choosing wisely between the alternative courses of action with that goal in mind. The trouble is that on the conception of religion dominant in contemporary philosophy of religion, religious commitment has come to look like an arbitrary affair. Not only will this make us doubt our commitment; another important consequence is that we see no way in which to conduct criticism and reform in an intelligent way. These two elements are inexorably linked to one another: if we lack one, we also lack the other.

From the point of view of a pluralistic society, questions about the justification of religious practices (or religious beliefs) come naturally. The policies we advocate, and the individual choices we make, are heavily influenced by commitment to those practices, so when conflicts arise, it comes as no surprise that questions about the grounds we have for our different commitments emerge. To me, it is clear that the approach taken by most philosophers of religion to these questions is unfruitful, and should be abandoned. I have shown that analogy-arguments from religious experience fail to supply the resources for significant criticism and reform. The problems those arguments face are so severe that I do not think they can be improved to any significant extent. Analogy-arguments from religious experience are, furthermore, set in a conception of religion I reject. That conception is also associated with a philosophical anthropology significantly different from the one I embrace. I have given reasons for thinking that the way we conceive of justification of human practices is a function of the way we think of human practices at large. Embracing a philosophical anthropology thus (in part) means that a certain view of what the relevant justification of human practices is like comes naturally. The purpose of this chapter is to give an outline of what this view is like if we embrace a pragmatic philosophical anthropology, and I shall concentrate on the importance of criticism and reform.

501 In this chapter, I shall mainly conduct the discussion of justification with religious practices rather than particular religious beliefs in mind.
Why We Need to Develop Resources for Criticism and Reform

There is a very attractive approach to the justification of religious practices available, and it involves pointing to the process I characterized as tension and resolution, that is, the function religious practices perform in many people’s lives. A religious view of life enables many people to lead a life they experience as richer than any alternative. Need we say more?

The simple picture is basically correct. *Justification of religious practices must take into account the (positive) role they play in people’s views of life.* What justifies a continued commitment to a religious practice for a person is the function which the religious practice performs in her life. But we would oversimplify matters if we stop here. If we link the justification of a religious commitment to the role it plays in our view of life, then it is also important that we demonstrate that there are ways in which we can criticize and reform our views of life *as well as the practices which influence them* when needed. So I am saying that experienced adequacy of a view of life cannot stand on its own; we also want to know something about how to deal with cases of conflict, and that the view of life is open to novelty. You can say that we need to know something about how the response we take to be adequate has developed, and how it is adjusted in future interaction with the environment. In short, we want to know whether we can criticize and reform our views of life if necessary.

Once resources for criticism and reform of views of life are supplied, you automatically supply resources for criticism of religious practices and their secular counterparts. Religious practices influence our conception of human flourishing, but when we find reasons to revise that conception, then our revised view of life may conflict with elements of the pictures of human flourishing which are presented in the stories, myths, and so on, of a religious practice. Hence I am saying that criticism of a view of life is always also (potentially) criticism of the practices on which it draws.

My ambition in this chapter is to explore the way philosophers of religion can contribute positively to the way we handle our views of life. I have already mentioned the importance of equilibrium in pragmatic philosophy. I now want to develop that idea and claim that by looking at intelligent ways of restoring equilibrium, we can learn important things about how to fruitfully handle conflicts and problematic situations where our views of life are involved.

I shall draw on the contemporary discussion of *reflective equilibrium* in moral philosophy to show how the way I think views of life can be criticized and reformed, and I shall modify the term ‘reflective equilibrium’ to fit into my discussion. Stated in the philosophical terms to be developed, I claim that being in a state of *reflective equilibrium* is important for when we consider a view of life to be justified. To say that it is justified is to say, then, that it functions well and

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502 Even if my discussion here is limited to religious practices, I see no reason to think that it will not apply to other practices that perform a similar function in our views of life as well.
contributes to a life of flourishing (an idea to be developed further later on). With regard to religious practices, I suggest that a person’s religious commitment is justified to the extent that the practice she is committed to contributes positively to a view of life that can be held in a state of reflective equilibrium, and hence (indirectly) contributes positively to human flourishing. Religious practices are subject to criticism if they impede the development of adequate views of life. This way of putting things is somewhat inaccurate, and I shall suggest important qualifications along the way.

Adequacy plays an important role in reflective equilibrium. I shall suggest that a significant part of what it is to hold a view of life in reflective equilibrium is to experience it as an adequate response to the existential conditions of human life. An experience of adequacy signals the absence of tension and confusion. A view of life we take to be adequate helps us avoid frustration and doubt, and allows significant interaction with the environment. Remember, however, that an experienced adequacy is insufficient for the purpose of justification; it may still be that once the view of life is put to the test, it proves deficient. The relevant kind of criticism and reform should, then, be such that it helps us to detect deficiencies, and remove them in the most effective way. In short, we need to sketch ways in which to detect, institute, and resolve problems in a satisfactory way. Here is where I think philosophers can make a positive contribution.

Before I start, let me say something about the relation between the social and the individual level of reflection in reflective equilibrium. It may look strange to turn to reflective equilibrium to develop the models I claim are needed to handle problems of a social character better than before, because reflective equilibrium is quite often taken to be a method which an individual should use in moral deliberation. In what follows, I will also, for reasons given later, discuss reflective equilibrium in individual terms, as something a subject struggles to attain. But I take the method to have important implications on a social level as well, and that there is no sharp distinction to make between an individual and a social level of reflection or justification. Let me explain.

In one sense, reflection on your view of life is always an individual affair. This is certainly true if you, like I do, believe that we cannot identify a Christian view of life as an abstract entity separable from the people who draw on Christian practices to develop a conception of human flourishing. But in another sense, such reflection always has reverberations on a social level. Here, I believe that it is fruitful to use Mead’s distinction between two phases of the self: the “I” and the “me”. The “me” makes the same responses as others. They are synthesized into a generalized other that every self that belongs to the same

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Footnote: In particular, I believe that a view of life cannot be disconnected from the subject having it more than for theoretical purposes (see chap. 4). As I shall claim, it is not strictly speaking a view of life that is in reflective equilibrium; it is rather a person with a certain view of life that finds herself to be in a state of reflective equilibrium.
practice has internalized. The "I", however, adds an individual element to reflection: novelty is always possible in the ways we respond to different situations.

Even if the "I" and the "me" are distinct phases of the self, they are not disconnected from one another. The responses of the "I" are, to a significant extent, conditioned by the shape of the "me". If that was not true, then we would occasionally be unable to recognize a thought or an action as a response to a particular situation. In other words, novelty must always take into account the state of what is fixed, and unproblematic, at present. This, in turn, means that there is a social aspect to the "I" as well, because to qualify as responses of the "I", responses have to be responses that introduce novelty in contrast to a background we share.

The interrelatedness of the "I" and the "me" suggests, I take it, that even though reflection on your view of life is an individual affair, it is always a social affair as well. What you respond to always has social character, since it is what constitutes the "me" of different people. Hence, it should be clear that there is no sharp distinction to make between the individual and the social level of reflection.

6.2 Reflective Equilibrium for My Purposes

It was Nelson Goodman who first introduced the term ‘reflective equilibrium’ in a discussion of how to justify induction.\textsuperscript{504} John Rawls developed Goodman’s ideas to formulate a method of moral deliberation in A Theory of Justice.\textsuperscript{505}

For Rawls, reflective equilibrium is a method for harmonizing our moral principles and our considered moral judgments. Considered moral judgments are, according to Rawls, the judgments we make in contexts where our judgment is not likely to be unduly affected by personal interest, or interest for someone else about whom we care a lot.\textsuperscript{506} The point of formulating moral principles is to make clearer, and to some extent systematize, our sense of justice. Moral principles are also valuable as we encounter new situations, where we are uncertain about how to act. As we formulate them, our considered moral judgments are always open to revision. Revision is called for where considered moral judgments conflict, because they cannot all cohere with the moral principles that are taking shape. But neither do the principles so formulated attain an absolute status. Revision may be called for as we widen the range of considered moral judgments.

‘Reflective equilibrium’ can be taken to refer to a method of moral deliberation. It can also be taken to refer to the end-state the method leads to. So

\textsuperscript{505} Rawls 1971.
\textsuperscript{506} Rawls 1971 p. 47f. Rawls is not saying that we always make unreliable judgments in cases like these, but there is a consensus that here, we have cases where non-moral factors are likely to influence our judgment in a way that might make it questionable.
reflective equilibrium is a method suggesting that we examine our considered moral judgments in order to reach a set of moral principles with which they cohere, but it is also a state we attain by using the method. From one perspective, the method justifies the state, that is, gives it any positive (epistemic) status. The state is only attractive as the outcome of a well-worked-out method for moral deliberation. From another perspective, the state justifies our use of the method. In other words, the method is recommendable, for it leads to a state with positive epistemic status. Both perspectives are actually correct. I think the state of reflective equilibrium has a certain priority, meaning that the method is suited for the purpose of reaching the state of reflective equilibrium, and if it fails to help us attain it, the method should be revised. The state of reflective equilibrium allows significant interaction with our environment, and this is why we experience it to be valuable.

However, the relation between the state and the method is slightly more complex. It is also a requirement of a state of equilibrium, to be a state of reflective equilibrium, that it is attained by use of a method we think is suited for fruitful resolution of encountered problems, a method which we have faith in. Faith in the method comes from previous successful employment where it has proved useful for the purpose of restoring equilibrium. This is what warrants (provisional) commitment to the method. So let me suggest that the state as well as the method of reflective equilibrium derive positive epistemic status from the way they function together.

Let us look closer at how moral philosophers think of reflective equilibrium as a method of moral deliberation.\textsuperscript{507} The method starts with our initial moral judgments. They take the form both of judgments about particular cases, and quite general judgments. In the first step, our initial moral judgments are to be filtered by the subject to leave only considered moral judgments. This is done by elimination of the cases where non-moral factors influence our judgment to a considerable extent. ‘Considered’ is, however, taken to refer to the status the subject herself assigns to her various moral judgments. Next follows the task of adjusting judgments and principles, so as to form a coherent set of beliefs. A state of narrow reflective equilibrium is attained when "the person completes the process of mutual adjustment, so that she accepts a simple and elegant moral theory that coheres with her considered moral judgments."\textsuperscript{508} After that is done, you should check whether the moral theory is compatible with other theories you embrace, such as theories about procedural justice, what a person is, and so on. When all elements (the considered moral judgments and moral principles in narrow reflective equilibrium and the background theories which you assent to) fit into a coherent whole, we attain a state of wide reflective equilibrium.\textsuperscript{509}

\textsuperscript{507} I will be drawing on oversights in DePaul 1993 and Daniels 1996.

\textsuperscript{508} DePaul 1993 p. 19.

\textsuperscript{509} In my study, I will not make much of the distinction between narrow and wide reflective equilibrium as ordinarily conceived of.
For the method of reflective equilibrium, it is crucial that no part of the equilibrium about to form is immune from revision. Moral principles, as well as considered moral judgments (and background theories), can be revised, if necessary. This imports vagueness into the method. How are we supposed to go about adjusting the elements to one another, so that reflective equilibrium is actually attained? As Michael DePaul comments:

Cases of conflict between a provisional [moral] theory and a considered moral judgment must be resolved individually; the inquirer must choose what to revise solely on the basis of what she is most strongly committed to, on the basis of what seems to her to be most likely to be true.\(^{510}\)

Richard Brandt, among others, objects that if this is everything the advocates of reflective equilibrium have to say about the resolution of conflicts, then they license continued commitment to every deeply held prejudice. We have, after all, every reason to expect that some of our considered moral judgments are unacceptable. How can we improve our moral system if we are permitted to keep them intact?\(^{511}\)

**Reflective Equilibrium and Coherence**

The shortcomings of simple outlines of reflective equilibrium tell us something important: the method of reflective equilibrium cannot simply aim at the preservation of the largest possible number of considered moral judgments. That position amounts to a *conservative conception of reflective equilibrium*. The problem with it is that if we start out as prejudiced people, we end up as prejudiced people. Very little has been said about how to improve and reform our moral beliefs. What we lack is resources for criticism and reform that may invest some faith in the method.

DePaul suggests that these problems can be partially remedied once we abandon the conservative conception. On a *radical conception of reflective equilibrium*, moral conversions can be called for where equilibrium is attained only if we substantially revise the judgments we initially made. In conversions, we do not intend to preserve what used to be our considered moral judgments. Think, for example, of a person being converted to Marxism.\(^{512}\) Where such a conversion occurs, the encounter with a rather different view of what is morally right can, eventually, make us attain a state of reflective equilibrium far removed from our starting-point. Reflection can force us to such revisions as we strive to hold on to what we are in fact most committed to now.

\(^{510}\) DePaul 1993 p. 19.

\(^{511}\) Brandt 1979 pp. 19ff.

\(^{512}\) An example discussed in DePaul 1993 p. 39f.
Conservative and radical conceptions of reflective equilibrium share an emphasis on the importance of coherence. The state of reflective equilibrium is, I mentioned, a state where a subject’s considered moral judgments and moral principles cohere. The method of reflective equilibrium should thus be designed to bring this coherence about in the best way possible. From now on, I shall simply assume that, to use my terminology, a coherent view of life is a view of life which is in a state of reflective equilibrium, so I shall use ‘coherence’ and (the state of) ‘reflective equilibrium’ interchangeably. Coherence is thus the aim of the method of reflective equilibrium.

Coherence is, most of the time, taken to be a property of beliefs, or a set of statements. I have, however, suggested that we should not primarily think of views of life in those terms. So how can I make use of coherence for my purposes? Well, what I think a set of beliefs and a set of funded meanings have in common, is that they may or may not enable fruitful interaction with the environment, once they are drawn on in thought and action. I shall develop the concept ‘coherence’ to essentially involve reference to what a coherent set of beliefs/funded meanings enable us to do. Let me try to clarify what I mean.

In philosophy, coherence is often discussed in formal or technical terms, and the main problem for coherence theories is to state what, apart from logical consistency, it is that makes a set of beliefs or statements coherent or incoherent. We do not want to talk about coherence in a set of statements or beliefs entirely unrelated to one another. On the other hand, it is easy to make the standards of coherence too stringent as well. It is very hard to specify exactly what it is to have a coherent set of beliefs, even if we can think up examples of incoherence, such as inconsistent belief-systems. A first complication, here, is that when we discuss reflective equilibrium, we are not only trying to determine whether a certain set of beliefs is coherent taken in isolation. We want to know if a set of beliefs/funded meanings is coherent from the perspective of a human being. This introduces considerations about acceptability, purposes, and mutual support, into reflective equilibrium. So the coherence important for my purposes involves reference to a human being and the way she will understand and act in her environment, to achieve certain purposes. This is a feature of some versions of reflective equilibrium that Folke Tersman draws attention to:

513 For good discussions of coherence, see Lehrer 1990 and BonJour 1985. I would say that there is no absolute distinction between formal and less formal considerations regarding coherence, and I am certainly not denying that there are important insights to be had from the more technical discussions as well. For instance, some elements of my outline of the virtues of a coherent view of life can also be found in Keith Lehrer’s discussion of explanatory coherence.

514 As pointed out in Herrmann 1998 p. 105.
Some commentators talk as if a reflective equilibrium is a set of statements, or more precisely a set of statements meeting certain conditions (consistency and coherence, etc). ... However, other adherents of the idea think that no matter what intrinsic properties a set of statements has, this is not sufficient for someone to be justified in accepting the statements. ...

[David] Brink’s and [Michael] DePaul’s views suggest that a reflective equilibrium is conceived as a state of a person rather than a set of statements (or a property of statements).\textsuperscript{515}

At times, I shall be talking about a coherent view of life. Then, this should be understood as referring to a view of life embraced by a person, a view of life drawn on in more or less every interaction with the environment.

In a rather different context, Hilary Putnam has a similar approach to coherence as necessarily involving features like integration and mutual support between elements making up a coherent whole. He claims that “coherence’ is not something that we have an algorithm for, but something that we ultimately judge by ‘seat of the pants’ feel.”\textsuperscript{516} To validate this claim, he discusses what it means to say that a ”theory of the world” is coherent: “it is an important and extremely useful constraint on our theory itself that our developing theory of the world taken as a whole should include an account of the very activity and processes by which we are able to know that that theory is correct.”\textsuperscript{517} This adds the constraint that a coherent ‘theory of the world’ must possess a certain \textit{completeness}. Among the elements of a coherent ‘theory of the world,’ we want to include an outline of our current cognitive capacities, the very capacities we draw on in a construction of a ‘theory of the world.’ That kind of completeness is one of the \textit{virtues} a coherent ‘theory of the world’ should possess, and a theory, which lacks it, is not a coherent ‘theory of the world’ at all, even if it is consistent and hangs together in certain ways. Coherence, then, has something to do with rational acceptability, and rational acceptability has something to do with how well (for instance) the elements of a theory are found to hang together as well as how they support and complement one another. What is most interesting here is that I take it that Putnam is, albeit indirectly, framing coherence in terms of \textit{virtues}. Putnam continues:

What I have been saying is that the procedures by which we decide on the acceptability of a scientific theory have to do with whether or not the scientific theory as a whole exhibits certain ‘virtues.’ I am assuming that the procedure of building up scientific theory cannot be correctly analyzed as a procedure of verifying scientific theories \textit{sentence by sentence}. I am assuming that verification in science is a holistic matter, that it is whole theoretical systems that meet the test of experience ‘as a corporate body,’ and that the judgment of how well a whole system of sentences meets the test of experience is ultimately somewhat of an intuitive matter which could not be formalized short of formalizing total human psychology.\textsuperscript{518}

\textsuperscript{515} Tersman 1993 p. 45.
\textsuperscript{516} Putnam 1981 p. 132f.
\textsuperscript{517} Putnam 1981 p. 132.
\textsuperscript{518} Putnam 1981 p. 133. Putnam’s emphasis.
What is fruitful in Putnam’s reasoning is, I suggest, his stress on features of coherence that we cannot judge in formal terms. I would not expect that the coherence I am after is exactly the coherence relevant for a ‘theory of the world,’ though. Still, reference must be made to elements such as whether a view of life is found to be plausible, and so on. I suggest that formal grounds are insufficient for judging whether a view of life is coherent or not, and that we approach the matter of coherence here as a question of whether a view of life exhibits certain virtues. Those are virtues a view of life needs to exhibit, I would say, if it is to be a view of life that we have confidence in, and they are also important for our chances to lead a more significant life than before, an idea I will return to in 6.6.

One important feature of coherence in the case of reflective equilibrium is well captured by Eberhard Herrmann when he remarks that attaining coherence (and thus the state of reflective equilibrium) involves “the feeling of not being puzzled anymore.” This comes close to the end-state of inquiry (outlined in 3.2), where doubt is finally appeased. Here, I think that it makes no real difference whether we discuss a set of beliefs, or a set of funded meanings, drawn on in interaction with the environment. In both cases, the absence of puzzlement indicates that drawing on the set of beliefs/funded meanings enables fruitful interaction with the environment. The coherence, which interests me, is thus related to our purposes.

I shall frame discussion about the virtues a coherent view of life should possess by drawing on a pragmatic theory of inquiry. The link to inquiry will prove helpful as I outline the resources for criticism and reform of views of life as well as (indirectly) of religious practices.

**Virtues of a Coherent View of Life**

My starting-point, then, is the aim of inquiry, that of restoring equilibrium between a subject and her environment. When the state is attained, we are not puzzled anymore, and the “transition from a state of puzzle and perplexity to rational comprehension is full of lively relief and pleasure.” In these transitions, we are most intensely alive. Elements of a situation, which puzzled us, now make sense, and the new equilibrium enables more significant and fruitful interaction with the environment than before. Typically, then, we think of it as

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519 Virtues can be exhibited to a smaller or larger degree, and I take this to mean that coherence, too, will be a matter of degree. It is not an all or nothing-affair.


521 For a similar view, see Okrent 1993 p. 394: “The ‘coherence’ which community practices must possess is not merely or primarily formal coherence, it is the coherence of action in the face of an environment.” The quotation illustrates well the relation between coherence, the state of reflective equilibrium, and our chances of leading a more significant life than before.

522 James 1956 p. 63.

richer than previous equilibria, and thus as more conducive to the purpose of leading a life of human flourishing.

However, if we want to resolve problems in an intelligent way, then there will be constraints on the method we use. *The equilibrium has to be restored in a certain way lest puzzlement remains.* Randomly chosen acts will not establish equilibrium which we are confident in: we would still be puzzled about why those acts worked the way they did. This is why I stress the connection between an intelligent handling of problems and attainment of a state of reflective equilibrium.

I shall discuss what it may mean to have a view of life in a state of reflective equilibrium in terms of the virtues such a view of life will display. The basic idea is that a view of life in a state of reflective equilibrium is a view of life that enables fruitful and significant interaction with the environment, and an ability to handle novelty in an intelligent way. From this, we can then derive normative considerations about how to go about restoring equilibrium and about the skills a competent inquirer should possess. So just as I suggested in my discussion of reflective equilibrium, the method should be worked out to lead to the desired state. Let us, now, look at the virtues of a coherent view of life, and their implications for the method of reflective equilibrium.

A first virtue of a coherent view of life is that it should be free of contradictions. Contradictions display themselves in situations where we are given contradictory impulses about how to act or how to understand what is going on, and it means that the view of life fails to provide orientation. Of course, any view of life will occasionally involve itself in that kind of contradiction. This is no problem if inquiry is undertaken to resolve the problematic situation. What is problematic is if those contradictions are not dealt with. Freedom from contradiction thus also implies that we do something about the contradictions we detect.

A second virtue is universality. Universality means that in a novel situation, our view of life offers guidance even if we have no previous experience of that kind of situation. To display the virtue of universality, a view of life need not have been tried in every conceivable situation; it should rather afford possibilities to recognize familiarity in an unfamiliar situation, and hence give us some leads about how to proceed when we deal with it.

Third, a coherent view of life is such that conflicts between different values we wish to preserve and promote can be handled in a way that we think is reasonable. That virtue requires that our conception of human flourishing is inte-

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524 Were it only a matter of restoring consistency, then we could make just about any change which would do that. This means that a number of revisions would appear to be just as rational, though some would change, e.g., our view of life in absurd directions. If we restore equilibrium in that way, it is unlikely that we would be confident in our view of life.

525 This is different from the cases where we have mixed emotions towards something. This need not puzzle us at all, if we have a view of life that helps us understand why it is understandable and possibly appropriate to respond that way.

526 The term comes from Brümmer 1982 p. 139.
grated, and has something to say about the proper balance of the different values we acknowledge. This does not mean, in a case of conflict, that we should refuse to acknowledge that *genuine loss* is often inevitable. What it does mean is that we need reasons to think that our choices are reasonable rather than arbitrary.

Virtues one through three above show us, I believe, how intimate the relation is between judgments about a view of life, and judgments about the subject that has it. A view of life is not something that exists as an abstract entity apart from concrete persons that draw on them in interaction with the environment. The virtues are all such that possession and lack of the virtues is displayed when views of life are put to the test. The test being, then, that we should be able to handle situations where conflict and/or novelty occur in a way that we find is reasonable.

Before proceeding further, I want to stress the idea that when I talk about the orientation or guidance that a view of life provides, this is not the same as saying that we follow an instruction manual. Human life is much too complex. Guidance has more to do with giving us the ability to make considered judgments in situations that are never exactly alike. I suggest that we think of it as the intelligent execution of habit, combined with the ability to intelligently solve problems via inquiry. On this view, we cannot leave the subject out when discussing guidance. Another consequence is that even if it were possible to take over someone else’s view of life, this is insufficient for attaining the ability to deal with your view of life in an intelligent way. Your view of life might still fail to exhibit the virtues important for coherence.

I have saved the most important virtue of a coherent view of life for last: a coherent view of life accounts for and integrates our experiences of existential significance in a reasonable way. This is essential for finding a view of life to be an *adequate* response to life. Integrating our experiences does not mean that we accept all of them as appropriate, but it means that we consider such judgments to be well-founded.

The outline of the virtues of a coherent view of life is based on my conviction that there is a strong connection between confidence in a view of life, its ability to function well, and its ability to be conducive to human flourishing. I believe that confidence results from fruitful interaction with the environment, and, I would suggest, we know from previous experience that fruitful interaction with the environment is made possible if we use a method well suited for the attainment of a state of reflective equilibrium as outlined here. This is why a state of reflective equilibrium is a desirable state: it is part of human flourishing, and since it is a desirable state, it is also desirable that we, in cases of conflict and so on, use a method which helps us attain that state.

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527 See 4.2 above.
528 A test I think is related the purposes for which we have formed views of life.
529 See 3.2 above.
What are the relevant elements that should cohere where views of life are concerned? Most important are the funded meanings that make up our view of life. We can properly view them as a systematization of experiences of existential significance made in the past, and drawn on in future interaction with the environment. The second element is the experiences of existential significance which we make as we interact with the environment. It is here challenges arise and novelty is encountered.

To work out a method where those elements can be integrated with one another, I suggest that we pay special attention to the way our emotions are engaged in situations of existential significance. I believe that many emotional responses are connected to our conception of human flourishing. Positive emotional responses signal that we conceive of something as conducive to human flourishing; negative emotional responses signal the opposite. I want to examine the tension that can arise between our views of life, as systematizations of previously made emotional responses, and new emotional responses we make in different situations. A method of reflective equilibrium should focus on bringing those elements into equilibrium. First, however, we must take a closer look at emotions and, particularly, emotional responses, to see how they can play the role I shall assign to them.

6.3 Emotions: Concern and Construal

Recently, there has been an upsurge of interest in emotions among analytic philosophers. Today, emotions are discussed and debated in a number of contexts. There is, however, widespread disagreement over what emotions are, and what role they play for our moral, esthetic, and cognitive endeavors. To make the present exposition manageable, I shall limit attention to what is most important for my present purposes, and I shall pay special attention to what it means to judge emotions to be appropriate or inappropriate. That is, as we shall see, a judgment which involves reference to our view of life.

To get some material for reflection, I shall start from a list of paradigmatic instances of emotions. First of all, however, let me say something about the relation between emotions and emotional responses. Emotional responses always occur at a specific time and towards some concrete instance of something. Emotions, on the other hand, can be thought of as dispositions to respond in a certain way when appropriate. If I always respond with joy to the arrival of spring, then there are concrete instances of positive emotional responses to spring, but they are not accidental: there is also a positive disposition. I think of that disposition as an emotion, and responses made in concrete cases as emotional responses.

Paradigm instances of emotions are, to use examples from Robert Roberts, "embarrassment, anger, shame, envy, gratitude, hope, anxiety, jealousy, grief,
despair, remorse, joy, and resentment” as well as fear, contempt, disgust, resignation, pride, remorse, and compassion. The list is not indisputable, but it gives us enough material for reflection.

Roberts has attempted to list some of the characteristics those emotions have in common. First, emotions are intentional, which means that they are always directed towards something. I am angry with Max, disgusted by the worm, ashamed of my behavior, I envy Emmi her new position, and so on. I am not just plain disgusted, angry, or envious. So “what the emotion is about, of, for, at, or to can in principle be specified propositionally.” As a contrast, hunger does not have an intentional element in that sense, and it is, consequently, not an emotion.

Second, we feel emotions. That is, normally, we are aware of them, and what they are about. Third, emotions motivate us to act and think in certain ways. Many explanations of intentional behavior would lack something if no reference was made to the agent’s emotions. This is true, in particular, for cases where “an emotion depends on the subject believing some state of affairs to obtain,” which are the most common cases.

Fourth, the subject experiences the emotions as unified wholes rather than as bundles of components. Fifth, and finally, emotions are to some extent under our control and to some extent not under our control. There is, however, substantial disagreement over the extent to which they are under our control, and in what way they can be controlled and modified at will.

Emotions as Concern-Based Construals

A philosophical conception of emotions should, I take it, strive to account for the characteristics of emotions in a satisfactory way. One quite common conception of emotions in contemporary analytic philosophy views emotions as, at bottom, judgments about a state of affairs. Let us call it a judgment theory of emotions. Intuitively, the judgment theory is appealing, and captures Roberts’s

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530 All examples are from Roberts 1988 p. 184.
531 Roberts 1988 p. 183f.
532 Roberts 1988 p. 183. In Roberts 1995, Roberts points out that we can be mistaken about what the intentional object of an emotion is, like, when in psychotherapy, the patient thinks that she is angry with her analyst, but she is really angry with her mother. I leave such complications aside here.
533 See, e.g., Greenspan 1988.
534 Roberts 1988 p. 183. I shall return to the cases where we respond emotionally to a situation without accepting the judgment the emotional response would normally have us assent to.
535 Though distinctions are certainly possible as you reflect on emotions.
536 Richard Solomon, for instance, holds that emotions are to a very significant extent under our control, and even speaks of choosing emotions (and emotional responses) as a strategy for obtaining certain goals. The view of emotions as being under voluntary control hangs together with a view of emotions as involving the making of judgments, and the making of judgments is something we can exert control over (Solomon 1998). Philosophers inspired by the physiological perspective advocated by James (1884) emphasize that emotions are normally not under our control. The disagreement here is embedded, then, in a more far-reaching disagreement about what emotions are.
characteristics. To be angry with Hanna is to judge that Hanna is culpable, to be afraid of Sofia is to judge that Sofia is a threat to my well-being, and so on. An emotional response essentially involves, then, the making of a judgment.

There are, however, as Roberts points out, a couple of problems with making judgments part of our emotional responses. First, we occasionally make emotional responses where we disagree with the judgment that we, according to a judgment theory, make as we respond emotionally. Roberts’s example is the white person who was brought up in a society where black people were pictured as inferior and threatening, and regarded with a mixture of “fear, resentment, and contempt.” That person may well, long after she has rejected that picture of black people, respond negatively to blacks again, like when her sister comes home with a black boyfriend. If judgments were an essential part of emotional responses, then how is this kind of emotional response possible? Unwanted emotional responses show us that emotional responses are not entirely under our control in the way some judgment theorists seem to think. They also show us that we must be prepared to take a critical stance towards our responses. The person in Roberts’s example wants to respond in another way, and she would not assent to the judgment she appears to be making. I do not take the example to show that there is no relation between emotions and judgments, but rather that the relation is more complex than the judgment theory thinks.

A second problem with judgment theories is, as Roberts puts it, that “a rational person has more options with respect to his emotions than he has with respect to his judgments.” If judgments were part of emotional responses, then this would be impossible, but there are instances where it holds true. Roberts takes the following example:

I am standing on a wobbly ladder, doing something important enough to warrant the risk to my bodily well-being. My judgment regarding the danger I am in is rational. And my fear is intense enough to impede me from doing the job I am on the ladder to do; so that, other things being equal, it is rational for me to try to mitigate my fear. On the judgment theory, to mitigate my fear is to change my judgment about the situation, in one of two ways: I might deny it, thus replacing it with another, incompatible judgment; or I might cease to make it without denying it (letting the judgment sink to a dispositional belief by “putting it out of my mind”). In the situation I have described it will be epistemically irrational for me to deny that the situation is dangerous ... But equally, it will be practically irrational to put the danger out of my mind; I must keep the danger in mind so as to avoid it as far as possible. If my judgment is rational and importantly relevant to the situation, rationality usually requires that I keep it as is. However, it is not irrational to try to mitigate my fear so as to be able better to do the task that needs to be done.

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537 Roberts 1988 p. 196.
539 Roberts 1988 p. 198.
540 Roberts 1988 p. 198f.
So according to Roberts, it is possible to construe the situation we are in so that fear of personal injury is neither denied, nor repressed. Rather, fear is one of our emotional responses, but it is overridden when contrasted with the importance of what we are doing (like trying to rescue a child from a burning building). This makes possible a modification of your emotional response as the situation is construed in a new way, a modification which is different from deciding that you should change your judgment about the situation, something that seems both irrational and very hard.

Here, we see a way in which emotional responses are under our voluntary control. We cannot choose directly what emotional responses to make, but we can modify the way we construe a situation, and part of this is that you respond emotionally to it in a different way than before.

The problems with judgment theories of emotions lead me to think that we should not equate emotions with judgments, or view emotional responses as essentially involving the making of a judgment. Instead, let us think of the relation between emotional responses and judgments in the way that an emotional response pragmatically implies a judgment about the situation we are in (more on this later). Normally, we assent to the judgment pragmatically implied, but this is not, as Roberts shows, always the case.

According to Roberts, we make better sense of emotions if we think of them as serious concern-based construals of the situations in which we find ourselves. Using my terminology, emotional responses are part of our construal of situations, and emotions are dispositions to construe situations in certain ways. By construal, Roberts means "a mental event or state in which one thing is grasped in terms of something else." Construing is much like discerning familiar patterns in novel situations, and it thus enables us to deal with them along familiar lines. It thus essentially involves our funded meanings. Emotional responses are, Roberts suggests, perceptual states, because we perceive something to be a certain way. Drawing on examples like the ambiguous picture that we sometimes see as depicting a young woman with her head turned away, and sometimes as depicting an old woman with a large nose, Roberts remarks that "what is seen is not a sensory property of the object and can be seen only if the subject imposes a certain organization on the object’s sensory properties." That organization is thus heavily influenced by our emotions.

Clearly, in order to perceive anything, the perceiver must impose a certain organization. Without it, perception is impossible. In that way, emotional responses are a function of our funded meanings much like other instances of perception. What makes them different from instances of ‘ordinary’ physical object-perception is, I would say, the logical level at which organization is

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541 Roberts 1988 p. 190.
543 Roberts 1996 p. 149.
imposed. Making them presupposes that the world already makes sense to us; that it is a practice-constituted environment where things already have meaning. If not, there would be no situations to respond emotionally to. Situating emotional responses at a different logical level than ordinary perception is different, though, from saying that they are an interpretation of a first neutrally construed situation: "[r]ather, the concern enters into the construal so as to characterize the appearance of the object." There is no difference in principle between the way in which we perceive something to be a worm and the way in which we respond to it with disgust.

Responding emotionally requires that we possess certain skills, although they may, at least in a rudimentary form, be hard-wired into the subject who construes something. A rabbit sometimes reacts in a way which suggests that it construes a situation as dangerous, and a child may react with fear of the vacuum cleaner, without having the cognitive resources to make the judgment that the vacuum cleaner is dangerous (posing a threat to her well-being). Something is seen as dangerous even where the judgment pragmatically implied is not made. Most likely, such responses are important for learning how to identify emotions like anger and fear. I do not think, however, that we should expect every adult human emotion to have that basic form; they may grow much more complex. The important similarity, between the rudimentary and the more complex emotional responses, is that the construals look the way they do because something concerns us. Thus Roberts:

To be angry is not just to see a person as having culpably offended; it requires a concern about some dimension of the offense, and possibly a concern about some dimension of the offender. To be afraid of heights is not just to see them as a danger to something-or-other; it requires that something I hold dear seem [sic] threatened. Nostalgia is not just grasping similarities with the distant personal past; it is grasping similarities about which I care.

Let us see what consequences my outline of emotions and emotional responses has for how we see them as related to our view of life. In one sense, it is important that we have a view of life to respond emotionally at all. If we did not care about anything, then we would have no emotions and hence make no emotional responses either. On the other hand, emotional responses have a logical priority to views of life: we would have no views of life unless we responded emotionally even before a view of life is developed. I take this to mean that emotional responses and views of life are mutually dependent; at least at the

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545 So I think that it is basically correct to say that emotions supervene on ‘natural facts,’ but that this should not be understood as a claim that first we identify the ‘natural facts’ and then, i.e., only later, we respond emotionally. Such a split can only be made in a logical sense, and not a temporal.
546 Some philosophers have drawn on this ‘natural’ origin of emotions such as empathy to better understand human morality. See, e.g., Snow 2000.
547 Roberts 1988 p. 191.
level of complexity they have reached in mature adults. Our view of life systematizes our emotional responses in the sense that we draw on it when we develop emotions as dispositions to respond emotionally in certain ways. Hence, the view of life also gives direction to our emotional responses, and I suggest that the direction makes us develop certain emotions towards things and situations. I do not think, however, that the influence of our view of life on our emotional responses is strong enough to guarantee that they will always harmonize with what we expect. It is a cornerstone of pragmatic thought that novelty is always possible in the course of future experience and interaction with the environment, and I expect that to be true here as well.

The idea of emotional responses as concern-based construals of situations we encounter, that I have taken over from Roberts, is not intended to eliminate the relation between emotional responses, and the making of judgments. All the same, instead of following the judgment theory, I suggest that we think of the relation between emotional responses and judgments as an instance of what Göran Hermerén calls pragmatic implication. A pragmatic implication is a relation between two propositions, \( x \) and \( y \), that is such that if we accept \( x \), then we would need special reasons, or some special explanation, not to accept \( y \).\(^{549}\) For my present purposes, we can think of the relation this way: an emotional response pragmatically implies a certain judgment, and we can, in principle, state it propositionally. Thus, as we respond emotionally, a certain judgment will come rather naturally as a consequence of the way we construe the situation.\(^{549}\) Sometimes, however, we reject the judgment pragmatically implied, as was the case with the person who has rejected the racism of her childhood. This makes room for the judgment that a particular emotional response is inappropriate. To make that judgment, we need the special reasons Hermerén mentioned for why to reject the pragmatically implied judgment.\(^{550}\)

It is the relation between views of life, emotions, and emotional responses, which makes reflective equilibrium interesting as a method in views of life. I

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548 Hermerén 1972 p. 31.
549 Most of the time, however, I do not think that there is any need to formulate it like a proposition at all. That is probably only important if we discover that there is some kind of conflict between an experience and our view of life.
550 There is a difference here between how Hermerén thinks of pragmatic implication, and how I use it concerning emotions. Hermerén frames his discussion in terms of accepting one proposition, \( x \), and then needing special reasons to reject another proposition, \( y \), pragmatically implied by \( x \). In my case, it is rather that an emotional response occurs and given the fact that it occurs, we need special reasons to think that the judgment it pragmatically implies should not be accepted; normally, we trust our responses to be appropriate. Remember, however, the person who occasionally responds with fear, resentment, and contempt towards blacks. The emotional response is certainly there. The fact that it has occurred cannot be denied. On the other hand, we can refuse to let it influence us, and work hard not to keep on responding this way, if we judge it to be an inappropriate response. So, in contrast to Hermerén, it is not so much that we accept the emotion; it is rather that we acknowledge that it has occurred, that we have construed the situation in a certain way. When we have acknowledged it, we want some explanation or special reasons for rejecting the judgment pragmatically implied by the emotion, and hence a reason for not construing the situation in this way.
shall concentrate on the relation between views of life and emotional responses, and the way in which emotional responses can work to challenge, as well as to support, the funded meanings of our view of life. Support is a matter of responding the way we expect, while challenges occur where there is novelty which makes our present set of funded meanings look insufficient.

6.4 Emotional Responses as Appropriate and Inappropriate

To attain a state of reflective equilibrium, our view of life should integrate the emotional responses we make, and thus set them in a coherent whole that allows significant interaction with the environment. Integration will not always mean, however, that we find the responses to be appropriate. Sometimes we categorize emotional responses as inappropriate, but this, I take it, is also a way of integrating them. To confidently make that judgment, however, we need reasons for that categorization. I shall also assume that there will be situations where integration does not come about automatically, but has to be struggled for.

As with other instances of perception, we draw on funded meanings as we make emotional responses. All the same, experience sometimes gives unexpected results, and can demonstrate that our present funded meanings are insufficient in relation to a problematic situation. I think that makes sense once we think of experience as one part of a larger network of transactions with the environment, which are undertaken for the sake of attaining and upholding equilibrium. A failure to uphold the equilibrium shows itself in the experience of a situation as problematic, but it is not limited to an experience; it extends to our habits of action, and so on, as well. There is hardly any need for an argument that would establish that we frequently lose equilibrium with the environment: I think this is something we are all familiar with.

Emotional responses that cannot be readily integrated into our view of life do not, consequently, occur in isolation from interaction with the environment. It is not only that we experience a certain situation in an unexpected way; we also feel that we are unable to handle it adequately by drawing on our present set of funded meanings. Given that, emotional responses we count as appropriate are also the emotional responses we think should affect future behavior, and inappropriate emotional responses are the ones that should not motivate action, given the purpose of dealing with the situation in a satisfactory way.

Suppose I enter my study at home just to find that my one-year-old is playing with the floppy disks stacked on a shelf. She has managed to break a disk that contained my only copy of an important document. Most likely, I shall be angry with my daughter, and stay angry even after I have judged the

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551 It may motivate us in some other ways, but not in the way appropriate emotional responses will.
response to be inappropriate. I believe that in a case like this, it is fair to say that my present emotion is *understandable*, but all the same *inappropriate*. It would be more appropriate to be angry with myself for being so careless with important documents. These judgments are connected to the ways in which I shall deal with the situation from now on. In that way, it is fair to say that my second construal is more adequate than the first. Appropriate emotional responses are, consequently, the emotional responses I make when I construe the situation adequately. I think everyone is familiar with cases when we find that we have failed to do this.

Judging an emotional response to be appropriate or inappropriate has to be done from the subject’s perspective, but this does not mean, as I mentioned, that the views of others are irrelevant for the judgment I make. Still, when I discuss reflective equilibrium here, I do it mainly from the perspective of an individual.

Does the undeniable fact that we sometimes judge emotional responses to be inappropriate pose a threat to my idea that they have a critical role to play in relation to our views of life? Maybe we always dismiss emotional responses as inappropriate as soon as there is a lack of fit with our view of life? While this is a conceivable way of dealing with conflicts, the result will not amount to a view of life in a state of reflective equilibrium. If we take the idea behind a radical conception of reflective equilibrium seriously, that is, that attainment of equilibrium sometimes requires substantial reconstruction of our previously accepted set of funded meanings, then we see that the method of automatically rejecting challenges is not very promising. It makes our present funded meanings unrevisable, no matter what happens in the future. The problem with this strategy is that it is unlikely that the resulting equilibrium will be one that you have confidence in. To attain *that* kind of equilibrium, namely, reflective equilibrium, challenges have to be dealt with *intelligently*, and that means taking them seriously, and sometimes letting them reconstruct your set of previously accepted funded meanings. This is part of reflective equilibrium’s requirement that you preserve what you think is most plausible in cases of conflicts.

**Appropriateness and Inappropriateness of Emotional Responses**

There is a number of ways in which you can talk of emotional responses as appropriate and inappropriate. Let us look at some of them, and see whether they are useful for my purposes. Patricia Greenspan first approaches the question of appropriateness\(^\text{\footnote{Actually, Greenspan frames her discussion in terms of justification, but I still think it applies here.}}\) of emotional responses from a general point of view, and discusses whether the tendency to make emotional responses has been selected by evolution, and is thus helpful for the survival of the human species. She believes it is, but this says very little about the appropriateness and in-
appropriateness of particular emotional responses, or classes of emotional
responses. All that an evolutionary approach shows, is that the human race has
benefited from the tendency to make emotional responses, and this is not very
interesting for my present purposes.553

Greenspan next introduces the idea of practical justification of emotional
responses. Emotional responses may be judged appropriate to the extent that
they fulfill some practical purpose, and motivate us to act in a way which is
useful for our purposes. The practical approach is a lot more interesting than
the evolutionary, because here, we move on the level of particular emotional
responses. Greenspan, though, demonstrates that in its rudimentary form, the
approach fails to capture all there is to our ideas about when emotional responses
are appropriate and inappropriate. First, we take certain emotional responses to
be appropriate regardless of the practical consequences.554 Even in Germany in
the 1930s, we would say that it would have been appropriate to respond with
revulsion to the persecution of Jews, even though not responding that way may
have been safer for your physical well-being. Appropriateness of responses has
something to do with them being the responses a human being should make, no
matter what the consequences. Equally it is true that some responses may be
inappropriate even if they serve me well in a particular situation. Suppose I
envy Alexander his new car so much that my wealthy aunt, driven to despair,
purchases a nice vehicle and gives it to me. Sure enough, envy paid off, but that
is different from saying that envy was an appropriate emotional response.
Regardless of whether it was or not, my getting a car makes no difference for
the judgment of whether the emotional response was appropriate or not. Practical
justification of an emotional response and the judgment of appropriateness do
not always coincide. We have to look elsewhere to find what we need.

We can learn something from seeing that practical justification and appro-
priateness do not always coincide. An emotional response’s being appropriate
is more similar to perceiving correctly, and construing situations in an adequate
way, than the link to practical justification suggests. There is an interesting
parallel with my discussion of the relation between satisfaction of our purposes
and truth. Making that relation too direct fails to capture the way we think of
truth, and making the relation between practical justification and appropriateness
of emotional responses too direct also misses something important about those
judgments. Still, I argued, truth is not unrelated to satisfaction of our purposes.
Similarly, I do not think that appropriateness of emotional responses is entirely
unrelated to practical justification, if we construe it not in terms of ‘good
consequences in a particular situation,’ but as ‘conducive to a life of human
flourishing.’ I shall develop this idea in the next section.

Inappropriate emotional responses are, I would say, most of the time understandable. The ex-racist, who occasionally responds negatively to blacks, will not hesitate to call those emotional responses inappropriate. Still, she understands perfectly well why she responds this way, although she wishes she would not. It is also logically possible that responses can be inappropriate and not understandable. Someone may sink into despair when the thermometer records -1° C on the day of her final exams. She may interpret this, though she knows that it is silly, as a premonition of the quality of her performance on the exams. The subject will, however, probably understand this response as well, once she reminds herself of her inclination towards superstition. Emotional responses are, after all, not under voluntary control in the sense that we can choose to respond differently. What we can do is to judge them to be inappropriate, and try to construe the situation in a different way than before.

Greenspan also identifies cases where an emotion can be judged appropriate even though the subject disagrees, on balance, with the judgment pragmatically implied. Emotions are often, Greenspan points out, “‘all-out’ reactions to portions of evidence.” It is conceivable that we judge an emotional response to be appropriate if it is “keyed to a significant subset of the perceptual evidence available.” When the entire situation is taken under consideration we will respond differently, but this does not force us to judge that our initial response was inappropriate. For example, there is nothing inappropriate about feeling sympathy for someone being sent to prison even if we know that she is a villain that is culpable for her deeds. What makes this a different case from the one where a person sometimes responds emotionally to blacks in ways she resents, is that here, there is no need to call the emotional response inappropriate at all, once we view it in the context where it occurs. If, however, a response has the status of being appropriate as keyed to a significant subset of the total situation, but not appropriate once we consider the whole situation, this has consequences for the extent to which we will let it influence our behavior.

To sum up the categorization made, we have emotional responses that are inappropriate and not understandable, though perhaps no responses qualify as members of this category. Then, we have inappropriate and understandable responses, like the negative response to a black person in Roberts’s example. Next, we find appropriate responses, which, however, are incompatible with an appropriate emotional response to the total situation. Finally, we have appropriate emotional responses, where the pragmatically implied judgment agrees with what we take to be the relevant features of the situations in which it has occurred. Here, we find the construal of the situation to be adequate.

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555 Greenspan 1988 p. 84. Greenspan’s emphasis.
556 Greenspan 1988 p. 88. Greenspan’s emphasis.
557 I think this says something important about cases of mixed emotions to something. The responses can all be considered appropriate but keyed to different subsets of the situation.
Judging an emotional response to be appropriate involves, and has a bearing on, our view of life. Appropriate emotional responses are those that are at hand as we construe the situation in a correct way, while inappropriate are those we make as we somehow misconstrue the situation. Hence, appropriate emotional responses to existentially significant situations capture the important elements and make sense of them. They give good orientation, meaning that we are capable of dealing with those situations in an adequate way. The opposite holds true for inappropriate emotional responses; those are the responses that fail to construe the situation correctly, and thus miss something important. The different judgments are also important for the way future interaction with the environment will look; appropriate emotional responses will influence our behavior in a much more direct way than inappropriate emotional responses will.

I shall suggest three things concerning emotional responses. First: as a rule, they accord with our view of life. No challenge to our conception of human flourishing is normally forthcoming from them, and they allow unproblematic interaction with the environment. Second, challenges occasionally occur, which means that we find our present set of funded meanings to be insufficient in some respects. Those challenges ought to be dealt with by use of the method of reflective equilibrium, and the goal is to attain a new state of reflective equilibrium. If the challenge forces us to substantial reconstruction of funded meanings, what results is a state of equilibrium we find is richer than previous equilibria. Third, to deal intelligently with conflicts in views of life, it is crucial that we develop our competence as experiencers and inquirers.

6.5 Views of Life in Reflective Equilibrium

The funded meanings of our view of life give direction to our emotional responses. We also strive to integrate them into this set. This means accounting for them in some way. Most of the time, this is simple. If we judge them to be appropriate, or judge that we have good reasons for categorizing them as inappropriate, the emotional responses will appear quite unproblematic. Sometimes, however, a certain tension can be noted between emotional responses and our view of life, and that is when there are emotional responses which do not fit with our view of life, and we are insecure about whether it is appropriate or not. We can think of such tension in terms of insecurity about how to construe a situation, and what to do about it. We might have contrary impulses or no impulses at all, and to overcome the insecurity, we need to find a way to construe

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558 Inappropriate emotional responses may certainly influence behavior in many ways, but that influence is quite different from that of appropriate emotional responses.

559 Here as elsewhere, I concentrate on the contributions philosophers can make to criticism and reform of views of life and religious practices.
and handle the situation which secures fruitful future interaction with the environment in similar situations.

Let me remind the reader of some elements of the pragmatic theory of inquiry. Inquiry is called for when some course of action leads to frustration, or when something unexpected occurs, which we are not accustomed to. It is important to note that identifying a situation as problematic is no cognitive affair: it is what Dewey calls precognitive. The expectations we have when we act in a mainly habitual manner are not formulated. Nevertheless, we notice when things do not turn out the way we expected, and that is when we find ourselves in a problematic situation. I think the same thing holds true for the emotional responses we make; they may not accord with what the funded meanings of our view of life would have us expect, and this shows itself in the experience that we are in a problematic situation. We thus detect challenges to our views of life even if we never make any predictions about the responses we shall make.

The role I believe emotional responses can play here is similar to the role experience can, from a pragmatic standpoint, play in other kinds of inquiry as well. Experience is closely related to action, and some tension occurring in experience is never limited to that sphere; it also affects how we should relate to the situation, and how to deal with it. This is why doubt (understood in a pragmatic sense) is so frustrating: in the case where an emotional response does not fit with the funded meanings of our view of life, the question is not only about whether our response was appropriate or not. As mentioned, this is closely linked to questions about how we should act; that is, how we should understand and deal with this and similar situations in the future. An important step towards resolving the problematic situation is to make an intelligent judgment about whether the unexpected emotional response was appropriate or not. To say that the judgment has to be intelligent is to say that it should be made with an eye to the goal of attaining a view of life which exhibits the virtues of a coherent view of life. That requirement, in turn, is a natural consequence of the connection there is between a well-functioning view of life and human flourishing.

I have already claimed that a view of life is not primarily a propositional affair, and that emotional responses do not essentially involve judgments. Still, I believe that this is not really an obstacle to seeing that there is something problematic about how we sometimes respond, and that certain responses do not ‘fit’ with our conception of human flourishing. There can be a lack of coherence among funded meanings, and it is related to the way we experience situations and the way we act. In the process of tracing this lack of fit, we may very well formulate beliefs in order to explicate the elements of the problematic situation, but resolution is not limited to a revision of our beliefs; it also includes reconstruction of funded meanings.

There are two standard reactions to a lack of fit between our view of life and some emotional responses we make. The first is to dismiss the emotional
responses as somehow inappropriate, or only keyed to what Greenspan calls a significant subset of the total situation. The person who rejected racism, but all the same responds negatively to her sister’s boyfriend, for instance, will attempt to construe the situation in a way that takes account of the racism of her upbringing, and thereby explains those experiences as the vestiges of a rejected inheritance. This judgment involves, importantly, that you supply some explanation for why the responses look the way they do, and why they are inappropriate. In other words, to confidently reject such a response as inappropriate, we need reasons for why to treat the response that way. Roberts sketches the mechanisms that may lie behind the rejection of racism:

Ten years later I have a graduate degree from an Ivy League university, where I have rubbed shoulders with some black people who are clearly my intellectual betters, and I have become convinced beyond any doubt that whatever inferiority the black population may display is a result not of nature but of cultural deprivation.560

Clearly, there is no single decisive element in a conversion to anti-racism. The reasons are intellectual (research demonstrates that inferiority is a result of cultural deprivation), as well as what you may call experiential (interaction with the people you despise convinces you that they cannot be stereotyped the way you used to). The process may, furthermore, take years, because it involves substantial reconstruction of the way you think and behave.

Reforming the way you think of blacks does not mean that you will never make negative emotional responses to them again, but it means that you have the resources for confidently classifying such experiences as inappropriate. Thus you can categorize them as inappropriate, and thereby avoid viewing them as genuine challenges to your present set of funded meanings. Here, the reasons you have for rejecting the emotional response as inappropriate play an important role:

In certain situations I find my former emotions returning. ... When I find myself losing out in job competitions with talented blacks, a certain racial contempt (which I could of course never admit to anyone) twinges my consciousness fleetingly, until I “get hold of myself.” I fight my racist emotions by talking to myself about my evidence that blacks are full members of the human race, of equal talent on the average with whites.561

Talk of “evidence” should not overshadow the fact that part of this evidence is that I have come to construe situations in a different way than before, and that I also find the new construal to be superior (that is, more appropriate) to my previous construal. Part of this is that I have now learned not to ascribe properties to black people as a group, which only some individual blacks exhibit. I have good reasons, both intellectual and experiential, for construing the situa-

560 Roberts 1988 p. 196.
561 Roberts 1988 p. 196.
tions thus. The superiority of the new way of construing the situations is shown by the way it enables me to handle the situations better than before.

The other possible response to a case where some emotional responses do not fit with the set of funded meanings that makes up my view of life is relevant in the cases where we cannot confidently dismiss the responses as inappropriate. That is, we rather tend to think that the emotional response I made is a more adequate construal of the situation than previous ones, a construal that enables me to interact more fruitfully with the environment. This means that a certain tension prevails, which we should try to resolve via inquiry.

Imagine the case of a woman who is struck by the unjust relation between the sexes, upheld and legitimized by a religious practice she is committed to. This person may have derived significant parts of her conception of human flourishing from that practice, and taken to heart some of its ideas about a gender-based division of labor as pleasing to God. The division of labor is part of that woman’s conception of human flourishing, so she thinks differently of male and female flourishing. However, once she is made aware of the patterns of oppression of women, which persist in her society, she also comes to see the division of labor as unjust, and involving stereotypic views about both men and women. While women are deprived of influence in social and church affairs, men are equally deprived of influence in the domestic sphere, and not allowed to develop sides regarded ‘feminine,’ such as taking care of children.

It is important to keep in mind that the challenge, in a case like this, need not originate in experience in the way that suddenly, she construes previously unproblematic situations as problematic. The woman in my example needed help to be able to construe certain situations as unjust. But I believe that it is important for this to really be a challenge to our present set of funded meanings (and thus our view of life), that our responses come to look different, too. It is as we make those responses we come to see our present set of funded meanings as problematic, because it cannot account for a number of emotional responses we now make. If we did not make those responses, it is unlikely that we could talk of a challenge to our present set of funded meanings at all.\footnote{DePaul writes: “we would clearly want our moral judgments to correspond with our moral experiences.” He thinks this means that if we are going to be confident in the moral judgments we make, they have to be supported by the moral experiences (which include emotional responses) we make. DePaul 1993 p. 211. That applies here as well.}

Using the method of reflective equilibrium might mean that the woman feels compelled to revise her view of life in important respects to take into account her experiences of injustice. This involves reconstruction of the way she thinks of the proper relation between men and women. At the same time, such revision involves a rejection of elements in the picture of human flourishing that her religious practice presents. Those elements are now viewed as problematic, and in need of revision. Unless revision is made, the religious practice will function as an impediment to our chances of developing more adequate views of life.

\footnote{DePaul writes: “we would clearly want our moral judgments to correspond with our moral experiences.” He thinks this means that if we are going to be confident in the moral judgments we make, they have to be supported by the moral experiences (which include emotional responses) we make. DePaul 1993 p. 211. That applies here as well.}
Here is an illustration of the way in which criticism and reform of your view of life has a bearing on the practices which influence it as well.

What the above examples show is that where there is a lack of fit between emotional responses and the funded meanings of our view of life, there are two options available. As regards which option to prefer, does the method of reflective equilibrium give us some leads in concrete cases? Certainly not by assigning numeric values to different options, so we can choose the one with the highest score. Is choice then an arbitrary affair? No, what we can do is to develop intelligent ways of dealing with conflicts by drawing on how satisfactory solutions have been worked out in the past. This involves acquiring habits, but also the intelligent execution of habit. The opposite of arbitrariness, here, is the careful reasoning of a competent subject, and competence is linked to an ability to resolve problematic situations in such a way that confidence in the resulting equilibrium is restored. What warrants our faith in the method is the way it has previously enabled us to restore equilibrium, and thus made fruitful interaction with the environment possible, where tension is resolved. Employing the method of reflective equilibrium as I conceive it, thus requires that the subject is competent, and that we have some reasons for thinking that we are competent. Otherwise, it is unlikely that the resulting equilibrium will be one that we have confidence in, and confidence is, I have repeatedly suggested, important for a view of life to function well.

To sum up, I suggest that a view of life in reflective equilibrium integrates and accounts for our emotional responses in ways that we find plausible. Sometimes, we dismiss responses as inappropriate, and supply reasons for that judgment; sometimes, we judge them to be appropriate, and strive to make the necessary adjustments of our view of life. In order to restore reflective equilibrium, and to have a view of life that we can be confident in, it is necessary that we trust ourselves to be competent enough to make those judgments wisely. This means that competence, and ways of attaining competence, are crucial in an outline of the method of reflective equilibrium.

6.6 Reflective Equilibrium and Competence

I am not trying to write an instruction manual for the attainment of a state of reflective equilibrium in views of life. I am interested in the capacities competent inquirers should display, and some tendencies they should look out for. Since I am mainly interested in the way in which our view of life can be challenged and reconstructed by our emotional responses, I shall concentrate on the competence required to respond adequately to situations, and to assess whether the responses made were adequate or not. This is, I would say, a crucial part of the competence we need to undertake inquiries in views of life. I shall
pay special attention to the role that remedying blindness and naïveté has for our development as competent perceivers.

"Now the blindness in human beings, of which this discourse will treat, is the blindness with which we all are afflicted in regard to the feelings of creatures and people different from ourselves." This is the opening sentence of James’s lecture "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings." To illustrate the blindness that often befalls us, he tells us a story:

Some years ago, whilst journeying in the mountains of North Carolina, I passed by a large number of ‘coves,’ as they call them there, or heads of small valleys between the hills, which had been newly cleared and planted. The impression on my mind was one of unmitigated squalor. The settler had in every case cut down the more manageable trees, and left their charred stumps standing. The larger trees he had girdled and killed, in order that their foliage should not cast a shade. He had then built a log cabin, plastering its chinks with clay, and had set up a tall zigzag rail fence around the scene of his havoc, to keep the pigs and cattle out. Finally, he had irregularly planted the intervals between the stumps and trees with Indian corn, which grew among the chips; and there he dwelt with his wife and babes—an axe, a gun, a few utensils, and some pigs and chickens feeding in the woods, being the sum total of his possessions.

For James, the life of the people in the coves looked more like an animal existence than anything worthy of human beings. It appeared impossible that the inhabitants could lead a meaningful life at all. But through conversation, James realizes that he makes the common mistake of spectators of failing to take the perspective of the subjects she passes judgment on. He continues the story thus:

Then I said to the mountaineer who was driving me, "What sort of people are they who have to make these new clearings?" "All of us," he replied; "why, we ain’t happy here, unless we are getting one of these coves under cultivation." I instantly felt that I had been losing the whole inward significance of the situation. Because to me the clearings spoke of naught but denudation, I thought that to those whose sturdy arms and obedient axes had made them they could tell no other story. But, when they looked on the hideous stumps, what they thought of was personal victory. The chips, the girdled trees and the vile split rails spoke of honest sweat, persistent toil and final reward. The cabin was a warrant of safety for self and wife and babes. In short, the clearing, which to me was a mere ugly picture on the retina, was to them a symbol redolent with moral memories and sang a very pan of duty, struggle, and success.

I had been as blind to the peculiar ideality of their conditions as they certainly would also have been to the ideality of mine, had they had a peep at my strange indoor academic ways of life at Cambridge.

The tendency James describes is one with which are all familiar, and even though his purposes are different from mine, I believe that what he says is relevant for

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564 James 1983 p. 133f.
views of life as well. Blindness is a tendency we should remedy, so we can trust that we notice the relevant features of situations, and this is necessary to deal intelligently with our view of life. Blindness is an inability to respond to what is there before you, and thus an inability to construe the situation appropriately. This, in turn, means that we have reason to think that were we not blind, we would discern problems and challenges, which now pass unacknowledged. As long as blindness persists, we miss opportunities to lead more significant lives.

Michael DePaul points to another problem with reflective equilibrium as it is ordinarily conceived: it says nothing about the range of relevant experiences we need to attain a state of reflective equilibrium. Surely, we have reasons to doubt that a view of life based on a very limited range of experiences will exhibit the virtues of a coherent view of life. DePaul presents us with an example starring Jay, a young American with a very romantic conception of war. The only movies he has seen, and the only books he has read, are those that tend to present war as something like a game where boys are turned into men. He has also only had contact with people with a similar conception of war. Here, we have a problematic tendency different from blindness, because “we can … suppose that Jay’s evaluation is not the result of any insensitivity [that is, blindness] on his part. He would be moved by experiences that generally move others.” Supposedly, there are experiences readily available that would modify his views on war, if he were to have them. As reflective equilibrium is normally construed, being in a state of reflective equilibrium does not demand of Jay that he seek those experiences out. Nevertheless, the same thing holds here as it did with blindness: Jay’s view of life will hardly exhibit the virtues of a coherent view of life. As soon as his range of relevant experience is broadened, it will prove deficient.

There is something deplorable about the blind and naïve person. But what is it? For one thing, her view of life is incomplete in important respects. It will, occasionally, run into problematic situations in which she is not afforded guidance. We thus have reason to think that her view of life is not functioning well. But that cannot be all, because if the person is extremely blind, and never ventures to widen her range of life-activities, then maybe she will never run into trouble either. It appears that her view of life is perfectly adequate. So what makes us inclined to say that it is deficient? I think we can make some progress by drawing an analogy to happiness.

What is it for a person to be happy? Clearly, happiness has something to do with being in a special psychological state. I cannot be deeply depressed and happy at the same time, so a psychological state of a special kind is a necessary condition for being happy. But—and this is important—to strive for a life of happiness is different from striving to achieve that psychological state no matter what. When we strive for happiness, we strive for the happiness that arises naturally in the course of a life where we flourish as human beings.

Consider the happy husband unaware of the fact that his wife is cheating on him. There is information readily available that, if attained, would shatter his world entirely. Maybe he even has a hunch that something is wrong, but he nevertheless ignores all signs. With this person, I take it to be clear that there is something deficient about his happiness, because it is based on an inaccurate perception of what his life is like.

It is, I claim, something similar that makes blindness and naïveté tendencies that we ought to rid ourselves of. In the blind and naïve person’s life, challenges go unnoticed and her view of life is seldom, if ever, challenged. We are, however, inclined to say that there are challenges she should notice and deal with. A view of life, which is in a state of reflective equilibrium, is, in an important sense, richer than one where blindness and naïveté impedes such development. As with other equilibria that are the result of inquiry, it enables a more fruitful interaction with the environment than what used to be possible; thus, it also makes possible a more significant life than before. So if you strive for a life of human flourishing, you will be concerned about the status of your view of life, and try to see to it that you are a competent subject in these matters, because you need that to attain a state of reflective equilibrium.

This may sound confusing. Am I saying that it is part of our conception of human flourishing that the method of reflective equilibrium should be used, so that the method is somehow part of our view of life? If so, what of those who think otherwise (that is, those with other views of life)? To these questions, I would reply that the method of reflective equilibrium is not part of your view of life, but it looks promising as a method in view of life-matters because we have found that when we employ it, what results is a view of life richer than the view of life we used to embrace. In that sense, reflective equilibrium is attractive, because there is a tendency to value an equilibrium attained by (intelligent) inquiry as richer than the one preceding inquiry, because taking more factors into account, and being useful in a broader range of situations.

To say that a new equilibrium is richer than previous equilibria involves comparing their ability to function well: the new equilibrium enables us to deal with more situations than in the past. This will not mean that there will be few or no challenges to your view of life: the extremely blind and naïve person’s view of life could accomplish that task even better. It has more to do with the way we experience an equilibrium attained after a problematic situation has been resolved to be an equilibrium that allows more significant interaction with the environment. Significant is, then, somewhat different from unproblematic, because it involves the demand that challenges are detected and addressed, and not left unnoticed. It is also different from pleasant, because a life that is significant is not necessarily pleasant. Making use of the method of reflective equilibrium is thus intended to enable fruitful interaction with the environment,

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507 Cf. the way that experiences Dewey calls an experience can transform your life discussed in 4.4.
but not in the sense that challenges are avoided: it is a method we should use to be able to lead more significant lives than before.

Clearly, this way of ‘justifying’ the use of the method of reflective equilibrium ultimately appeals to our tendency to respond positively to the attainment of a new equilibrium. The experiences of this value, or good, warrant my calling those lives more significant than before. But now you may wonder: am I claiming that positive emotional responses to new equilibria result from a biological disposition, so that it something universal and unquestionable? Is that what justifies assigning an important role to them in my study? I would not think so. It may well be that this response, as was the case with instincts and experienced needs, cannot be adequately explained if we only use biological terms. Human beings are social and biological organisms, and the influence of those two elements can hardly be held apart. With instincts and experienced needs, I suggested that we might think of them as impulses that have been given direction and taken a certain shape, as human practices have developed. I think something similar holds true here. There are tendencies to respond positively to cases where imbalances in the transactions between organism and environment are removed. As human practices have developed, the tendencies have been given a certain shape, which means that now, we respond positively to equilibria which integrate a wider range of experiences.\textsuperscript{568}

It is certainly true that even though these positive responses are deeply embedded in the way we think at present, they may be criticized if the need arises. However, in order to solve the problems I am out to solve, I see no need to call this experienced value in question. Remember what Dewey has to say about the philosophers’ relation to the goods we experience:

As philosophy has no private score of knowledge or of methods for attaining truth, so it accepts the goods that are diffused in human experience. It has no Mosaic nor Pauline authority of revelation entrusted to it.\textsuperscript{569}

Philosophers are not obliged, in fact, not even entitled, to construct a conception of good that neglects the goods diffused in human experience. Those goods need no further metaphysical or other basis to be legitimately drawn on in philosophical inquiry. If, in the course of reflection, we find no reason to question them, we can draw on them just as confidently as we “accept and … utilize for a purpose the best available knowledge of [their] own time and place.”\textsuperscript{570}

\textsuperscript{568} Think, for instance, of the way I described the function of religious practices in terms of tension and resolution. It is an important part of such a view of human life that a religious view of life is necessary if we are going to lead a significant life. Here, too, there is a positive evaluation of the end-state of a process where our funded meanings have been reconstructed.

\textsuperscript{569} Dewey 1958 p. 408.

\textsuperscript{570} Dewey 1958 p.408.
Remedies for Blindness and Naïveté

Blindness and naïveté are not so much properties of views of life, as they are properties of subjects with views of life. How is a subject supposed to overcome these tendencies? I agree with Nussbaum and DePaul that art and esthetic experience has a very important role to play here. Esthetic experience, taking the form of an experience, teaches us the lesson that new experience can always overthrow seemingly stable equilibria. It thus introduces an attitude of ‘healthy fallibilism’ towards funded meanings. Further, it is certainly true that art makes experiences available to us, which would otherwise be impossible to undergo, like (for a person such as Jay) what it is like to be at war, and the cramping effects war has on people and entire societies. As Nussbaum puts it: "our experience is, without fiction, too confined and too parochial. Literature extends it, making us reflect and feel about what might otherwise be too distant for feeling."

Art, and especially art that has a narrative structure, like opera, film, fiction, and so on, is also important for remedying blindness. You are forced to take the perspective of other people, and this increases your own sensitivity, and hence competence, as a perceiver. In fact, I can think of no better remedy for blindness.

Thus the most important remedy for blindness and naïveté is that you widen your range of relevant experiences. Art is one of the ways in which this can be done. By widening the range of relevant experiences, you get better at handling the situations you encounter, because you are familiar with a broader range of situations, and you are less likely to overlook important features of them. This, I would insist, means that life is more significant than before. But we need not assume that the widening must be made in an unreflected fashion. The subject concerned about her view of life will ponder questions about whether her present equilibrium involves blindness and naïveté. We also expect this person to seek the relevant experiences out, unless she has good reasons to consider them to be corrupting, meaning that they would cloud rather than improve her judgment.

Judgments about which experiences to seek out and which to consider corrupting are judgments that subjects have to make themselves. Here, too, there are constraints on our judgments since human practices have a social character. In the end, however, the individual has to decide what the most reasonable adjustments may be, and live with those decisions.

571 Nussbaum 1990 (passim), DePaul 1993 p. 199.
572 A healthy fallibilism is a fallibilism where we acknowledge that we may have to revise much of what we now are committed to in the course of future experience and interaction with the environment, but where we do not let this insight make us doubt everything which is settled now. A vicious fallibilism, on the other hand, is when the acknowledgment that anything can be revised in the future leads us to doubt everything. If that doubt was genuine, we would be completely paralyzed.
573 Nussbaum 1990 p. 47.
6.7 Criticism and Reform of Views of Life and Religious Practices

My suggestion is thus that if we attend to the virtues coherent views of life exhibit, we can devise a method of reflective equilibrium with important lessons for how to handle conflicts and challenges within your view of life. The method of reflective equilibrium is not only a method for handling particular cases of conflict: it also stresses the importance of competence for our chances to handle those conflicts in a promising way. The goal of the method of reflective equilibrium is, ultimately, to help us make life more significant. With that in mind, we cannot overlook the importance of competence for our capacity to detect and deal with challenges. The method of reflective equilibrium urges us to integrate our experiences of existential significance with our view of life. In that process, no mechanical algorithm is offered; it is the subject that has to decide which changes and modifications that are most reasonable. Since this is what the method looks like, it must also include an account of what the relevant competence is like, and how it can be attained, because without competence, we will be uncertain about whether we make adjustments in an intelligent way. Hence, the striving for competence is no marginal affair in the method of reflective equilibrium: it is an essential element of it.

By now, a critic may be bothered by the lack of a guarantee that the method of reflective equilibrium helps us develop towards truth. What if the method of reflective equilibrium, as I conceive it, actually leads us deeper and deeper into falsity? How can we know for certain that this is not happening?

My reply to this critic is that the kind of guarantee she asks for cannot be had, not even in science, but I would also add that it is unnecessary. The critic presupposes that there is a standard for truth which is independent of the practices we have developed as responses to different experienced needs, a standard which, whether accessible or not, is the yard-stick for how well our different practices perform. In effect, what our critic is mounting is a version of the skeptical challenge to any of our cognitive endeavors: no matter how well-tested our knowledge-claims are, they can always turn out to be false. If we share the critic’s presuppositions, then it is possible to doubt any method, even those used in science and everyday life. It is, however, a presupposition we should reject. Truth relates to our practice-constituted environment, and it bears an indirect relation to satisfaction of our purposes. By this, I mean that the criteria for truth generated in different practices are not independent of the purposes for which a certain practice developed. Let us take views of life as an example. Views of life have developed because we need orientation in certain situations about how to act. Not just any orientation is equally good, though. We want an orientation that enables us to lead more significant lives than before. This is why blindness and naïveté are problematic: they prevent us from

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575 See the discussion on truth in 3.4.
developing towards equilibria that allow significant interaction with the environment. Once they are overcome, we tend to see the resulting equilibria as richer than previous equilibria.

What the critic is saying is that by using the method of reflective equilibrium, we may be developing farther and farther away from truth. Then, truth would have nothing to do with whether a view of life enables more and more significant interaction with the environment. Hence, the critic presumes the view of truth I rejected as unintelligible in 3.5; I would also add that if that were what truth comes to in views of life, then we are probably better off without it. Once we reject the presuppositions of the skeptic’s challenge, we see that the guarantee the critic asks for is something we cannot provide; not because we lack a certain capacity, like the capacity to adopt God’s perspective on the world, but because the critic’s demand rests on mistaken assumptions about truth. Let me suggest, instead, that the criteria we can formulate for truth and falsity in views of life are indirectly related to satisfaction of our purposes in the following way: we think certain methods tend to lead to true beliefs, because they are methods that enable more significant interaction with the environment than used to be possible. It is the positive responses to these new equilibria that give meaning to talk of true and false in relation to views of life.

Given my stress of an indirect link between truth and satisfaction of our purposes, we cannot talk of truth in views of life as having nothing to do with the most fruitful methods for restoring equilibrium that we know of. All the same, this is different from defining truth in terms of the outcome of a method; further experience and inquiry can show that the method is problematic, and stands in need of revision. What will warrant such judgments (like that the method of reflective equilibrium stands in need of revision) is not, however, some metaphysical insights into the true nature of human life, but failure of the method to restore equilibrium in a satisfactory way.

**Criticism and Reform of Religious Practices**

Before I go on to spell out the consequences of my approach for the way the problems of religion can be dealt with, I want to say something about the impact it can have on how we think of the justification of religious practices and the veridicality of religious experiences.

I propose that for a religious practice to be justified, it must be such that it enables us to develop more and more adequate views of life, that is, interact more fruitfully with the environment. A certain resolution of tension may be unsatisfactory, because it causes problems elsewhere that we have to deal with. A religious practice, which, for instance, legitimizes and sustains customs and habits that are unjust and oppressive, is thus a practice we cannot uncritically draw on even if it offers the means to resolve a particular problematic situation.
Here, a criticism of views of life and the practices that influence them are intimately related. The woman who detects deficiencies in her view of life, for instance, is not merely criticizing the shape of her previous view of life; she is also criticizing the practices on which she has drawn to develop it.

Such criticism always has a social aspect to it; it is hard to revise a religious practice on your own. As you argue for a revision you will, in effect, attempt to make others see what you see, and respond in a similar way to it. Then, it may be that the practice is reconstructed in order to make it more inclusive. In its reconstructed form, it can continue to be a source of inspiration to draw on as you develop your conception of human flourishing.

The resources for criticism and reform of religious practices, which the method of reflective equilibrium offers, are, I take it, important for having confidence in the religious practice to which you are committed. Such confidence results from seeing that the religious practice in question is a practice on which you can draw to develop adequate views of life. It is only if this holds that a religious practice helps us resolve tension in a satisfactory way, that is, a way that will not lead to a number of other problematic situations in the future. If the method of reflective equilibrium is employed, religious commitment will not be arbitrary in the sense that any commitment is as good as any other. Commitment is evaluated from the perspective of how well a religious practice can perform the function of contributing to a more significant life.

The question of justification of religious practices is thus a question of whether they can be drawn on to develop and uphold views of life, which are in a state of reflective equilibrium. They are liable to criticism and reform to the extent that they impede such development. Now, the status of being justified in this way is never final. Since experience has what James called a tendency to "boil over," it is always possible that future interaction with the environment will reveal problematic features. Here, let us take James’s suggestion about ethics seriously, and apply it to views of life and religious practices as well: "there can be no final truth in ethics any more than in physics, until the last man has had his experience and said his say." 576

What about religious experiences and the question of when religious experiences are veridical? According to Alston, criteria for veridicality are internal to a particular religious practice, and make up an important part of the religious doxastic practice’s overrider system. 577 Taken to its extreme, this view implies that judgments of veridicality cannot be criticized from the outside. James

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576 Here, I oversimplify the relation between criticism and religious practices somewhat to make the point that criticism of religious practices is possible and necessary. I want to add that the direction is never one-way. Religious practices are important sources of criticism of your current view of life. After all, that is what the tension-resolution model of the function of religious practices adopted in chap. 4 is all about. Criticism thus goes both ways.

577 James 1956 p. 184.

578 See 5.4.
seems to advocate the opposite view by presenting a universally applicable ethical criterion. He writes that “in the end it had to come down to our empiricist criterion: By their fruits ye shall know them, not by their roots.” Religious experiences with good consequences are veridical while the others are unveridical. I think Alston and James are both right, although their suggestions are directed at somewhat different levels where we can raise the question about what the appropriate criteria are like. Let me explain.

It is clear that within a religious practice, we do not only look to moral fruits to judge the veridicality of religious experiences. The criteria there are (normally not explicitly formulated) also involve considerations such as the kind of experience we are talking about, the circumstances where it occurred, the beliefs we accept after having undergone such an experience, and so on. I do not think that the criticism of religious practices, which the method of reflective equilibrium makes possible, is at work at the level of a particular judgment about the veridicality of a religious experience. Other criteria are employed, and they are, as Alston claims, specific for the religious practice. But these criteria may be affected by criticism, and thus, judgments about the veridicality of religious experiences are not an entirely internal affair for any religious practice. This, I take it, is the truth behind James’s drastic statement:

Nothing is more striking than the secular alteration that goes on in the moral and religious tone of men, as their insight into nature and their social arrangements progressively develop. After an interval of a few generations the mental climate proves unfavorable to notions of the deity which at an earlier date were perfectly satisfactory: the older gods have fallen below the common secular level, and can no longer be believed in. To-day a deity who should require bleeding sacrifices to placate him would be too sanguinary to be taken seriously. Even if powerful historical credentials were put forward in his favor, we would not look at them. It might be that for a religious practice to resolve a tension in a satisfactory way, adjustment will involve reconstruction of our criteria for veridicality. If not, the practice will not help us attain a state of reflective equilibrium, which means that if we draw on it to resolve a certain problematic situation, other problems emerge, that will prevent us from leading a more significant life.

6.8 The Problems of Religion and the Preservation of Goods

Already in chapter 1, I suggested that the problematic status religion has today is connected to an incapacity to deal with concrete problematic situations of which religion or religious belief is somehow part. Those problems are of different kinds, and situated at different levels. At an individual level, my commitment is contested as I encounter conflicting views, and similar problems recur

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579 James 1982 p. 20. For James’s view of truth in religion, see Kappy Suckiel 1996.
at an interreligious level, as well as at a social level, where we have to interact with other people for a number of purposes. I argued that mainstream philosophy of religion has not contributed positively to our ability to understand and handle those problems. Can we do better with a pragmatic conception of religion and views of life? That is what I propose. To really demonstrate that I am right, I would need to show how different extra-philosophical problems can be dealt with better than before, but it is not possible to undertake such inquiry here. I will just make some remarks about how the results obtained indicate that a pragmatic conception of religion would, in fact, enable us to handle the problems of religion better than before.

What justifies our commitment to certain religious practices, despite the plurality of relevant alternatives, is the way it arises naturally from the shape our views of life has, views of life that we take to be in a state of reflective equilibrium. You will not attain that kind of confidence by isolating yourself from relevant alternatives; it arises from intelligent handling of problematic situations, and the way this has enabled fruitful interaction with the environment. The confidence we need in the face of plurality will be had only if we use the method of reflective equilibrium, and make use of the results to criticize and reform religious practices as well. If my view of life is in a state of reflective equilibrium, and a religious practice contributes to my conception of human flourishing, I would even say that commitment to the religious practice is not optional. Without the contribution the religious practice makes, something important, which I cannot do without, would be lacking.

Confidence in our own commitment does not force us to think that other people are mistaken, even when they embrace conceptions of human flourishing rather different from ours. We can come to see that these views of life, too, exhibit the virtues of a coherent view of life. I think we are able to understand the persistence of disagreement once we come to see how different religious practices have developed as responses to experienced needs, and we combine that idea with a view of experienced needs as resulting from the direction certain impulses have been given as human practices have developed. If we thus view different religious practices as responses to somewhat different experienced needs, we can come to see why there are similarities as well as differences. We need not think that one of those needs is more genuine than the rest: the form they have taken depends on social and individual factors, and these differences are reflected in the plurality of religious practices we face today.

Here, I think pragmatism helps us understand and live with religious diversity, and the plurality of views of life in contemporary society. Religious diversity, in itself, poses no problem as long as no conflict about what policies to choose, or something similar, arises. How, then, are we helped to deal with those conflicts? What we can do is to look both for what we share, both for what

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50 I The problems of religion are spelled out in 1.2.
we disagree over, and how these elements are embedded in our respective con-
ceptions of human flourishing. I believe that once we construe conflicts this 
way, we will be in a much better position than before to work out compromises, 
where what is important in different positions is respected and retained. When-
ever this is impossible, decisions have to take the form of collectively based 
decisions where everyone is given a hearing, and everyone’s opinion is respected. 
In the debates preceding such decisions, I believe that it will be important to 
show how a certain standpoint hang together with your view of life, and that it 
is a position which a person with a view of life in a state of reflective equi-
librium can hold. It becomes easier to reflect critically once you see the way 
particular standpoints are embedded in your conception of human flourishing, 
and realize that these conceptions are not immune to criticism.

As this brief overview indicates, intelligent conduct of a community will 
take the form of democratic discourse and decision-making. This is not, however, 
quite enough. Democratic discourse should also make room for critical and 
intelligent discussion of the different standpoints we take concerning human 
flourishing. That is, it should not only be a discourse about the way to realize 
certain goals; it should include discourse about the goals or values we should 
pursue. This means that critical discussion of views of life must come in as part 
of such discourse. I believe that the method of reflective equilibrium, as I have 
sketched it, says something important about what such discourse may look like, 
by offering resources for criticism and reform of views of life—our own as well as others’.

The Goods of Religion and the Promise of Pragmatism

This chapter has given an overview of the way in which a pragmatic conception 
of religion holds resources that would enable philosophers of religion to con-
tribute positively to the ways in which we deal with the problems of religion. 
There are no hard and fast solutions to the conflicts we encounter, and problem-
solving must be undertaken at a rather concrete level. Keeping problem-solving 
at a concrete level will not, however, make it impossible to learn from past 
successful resolutions, although we should not expect very clear directions 
about how to proceed. Part of what it is to be a competent inquirer is to be open 
to the peculiarities of a certain situation. As Martha Nussbaum writes: “a 
person of practical wisdom will cultivate emotional openness and responsiveness 
in approaching a new situation.” So, I would add, should philosophers.

Making use of the resources of criticism and reform does not require of us 
that we abandon or entirely rebuild the already existing modes of criticism and 
reform that have developed as we have struggled to come to terms with problem-
matic situations in the past. On the contrary: one of the best models available

582 Nussbaum 1990 p. 78f. See also p. 69.
for resolution of the problems at hand is that of an open democratic society, where different conceptions of human flourishing are allowed to develop side by side, and where there are only problems to solve when concrete conflicts arise. What the philosopher can do is to contribute to those models by drawing attention to ways in which they can be made to function better than before. Criticizing and revising views of life is an important part of such discussions if we are going to be confident in the results. The urge to focus on concrete problems is also a result of the insight that there is really nothing strange or problematic about, for example, religious pluralism. A pragmatic conception of religion would, I believe, help us understand such plurality, which means that we have more time to spend on other questions.

We have reason to think that the practice of philosophy of religion would look quite different if a pragmatic conception of religion was adopted. Its conception of the problems to deal with would look different; so would the models drawn on when we discuss justification, and resolution of problematic situations. The conclusion of this chapter is that such a conception of religion would enable philosophers of religion to contribute at least some of the resources for criticism and reform which are urgently needed in order to preserve the goods of religion. Criticism and reform are linked to the virtues of a coherent view of life, and derives normative force from the way intelligent resolutions of problematic situations in the past have enabled us to lead more significant lives. This means that we, as philosophers, can supply resources to criticize and reform religious practices in ways that will make them practices we can draw on to develop views of life in reflective equilibrium, and thus lead significant lives. That, in turn, implies that we would be in a better position than before to preserve the goods of religion. It is time, now, to sketch the implications for the future of philosophy of religion.
CHAPTER 7
Conclusion: A Metaphilosophical Pragmatic Argument and the Future of Philosophy of Religion

7.1 A Metaphilosophical Argument Explicated

In chapter 2, I outlined an argument-form to use in critical comparison of incompatible philosophical anthropologies, based on a metaphilosophical pragmatic attitude to philosophical practice. It is time, now, to discuss how the results obtained throughout my study can be used for this kind of argument.

What makes metaphilosophical pragmatic arguments interesting is that certain problems of religion arise as we encounter religion in its concrete manifestations. We have to address those problems regardless of whether we adhere to some religious tradition, live alongside people who do, or belong to a society where different religious traditions still influence the way people think and behave. What is common to all these different ways of interacting with religion is, I have argued, a need for resources for criticism and reform. This means that we need ways of distinguishing what is acceptable and what is not, which helps us avoid the conclusion that religious commitment is an arbitrary affair, and that religious beliefs and practices are exempt from substantial criticism.

As stated in chapter 1, there is a close connection between supplying the resources for criticism and reform, and preserving the goods of religion. We have an ambivalent attitude to religion, and the ambivalence implies that un-critical commitment to any religious practice is not a viable option today. We want to know that there are ways in which these practices can be reformed, should the need arise. Apart from this, we also want to know whether there is something that warrants a continued commitment to our own religious practice in spite of the plurality of alternative religious and non-religious practices. Such plurality quite naturally leads to questions about how rational exchange between traditions is possible. Here, too, we need resources to draw on to criticize
and reform religious practices. Accordingly, questions about justification, criticism, and reform arise naturally in the course of our lives.

Analogical arguments from religious experience promise to bring order into the regulation of religious beliefs and religious practices by giving us the means to determine which are acceptable and which are not. If we can establish that certain experiences are genuine experiences of God, then the beliefs that those experiences support acquire a positive epistemic status, while beliefs incompatible with them are rightly criticized. However, the philosophers who have developed this kind of argument fail to establish the analogy to sense perception upon which it rests. Alston’s doxastic practice-approach, for instance, ultimately results in the claim that the adequacy of the religious beliefs embedded in a religious practice can only be judged by criteria derived from the very same religious beliefs. If nothing more substantial is said about criticism and reform, it looks as if the goods of religion are inevitably lost.

A Metaphilosophical Pragmatic Argument and the Promise of Pragmatism
On the pragmatic perspective taken in this study, there is no interest in calling the (extra-philosophical) problems of religion pseudo-problems. They are real enough in the situations where they emerge. Part of what makes religious belief problematic is that in the context of views of life, our responses to different situations and events are not shared. Not everyone finds the religious practice on which I draw to develop a view of life adequate. Instead, people have rather different conceptions of human flourishing, and they respond differently to the situations where human flourishing is at stake. With this in mind, it is not surprising that religious beliefs are contested, and appear problematic. But is that automatically the same as saying that no good reasons can be presented for your view of life? Pragmatism claims that it is not. Chapter 6 shows, I take it, that even in cases where there is only overlap (and no consensus) concerning how to respond (the situation encountered in views of life), we are not forced to conclude that commitment is an arbitrary affair, if by that you mean that no good reasons can be presented to support your view of life. The resources for criticism and reform of a religious practice are not limited to criteria internal to that practice. In fact, we have good reasons for taking a critical stance to it when we face situations where we detect problems with our present view of life. The outcome may well be that we recognize the need for reform of the practice to incorporate novelty.

Pragmatism thus promises that the goods of religion can be preserved, since religious views of life can develop to a state of reflective equilibrium. At least, I see no reason to think that this is impossible. To determine whether I am right

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583 This is true even if we admit that the problems would not be construed in exactly the same way if we embraced a different conception of religion.
or not, we would have to return to the situations where the extra-philosophical problems of religion emerge, to (among other things) see whether we are capable of handling those situations better than before. This, clearly, goes beyond the scope of my present inquiry. I believe, though, that enough has been said to establish that there are promising resources for significant criticism on a pragmatic conception of religion and views of life. If we make use of them, it is likely that it is possible to develop religious views of life so they attain a state of reflective equilibrium.

This brings us to the metaphilosophical pragmatic argument I have been developing. The argument's background is that in religion, goods about which we care are threatened, and one resource we make use of to preserve them is philosophical reflection. The argument proceeds along the following steps:

(1) The goods of religion are threatened. We are incapable of solving the problems which religious practices give rise to in a satisfactory way.
(2) Since this is so, religious practices, and the way we deal with them, stand in need of criticism and reform.
(3) An important feature of the present situation is that the resources for significant criticism and reform are lacking. This is what I take to be the common denominator of the different problems of religion I identified.
(4) Analogy-arguments from religious experience fail to supply resources for criticism and reform. This means, significantly, that as long as the conception of religion dominant in contemporary philosophy of religion holds sway, philosophers of religion are incapable of contributing positively to our attempts to preserve the goods of religion.
(5) If we adopt a pragmatic conception of religion, we are able to develop resources for criticism and reform. It thus holds a promise that the goods of religion can be preserved. The way to determine whether the promise can be kept or not goes via returning to the extra-philosophical problems of religion, and dealing with them from the perspective of a reconstructed religious practice (and, as part of that, a reconstructed way of understanding and dealing with religious practices).
(6) Hence, a pragmatic conception of religion is superior to the conception dominant in contemporary philosophy of religion, because it suggests a promising way to preserve the goods of religion.
(7) Since we are concerned about preserving the goods of religion, we should adopt a pragmatic conception of religion, and abandon the conception of religion dominant in contemporary philosophy of religion.

There is no clear distinction to make between religious practices and the way we deal with them. Changes in one always lead to changes in the other as well.
The argument, to be convincing, presupposes that we accept a pragmatic metaphilosophical attitude to philosophical practice. But even if the argument concerns the way we think philosophically of human practices, I would say that it is still part of philosophical practice, as I conceive it. Philosophical practice, as a self-reflective undertaking, can and should go beyond aspect 1–criticism to engage in aspect 2–criticism, even of itself. Such criticism can have important consequences for the future of philosophy. The argument presented here suggests that we change our conception of religion, because that would enable us to handle the extra-philosophical problems of religion better than before. Since conceptions of religion are also associated with the interpretative frameworks I refer to as philosophical anthropologies, the argument also forces us to raise critical questions about what consequences my argument may have for philosophical practice at large.

It is clear that the changes brought about by a metaphilosophical pragmatic argument are not limited to the practice of philosophy of religion; they also influence our religious practices. This forces us to reflect further on the relation between philosophy of religion and religious practices, and the way in which they affect one another.

A first threat to a metaphilosophical argument is posed by the claim that philosophy of religion and religious practices have nothing to do with one another. If that is true, then a change of our conception of religion (that is, a change within philosophy of religion) will not affect religious practice at all. If so, philosophical reflection is unable to help us reform those practices to better handle extra-philosophical problems in the future. However, this position is quite implausible. I believe that there are several ways in which philosophy of religion and religious practices are related. Let me mention a few. First, philosophers of religion are quite often religious people themselves, and they can affect the religious practices of which they are part in many different ways. Second, philosophers of religion participate in the education of journalists, ministers, and teachers; people with a massive influence on how we think of religion. Third, conceptions of religion also influence theologians in their reflection on different religious traditions, and the way they suggest that religious belief might be understood today. Fourth, and finally, developments in philosophy of religion influence the public intellectual debate, which includes, but is not confined to, the academy. So clearly, it is possible, and, I would say, evident, that philosophy of religion makes a difference for religious practice.

See 1.7.

This is not the same as saying that these problems are dissolved. That would imply that the problems were never genuine problems at all. I prefer to say that now, we can set them in a context where they can be dealt with.
Asserting that there is a relation between philosophy of religion and religious practices along the lines sketched above indicates, however, another potential threat to metaphilosophical pragmatic arguments. The threat is that if there is a very close relation between religious practices and philosophy of religion, then a metaphilosophical pragmatic argument will not only concern changing your conception of religion; it means dramatically altering religious practices as well. But then, it looks as if pragmatic philosophers of religion present something entirely different from the religiosity we find in religious practices today. If you think that is correct, then we may well wonder whether the needed overlap in our view of what the goods of religion are, is actually at hand. After all, religious practices would be thoroughly reconstructed by the adoption of a pragmatic conception of religion, and it is not at all certain that there would be a continuity of experienced goods between religious practices as they look before and after reconstruction. Furthermore, if the goods are not shared, then it is doubtful whether you can hold that the problems of religion are shared, either. Hence, the metaphilosophical pragmatic argument, dependent as it is on overlap in our views about what the goods of religion are, and the way in which they are threatened, will not get off the ground.

I have already shown that philosophy of religion and religious practices are related. However, I believe that the relation is not intimate enough to undermine the prospects for a metaphilosophical pragmatic argument. Let me try to trace the existing relation, and then say something about why I believe that metaphilosophical pragmatic arguments have force.

I argued in 1.4 that for beings like us, reflection on human phenomena is inevitable. In the course of reflection on religion, we develop a comprehension of religion. Philosophical reflection is not radically different from that reflection, but it is worked out for a more determinate purpose and with a specific set of concepts. I further suggested that we think of people’s comprehension of religion as part of the phenomenon philosophers of religion deal with.

Keeping the distinctions between a phenomenon, our comprehension of a phenomenon, and our conception of a phenomenon in mind, let me make the following suggestions. Reconstruction of our conception of religion brings about a reconstruction of our comprehension of religion. This, in turn, influences the way the phenomenon develops. But influence is not one-way: philosophers must take account of the phenomenon with which they are dealing. Otherwise, they are vulnerable to phenomenological arguments, stating that they distort the phenomenon under reflection.587 But this cannot mean that philosophers are

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587 As an example of a phenomenological argument, consider Mikael Stenmark’s critique of D. Z. Phillips: “[I]s there any reason to think that in general [religious beliefs] contain no factual element at all? Phenomenologically speaking, it seems as if ordinary religious believers typically think and talk as though religious beliefs were a kind of factual beliefs” (Stenmark 1995 p. 321). See also Soskice 1985 p. 107, where Janet Martin Soskice claims that the Christian tradition itself is inherently realist, and that non-realism is thus always revisionary. I do not think that it is correct to say that the Christian tradition is realist in
obliged to leave everything as it is. We have every reason to think that religious practices have been influenced by philosophy of religion in the past as well. It has affected our comprehension of religion, and this has had consequences for the way religious practices have developed. Hence, in relation to religious practices as they look at present, a suggested reconstruction of our conception of religion will involve a reconstruction of religious practices as well. This goes, in particular, for our comprehension of religion, but we need not assume that reconstruction is limited to it.

A certain reconstruction of religious practices must, in fact, take place if we are going to improve our ability to deal with the extra-philosophical problems of religion. So clearly, a metaphilosophical pragmatic argument involves the suggestion that we revise our religious practices in certain ways. But this should not lead us to think that pragmatic philosophers of religion are automatically vulnerable to phenomenological arguments. I have already stated that a conception of religion is to some extent a simplification of the phenomenon religion, and that it is the result of an interpretative undertaking. Simplification and interpretation occur for the purpose of dealing with the phenomenon philosophically. Therefore, a conception of religion cannot be, and should not attempt to be, an exhaustive account of religion. The reconstruction called for by my metaphilosophical pragmatic argument should thus not be taken to introduce something with which religious subjects are unfamiliar. Instead, it draws attention to another way of understanding the phenomenon and its elements, so that we can set these elements into a (different) coherent whole.

The upshot of the relation I have sketched between a phenomenon and our conception of a phenomenon is that a change of our conception of a phenomenon has consequences for the phenomenon as well. To take just one example, I suggested in 6.8 that adopting a pragmatic conception of religion may have consequences for what the criteria for determining whether religious experiences are veridical or not might look like. We need not assume, however, that the changes called for are drastic enough to make pragmatic philosophers of religion vulnerable to phenomenological arguments. Even where revision is called for, it is linked to elements present in the particular religious practice, elements religious people acknowledge as part of that practice. Consequently, overlap will normally be significant enough for metaphilosophical pragmatic arguments to have force.

Having clarified the relation between philosophy of religion and religious practices, it is time to deal more directly with the question of what bearing the argument presented here has on how we think philosophically about religion, and what the implications are for philosophical practice more generally.

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586 itself; on most conceptions of religion, however, religious practices are understood in a realist fashion. That is a somewhat different claim from Soskice’s, however.

588 Including, then, our comprehension of religion.
7.2 Consequences for Philosophical Practice

I have presented reasons for thinking that my metaphilosophical pragmatic argument should be taken seriously. Of course, if you refuse to admit that philosophical practice can or should have any relevance beyond philosophical practice itself, then the argument will not be impressive. My interest here is with those who agree with me that the goods of religion are threatened today, and, like me, wonder whether philosophy can contribute to making them more secure. This means agreeing with significant parts of my view of philosophy as criticism, including the emphasis on the relation between philosophical and extra-philosophical problems.

The conclusion to draw from this study is that a reconstruction of our conception of religion would be helpful for philosophical attempts to preserve the goods of religion. Reconstruction would enable us to ask other questions than before, because our ways of thinking about religion are reconstructed. For instance, the way we think of justification of religious beliefs and religious practices, and about the contributions philosophers can make in that respect, would be quite different.

At this point, things become complicated. Is it possible to change your conception of religion while all the same leaving your philosophical anthropology intact? We can hardly avoid raising critical questions about a philosophical anthropology once we realize that a conception associated with it is problematic. The question is: can we continue to embrace it at all? If not, it looks as if a single metaphilosophical pragmatic argument can have drastic consequences for the future of philosophy.

What would call for a reconstruction of your philosophical anthropology is that when your conception of religion is reconstructed, then it will, in a certain sense, be inconsistent with how you tend to think of other human practices. This may well result in a certain tension, which, to be resolved, calls for a reconstruction of your philosophical anthropology. Can a single argument warrant taking such a large step? That would have to be a very convincing argument indeed. Alternatively, you could claim that there is no overarching philosophical anthropology, but only different pictures of different human practices. If so, a convincing metaphilosophical pragmatic argument calling for reconstruction of our conception of religion would say nothing about philosophical practice at large.

I think, pace the latter position, that we should not think of a philosophical anthropology as a number of free-floating pictures of human practices without implications for one another. In my view, a philosophical anthropology supplies a more general orientation to human practices, which we bring to bear in reflection on rather different human practices. On the other hand, it would be strange to hold that the metaphilosophical pragmatic argument presented here single-handedly establishes the superiority of a pragmatic philosophical anthro-
Let me suggest that my argument that a pragmatic conception of religion is superior—given our interest to preserve certain goods of religion—poses a problem for the philosophers who embrace a philosophical anthropology with which the conception of religion dominant in philosophical practice is associated. However, as Kuhn pointed out with respect to scientific inquiry, researchers can live with inconsistencies and problematic features of a paradigm, as long as they believe that eventually, the problems can be overcome. It is not the case that they dump their whole cartload of beliefs as soon as a problem turns up. Something similar probably holds true in philosophy. As a consequence, let us say that philosophical practice faces a problematic situation which calls for further inquiry. My study may be helpful in the process of instituting a problem to be further dealt with, as well as for indicating a promising proposal about how to resolve the problematic situation. Much more inquiry is called for before a question like the one concerning which philosophical anthropology to embrace is settled.

So the bearing of the metaphilosophical pragmatic argument worked out here on philosophical practice is that it forces philosophers to keep raising complex questions about philosophical practice, the purposes for which philosophical practice has developed, and what the proper relation between them is. In itself, it will not cause a sea-change of philosophical practice, but on the other hand, it presents an attractive option for philosophical practice that cannot be dismissed without good reasons.

You may well wonder whether it is possible to choose what philosophical anthropology to embrace, given the non-propositional picture-character I take it to have. It cannot be quite like choosing between being a consequentialist or a deontologist in ethics. The question is whether we can really make ourselves conceive of human phenomena in any other way than we already do. So, again, are metaphilosophical pragmatic arguments really possible?

I would reply that if a metaphilosophical pragmatic argument causes us to raise doubts about a particular philosophical anthropology, this is important, because (genuine) doubt is something we cannot ignore. The case where we accept that a pragmatic conception of religion is superior to the one dominant in contemporary philosophy of religion inevitably raises doubts about the philosophical anthropology with which the problematic conception of religion is associated. Doubt is appeased when we attain a satisfactory resolution of the problem at hand, and if the most promising resolution involves reconstruction of your philosophical anthropology, then I would rather turn the objection around: in the long run, you cannot help reconstructing your philosophical anthropology, if that is what it takes to resolve the problematic situation. I repeat, however, that further inquiry will be necessary to warrant such a change.

What, then, would it mean to start embracing a philosophical anthropology different from the one you already embrace? Probably the change would be
similar to a conversion, or of an esthetic experience where funded meanings are reconstructed. As is true of some other changes of a similar kind, we should expect this to be a long, and often gradual, development. Furthermore, we should not think of the process as something going on in solitary confinement. There is a social aspect to these changes, in the way that you continually test and try out ideas in relation to a community of which you are part.\footnote{In this case, ‘community’ will be understood in two different ways: a philosophical community and a larger community to which we belong.}

Can reflection on the goods of religion lead to some other result than the one my metaphilosophical pragmatic argument seeks to establish? Can you hold that some other conception of religion is superior to the one advocated here? I believe so, but in order to make room for that kind of debate, we need to broaden philosophical practice to make it capable of raising and critically discussing a new kind of questions. This is an extension that is prompted by the possibility of presenting metaphilosophical pragmatic arguments, and it does not presuppose that any particular metaphilosophical pragmatic argument (like the one presented in this study) is successful.

7.3 A Basis for Philosophical Plurality

What I seek here is a kind of counter-argument to my metaphilosophical pragmatic argument, available to someone who is sympathetic to my view of philosophical practice, but also thinks that my pragmatic alternative misses something important. I shall concentrate on an interesting way of arguing which, I take it, shows that accepting the idea of philosophy as criticism inevitably forces us to broaden the range of questions we address in philosophical practice. If acknowledged, this should ideally lead us to embrace a philosophical plurality.

The most interesting objection to my metaphilosophical pragmatic argument is, in my opinion, one that questions my idea that there is enough overlap between our views on what the goods of religion are to make the argument convincing. The objector need not question the account of the goods I have provided in its entirety, but only hold that it is incomplete. Once another view of the goods of religion is accepted, a pragmatic conception of religion can be shown to be unsatisfactory. This would also subvert the metaphilosophical pragmatic argument I have presented.

I interpret Roger Trigg as saying something like this in his defense of religious realism against different versions of antirealism.\footnote{This is a way of understanding Trigg’s position from a pragmatic perspective. I am not suggesting that this is what Trigg intended to say in his defense of realism.} Trigg thinks that it is important that realists “maintain in a theological context … that religion is not in the business of constructing reality, but of responding to something that
is totally apart from us.”

Why is this important? Because “[r]ealism in theology, like realism elsewhere, attempts to ground our knowledge. Indeed, in pointing to a transcendent God, it hopes to point to the source and guarantee of all knowledge.”

In what way would this make a pragmatic conception of religion unsatisfactory? Well, Trigg claims to have identified an important good of religion, which I have not reckoned with in my discussion. To preserve this good, Trigg might claim, we need to embrace a conception of religion stressing that God exists in some metaphysical mode. God, for Trigg, serves as a guarantee that human cognitive activity is worthwhile, and that there is a point to our pursuits going beyond purely instrumental considerations.

To be sure, Trigg conceptualizes this good of religion in philosophical terms that makes it look as if it is not a need of ordinary religious people, but rather of philosophers of religion with an inclination towards foundationalism. But I am not so sure that this is really true. In a philosophical discussion of what the goods of religion are, you will formulate these goods using the concepts that are available, given your conception of religion. It may well be that Trigg traces an experienced good not only of philosophers of religion, but of religious believers generally. Here, let us assume that this is the case.

For my own part, I do not find Trigg at all convincing. My initial response would be that God is real enough on a pragmatic conception of religion. Trigg makes his claims in response to rather extreme versions of religious antirealism, and it may well be that he would find a pragmatically real God real enough to preserve the good of religion, which he is concerned about. For the sake of this argument, however, let us suppose that he would not. Then, still for the sake of the argument, I would raise the question of whether the good, which Trigg traces, is really important in religion. But is that response really to the point? I believe it is not, because it is not up to me qua philosopher to determine whether goods encountered in the course of human experience are genuine or not. This is true for the goods of religion as well.

Instead, what I think is important here, is that we have an attempt to identify a good of religion that my pragmatic conception of religion might be unable to preserve. In philosophical practice as it looks at present, this would be an irrelevant objection, but once we adopt the idea of philosophy as criticism, it strikes directly at my metaphilosophical pragmatic argument. In order to deal with it, we need to expand the boundaries of rational discourse to incorporate intelligent discussions about the different goods we find in human practices. Regardless of whether my metaphilosophical pragmatic argument is convincing or not, this is something I think my study establishes. It is, actually, a natural

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consequence of acknowledging the relation between philosophical and extra-philosophical problems, and the view of philosophy as criticism.

**Truly Embracing Plurality**

Should we expect consensus on the question about what the goods of religion, which we should struggle to preserve, are like? Most of the time, I guess that we have significant overlap. Quite often, overlap will be sufficient for metaphilosophical pragmatic arguments to have significant force, but this may not always be the case. Is this a fact to be deplored? From a pragmatic perspective, a natural response is that it is not. Consider what James has to say about the irreducible plurality of forms of human spirituality:

Ought it to be assumed that in all men the mixture of religion with other elements should be identical? ... In other words, is the existence of so many religious types and sects and creeds regrettable?

To these questions I answer 'No' emphatically. And my reason is that I do not see how it is possible that creatures in such different positions and with such different powers as human individuals are, should have exactly the same functions and the same duties. No two of us have identical difficulties, nor should we be expected to work out identical solutions. ... The divine can mean no single quality, it must mean a group of qualities, by being champions of which in alternation, different men may all find worthy missions. Each attitude being a syllable in human nature's total message, it takes the whole of us to spell the meaning out completely.\(^5\)

Maybe the same thing is true in philosophy of religion. We find partially different goods to reside in religion, and one of the goods identified by Trigg is such that, to preserve it, we would have to adopt a conception of religion much like the one dominant in contemporary philosophy of religion. I do not at all feel compelled to accept Trigg’s analysis, but can I say that he is mistaken? I think there are good reasons for not sharing his standpoint, including the conclusions of chapter 5, that on the conception of religion Trigg embraces, we are unable to contribute positively to attempts to come to terms with the extra-philosophical problems of religion. This is a problem for Trigg, and the objection shows that exchange and argument are possible even after we acknowledge the importance of experienced goods for philosophical practice.

In addition, you can raise the question why human knowledge needs the kind of metaphysical basis Trigg thinks is so important.\(^5\) Can I, however, say that he is misconstruing religion, or that the good he traces is not a genuine good?

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\(^5\) James 1982 p. 486f.

\(^5\) Here Trigg’s position is, in a very important respect, at one with that of Joseph Runzo, who writes: “Since theological realism inherently emphasises the importance of the cognitive content of religious belief, the realist position supports the central role which reason has in the religious life.” (Runzo 1993a p. 168.) Clearly, here, too, we have something more than a neutral statement about the character of religion. Something is taken to be valuable which, to be preserved, requires a certain conception of religion.
It seems real enough for some people. We can hardly appeal to any uncontroversial idea of what religion really is to settle the question of what the goods of religion are. That strategy will not sit too comfortably with my way of thinking about human practices. Neither can we claim that the good, which Trigg is concerned about, is not a genuine good of religious practices. His position is, however, still liable to criticism, on the grounds that it is doubtful whether it will be helpful for our attempts to preserve the goods of religion.

Let me suggest that what we encounter here is not the limits of rational discourse, but something that rational discourse must take into account: that our experiences of value (related to one or another human practice) may look different. Consequently, metaphilosophical pragmatic arguments will not automatically convince everyone. As long as there is overlap, however, on what the goods of religion are, metaphilosophical pragmatic arguments still have force. The goods, which both Trigg and I acknowledge to be important, are admittedly threatened. It further looks as if Trigg’s conception of religion does not help us preserve those goods. For Trigg, this might result in the choice of giving up some good of religion to preserve the rest. For instance, it may be that to preserve at least some of the goods of religion, the good, which Trigg has identified, may have to be sacrificed. Such a conclusion would have to be the result of an intelligent trade-off between incommensurable goods, or values, and it most likely involves genuine loss. Nevertheless, this might be the most intelligent thing to do.

Choices between goods can be made in an intelligent fashion even though we lack explicitly formulated rules for how to proceed in concrete cases. If such choices in philosophical practice are going to be intelligently made, however, philosophers will have to start asking questions about the values we want philosophical practice to promote and preserve. What is important for us in religion? How can the goods be preserved? How should we make trade-offs between such goods? Philosophy as criticism demands of us that we raise those questions, and dealing with them involves scrutinizing and comparing incompatible philosophical anthropologies. If we refuse to acknowledge the importance of (experiences of) values for philosophical practice, such questions are never addressed, and this has negative consequences for the ability of philosophical practice to contribute positively to our quest for human flourishing. In this study, I have sketched what philosophical practice might look like once the relation to extra-philosophical problems is acknowledged, and also showed why this extension of philosophical practice is desirable. Investigating to what extent different goods of religion can be preserved on different conceptions of religion is crucial for philosophical practice’s ability to contribute to human flourishing. Sometimes, there is disagreement about the goods of (for instance) religion, which is such that we lack the overlap convincing metaphilosophical pragmatic

\[\text{Cf. O’Connor 1993 on the importance of our commitments for the philosophical positions we embrace.}\]
arguments need. This is a kind of disagreement that (though not irresolvable), we ought to learn to live with. We cannot expect consensus on complex questions concerning which conception of religion (and which philosophical anthropology) is most fruitful for preserving the goods we think it is important to preserve. Persisting disagreement is understandable once we acknowledge that we are different, and may not always find the same things valuable.

I conclude that if my way of working philosophically with the problems of religion is taken seriously, philosophical practice should not go on doing business as usual. It has to address those questions of value we so easily tend to think of as non-philosophical, or unsuited for philosophical reflection, if we are going to be able to deal intelligently with the problems we face. Once you raise questions about the way in which philosophical practice can contribute to our chances of making experienced goods more secure, you will see that reconstruction of philosophical practice is sometimes called for. That way, philosophy can better serve the purpose of contributing to our chances to lead a life of human flourishing.

As I stated, the new type of questions we would ask are questions where consensus is not easily achieved. But why would consensus be so important? Lack of it does not imply that the standpoints people hold are capricious, or that intelligent discussion of different standpoints is impossible. Instead, what we have is a platform for a philosophical plurality which is tolerant of the different ways of understanding the goods of various human practices, while all the same prepared to raise critical questions about the presuppositions and consequences of the standpoints held.

I started this study with a quote from William James. I can do no better than ending the same way. In this passage, James spells out the pluralistic spirit he believes should be an ideal for any type of human interaction. I think philosophers would benefit from taking his message to heart:

No one of us ought to issue vetoes to the other, nor should we bandy words of abuse. We ought, on the contrary, delicately and profoundly to respect one another’s mental freedom: then only shall we bring about the intellectual republic; then only shall we have that spirit of inner tolerance without which all outer tolerance is soulless, and which is empiricism’s glory; then only shall we live and let live, in speculative as well as in practical things.\textsuperscript{586}

\textsuperscript{586}James 1956 p. 30.
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