

Inferential Orientation and Religious Belief: Foundations of a Wittgensteinian Critique of Religion

Ariel Peckel, *University of Toronto, Canada*

What follows is an effort to demonstrate how Wittgenstein's late thought on religion outlines a unique basis for a thoroughgoing and systematic philosophical critique of religion.¹ To this end, it is imperative to isolate and substantiate this key analytical focal point of his writings on and relevant to the subject, which broaches a mode of experiential orientation germane to ordinary language: what, in a broad and non-technical sense, I describe as "inferential." I have not encountered a robust thematic treatment of this topic with express consideration of Wittgenstein's philosophical views on religion; it is accordingly where I seek to intervene in the scholarship.²

1. By calling this a critique I mean that the resources of the targeted framework are taken up in order to show the limits of what can be meaningfully said and laid licit claim to respective to that framework, as well as to identify what can be termed the "dialectical illusions" embroiled in it, to expressly align this method with Kant's own and the tradition inspired by it. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, eds. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), A58/B82-A64/B89 [Doctrine of Elements. Pt. II. Transcendental Logic] and A293/B249-A298/B355 [Transcendental Illusion]. Cf. Stanley Cavell, "The Availability of Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy," in *Must We Mean What We Say? A Book of Essays* (Cambridge: CUP, 2002), 60-1.

2. I am considering authors that have sought comprehensive elucidations and/or adaptations of Wittgenstein's late philosophy generally, as well as those who have undertaken narrower examinations of his thought on religion in particular. Among the first, I include Stanley Cavell (esp. *The Claim of Reason* and parts of *Must We Mean What We Say?*), P.M.S Hacker (esp. *Comparisons and Context*), and John McDowell (esp. *Mind and World* and parts of *Mind, Value, and Reality*). Among the second, I include *Religion and Wittgenstein's Legacy*, eds. D.Z. Phillips and Mario von der Ruhr (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), a systematic study by leading Wittgenstein scholars; Stephen Mulhall's "Wittgenstein on Religious Belief," in *The Oxford Handbook of Wittgenstein*, eds. Oskari Kuusela and Marie McGinn (Oxford: OUP, 2012), 755-775, and "Wittgenstein and the Philosophy of Religion," in *Philosophy of Religion in the 21st Century*, ed. D.Z. Phillips and Timothy Tessin (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 95-118; Martin Kusch's "Disagreement and Picture in Wittgenstein's 'Lectures on Religious Belief,'" in *Image and Imaging in Philosophy, Science and the Arts*, Vol. 1, eds. Richard Heinrich, Elisabeth Ne-

Wittgenstein's most sustained, but not yet definitive, philosophical engagement with religion can be found in his "Lectures on Religious Belief" from 1938. It therefore marks the obvious place to focus an examination of his thought on the subject, proceeding via critical detours to his scattered comments on religious belief, language, and related remarks in *Culture and Value* and in his fully developed late philosophy in *Philosophical Investigations* and *On Certainty*. Doing so, we encounter his opposition to rationalist-evidentialist forms of theism and atheism (the latter of which are sometimes labelled "scientism") – together with the very debate constructed on that basis – as well as the qualifications and limitations he imposes on religious language, owing to grammatical considerations that are especially attentive to accepted inferential practices. I examine circumstances of language use, standards and criteria of judgment, ordinary beliefs, and means and possibilities of conceptual assimilation among language-games as the nodes of analysis with respect to which a critique of religion firmly rooted in Wittgenstein's ordinary language philosophy is to be developed.

Circumstances of Use

It comes practically as a stipulation when Wittgenstein announces, in the Lectures, that evaluating religious beliefs according to criteria belonging to a major representative form of experiential orientation, which I have called "inferential," is fundamentally misguided. At once, my choice of the term "inferential" may be objected. It bears mentioning that the term stems from a related use in Wittgenstein; in this passage, for example:

Imagine a procedure in which someone who is pushing a wheelbarrow comes to realize that he must clean the axle of the wheel when the wheelbarrow gets too difficult to push. I don't mean that he says to himself: "Whenever the wheelbarrow can't be pushed...", but he simply *acts* in this way. And he happens to shout to someone else: ... "This wheelbarrow won't push. So the axle needs cleaning." Now this is an inference. Not a logical one, of course.³

meth, Wolfram Pichler et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter Open, 2011), 35-58; Norman Malcolm's *Wittgenstein: A Religious Point of View?* (London: Routledge, 2002); and Cora Diamond's seminal "Secondary Sense," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 67 (1966): 189-208. I could include others, but I consider these sources representative of the tracts of Wittgenstein scholarship that my claim has in view.

3. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, 3rd ed., eds. G H. Wright,

I will not get into the non-propositional backdrop of this and related inferential statements. All I mean to illustrate is Wittgenstein's broadening of the range of application of inferential statements by disburdening us of the presumption that they belong strictly in the province of logical operations, but are rather far more pedestrian; "ordinary," as stated. We will have occasion, further on, to link this mode of orientation to reasoning based on past experience, to further explicate its quotidian dimensions and sharpen its contrast from specialized uses of the term that may misleadingly invite objections to inferentialism, e.g. in its use as an epistemological solution to skepticism about other minds.

To return to Wittgenstein's point from the Lectures: the wrong game is being played if one supposes the rules and criteria connected with inferential practices to be involved in or serve as grounds of appeal where religious beliefs are in question. Why Wittgenstein does not so much argue this as ascertain it off-the-bat is that the insight is plainly gleaned from observation of the circumstances in which those beliefs have their life ("don't think, but look!"⁴). In his late philosophy, this methodological procedure becomes the norm: "Ask yourself: On what occasion, for what purpose, do we say this? What kinds of action accompany these words?... In what kinds of setting will they be used; and what for?"⁵ Also: "One cannot guess how a word functions. One has to *look* at its application and learn from that."⁶

In the Lectures period, this methodology is already in use. Where he observes adherence to an "unshakeable [religious] belief," he notes that it shows "not by reasoning or by appeal to ordinary grounds for belief, but rather by regulating for (*sic*) all in [the believer's] life."⁷ For many, the belief in divine redemption is something on which their way of life hinges; the

Rush Rhees, and G E. M. Anscombe, trans. G E. M. Anscombe (UK: Athenæum Press Ltd, Gateshead, Tyne & Wear, 1978), §30.

4. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* [henceforth *PI*], revised 4th ed., eds. P M. S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte, trans. G E. M. Anscombe, P M. S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte (Chichester, West Sussex, U.K: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), §66.

5. *PI* §489.

6. *PI* §340.

7. Ludwig Wittgenstein, "Lectures on Religious Belief" [henceforth *LRB*] from *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*, ed. Cyril Barrett (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 54.

belief in the possibility of snow tomorrow is not.⁸ A notebook entry from the period in *Culture and Value* captures this thought according to a slightly different, but equally applicable, source of comparison:

Christianity is not based on a historical truth; rather it offers us a (historical) narrative and says: now believe! But not believe this narrative with the belief appropriate to a historical narrative, rather: believe, through thick and thin, which you can only do as the result of a life. *Here you have a narrative, don't take the same attitude to it as you take to other historical narratives! Make a quite different place in your life for it.*⁹

Relatedly, the reason that the “expression of belief may play an absolutely minor role” in, for example, “what we call believing in a Judgement Day or not believing in a Judgement Day,”¹⁰ is that this kind of statement – the form of which, in another context and using other terms, would straightforwardly appear derivative or revelatory of a belief – is here overshadowed by (and in another sense, is secondary to) the believer’s existential outlook, which encompasses a gamut of judgments, actions, behaviour, and thought exhibited in her life in connection with that belief.¹¹ The system of reference in which such a belief is encountered is scaffolded by this matrix of interrelated modes of experience, which speaks to the circumstantial background of that belief far more than merely articulating the belief can, even though in ordinary contexts the latter is typically sufficient to warrant judgments about the articulated belief and its relata.

To be sure, Wittgenstein does eventually support his original stipulation

8. But perhaps the framework in which that belief is embedded, is. An inferential-scientific frame of reference may determine for many their form of life in consequential ways as well; in crucial ways, which will be explored, it already does. The question of whether it can (perhaps, thus) make it meaningful is one that I leave aside here.

9. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value* [henceforth *CV*], eds. G H. Wright and Heikki Nyman, trans. Peter Winch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 32e 1937. All *Culture and Value* references list the corresponding dates of entry in order to mark the timeline between the Lectures and Wittgenstein’s concretised philosophy of language, hence tracking the developments of that period according to a precise chronology.

10. *LRB*, 55.

11. Compare with an entry dated a decade later: “It strikes me that a religious belief could only be something like a passionate commitment to a system of reference. Hence, although it’s *belief*, it’s really a way of living, or a way of assessing life. It’s passionately seizing hold of *this* interpretation” (*CV* 64e 1947).

with some important contrasts, highlighting why it is of the essence to examine circumstances of use, to learn to compare between different ones, and to remain vigilant when drawing those comparisons. As Wittgenstein emphasizes – what will become a major target in his later thought owing to the pseudo-problems it generates for philosophers – the fault in failing to appropriately survey circumstances of use is a frequent source of linguistic bewitchment in our critical approaches, in this case, to religion:

In a religious discourse we use such expressions as: “I believe that so and so will happen,” and use them differently to the way in which we use them in science. Although, there is a great temptation to think we do. Because we do talk of evidence, and do talk of evidence by experience.¹²

Concepts that figure representatively in contexts of inferential orientation, together with their related practices – predictions and retrodictions, appeals to grounds of evidence or experience – make an appearance in religious discourse at times, which misleads us into construing them as amenable to the same evaluative standards. This equivocation, by which two language-games are conflated and thereby seemingly responsive to the same standards, performs a double disservice: one incurred by atheistic rationalist-evidentialists, who are now convinced that subjecting religious beliefs to those standards is an effective critical path to disarming the system of reference to which they belong as a licit epistemic source (a correct conclusion, but wrong premises, as will be shown); the other by theistic rationalist-evidentialists, since their being so is grist to the mill of their atheistic objectors. Such a theist Wittgenstein finds in his co-panelist from the Lectures, Father O’Hara.

O’Hara pretends to support his (religious) beliefs on grounds of evidence, on account of which Wittgenstein rebukes: “But I would ridicule [his belief], not by saying it is based on insufficient evidence. I would say: here is a man who is cheating himself. You can say: this man is ridiculous because he believes, and bases it on weak reasons.”¹³ The circumstantial backgrounds, against which the roles of the concept of belief in the language-games at issue are understood, are very different. In one, holding beliefs *prima facie* relates to existential codes of conduct; in the other, holding

12. *LRB*, 57.

13. *LRB*, 59.

beliefs *prima facie* relates to contexts of justification under particular norms.¹⁴ Both involve given sets of commitments, which, as so given, are bound by normative canons and institutions that guide those commitments in particular ways. (Compare the normativity of ritual versus the normativity of causal explanation.) These differences in kind of commitments show up in the circumstances. To pursue one major (but not the only) such difference: the belief in snow tomorrow is born and embedded within circumstances in which procedures of justification are at play, which are distinctively structured on a motivation to know, and to act accordingly; the belief in eternal reward is, primarily, not.¹⁵

That difference, to codify it philosophically, is that while both modes of orientation are doxastic, only the inferential ones can rightfully be called epistemic, where the latter are structured upon possibilities of justification (“reasons-giving”) in accordance with accepted normative procedures. (We might codify the religious mode as “existential” in this contrast.) By couching religious beliefs in inferential terms, O’Hara turns non-originally epistemic concerns into epistemic ones, thereby subjecting them to standards of judgment to which beliefs in an inferential context are held, and in accordance with whose criteria they are vetted. That is why he makes himself a target of ridicule on account of them: religious beliefs are not “based on reasons,” assuming they are framed in such terms, in ways remotely consonant with the ordinary practice of basing beliefs on reasons. Within this ordinary practice, inferential (and, as we will see, often also scientific) beliefs constitute representative cases, and these anchor credence and confidence on criteria responsive to standards of plausibility or probability supported by past experience. Were one to adjudicate religious beliefs by those and related standards, the verdict could not help but be

14. Readers familiar with *On Certainty* might argue that beliefs stand in no need of justification, that only knowledge-statements do. While this is indeed a concern of Wittgenstein’s as far as differentiating the grammar of knowing from that of believing is concerned, he nonetheless agrees that in certain circumstances – the discussion shows that this is one – a “system of verification” ties in with our beliefs (§279): we are called to answer to why such beliefs are held by giving reasons (§243, §550, §556, *inter alia*).

15. I think Wittgenstein would argue that the concern over “knowing” whether eternal reward is true or not enters quite late into that language-game. By the time one raises that question, and insofar as one raises it as a pressing concern, one’s life has already been decisively shaped and conditioned by that belief.

exceedingly unfavourable; “weak,” as Wittgenstein judges.

Hence to the supposition that a believer should invoke evidence in support of his belief in the Last Judgement, which an atheistic objector counters by arguing that such a belief rests upon very flimsy evidence, Wittgenstein replies: “If you want to compare it with the evidence for it’s raining to-morrow it is no evidence at all.”¹⁶ To accommodate the appeal to evidence for the kind of proposal the theist makes would require flouting the recognizable patterns of what we ordinarily call “inferring on the basis of evidence” at an elementary level, which is why Wittgenstein refuses to call the theist’s move an appeal to evidence *überhaupt*. Immediately following, Wittgenstein notes a parallel of this situation in mathematical language-games: “If you suddenly wrote numbers down on the blackboard, and then said: ‘Now, I’m going to add,’ and then said: ‘2 and 21 is 13,’ etc. I’d say: ‘This is no blunder.’”¹⁷ It is no blunder because it is a fundamental misunderstanding of the practice of addition, and it is only within that practice, against a background in which its rules are understood – even if they are misapplied – that something is or not a blunder. Relatedly, the appeal to the practice of basing beliefs on evidence in the context of religious beliefs reveals, not a mistake, but a grammatical deception. This is the charge Wittgenstein levels at O’Hara.

To illustrate this last point, consider these related remarks from *Philosophical Investigations*, both of which have the form of transcendental arguments: “Orders are sometimes not obeyed. But what would it be like if no orders were *ever* obeyed? The concept of an order would have lost its purpose”; and “... if rule became exception, and exception rule; or if both became phenomena of roughly equal frequency – our normal language-games would thereby lose their points.”¹⁸ A language-game of course tolerates measures of deviation in the application of its rules and the performance of its instituted practices. But to pretend religious beliefs are amenable to evidence, and so, answerable to standards in the province of inferential orientation, would amount to integrating a host of exceptions – of “unobeyed orders” – to the inferential language-game in proportions that it cannot tolerate without causing the whole set of accepted institutions

16. *LRB*, 61.

17. *LRB*, 62.

18. *PI* §345; §142.

that make evidence-based beliefs what they are to collapse. For an instance to be lawfully said to belong to a practice, it must be able to behold itself to the standards that define that practice; it is in this regard that religious beliefs prove ineligible for consideration within the criterial parameters of inferential orientation. This also means they would not even qualify as “false” (nor “true”) or “unsound” (nor “sound”) with regard to them: they are of the wrong kind, categorically off the spectrum within which such assessments are meaningful.

Standards and Criteria of Judgment

Some mention of standards and criteria of judgment has been made. This is the place to expand on them. By examining what the standards and criteria of judgment consist in as far as inferential language-games are concerned, it is possible to produce a sharper description of these language-games and begin answering why the beliefs pertaining to them are woven into the tapestry of our ordinary beliefs, in contrast to beliefs whose provenances are in religious systems of reference. I take Cavell’s distinction between standards and criteria to be the most instructive: criteria “determine whether an object is (generally) of the right kind, whether it is a relevant candidate at all, whereas standards discriminate the degree to which a candidate satisfies those criteria.”¹⁹ That critically different standards and criteria of judgment govern inferential and religious language-games is crucial to Wittgenstein’s point: belief-statements are answerable to the standards of judgment of their respective language-games. When these criteria are conflated, we have seen, the beliefs of one language-game are inappropriately evaluated with reference to standards that would collapse if this conflation were carried out to its logical conclusion, which is a principal reason why those beliefs cannot even constitute tolerated deviations from accepted paradigms, viz. “blunders.”

Much of Wittgenstein’s late philosophy of language revolves around traditional skeptical problems in epistemology. *Philosophical Investigations*

19. Stanley Cavell, “Criteria and Judgment,” in *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 11. My own exploration of standards and criteria of judgment in Wittgenstein converges significantly with Cavell’s; his account is thus the right source to consult for a greater overview of my own background of understanding of the topic.

dwells on these topics at length; *On Certainty* is almost exclusively concerned with them. We must be very cautious where we situate religious beliefs in this relation. It would be presumptuous and misleading to claim that the theist who stakes his hopes on a better future world fits the same mold as the skeptical metaphysician who hangs his doubts on the possibility of a world in which brains reside in vats. But it would be credulous to dismiss, on those grounds, the important similarities that the skeptic and the theist exhibit, especially in cases where the latter frames beliefs in terms proper to inferential contexts. We proceed to examine standards and criteria of judgement with respect to inferential contexts as those foci of analysis which, once foregrounded in Wittgenstein's diagnoses, serve to dispel certain philosophical bewitchments and skeptical anxieties in order to "show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle"²⁰ – where that fly will, occasionally, prove to be the theist.²¹

Take this example: "What we call historical evidence points to the existence of the earth a long time before my birth; – the opposite hypothesis has *nothing* on its side."²² It certainly has nothing we would be prepared to call "evidence"; and since it fails to respect the normative delimitations interwoven with that term's usual use, as a hypothesis proceeding from evidence it is a miscarriage in principle. Among other hypotheses that would, by Wittgenstein's lights, have nothing on their side, would be the hypothesis that the earth was created six-thousand years ago by God. And through a rough reformulation of that objection raised earlier regarding the collapse of grammatical standards, in this case regarding scenarios of intolerable skeptical doubts, we glimpse another junction where the latter and religious beliefs intersect: "If someone doubted whether the earth had existed a hundred years ago, I should not understand, for this reason: I would not know what such a person would still allow to be counted as evidence

20. *PI* §309.

21. I am sympathetic to Cavell's insight that Wittgenstein's preoccupation with skepticism is not purely motivated by an urge to easily brush it away as incoherent, but stems from genuine existential pressures rooted in it (see Stanley Cavell's "Criteria and Skepticism," in *The Claim of Reason*, 37-48). That said, Cavell engages only the *Investigations* to pursue this point, expressly eschewing *On Certainty*, in which Wittgenstein markedly shifts gears to the more sardonic purpose of ridiculing and poking holes in certain skeptical thought-scenarios.

22. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty* [henceforth *OC*], eds. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, trans. Denis Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969), §190.

and what not.”²³ The believer who entertains related doubts on religious grounds – think Creationism – likewise expresses, not an epistemic attitude, but an attitude toward epistemic attitudes, which is partly why it lands itself outside the epistemic framework that it targets, and why it entails a pointless debate.

Creationists recognize scientific standards of evaluation – e.g. the appeal to evidence – and take their position to vie for credence within the playing-field of those standards. As such, they should be accepting the criteria of judgment which those standards command, but they do not. (In fact, as we are seeing, their proposal cannot be amenable to those criteria – it can satisfy them to no degree. This is the grammatically deceptive attitude.) Philosophically, the situation is like recognizing rules and pieces of chess, and to claim to be playing it, all the while tossing dice around and shuffling checkers across the chessboard, crying “Checkmate!” (Cavell: “I must move the Queen in straight paths... You CAN *push the little object called the Queen* in many ways, as you can *lift* it or *throw* it across the room; not all of these will be *moving the Queen*.”²⁴) The scientists’ problem is to think that this remains a chess game. For to seriously entertain the Creationist “thesis” – to consider it amenable to the criteria of their discipline, and thus, disputable with respect to their standards – would mean for the scientists to allow an exception they would not otherwise admit (say, coming from someone in a lab-coat), and could not admit without tearing down the evaluative foundations of their discipline; with respect to which, among other things, proposals first qualify as entertainable “theses.”

Qualification according to criteria lands an attitude in or outside a practice (Cavell, above); but this just means that those criteria preside even when attitudes are to be describable as ones of objection: objections take place within the logic of language-games, are rounded by its standards. In an explicit defense of inferential-scientific doxastic attitudes (the reason for the hyphen will become clear shortly), Wittgenstein identifies in “reasonableness” such a standard: “Thus we should not call anybody reasonable who believed something in despite (*sic*) of scientific evidence.”²⁵

23. OC §231.

24. Stanley Cavell, “Must We Mean What We Say?” in *Must We Mean What We Say? A Book of Essays: Updated Edition* (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 26.

25. OC §324.

It is not, however, that given religious beliefs now count as unreasonable: to designate them as such would be to subject them to a standard of inferential-scientific language-games, as instances that fall afoul of the standard. But Wittgenstein's point is that religious beliefs do not recognize that standard, which means they can neither honour nor dishonour it. As Wittgenstein notes in the Lectures, in a statement that summarizes his contention with O'Hara: "'Unreasonable' implies, with everyone, rebuke... [but] they don't treat this as a matter of reasonability... Not only is it not reasonable, but it doesn't pretend to be. What seems to me ludicrous about O'Hara is his making it appear to be *reasonable*."²⁶

There is, after all, an alternative to "unreasonable" when something is avowedly not reasonable, and that is *areasonable*. In this context, "areasonable" implies that standards of reasonableness can neither diminish nor enhance religious beliefs, because these beliefs are by their very nature disqualified from the domain where such standards preside. It may be a matter of perspective whether exempting religious beliefs from standards of reasonableness is an insult or a courtesy, but this much is certain: they are to be given no weight as epistemic alternatives against inferential-scientific beliefs – they are not alternatives. The destination of the atheistic rationalist-evidentialist was correct, but the journey was in error: religious beliefs have no place in reason/evidence-based systems of reference, not because they try to get in and consistently fail the entry exam, but because they do not categorically (=criteriologically) belong there.

To some ears, this criteriological exemption spells fatal relativism. Yet aside from showing that the appeal to inferential/scientific standards is fundamentally misplaced and practicably untenable where religious beliefs are concerned, Wittgenstein furthermore considers it impotent as far as diminishing the value of the convictions that religious beliefs command goes: "Anything that I normally call evidence wouldn't in the slightest influence me [as a believer]."²⁷ While it is true that one may be moved to abandon a religious outlook owing to exposure to arguments against the existence of God predicated on lack of evidence, such a change in outlook supposes an antecedent acceptance of paradigms of a scientific worldview, viz. those which enshrine the preponderance of evidence as desideratum

26. *LRB*, 58.

27. *LRB*, 56.

for believing something *überhaupt*. Where these are not accepted, or not accepted always – e.g. cases of religious convictions – Wittgenstein’s point is exactly proven.

Whatever relativistic consequences Wittgenstein’s view entails, some of which I will discuss, there is nothing to suggest that religious frameworks are immunized from criticism. For one, Wittgenstein’s grammatical qualifications do far more to restrict the sphere of influence of religious beliefs than atheistic rationalist-evidentialism could lay claim to, since the latter (along with many theists) continue to count religious beliefs as eligible contenders for empirical explanation and prediction, which is chess with dice and checkers (i.e. not chess). Wittgenstein not only rejects the very structure and legitimacy of that competition by a priori disqualifying one side of it, but doing so, grants inferential-scientific frameworks the full dominion over empirical-epistemological matters that, as it is, they anyway enjoy, while (re)confining religious beliefs to the domains in which they paradigmatically have their meaning and exert their influence.

Ordinary Beliefs

We know that religious beliefs are regarded by Wittgenstein as immensely valuable and consequential for many a believer, as the excerpts from *Culture and Value* suggest, and as general observation of the kinds of commitments those beliefs entail (existential, psychological) reveals.²⁸ But how consequential to the way we live our lives are inferential beliefs? For Wittgenstein, the answer to these questions is, I think, unavoidable in his mature philosophy: tremendous, owing to their indispensable everyday ubiquity. What I have been calling inferential beliefs make up – and in their primitive form are the foundation of – the constellation of our ordinary beliefs. Their regular and regulating role in the quotidian lion’s share of human actions, judgments, behaviour, and thought is proof of the fact that we could not, because we do not, get by without them. With this, our analysis takes a step away from rationalism-evidentialism (rather than continuing to step on it) and toward a critique of the values of frameworks of belief.

28. For more on Wittgenstein’s own religiosity and his attitude toward religion, see Ray Monk’s philosophical biography, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991).

Routine actions and behaviour bespeak an orientation based on the time-tested lessons of past experience into which human beings are reared. As a practice governing regular conduct, and laden with corresponding, largely tacit beliefs, it is paradigmatic of how human beings qua human live in an everyday way: “[People] have always learnt from experience; and we can see from their actions that they believe certain things definitely, whether they express this belief or not.”²⁹ It is in this connection that I have referred to a “primitive” form of inferential systems lying at the heart of our ordinary orientation in the world. Considered in the broadest possible sense, our inferential orientation is an extension of our education in the lessons of past experience: that undisputedly most fundamental teacher of human life, and in important ways, not of human life alone, as I will discuss.

To reiterate this “broadest possible sense” of inference, consider this passage from the *Investigations*:

“From what one can see here, I infer that there is a chair over there.” That is an inference; but not one belonging to logic. An inference is a transition to an assertion; and so also to the behaviour that corresponds to the assertion. I draw the consequences not only in words, but also in deeds.³⁰

It is not difficult to appreciate the guiding role of internalized lessons of experience here – the general trust in sense-perception built on them, the kind of epistemic confidence they anchor (though they are not its “ground”!³¹) – and how they are routinely expressed in the “consequences we draw,” via no logical detour, through deeds (and at times, their accompanying words).

We can also appreciate why objections to inferentialism as an epistemological solution to skepticism of other minds would be misplaced, a result of equivocation prompted by my use of the descriptor “inferential.” McDowell captures the spirit of Wittgenstein’s view on such matters when he notes that possession of a shared language signifies a capacity for a “meeting of minds,” occurring through no mediation of inference (or interpretation, in McDowell).³² Thus, one sees, one does not infer, another’s

29. *OC* §284. The caveat, stating that the role of the expression of belief is minor in these cases, was encountered above in relation to religious beliefs, and should remind us that at stake are modes of conducting one’s life as a whole, not beliefs in isolation of those modes.

30. *PI* §486.

31. *OC* §130-1.

32. John McDowell, “Wittgenstein on Following a Rule,” *Synthese* 58, no. 3 (1984), §11.

pain. (One might on occasion infer it; it is not a condition.) One learns, primarily, to recognize that someone is in pain, and to respond accordingly. (One may later learn – on this basis – to infer that someone is in pain.) In inferential orientation we have an extension of those fundamental lessons of past experience, but no past experience corresponds to the lesson or technique of “inferring the existence/content of other minds,” and so nothing can correspond to its extension. Although we do certainly infer – often non-propositionally, non-logically, as per Wittgenstein’s sense – what someone might do having spoken their minds.

Beliefs based on the lessons of past experience, which qua human we absorb and employ as a matter of everyday life, are at the bedrock of much of our conduct and are exhibited as such, in spite of any religious beliefs that accrete on that system of orientation: by and large, those do not encroach on the province of our experience-based orientation as functional alternatives, nor should we pretend, as theists or atheists, that they do. (I do not touch the flame because I know, from past experience, that it will burn me. Perhaps a given religious belief induces me to do so anyway, e.g. for ritualistic purposes – but that would be, precisely, against my better, i.e. my usual, judgment.) Now it might be objected that this situation is in fact one of a causal framework pitted against a system of reference that does not make sense of experience in causal terms, but say, in providential ones. But how experience is made sense of – interpreted, causally or otherwise – is not the concern here.

I have been conflating the designations “system of practices” and “system of reference,” and by and large they are synonymous, but distinguishing them now might be helpful. Religious beliefs belong as much to a system of reference as to one of practices, and these will be quite particular. (And some may overlap with others, e.g. Abrahamic religions. A case of “family resemblances.”³³) I want to confine beliefs exhibited in an orientation that reveals a basis on the lessons of past experience strictly to a system of practices, an elementary and universal one, which in so many words (in less, in fact) is how Wittgenstein has characterized it. Though in reality a system of reference, in the sense of a developed interpretative framework, would be found attached to this elementary system of practices, hypothetically we can regard the latter as independent of those interpretative

33. *PI* §65.

structures, indeed “prior” to them, for this reason.

Human beings act, behave, judge, and think in ways that bespeaks persistent commitments to the lessons of experience. Even animals exhibit such commitments, in ways bespeaking developed instincts, which shows the shared roots of this system of practices in nature, the continuity we have with animals in this respect, and the independence of that system from frameworks of interpretation.³⁴ To answer to the present objection and related discomforts: whether we interpret experience causally, providentially, or otherwise, is secondary to, and in ways is contingent on, the fact that human life qua human is primordially guided by our education in past experience.

Whether a causal or providential framework of interpretation captures this fact more “accurately” is a question that cannot legitimately be raised, for at issue is what “accurate” here means, what criteria of accuracy are being employed.³⁵ A providential framework is under no obligation to accept the criterion “true to past experience” as a measure of explanatory accuracy – unless it purports to play a game that prizes such a criterion. To call the inferential “more accurate” by comparison here seems correct, but is misleading: the providential has no real place in that game. For the measure “explanatory accuracy” paradigmatically, if not exclusively, belongs to an inferential-scientific language-game, in which case its criteria are accepted on its terms or not at all. Who does not accept them cannot rightfully claim to provide, strive for, or deal in, the kind of thing we call “explanatory accuracy.”

Assuming one is reared into a scientific worldview which distinctively prioritizes the value of past experience as a cornerstone of its discipline, and routinely demonstrates its success in employing the techniques

34. Cf. David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding and Other Writings*, ed. Stephen Buckle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), section IX; also Wittgenstein: “The squirrel does not infer by induction that it is going to need stores next winter as well. And no more do we need a law of induction to justify our action or our predictions” (*OC* §287). Hume agrees that, like squirrels, humans follow force of habit in their inductive practices – not owing to a lack of need for a “law of induction to justify” it, but because we cannot justify it. This is where Hume and Wittgenstein part ways. However, the fact that we cannot justify our inductive practices with a law of induction, and yet those practices remain effective in our everyday inferential orientation (on the less glamorous basis of habit: Hume’s point), simultaneously shows that we do not need that law, as Wittgenstein contends.

35. Cf. *OC* §199.

associated with it to the phenomena we call “empirical” – thus making them epistemologically accessible in all kinds of ways, e.g. via prediction or explanation – these scientific judgments also become interwoven in the “*totality* of judgments [that] is made plausible to us,”³⁶ and which hangs together with our ordinary doxastic and epistemic attitudes. Hence it is not *per accidens* that, in our place and time, the “pictures” we absorb as tools of judgment in the course of our rearing into the practice of judging happen to be those at once commonly accepted and endorsed by science: “The picture of the earth as a ball is a *good* picture, it proves itself everywhere... we work with it without doubting it”; “this picture now helps us in the judgment of various situations.”³⁷ And even more generally: “‘We are quite sure of it’ does not mean just that every single person is certain of it, but that we belong to a community which is bound together by science and education.”³⁸

I stress the conditionality of the last paragraph, because it signals where relativistic constraints merit attention.³⁹ While a primitive form of inferential orientation, one simply denoting a system of practices based on the lessons of past experience, was said to belong universally and elementarily to human beings, it was not claimed that a scientific framework, however much it may be said to honour or build upon those lessons, does so as well, or should. But any group of people whose lives are conditioned in significant ways by a scientific framework – to whom it makes a difference to anchor their goings-on or getting-by upon an education in and application of scientific canons and institutions – and who, as such, frame their judgments

36. *OC* §140.

37. *OC* §147; §146. This example is obviously dated. But note that its fundamental purpose is to illustrate a grammatical point: the term “picture” designates its role in our judgments. Wittgenstein no doubt conceded, with every other reasonable person, that the earth’s being a sphere was a well-established fact; but that does not exclude its grammatical use as a picture as well.

38. *OC* §298.

39. Wittgenstein is explicit about his relativism, e.g. concerning “reasonableness”: “But what men consider reasonable or unreasonable alters. At certain periods men find reasonable what at other periods they found unreasonable. And vice versa” (*OC* §336). But this relativistic proviso does not diminish the objections raised concerning reasonableness and religious beliefs: as stressed, if the latter should be described in terms proper to the former, it must signal acceptance of what, “at that period,” just are the criteria for qualifying or not as reasonable, and we know the problems this entails. For Wittgenstein, as for *us*, what is reasonable and what is scientifically accepted hang together: “Not merely is nothing of the sort ever seriously reported to us by reasonable people, but our whole system of physics forbids us to believe it” (*OC* §108).

about empirical phenomena in ways that bespeak elementary commitments to that framework – are beholden to its standards in these regards. We would not say this of an isolated tribe, regarding which a genuine clash of radically distinct language-games may obtain in this respect, a point I will return to. But we would say it of theists like O’Hara, who, in framing his beliefs, betrays his rearing into a system of reference in which evidence is resorted to as a basis of support for certain belief-statements, which in turn betrays his acceptance of that institution.

Accordingly, when doxastic attitudes are adopted that are blatantly antithetical to the lessons acquired by rearing in past experience with the aim of casting doubt on a system that is an extension of those lessons (the inferential), it can only mean that its rules are accepted, as must therefore its ruling. Failure to honour that condition is what makes them intolerable. Consider:

If anyone said that information about the past couldn’t convince him that something would happen in the future, I wouldn’t understand him. One might ask him: What do you expect to be told, then? What sort of information do you call a reason for believing this?... If *these* are not reasons, then what are reasons?⁴⁰

The very concept of reasons that gives sense to the proposition “I have reasons for believing X” – where X is an empirical proposition – gets its meaning against a background of education in past experience. If one employs that concept in this way, the only appropriate frame of reference from which to judge the possibility of occurrences (“empirical” ones, as if the epithet needed to be added) is with respect to the constitutive criteria and evaluative standards of that frame of reference, to which statements about such occurrences must answer. A believer does not generally adopt the attitude toward the “occurrence” of Judgment Day that she adopts toward occurrences in general: the former is a doxastic, but not concomitantly an epistemic, attitude. And the point here is: if she did adopt an attitude toward Judgment Day that resembled her attitude toward ordinary occurrences (an epistemic attitude), she could not give reasons for it without dissolving what distinctively makes up epistemic attitudes in their interdependence with the grammar of “reasons,” which is produced against a background where the verdict of past experience has a veto on what can and cannot lay

40. *PI* §481.

claim to counting toward beliefs in the possibility of an occurrence. (The point of Hume’s “Of miracles,” condensed to a sentence.)

What, then, is the value of our inferential orientation? This much we know: we do not get by without it in our everyday life. The Wittgensteinian defense of the value of inferential orientation is not without its Humean side: we habitually – I use the term deliberately – guide our actions and resolutions in accordance with lessons of past experience; but there is no basis prior to experience, or after, on which that mode of reasoning can be foundationally justified, there are only conventions that we live by, and that time and again prove their worth, primarily by that fact that we do live by them.⁴¹ And we have shown that, where inferential beliefs have earned their keep, there religious beliefs, as much as derailed skeptical ones, cannot feasibly encroach. None of this rids religious beliefs of their highest claim to value: bestowing meaning on a believer’s life. In this sense, the way one regulates one’s life in accordance with religious beliefs is fundamentally different from the way it is regulated by inferential beliefs. This is not to deny that an inferential/scientific framework can bestow existential meaning; though, speaking from general observation, I am unconvinced that such a system self-sufficiently possesses the resources for that. (But this would require a separate discussion.) So the question now becomes: can we grasp how religious institutions of value take charge of the domain of existential meaning? Can we understand the terms in which meaning is given to believers through religious codes and practices? Well, if we can grasp the concepts, their circumstances of use...

Conceptual Assimilation

“In one sense, I understand all he says – the English words ‘God’ [etc.] ... I could say: ‘I don’t believe in this’ and this would be true, meaning I haven’t got these thoughts or anything that hangs together with them.”⁴² Can I acquire a sense of what hangs together with those words? –Yes, but only a

41. From the *Investigations* it can seem like Wittgenstein feels himself at loggerheads with Hume on the problem of induction; and, to the extent that the latter considered it a “problem,” he is. But as far as what they ultimately make of induction – a sub-category of “inference,” both in the technical and non-technical sense I have been using – they are more in agreement than Wittgenstein perhaps cared to realize (footnote 34, above).

42. *LRB*, 55.

radical change in your life-circumstances could bring about the appropriate exposure to the circumstances of use of those words, which, to you, are otherwise off the grid of meaning: “I cannot utter the word ‘Lord’ with meaning. *Because I do not believe* that he will come to judge me; because *that* says nothing to me. And it could say something to me, only if I lived *completely* differently.”⁴³ Such is Wittgenstein’s attitude toward conceptual assimilation at the time of the Lectures. As his late philosophy develops, he loosens these strictures.

It would certainly be disappointing to discover, having prodded religious belief to the lengths we have, that nothing meaningful has actually been said that can speak to those beliefs in their own terms. True: by and large, we have not, strictly speaking, addressed those beliefs in “their own terms,” since we have mainly occupied ourselves with distinguishing those terms and that body of beliefs from the interrelated set of ordinary-inferential-scientific ones. On the other hand, “their own terms” are our terms, not an incommensurably alien tongue, as Wittgenstein, somewhat begrudgingly, concedes back in the Lectures:

“Being shown all these things, did you understand what this word [God] meant?”
I’d say: “Yes and no. I did learn what it didn’t mean. I made myself understand. I could answer questions, understand questions when they were put in different ways—and in that sense could be said to understand.”⁴⁴

By the time his late philosophy of language has crystalized, Wittgenstein is begrudging on this account no longer. As a passage from the “Philosophy of Psychology” fragment of the *Investigations* goes:

Religion teaches that the soul can exist when the body has disintegrated. Now do I understand what it teaches?—Of course I understand it—I can imagine various things in connection with it. After all, pictures of these things have even been painted. And why should such a picture be only an imperfect rendering of the idea expressed? Why should it not do the *same* service as the spoken doctrine? And it is the service that counts.⁴⁵

43. CV 33e 1937.

44. *LRB*, 59.

45. *PI* Part II §23. Cf. “In the first place, our language describes a picture. What is to be done with the picture, how it is to be used, is still obscure... it must be explored if we want to understand the sense of our words. But the picture seems to spare us this work: it already points to a particular use. This is how it takes us in” (*PI* Part II §55).

It is a direct consequence of his fully concretized philosophy of language that conceptual assimilation becomes a more ready possibility in practice than Wittgenstein admits in the Lectures period. As this passage points out, that possibility depends on exposure, particularly, grammatical exposure.

How do we acquire “grammatical exposure”? Apply the lessons we have learned so far. Pay attention to the circumstances of use, to how words are used in their circumstances and to what connects with them. To wit, statements about a thing “existing”: “If ‘X exists’ amounts to no more than ‘X’ has a meaning – then it is not a sentence which treats of X, but a sentence about our use of language, that is, about the use of the word ‘X.’”⁴⁶ Relate that to religious propositions about God existing, and compare: “The way you use the word ‘God’ does not show *whom* you mean – but rather, what you mean.”⁴⁷ As we are finding, “what” is meant by the term God is (and therefore can be) learned, specifically by learning what hangs together with it, e.g. the pictures and the service they render, the associations that accompany it, the patterns of action and thought endorsed in conjunction with it. The term “God” is not learned nor does it have its meaning in a vacuum: no matter how personal and subjective the content of that belief is said to be, there are “paradigms of behaviour” that are exemplificatory of what hangs together with such words, and, belonging to their circumstances of use, belong therefore to their meaning, whether that deeply private content is expressed by the word “God” or by the word “pain” (minding their interdistinctions).⁴⁸

To allegorize: the gap between language-games is bridged by behaviour, the toll to cross, paid in units of grammatical exposure: “Shared human behaviour is the system of reference by means of which we interpret an unknown language.”⁴⁹ Before coming to share or share-in a language-game, and as their precondition, we must already share common behavioural patterns; and it does seem quite impossible for a person or group to come to understand another with whom no behavioural traits whatsoever are shared.

46. *PI* §58. Cf. Cavell’s “Criteria and Skepticism” in *The Claim of Reason*, which makes the crucial point that the function of Wittgensteinian criteria is to tell us, not of a thing’s “existence, but of something like its identity, not of its *being* so, but of its being *so*” (p. 45).

47. *CV* 50e 1946.

48. See *PI* §300.

49. *PI* §206.

This condition is compatible with Wittgenstein's views on conceptual assimilation in the Lectures; recognizing that, there, the gap between himself and the believer in Judgement Day appears so wide as to require no less than a total revolution in one's way of life to begin sufficiently sharing the behaviour needed to bridge it, possible though it remains in principle. Wittgenstein of the *Investigations* and *On Certainty* no longer considers it necessary to go to such extremes. In part, this owes to a less qualified acceptance of the fact that, at a primordial level, there is already a great deal of behaviour shared among human beings, the most evident arguably being that expressed in connection with an orientation based on past experience.

Between secular and religious Europeans, significant degrees of shared behavior are to be expected; in a globalized and pluralized world, which is not only fertile for the crosspollination of language-games but has, in the course of becoming such a world, repeatedly experienced and effected such crosspollination, our behaviour is bound to be shared to great extents as well. Even between radically different language-games, where degrees of assimilability will be severely reduced at first (the isolated tribe case), the possibility of assimilation, communication, and ultimately sharing-in each system of reference exists; which is not to say that such a process is straightforward, innocent, or even desirable, but is to say that some stratum of shared human behaviour, however limiting, will always be present.⁵⁰ To deny this would mean committing to the view that certain human groups are fundamentally less comprehensible than certain animals. Yet consider our adeptness at understanding animals, especially mammals, on the basis of their behaviour – what they want, what they know (and know how to do), whether they feel anxious, eager, playful, tired. This is not an incorrect use of the term “understand.”

It so happens that more than only behaviour is shared by atheists and theists: words. Wittgenstein of the Lectures only hesitantly accepts that theists and atheists use the same words with the same sense, otherwise stressing that the latter have a very limited understanding of the former's world of meaning. (This remains too true, owing to poor efforts at grammatical exposure; but, we have seen, theists also exhibit grammatical alienation from their own systems of meaning.) Yet the same Wittgenstein of that period would prefigure, in his discussion of private use of the word

50. See *OC* §609-12.

“death,” the basis for the concessions he would eventually make on this point in later thought, anticipating many elements of his so-called “private language argument” from the *Investigations*:

We are all here using the word “death,” which is a public instrument, which has a whole technique [of usage]. Then someone says he has an idea of death. Something queer; because you might say “You are using the word ‘death’ which is an instrument functioning in a certain way.” If you treat this [your idea] as something private, with what right are you calling it an idea of death?—I say this, because we, also, have a right to say what is an idea of death. He might say “I have my own private idea of death”—why call this an “idea of death” unless it is something you connect with death... [In this case,] it does not belong on (*sic*) the game played with “death,” which we all know and understand. If what he calls his “idea of death” is to become relevant, it must become part of our game.⁵¹

As the passage suggests, the possibility of making that idea part of our game presupposes the whole ordinary, public grammar of the terms according to which that idea is articulated, including to the extent that it is called an “idea,” which is “private,” and is “about,” in this case, “death.” More so than in the private language remarks of the *Investigations* – where, in expressions of interiority construed “on the model of ‘object and name,’ the object drops out of consideration as irrelevant”⁵² – Wittgenstein is willing to allow (as I believe he would still allow in his later philosophy, if only for cases of deeply personal religious sentiments, not so much for philosophically-motivated idealism-supporting ones) that it is possible to acquire a better understanding of what, say, a believer expressing a highly particularized notion of death means by surveying what a sentence which employs that term “is connected up with, and get more and more of an idea as I see what he does with it.”⁵³

In an entry from *Culture and Value* dating to the final years of his life, Wittgenstein supports this procedure with reference to the utterances of believers more generally:

If someone who believes in God looks round and asks “Where does everything I see come from?”... he is *not* craving for a (causal) explanation... He is, namely,

51. *LRB*, 69. Brackets in original.

52. *PI* §293.

53. *LRB*, 70.

expressing an attitude to all explanations.—But how is this manifested in his life?... *Practice* gives the words their sense.⁵⁴

Here are words and sentences with ordinary institutions of use, which in that form hang together with causal explanations and their associated standards.⁵⁵ Yet the believer orients these toward a different purpose, which would be lost on us, unless we were to heed the double-register wherein a familiar linguistic construction takes on an unusual role. But if this register is double, it is so, not because it tracks two modes of use that run parallel to one another without intersecting, but only to the extent that an unordinary mode of use bifurcates, as it were, from an ordinary one. And insofar as it is to remain expressed and expressible in an unordinary avenue of use, it will be found not only departing from the ordinary, but routinely crisscrossing back to it: “Could you explain the concept of the punishments of hell without using the concept of punishment? Or that of God’s goodness with using the concept of goodness? If you want to get the right *effect* with your words, certainly not.”⁵⁶ And that right effect includes the expression of those constructs insofar as they are to reflect deviations from or modifications of the ordinary concepts they employ.

Towards the end of his thought, it does not appear that Wittgenstein’s intention is to make of religious concepts and beliefs something exceptionally unordinary, as the Lectures more or less had done, but rather, to preserve their unordinary aspects while diminishing their exceptionableness, grammatically speaking. In other words, it is not the case that Wittgenstein sought to establish religious concepts and beliefs as exceptions to the grammar of beliefs, nor would his late philosophy allow this. Notwithstanding the important differences they exhibit and call to honour, they are structured on the grammar of ordinary beliefs, as is evidenced, *inter alia*, by the fact that they resemble them exactly in form. This resemblance is largely responsible for the apparent conflict between theistic and atheistic rationalist-evidentialism: without it, that conflict could not effectively be staged, mainly because theistic rationalist-evidentialism such as it is could not really arise.

54. *CV* 85e 1950.

55. Cf. Cora Diamond’s “Secondary Sense” (cited above, footnote 2). Also: *PI* Part II §274-§278.

56. *CV* 80e 1949.

Indeed, by the end of his thought, Wittgenstein would also concede that the conditions for exposure to religious language-games – and thus, for conceptual assimilation and the possibility of critical orientation toward the modes of experience connected with them – were at reach as a matter of ordinary maturation into contexts of human interaction:

Life can educate one to a belief in God. And *experiences* too are what bring this about... These neither show us God in the way a sense impression shows us an object, nor do they give rise to *conjectures* about him. Experience, thoughts,—life can force this concept on us. So perhaps it is similar to the concept of “object.”⁵⁷

Road Forward

On the basis of the Wittgensteinian foundations for a critique of religion outlined, the fundamental method of philosophical access to religious frameworks has to proceed by examination of the actions, behaviour, judgments, and thought expressed in conjunction with the concepts and conceptual constructions belonging specially to those frameworks. It goes without saying that to speak of an examination of such modes of experience is to speak of an examination of modes that are collectively manifest, namely, by the group claiming adherence to that framework which they are said to belong to, precisely on grounds of such collective manifestations in its name. Collective manifestations are instances of the paradigmatic patterns which adherents to a religious outlook with a general consistency follow, else those patterns would not be definitive of *that* religion, nor could be followed as distinctive paradigms of that religion so as to warrant self-description or identification in terms of *that* religion uniquely, as distinct from any other. That is why saying that such collective manifestations are not the “real” manifestations of a given religious framework would not do: they are the “data” of the philosophy of religion.⁵⁸

Those collective modes are to be evaluated within the purview of the categories they lay licit claim to – such categories as concern the ethical,

57. CV 86e 1950.

58. Cf. David Hume, *Dialogues and The Natural History of Religion*, ed. J. C. A. Gaskin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 29-130. “True religion, I allow, has no such pernicious consequences: But we must treat of religion, as it has commonly been found in the world” (*ibid.*, 125).

the existential, the psychological, the metaphysical, the political – attending to their interconnections within their own systems of provenance and with respect to others. Laying claims to these, as religious frameworks do, by extent implies their readiness, acknowledged or not, to be answerable to the governing standards of these categories; but, unlike with inferential orientation, where these categories are concerned religious frameworks must be answerable to them, too, precisely because these involve evaluative canons they have had, and have still, a meaningful hand in shaping in accordance with commitments that are like in kind to other frameworks that similarly partake in that process, such as philosophical ones.

That being said, our inferential orientation, inasmuch as it extends the elementary and universal operations of reasoning on the basis of past experience, therefore provides a kind of bedrock for criteria of judgement that can or ought to (where they do not in fact already permeate them) serve as limiting critical reference-points for many of these categories. (This is a point Hume goes to lengths to elaborate throughout his writings, and dimensions of it were seen in Wittgenstein's treatment of certain religious and skeptical attitudes.) I can only state this proposal tentatively here, but I regard it as marking the road forward in the development of a critique of religion that proceeds in accordance with the foregoing outline: the use of the criteria of inferential orientation as yardsticks for evaluation in all those categories of human action and thought where religious values eligibly contend.

Those familiar with Wittgenstein's biography might reproach, perhaps rightly, that Wittgenstein would disapprove of this project on a personal level, since it threatens to slight his broader sympathies for religious values; although, as I hope to have shown, his philosophy warrants it. The road forward thus leads to a more aggressively Humean horizon, since Hume considers our inferential reasoning to structurally underlie our moral reasoning,⁵⁹ to override in matters legal and political,⁶⁰ and even observes that we commonly default to it in considerations which, on the surface,

59. David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding and Other Writings*, ed. Stephen Buckle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), XII, §29.

60. David Hume, "Of Suicide," in *Moral Philosophy*, ed. Geoffrey Sayre-McCord (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co, 2006), 383, footnote 4; cf. *The Natural History of Religion*, section IX.

call for evaluation by reference to religious codes⁶¹ – for such reasons, we are best off honouring its conventions than not. But Hume’s method is similar to Wittgenstein’s (in ways I will one day further explore) in that both endeavor to remind us of what we already know, and can “know,” as part of an effort to draw boundaries; most considerably, boundaries of judgment. Hume said that a “correct *judgment*... confines itself to common life, and to such subjects as fall under daily practice and experience.”⁶² It has been shown, through Wittgenstein, that our common life, our ordinary beliefs, our inferential orientation, serve as correctives to our judgment in general. I have wanted to show, through Wittgenstein, that we must, as Hume insists, become more rigorous in honouring their role as correctives to our judgment concerning religious values in particular.⁶³

61. *The Natural History of Religion*, XII.

62. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, XII, §25.

63. I align myself with Cavell in the consideration that such an application of ordinary language philosophy (in the certain Humean vein I tentatively propose) would denote an effort, not to “reinstiate vulgar beliefs, or common sense, to a pre-scientific position of eminence, but to reclaim the human self from its denial and neglect by modern philosophy” (*The Claim of Reason*, 154) – or in the case at issue, to reclaim the human self, and sensible and desirable human thought and behaviour, from their denial and neglect by hosts of enshrined values belonging to certain religious systems.