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## RELIGIOUS HINGE COMMITMENTS: DEVELOPING WITTGENSTEINIAN QUASI-FIDEISM<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract.** *The main goal of this paper is to develop further a quasi-fideistic Wittgensteinian view on the nature of religious beliefs proposed by Duncan Pritchard (Pritchard, 2000; Pritchard, 2012a; Pritchard, 2012b; Pritchard, 2015; Pritchard forthcoming). According to Pritchard, Wittgenstein's thoughts on religion may be connected with the epistemological perspective developed in his final notebooks On Certainty (Wittgenstein, 1969), where Wittgenstein argues that our empirical beliefs rest upon grounds (i.e., hinge commitments) that cannot be rationally defended, but that we nonetheless find certain. Pritchard proposes that the idea of hinge commitments may be extended to religious beliefs as well, and argues that if this is done, religious beliefs may turn out to be no less defensible than our nonreligious, empirical beliefs. Pritchard provides a preliminary analysis of the kinds of hinge commitments as well as of their characteristics. In this paper our main concern is to engage in further analysis of these commitments. Such analysis seems to be necessary if we are to grasp the way faith relates to the rest of human knowledge. Moreover, we suggest that the best way to approach this task is by asking how we acquire basic hinge commitments. In order to answer this question we need to consult not only philosophers but also developmental and social psychologists, and see how children acquire knowledge of religious as well as nonreligious beliefs.*

In Wittgenstein's writings there are plenty of insightful comments regarding the nature of faith and religious belief, but certainly not enough to make a full-blown philosophy of religion. His comments have nevertheless inspired many discussions. Some of these discussions have primarily interpretative goals and aim to tell us what Wittgenstein most likely thought about faith. Other

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discussions focus on the way his remarks, no matter how ambiguous they might be, help us understand the nature of religious beliefs. Of course, these two kinds of debate are not unrelated. The way we interpret Wittgenstein will certainly influence the way we will use his views in tackling the more general problem of the status of religious beliefs and their relation to non-religious ones.

In the first part of the paper we briefly outline Wittgenstein's alleged fideism as this is the most frequently discussed issue regarding Wittgenstein's view on religion. Philosophers such as Norman Malcolm (Malcolm, 2000/2002; Malcolm, 2000), Peter Winch (Winch, 2002), D.Z. Phillips (Phillips, 1993) and Iakovos Vassiliou (Vassiliou, 2001), to name but a few, who read Wittgenstein in this key, argue that Wittgenstein focuses on the regulative and expressive function of our religious beliefs. This is what distinguishes religious from scientific beliefs. In other words, they hold that, for Wittgenstein, religious beliefs do not aim to explain and predict phenomena in the world but give purpose and meaning to our everyday activities and way of life. This position faces two main objections that need to be addressed if we are to get a better grasp of the nature of religious belief. First, it remains unclear whether, and if so, in what sense religious beliefs are true or false; and, second, whether this view of religion can avoid radical epistemic relativism.

Thus, in the second part of the paper we further tackle the question of the epistemological status of religious beliefs in Wittgenstein's philosophy. For this purpose we turn to Pritchard's quasi-fideistic development of Wittgenstein's view of religious discourse (Pritchard, 2000; Pritchard, 2012a; Pritchard, 2012b; Pritchard, 2015; Pritchard forthcoming). We do not see Pritchard's account as strictly an *interpretation* of Wittgenstein since it combines elements of his view with ideas taken from another work of Wittgenstein's, *On Certainty*, in a way that probably would not have been welcomed by Wittgenstein himself.<sup>2</sup> In spite of that, however, we find Pritchard's account of religious discourse plausible, though not free of difficulties, and it seems to us sufficiently close to Wittgenstein to be called Wittgensteinian. Our goal is to examine to what extent this Wittgensteinian position could help us cast more light on the very phenomenon of religiosity. The main advantage of Pritchard's quasi-fideism is that it addresses in a straightforward manner the question of the truth of religious beliefs without throwing doubt on their regulative and expressive function. This seems to be promising as a way to understand the nature of religious beliefs. According to Pritchard, Wittgenstein's thoughts on religion are best understood from the perspective of his epistemology developed in his final notebooks *On Certainty*. The main thesis that Wittgenstein develops here

2 For interpretations of Wittgenstein's view that seem more faithful to its complexity and its unresolved tensions, see, e.g., Schroeder 2008; Cottingham 2009; Cottingham 2017.

is that all our empirical beliefs<sup>3</sup> rest upon grounds (i.e. hinge commitments) that cannot be rationally defended, but that we nonetheless find certain. In this way our religious beliefs, Pritchard argues, are not worse off than our nonreligious beliefs. What this means is that defending our religious beliefs from the skeptics is no more difficult than defending any other basic beliefs that we have.

The main problem with Pritchard's view is that it does not differentiate sufficiently between various kinds of hinge commitment as well as between the ways we accept them as certain. But unless we know how religious hinge commitments stand in relation to hinge commitments of other kinds we cannot take for granted that there is no epistemic difference between them. In the second part of this paper we aim to explore further the variety of hinge commitments and to offer a preliminary analysis of the way religious hinge commitments, and religious beliefs generally, relate to the rest of the human knowledge: knowledge of other minds, knowledge of the so-called Moorean certainties, ordinary empirical knowledge, scientific knowledge, etc. Neither Wittgenstein nor Pritchard engages in such an exploration of hinge commitments, but we hold that Pritchard at least would not find it unwelcome. Furthermore, we suggest that the best way to begin such an exploration is by asking how we acquire/learn basic hinge commitments. In order to answer this question we need to consult not only philosophers but also developmental and social psychologists and see how children acquire knowledge of other minds, how they learn basic Moorean certainties, and finally how they acquire religious beliefs. It is our contention that only when we tackle the questions about acquisition more closely will we be in a position to understand better the very nature of our religious beliefs. Finally, we conclude that only through such an approach we can hope to cast more light on the important questions such as: to what extent the worlds of a believer and a non-believer overlap and where the communication between the two is not only possible but also desirable.

## 1. Wittgenstein and fideism: problems and inconsistencies

According to the fideistic interpretation of Wittgenstein that was initially proposed by Norman Malcolm (Malcolm, 2000/2002), and developed by D.Z. Phillips (Phillips, 1993) Wittgenstein understands faith as a form of life. What this comes down to is that faith has its own criteria for what constitutes plausible or implausible beliefs and cannot be subjected to criticism from the outside. In other words, the 'logic of religious discourse' is only intelligible to those who share a way of life and participate in the religious practices of

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3 Pritchard talks throughout about 'rational' rather than empirical beliefs, but if we think just of empirical beliefs his position is clearly more defensible.

their community. So, to understand religious concepts we need a religious tradition; without a participant's understanding of that form of life, there can be no understanding of religion. If this is the case then it seems that religion, morality, and science may each have criteria of intelligibility peculiar to itself. But does this mean that a religious and a nonreligious person live in completely different worlds? Are we then to accept that there is no difference between religion and superstition? Let us unpack this a bit.

If we interpret Wittgenstein's stance toward religion from the perspective of his philosophy of language and conclude that faith, for Wittgenstein, is a language game with its own rules, it seems that we ascribe to Wittgenstein radical epistemic relativism according to which all of us can have our own truths. This would mean that the 'truth' of some aboriginal cult stands on a par not only with the official Christian doctrine, but also with the scientific worldview. It is highly unlikely that Wittgenstein would have subscribed to such a view. For Wittgenstein religious faith and superstition are quite different (Wittgenstein, 1980). The former is oriented toward developing our love for God while the latter results from fear and is a pseudo-science in the sense that it aims to explain and predict phenomena. In other words, Wittgenstein seems to disqualify superstition as a pseudo-technological attitude to the world. When acting on a superstition our intention is not to strengthen our love for God, but to influence the course of events in the world: to get cured, to heal a loved one, to lead a successful life and the like. Even proper religious practice such as baptizing a child could be a form of superstition. For instance, if we baptize a child so that she can have a long life, it is a superstitious action. If we baptize her for the sake of joyful affirmation of God then it is a sign of proper faith. But, what does constitute proper faith for Wittgenstein? What does he say about the nature and function of our religious beliefs?

D.Z. Phillips, in his interpretation of Wittgenstein, argues that it is precisely the function (not so much the epistemic value) of religious beliefs that differentiates them from scientific beliefs. This function is first and foremost regulative. Our belief in God guides us in our daily life. It tells us how to behave and what to do. In this way religious beliefs are deeply intertwined with our daily routines. If we cut religion off from our everyday life and reduce it to a mere doctrine that we endorse, religion becomes an esoteric game (Phillips, 1993, 69). However, this is not the case for Wittgenstein. A belief in God is not some extra metaphysical belief that we carry around for theoretical purposes (to account for the world's events and explain phenomena). On the contrary, the belief in, e.g., Jesus Christ and his resurrection, determines for us how we are going to treat and understand both ourselves and others in a way that no scientific theory

could. Wittgenstein often tries to capture the difference between religious and scientific beliefs. So we find him saying:

If someone who believes in God looks round and asks ‘Where does everything I see come from?’, ‘Where does all this come from?’, he is *not* craving for a (causal) explanation; and his question gets its point from being the expression of a certain craving. He is, namely, expressing an attitude to all explanations. (Wittgenstein, 1980, 85e)

The way you use the word ‘God’ does not show *whom* you mean—but, rather, what you mean. (Wittgenstein, 1980, 50e)

D.Z. Phillips emphasizes that for Wittgenstein, a religious belief is very different from a scientific one. Our belief in the resurrection is not, and cannot, be the same as belief that the water is H<sub>2</sub>O or that Pontius Pilate was the fifth prefect of the Roman province of Judaea. The latter are simple empirical truths that could be overthrown in a regular manner. The belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ is not of that sort and cannot be overthrown in that way. That belief has a regulative and expressive function. By stating it, we express our commitments; i.e., what we are prepared to do, what we think we are obliged to do etc. in the light of Christ’s resurrection and his teaching. To put it differently, historical proof of the Gospels (the historical-proof game) is irrelevant to our belief in God (Vassiliou, 2001, 33). The message of the Gospels is seized by the faithful who believe that such a message of this kind is essential for their life. For them the task of religion is not to explain or predict events in the world, but to make sense of many aspects of their life, such as one’s moral character, social allegiances, or aesthetic sensibilities. Along these lines Wittgenstein says: ‘Christianity is not a doctrine, not, I mean, a theory about what has happened and will happen to the human soul, but a description of something that actually takes place in human life’ (Wittgenstein, 1980, 28e).

Now, if the function of our religious beliefs is regulative, can we speak of religious truth at all? Phillips seems to think that we can and that the believer ‘must unapologetically be prepared to advance truth-claims’ (Cottingham, 2009, 205). However, given that they are regulative rather than descriptive, such beliefs cannot be supported like empirical claims. Thus, the status of these truth claims, even when we are prepared to accept them as true, remains mysterious. Moreover, if we allow for beliefs to be true in some non-empirical special way but do not spell out how exactly this is possible we in effect open the door for all kinds of ‘subjective truth’ (the alleged truth for oneself though not necessarily anybody else), i.e., we open the door to radical epistemic relativism. So, in order to avoid such relativistic conclusions we need to be very specific about the conditions in virtue of which religious beliefs are true, how these beliefs are defended, and what kind of evidence they rest

upon. Duncan Pritchard (Pritchard, 2000; Pritchard, 2012a; Pritchard, 2012b; Pritchard, 2015) offers a quasi-fideistic interpretation of Wittgenstein that addresses these worries, so let us turn to his interpretation now.

## 2. Pritchard: hinge epistemology, quasi-fideism, and Wittgenstein

Pritchard develops a quasi-fideistic interpretation of Wittgenstein in several papers (Pritchard, 2000; Pritchard, 2012a; Pritchard, 2012b; Pritchard, 2015, Pritchard forthcoming). He argues that in order to understand Wittgenstein's take on the nature of religious beliefs properly, we need to carefully read Wittgenstein's last notebooks collected under the title *On Certainty*.<sup>4</sup> The main thesis that Wittgenstein develops there is that all of our empirical beliefs rest upon grounds that cannot be rationally defended, but that we nonetheless accept as certain. Now, what does this mean? Does it mean that we are essentially irrational creatures holding our views with no reasons to support them? Certainly not. It is more complicated, but also more compelling, than that. So, let us examine together with Pritchard the structure of reasons that Wittgenstein develops in *On Certainty*, as well as what it means to say that our basic certainties are groundless, i.e. that they are not supported by more basic beliefs.

One of the basic certainties that we don't doubt is that we have two hands.<sup>5</sup> Now, what would it mean, Wittgenstein asks, if we were required to provide further reasons to defend this certainty? That would mean that we are required to find a truth more basic than the one that we already hold to be certain. But, this does not make sense, argues Wittgenstein. 'My having two hands is, in normal circumstances, as certain as anything that I could produce in evidence for it. That is why I am not in a position to take the sight of my hand as evidence for it' (Wittgenstein, 1969, §250, 33e). In other words, when we are asked why we believe that, e.g., Julia Roberts was in Belgrade we could offer reasons for this claim. Julia Roberts being in Belgrade does not qualify as a basic certainty and there are reasons that we can give to justify why we believe that she was there. We could say that we have read about it in the newspapers (and that we have further reasons to believe that it was not fake news), or that our friend saw her, or alternatively that we met her in downtown Belgrade. This is how our usual reasoning goes.

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4 For an interesting application of the epistemology of hinge commitments in the moral domain see e.g., *The hinges of morality: An investigation of moral particularism, Wittgenstein and euthanasia* (Kevin Buzinski, 2006, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation).

5 In the discussion on basic certainties Wittgenstein is dealing with G.E. Moore's arguments against the skeptic. This is why Pritchard refers to these certainties as the 'Moorean certainties'. However, we will not examine in more detail either Moore's or Wittgenstein's answer to the skeptic.

We aim to substantiate our less secure claims with more secure ones. But all this reasoning is made possible by basic certainties such as that we have hands and eyes, that Hollywood and Belgrade are cities on this earth, that the earth itself did not come into existence five minutes ago, etc. However, when it comes to such basic certainties the kind of reasoning illustrated above is not possible. Whatever we might say to support those certainties would not in itself have any higher degree of certainty.

This reveals something interesting about the nature of our beliefs, but also about the very possibility of doubt, as Pritchard correctly notices. We have seen that Wittgenstein aims to show that all our beliefs rest upon certainties that have no further support. But Wittgenstein also wants to state that the very act of doubting a particular belief presupposes basic certainties. If we try to doubt everything he says we 'drag everything with it and plunge it into chaos' (Wittgenstein, 1969, §613, 81e). Furthermore, to doubt everything would be an incoherent project because we need to believe in something if our doubt is to make any sense. 'If you tried to doubt everything you would not get as far as doubting anything. The game of doubting itself presupposes some certainty' (Wittgenstein, 1969, §115, 18e). In a nutshell, according to Wittgenstein, we simply cannot provide rational grounds for everything we believe nor can we doubt everything we believe. Both projects are incoherent. What we are left with is what Pritchard calls knowledge that rests upon arational, indubitable hinge commitments.

What are these hinge commitments that we presuppose and hold on to? This is a crucially important question if we are to understand human psychology and epistemology. However, once we start identifying and classifying hinge commitments we necessarily move beyond hinge commitments recognized by Wittgenstein himself. It seems to us defensible, however, to think of Wittgenstein as introducing the general idea of hinge commitments in the specific case of ordinary empirical beliefs in a way that leaves open the possibility of other types of hinge commitments. Even the class of ordinary empirical beliefs is quite heterogeneous, and includes (among others) various examples of Moorean common-sense truisms discussed in *On Certainty*: that I (for example) have two hands, that there are other people in the world beside myself, that we all live on earth, that the earth was not created yesterday, that I grew up in Belgrade while some other people grew up in other cities, towns, or villages. All of these heterogeneous beliefs, in fact, make our conversations about, as well as our debates on, particular states of affairs possible (e.g., the debate whether the birthplace of Julius Ceaser was Rome or Beneventum). It is hard to imagine how we would argue about anything with someone who would claim that the earth did not exist five minutes ago and that there are no other people, nor places where they were born.

Now, the next question is whether it is possible to extend this epistemology of hinge commitments from the basic case of ordinary empirical beliefs to the

*prima facie* quite different case of religious beliefs? Pritchard argues that this is a defensible move, and that there are both regular religious beliefs, beliefs that may be supported by other, more basic beliefs of the same kind, and religious beliefs that are basic hinge commitments: this is his quasi-fideistic development of Wittgenstein's philosophy of religion. Let us briefly see how this works.

Pritchard argues that while writing *On Certainty* Wittgenstein relied on insights gained from *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* by John Henry Newman (Newman, 1870/1979), which is primarily a text that examines the nature of the relationship between religious and nonreligious beliefs.<sup>6</sup> According to Newman, religious and nonreligious beliefs should not be judged by different criteria, especially when it seems that the more strict ones are applied to religious beliefs. According to Newman, it is believers who are traditionally asked to provide rational support for their beliefs while most of our common sense nonreligious beliefs do not face the same challenge. That is, we are not required to provide further reasons for believing them. But, should somebody ask us, we would not be able to provide further support. In this sense there is no difference between our religious and nonreligious beliefs even though this is often not acknowledged. As Pritchard notices, the examples of these nonreligious beliefs that we take for granted and that Newman cites in his book are remarkably similar to the Moorean certainties Wittgenstein talks about in *On Certainty*. Newman says:

We are sure beyond all hazard of a mistake that our own self is not the only being existing; that; there is an external world; that it is a system with parts and a whole, a universe carried on by laws; and that the future is affected by the past. We accept and hold with an unqualified assent, that the earth, considered as a phenomenon, is a globe; that all its regions see the sun by turns; that there are vast tracts on it of land and water; that there are really existing cities on definite sites, which go by the names of London, Paris, Florence, and Madrid. We are sure that Paris or London, unless suddenly swallowed by an earthquake or burned to the ground, is today just what it was yesterday, when we left it. We laugh to scorn the idea that we had no parents though we have no memory of our birth; that we shall never depart this life, though we can have no experience of the future. (Newman, 1870/1979, 149)

All of the above are usually taken to be reasonable beliefs beyond any doubt and yet for most of them we are not able to provide any further reasons that would be more certain than they are. Here Newman is developing what

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6 There are certainly some striking parallels between *On Certainty* and Newman's *Grammar of Assent*. But neither Pritchard nor Kienzler, on whose paper (Kienzler, 2006) Pritchard relies, have produced any significant evidence for the view that, as Kienzler says, 'from 1946 until 1951 [i.e., Wittgenstein's death] Newman's *Grammar of Assent* was probably the single most important external stimulus for Wittgenstein's thought' (Kienzler, 2006, 117).



Pritchard calls a ‘parity argument’ in defense of religious beliefs. Unlike Locke (1689/1979) who thought that religious beliefs are the same as nonreligious beliefs because they can be tested and supported by rational reasons, Newman argues that all of our beliefs *lack* support in the same way.

Pritchard proposes that this is exactly Wittgenstein’s view on religious beliefs. If so, those beliefs depend on certain hinge commitments. These are groundless, but so are the hinge commitments of regular beliefs. Along these lines Pritchard’s concludes:

The crux of the matter is that the basic religious convictions of one who has faith will form part of that person’s hinge commitments, and hence will be part of the bedrock against which rational evaluations are undertaken. In this way, some of the person’s religious beliefs will be rationally held, and hence in the market for being rationally grounded knowledge, even though such beliefs presuppose essentially arational hinge commitments. (Pritchard forthcoming, 12).

However, it is important to note that this kind of parity between religious and nonreligious hinge commitments is not entirely warranted. That is, it seems that we would need to know more about the nature of hinge commitments in general and religious hinge commitments in particular to be in a position to conclude that religious hinge commitments are no different in epistemic status from the hinge commitments of regular beliefs. We will come back to the specific nature of religious hinge commitments shortly, but first we should look at what Pritchard has to say about the nature of hinge commitments. The first thing to notice, Pritchard argues, is that these commitments are not regular beliefs nor do they come in such form. At first sight this does not sound right. That is, it looks as if hinge commitments (e.g. ‘I have two hands’, ‘No man has ever stepped on Mars’) are no different from normal beliefs. It seems that we can (and we do!) express them in language and judge their truth or falsity accordingly. However, despite appearances, Pritchard argues that we should not think of them in this way. According to him, this basic kind of knowledge that does not consist of propositional attitudes on the basic level even though we, as creatures with language, can express it in such a way. However, the ability to express these commitments in language should not mislead us into thinking that they are no different from regular empirical beliefs that can be supported by invoking other beliefs. That is, as Pritchard puts it, we should not think of them as beliefs acquired via a rational process (Pritchard forthcoming, 7).<sup>7</sup> It is important to keep in mind that what Pritchard is trying to do here is to draw a distinction between our everyday/scientific knowledge and hinge commitments even

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7 While addressing the nature of hinge commitments as not beliefs in a regular sense (beliefs as propositional attitudes) Pritchard explicitly says: ‘Once we recognize that our hinge commitments are not beliefs, however—and, relatedly, not the kind of propositional attitudes that can be acquired via rational processes [...]’ (Pritchard forthcoming, 7)

though the latter might appear, at least in their form, as no different from the former.

Also, as Pritchard notices, it seems that not all of these commitments belong to the same class. For instance, the fact that I have hands and the fact that no human foot has ever stepped on Mars are different in many ways. We can easily imagine some future world in which there are human colonies on Mars (and hence that would cease to be one of our hinge commitment) but it is hard to imagine the world in which human beings have no hands and are uncertain about their (non)existence. Furthermore, if we take the Mars example it seems that some hinge commitments are confined to the time and place we live in. If that's the case then it seems that there is nothing to prevent us from saying that truths are relative to cultures, and that the cultures are incommensurable because they rest on different hinge commitments. But for Pritchard this is not necessarily the case. According to Pritchard's interpretation of Wittgenstein, Wittgenstein is trying to establish some sort of hierarchy among various hinge commitments (or at least hints at how it could be done). Thus Pritchard argues that there is a general *über* commitment that marks all other hinge commitments. Such *über* commitment is the feeling that 'we are not radically and fundamentally wrong' and all other hinge commitments contain it. This is how we know that we are dealing with a hinge commitment in the first place.

But then the question is whether *any* convictions, whatever its status *vis à vis* our other beliefs, might qualify for a hinge commitment. Pritchard argues that this is not the case. If we start believing firmly one day that there are fairies at the end of the garden, this won't qualify as a new hinge commitment as it does not fit into our existing belief system. Also, even though hinge commitments of different cultures may look vastly different, we need to take a closer look and analyze them. That is, what might appear as a distinct commitment, unrelated to our other beliefs, might in fact be subsumed under a more general one. Our hinge commitments are usually of a mundane nature: e.g. that we have two hands, that we live in London or Belgrade etc. But, different hinge commitments that people have about places they live in are not incommensurable. On the contrary, people who have these commitments have in common one, so to speak, umbrella hinge commitment summarized as 'people have homelands and hometowns' (despite the fact that in most cases it will be different homeland or hometown). Along these lines Pritchard concludes: 'Indeed, if anything, I think we should expect there to be large overlaps in hinge commitments, of a kind that should militate against the possibility of a widespread epistemic incommensurability'. (Pritchard forthcoming, 9)

Now, we believe that this kind of analyses of hinge commitments is something that we need to expand and develop further. Particularly because we think that it is of great importance to examine how religious hinge commitments that nonreligious people see as anything *but* mundane beliefs

become exactly that for a believer. In other words, in the world of a believer it seems that 'God exists' stands as a hinge commitment along with many others such as that there are other people, that we live in Belgrade, that the earth has existed for many yers, that we have two hands. To clarify this is of crucial importance. Before this is done there is little reason to accept Pritchard's view of the epistemological status of religious beliefs.

So, how does it happen that the existence of God becomes certainty for a believer? In order to understand this we need to classify further basic religious commitments. For this purpose conceptual analysis alone will not suffice. In addition to it we need to ask a psychological question: how do we acquire these basic hinge commitments? Wittgenstein was aware of the importance of this question and he hinted at the answer. He says that they are 'swallowed down' (Wittgenstein, 1969, §143, 21e) along with the basic picture of the world. Obviously, Wittgenstein meant to differentiate between 'swallowing down' as a process of acquiring hinge commitments and a rational process through which we, e.g., learn history. However, we need to be more specific than that. In the next two sections we turn to these questions. First, we illustrate how one kind of hinge commitment is acquired, namely how we acquire our knowledge of other minds. The closer look at this particular hinge commitment will hopefully help us see to what extent our religious beliefs and commitments are similar to or different from others. We then turn to the analysis of the nature and the acquisition of our religious beliefs.

### 3. Hinge commitments and their acquisition: the case of social cognition

The acquisition of a hinge commitment that is probably most extensively studied concerns our knowledge that other people exist and have inner lives full of hopes, desires, intentions, and thoughts; lives that are similar to our own. Psychologists call this kind of knowledge social cognition. Its nature and developmental vehicles involved in its acquisition have been a matter of dispute. However, we believe that this knowledge represents one of the best examples of a basic hinge commitment even though, so far as we know, Wittgenstein himself never mentions it as such. Now, what does it mean to say that our knowledge of other people's minds is a basic hinge commitment? M.R.M. ter Hark<sup>8</sup> (1991) provides an answer. He argues that our basic

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8 M.R.M. ter Hark (1991) has suggested a Wittgensteinian attitudinal approach to the problem of other minds. His proposal is similar to other standard Wittgensteinian approaches in understanding the relation between our inner states and outer behavior as a conceptual one. It differs from other Wittgensteinian approaches in its main thesis, namely that the fundamental knowledge of others (knowledge that is the basis of our beliefs about other people's mental states) is not a belief (propositional attitude), but rather an attitude toward others. This attitude is an intuition that we already have when

knowledge of ourselves as well as of others does not take a developed linguistic form. In other words, it does not consist of beliefs that are to be further supported by reasons and evidence. It is essentially prelinguistic. Along these lines Hyslop says: 'Something perhaps deeper than knowledge applies in one's own case, something prelinguistic even.' (Hyslop, 1995, 124). In the case of other people this knowledge is also not a belief, but rather an attitude that we take toward others. This attitude is also prelinguistic. To have a proper attitude toward others means always treating them as persons with their inner mental lives, never as mere physical objects. In other words, this knowledge is more like perceptual knowledge than inferential/demonstrative knowledge. When we see another person falling down the stairs we immediately see (and know) the pain they feel. The immediacy of such experience does not leave room for an elaborate inferential process that supposedly lies behind our knowledge that this person is in pain.

So far so good, but it seems that even though this knowledge of others might be a prelinguistic hinge commitment, we can still talk about other people's mental states and speculate (in language) about what they feel and whether we got that right. To see how it is possible to have arational knowledge about the existence of other minds that cannot be further justified but at the same time be able to express such knowledge in language and ask further questions about the nature of other people's thoughts and feelings can become clearer when we take a look at the way children acquire such knowledge.

Children acquire intuitive, arational knowledge of other people very early, during the first year of their life, before they begin to use language. Once their language develops they become able to enlarge this intuitive knowledge, express it verbally and, as competent language speakers, ask further questions about the nature of other people's beliefs and feelings. There are many important steps in the development of social cognition that psychologists have identified. This includes the development of social orienting (the tendency of a child to look at the person not the objects), emotional recognition (recognition of different facial expressions), social referencing (in novel situation checking the caregiver's emotional expression in novel situations to determine if it is dangerous or not) joint attention (the ability to focus together with a caregiver on a particular object) and the like.<sup>9</sup> All of these indicate that a child treats other people as conscious, emotional beings long before she starts to use language. A child's knowledge of others

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we form beliefs (propositional attitudes) about particular people. Radenovic (2014) argues that such a distinction, between the intuitive general attitude toward other people and particular beliefs about their mental states, seems to be needed to make sense of what we know about the development of social cognition and language.

9 There is extensive literature on the nature and development of social cognition. For a review see, e.g., Tomasello (1999), Suzanne Hala (1997).

is then best understood as a hinge commitment that is not a belief but is nonetheless some kind of intuitive, pre-linguistic knowledge. In other words, this pre-linguistic knowledge of others as persons that is pre-linguistic is acquired in the first months of life and is a hinge commitment that stays with us later in life. As such it provides the framework in which we can ask specific rational questions about other people's beliefs and emotional states. But, even though we can wonder if a colleague of ours is being honest or not, if our friend really suffers as she says she does, or if our neighbors are really liberal democrats as they claim to be, we cannot, in the same way, question whether other people have minds and whether they are persons at all. This is a basic hinge commitment for which we cannot provide more secure evidence than what we already have.

Now, let us see if the model of the development of social cognition can be applied to our religious hinge commitments and beliefs. If this cannot be done in some straightforward way it is important to examine the differences and see what these differences tell us. The first striking difference between our knowledge of other people's minds and our knowledge of God is that it seems unquestionable that children acquire belief in God (including its arational basis) linguistically. Even if our social practices play an important role in this acquisition (and they do, as we will see shortly) they nonetheless involve the use of language. As we have seen, our knowledge of other people's minds (or more specifically our hinge commitment that other people have minds and that they are persons) is acquired through preverbal communication with caregivers. So, the origins of our religious beliefs cannot be located in the first year of a child's life. Secondly, all people share a hinge commitment about the existence of other people's minds (except for the individuals with autistic spectrum disorder<sup>10</sup>) but not all of us become religious. So, this difference tells us that they cannot be acquired via the same social and psychological mechanisms.

Now, the question is what are these mechanisms for 'swallowing down' basic religious beliefs? So far we know that they are not the same as those involved in the acquisition of social cognition even though many people become religious when they are children (Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi & Michael Argyle, 1997). If we stick to philosophical conceptual analysis, we could ask whether religious beliefs are learned like any other basic Moorean certainties such as 'Today is Monday', 'I live in Belgrade', 'No human being has ever stepped on Mars'. But, is it really the case that the arational core of our religious beliefs is acquired in the same way as for instance the name of our hometown? Somehow, this does not sit well with our basic intuitions either. These intuitions tell us that the beliefs about the world even if they are classified as hinge commitments are of a different kind and play different

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10 See e.g. Peter Mundy (1995), Simon Baron-Cohen (1995).

functions in our lives from those of religious hinge commitments. To assume that our arational religious core is differently acquired than regular Moorean hinge commitments becomes even more plausible when we examine closely the conditions under which we are ready to give up or revise such commitments. For instance, as we have seen in previous sections, we can imagine some future successful human expedition to Mars that would change this basic hinge commitment: that no human being ever stepped on Mars. But, then it seems that our religious beliefs are resistant to similar scenarios (or at least some of these beliefs are). It is hard to see that any similar event would be able to undermine singlehandedly the faith of a religious person. Pointing out to the religious person that we have never had convincing evidence for God's existence will not suffice, nor will any fact newly discovered by the sciences be able to turn a religious person into an atheist. As we have seen, Wittgenstein was more than aware of this peculiar feature of our religious beliefs. Now, some people do lose their faith and it is important to see under which conditions. Moreover, the conversion could go both ways. That is, there are people who were never religious and all of a sudden turn into believers, while some people who were believers lose their faith. Such transforming religious experience, both positive and negative, needs to be carefully studied if we are to understand better the nature of religious hinge commitments. That is, such dramatic changes in faith presuppose that a person in an unusual way changes the core of their worldview in an unusual way. However, such change does not come as a result of some new human achievement as in the hypothetical case of the first men on Mars, but in some other way. Religious conversion as such is a different kind of phenomenon from the ordinary 'change of mind' and deserves further research into its origins.<sup>11</sup> Let us add that Wittgenstein was more than aware of these possibilities. He indicated the very specific nature of such change when he said that 'Life can educate one to belief in God' (Wittgenstein, 1998, 86). He says here that some extraordinary life experiences can make us religious, but they are not reducible to nor are they of the same nature as the discovery of a new empirical fact.

So far we have broadly outlined how the acquisition of basic religious hinge commitments must differ from the acquisition of the hinge commitments of social cognition and other Moorean certainties. In the next section we examine more closely the nature of religious upbringing and identify social mechanisms that foster faith in children. But, there are still important philosophical questions to tackle too. Pritchard does offer a quasi-fideistic interpretation of Wittgenstein and proposes quasi-fideism as a way to understand the nature of religious beliefs, but he does not make the attempt to classify further the variety of religious beliefs. This too will be our goal in the next section.

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11 For psychological studies on conversion see e.g. Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi & Michael Argyle (1997).

#### 4. Classification and acquisition of religious hinge commitments

As we have seen, Pritchard argues that we should think of our religious beliefs as having an arational core. This means that such an arational core does not have, nor does it require further support. It does not come in the form of a propositional attitude (i.e. belief) and it is of an intuitive nature. In this way it is on the same footing as other hinge commitments. This also means that a religious person's belief in God is just as strong as our belief that we have two hands or that other people have minds. It may be compared epistemologically to some perceptual beliefs and represents a simple fact in the believer's life. With this hinge commitment in place a believer can discuss how it is that God is just and merciful at the same time or what it means to be humble. But the framework that makes these discussions among believers possible is the unquestionable existence of God. Now, to understand better the nature of our religious hinge commitments and to see if, for instance, 'God exists' is the only religious hinge commitment or whether there are more of them, we need to examine closely the diversity of religious beliefs. So, let us start as philosophers first and then see how psychologists could help us.

As philosophers we need to engage in conceptual analysis and see which of our religious beliefs are arational and which ones are subject to discussion and argument. That is, which ones represent hinge commitments and which ones are beliefs about which we can reason and argue. What we offer here is a preliminary analysis, but analysis that we believe needs to be done. There are all kinds of beliefs that people loosely qualify as religious: from the belief in God (a higher power in general), to the belief in a particular God (Hebrew, Christian, Muslim). Then, there are more specific religious beliefs such as the Christian belief in resurrection. And, finally, there are those beliefs about which we occasionally read in the newspapers. For instance, when we read that a middle aged woman from Arkansas claims to have seen Jesus Christ in the night lamp or in a piece of wood. Even at first sight it is clear that not all of these beliefs are hinge commitments. Let us make a preliminary and easy first distinction among these beliefs: the belief in God would be a hinge commitment while the belief in seeing Jesus in the night lamp can be rationally debated. Upon closer inspection the latter can turn out to be a form of superstition that, as we have seen, Wittgenstein fiercely argued against. If seeing Jesus in the piece of wood is treated as a sign of good luck or a sign that somebody will be healed etc. then this belief belongs to a pseudo-technological stance. For Wittgenstein that would make it superstition, not a genuine religious belief. But, even if 'seeing Jesus' in a night lamp was not understood in this instrumental way it could still be understood as a confirmation of somebody's faith in a proto-scientific sense (as providing the empirical evidence for our belief in God). The very need

to confirm our faith by empirical evidence seems to be proto-scientific, not a proper religious need.<sup>12</sup>

But beside beliefs that miracles happen (to us) on a regular basis and the belief that there is a God, there are beliefs that are in between. They too are in need of sorting out. Thus, there is a question what to do with the beliefs in a specific God: Hebrew, Christian or Muslim. Or, with the belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The latter seems to be the hinge commitment of a Christian, but not of a Muslim or a Jew. It certainly has been so for Wittgenstein: 'Perhaps one may say: Only love can believe the Resurrection. Or: It is love that believes the Resurrection. One might say: Redeeming love believes even in the Resurrection; holds fast even to the Resurrection. What fights doubt is, as it were, *redemption*. Holding fast to *this* must be holding fast to that belief' (Wittgenstein, 190, 33e). At this point, we need to pose the question how these beliefs are acquired since that seems to be the most promising way to determine which religious beliefs constitute our religious hinge commitments. That is, only when we learn what exactly is 'swallowed down' and what is rationally or irrationally acquired in our religious upbringing will we be in a position to identify which of our religious beliefs constitute the core of our faith that cannot be given up without a radical change in our religious view.

Both philosophers and psychologists of religion do have something to say about how we acquire religious beliefs. For instance, Cottingham (Cottingham, 2006, 415–418) argues that through everyday religious practice we become religious and compares this to the way we become virtuous according to Aristotle (namely, by doing virtuous actions). He even goes on to say that becoming religious is like learning to walk. 'We figure out how to walk by walking and that is how we learn to trust God (i.e. by trusting him)' (Cottingham, 2006, 420). Along the same lines Stanley Hauerwas (Willimon & Hauerwas, 1996, 18) emphasizes how developing certain habits is important for religious life. Habits such as prayer and reading the Scripture are there to help the believer to avoid distractions and pay attention to God. They are there to develop and secure our faith in God. This is, in a nutshell, how certain philosophers tend to understand Wittgenstein's process of 'swallowing down' religious beliefs. These suggestions are not so different from what psychologists tell us about the development of faith in children. The first important point emphasized by the psychologists of religion is that the acquisition of religious beliefs is not mere acquisition of a belief system, but the acquisition of an identity (see Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi & Michael Argyle, 1997). We become who we are through our religious upbringing. This means that growing up in a religious family tends to ensure (or at least is

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12 Formation of religious beliefs of this kind and religious experiences that contribute to it should be explored further. It would be interesting to see what kind of people seek such empirical confirmation and under what circumstances.



meant to ensure) that the child sees and interprets the world in a particular way. So, by becoming religious, i.e. by endorsing certain religious beliefs, we do not acquire 'beliefs capable of correction by perceiving properly, but [we acquire] the very terms in which we perceive the world, almost ... the condition and grounds of consciousness itself' (Dollimore, 1984, 9). This quote is in line with Wittgenstein's saying that no empirical evidence can undermine our belief in God.

Now, how is this religious identity (that goes beyond the mere acceptance of a religious doctrine) acquired? The child is introduced to a religious life of her community through particular religious practices, and through participating in such practices she starts attaching meaning to particular events. Those practices form the basis for the child's value system and determine which qualities and events she is going to experience as important. In other words, such practices secure the meaning of a certain way of life and '*must* be recreated by individuals if they are to remain plausible' (Brown, 1988, 67). In this way through praying, going to church, receiving the Eucharist and the like, the child's identity is given definition. Children who grow up in secular families participate in entirely different social practices and so the belief in God does not become the bedrock of their identity. For instance, different meanings are created when the child celebrates New Year's Eve in a secular family and when the child celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ in a Christian family, even though some of the important rituals are the same: e.g., giving presents and decorating the Christmas tree. The child enters these religious practices of her community through her significant others, i.e., first and foremost her family. The mother's role seems to be of crucial importance here (Brown, 1988). Later, in adolescence, the peer group can influence the child (Hunter & Youniss, 1982; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Nonetheless, to what extent the child will remain religious as an adult is best predicted by the extent to which her mother was religiously active (Hunsberger & Brown, 1984).<sup>13</sup>

From the above findings and insights we can draw an important conclusion, namely that children acquire religious feelings/attitudes together with some basic religious metaphysics. In other words, children acquire a religious attitude toward God through being initiated into the religious practices of their community. However, those religious practices do not take place in a vacuum. Through participation in those practices children acquire certain pictures associated with God (like the image of praying, of Virgin Mary, of the crucifix and the like). Once they associate those specific practices with these particular images they develop an emotional acceptance, amounting to a hinge commitment, that God exists along with the metaphysical beliefs accompanying it, such as the belief in Jesus Christ and the resurrection. The religious feelings together with some metaphysical beliefs become religious

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13 For the summary of the statistics of parental influences on religiosity of children and adults see Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi & Michael Argyle (1997).

hinge commitments. Thus, the conclusion we reach is in line with what psychologists tell us. 'People do not internalize abstract norms, but images of themselves in concrete relationships with specific people or groups' (Miller, 1963, 666). Or as Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi & Michael Argyle nicely put it:

Children become aware of their group affiliations (religion, class, or ethnicity) before they acquire a particular set of beliefs. First they find out that they are Roman Catholic, a Baptist, or a Moslem, and only then will they learn that, as a Roman Catholic, as a Baptist, or as a Moslem, they are supposed to espouse certain beliefs. Later on these beliefs seem as natural as the ascribed identity. (Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi & Michael Argyle, 1997, 98)

Now, when we have a clearer understanding of how our religious beliefs develop we can return to the philosophical attempt to categorize religious beliefs. It seems that the belief in a specific God (Hebrew, Christian, Muslim) is to be treated as a hinge commitment, not as a regular belief. The same applies to the Christian belief in Jesus Christ and the resurrection. The general belief in God and the belief in a particular God of a particular tradition cannot be separated in the child's upbringing and as such become a religious hinge commitment; a commitment that cannot be overturned by empirical evidence or scientific truths. In other words, our religious/emotional attitude is inseparable from at least some metaphysical beliefs of the religious tradition we are brought up in. It is interesting to note that this view is also present in the thought of the famous Orthodox theologian George Florovsky. According to Florovsky, religious beliefs are certain if properly grounded in ecclesial experience. Religious beliefs are akin to perceptual beliefs, and the reliability of religious belief is secured by the knower's ecclesial incorporation. Florovsky's proposal requires a process of conforming one's personal judgment to the church tradition (Gavrilyuk, 2014, 228).

Our sketch of the way religious beliefs are acquired comes to an end here. Even though it is our contention that further analysis in this direction is of crucial importance for our understanding of religion and the role it plays in human life, there are some preliminary conclusions that we may draw here. First, we have to admit that the above analysis of the origin of religious hinge commitments is of no help when it comes to differentiating between beliefs of major religious traditions. We have acknowledged that a religious upbringing fosters particular hinge commitments in a child, and such commitments include some specific religious beliefs such as the Christian belief in the resurrection. However, given that the believers of, e.g., Jewish or Islamic faith do not share these specific hinge commitments, it seems that there is no way to settle their disagreement with Christians or, indeed, the disagreement between themselves on rational grounds. Thus, the hinge epistemology of religious beliefs cannot help us decide which specific set of religious beliefs is more likely to be rationally acceptable, let alone true. It can only give us

a psychological explanation why the believers hold the beliefs they do as indubitable. But, as we have seen, it can help us distinguish between religious hinge commitments, scientific beliefs and ordinary superstition.

Second, it seems that we are now in a better position to see to what extent the world of a believer and a nonbeliever overlap. During the last century or so we have witnessed various attempts by philosophers to overthrow religion by invoking evolution. These have been opposed by creationist accounts of the origin of life. But is the battle won or lost on those grounds? If we follow Pritchard's Wittgensteinian quasi-fideism, the answer is: not necessarily. All of these beliefs, if they are not hinge commitments, are about the common world shared by a nonbeliever and a believer. They can be decided on rational grounds. But, regardless of how they are decided, that will not affect the core hinge commitments of a believer or a nonbeliever. In a sense there is no battle there. Again, in order to draw such a conclusion, we need to see if the Biblical claim that the earth is five thousand years old is a hinge commitment of a Christian in the same way that the belief in resurrection is. This does not appear to be the case. This claim seems to be similar to 'No man has ever set foot on Mars', and is thus open to refutation in a similar way, as opposed to the belief in resurrection. The same applies to questions related to evolutionary theory. This is a theory about particular states of affairs in the world and is part of the scientific attempt to explain the world. Now, this should not be problematic for a believer who can presume that evolutionary dynamics are derived from the will of God. After all, as we all know, the belief in the geocentric system was rejected by the scientific community, but also by the Church, and that did not undermine the belief in God and Jesus Christ of an average Christian or even an average scientist of Christian faith.

In conclusion, we wish to draw attention to a related point. If we are to end one of the longest culture wars, the one between atheists and religious believers, a conceptual analysis of the status of religious and non-religious beliefs is of crucial importance. When we realize that some religious beliefs are nothing but masked proto-scientific or pseudo-technological beliefs (i.e., superstition) that aim to provide an account of the world or use this account to influence how we act, we can, as suggested above, adjudicate the dispute by dismissing such beliefs as superstition or false science. But the believer's faith in God cannot be overthrown in this way: we can say, with Wittgenstein, that this is the wrong target and that scientific evidence cannot work on a believer, not because she is irrational, but because her hinge commitments lie elsewhere.

Finally, atheists might say that religious hinge commitments are different from all other hinge commitments in virtue of being optional. All others are more or less shared by everyone. Everyone has knowledge of other minds and believes in the Moorean certainties (except people with specific mental disorders). But, not all of us are religious. There are people (and Wittgenstein

seemed to be one of them) who never had, nor were ever able to develop, faith in God. Now, if being religious is optional, why not be in favour of a world without religion of any kind? The problem with this kind of attitude is that it neglects the reality of human spiritual needs, needs that science does not fulfill. We believe that further psychological inquiry into the nature and acquisition of religious beliefs is crucial if we are to understand the kind of existential, psychological and spiritual needs we as human beings typically tend to have. It is our contention that this is also crucial if we are to get a better insight into the epistemological status of such beliefs. When all is said and done, these human needs and religious beliefs are here to stay: it is our task to try to explain them, not to deny them.

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