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**"Are Eyebrows Going to Be Talked of
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Introduction

Throughout history people have used both religion and science to explain the world around them. As modern technology advances the explanatory realm left open to religion appears to be shrinking (at least from a secular perspective). Against this strong tide of empiricism some have elected the strategy of arguing for religion by claiming that it is on equal footing with science, or that it can answer the same questions with which science grapples. However, in wanting to grant religion its due importance we can be forced into a position of complete relativism, in which no description of the world can be said to be more accurate than another. This seems to destroy our very notion of truth and to use internal consistency as the only test of validity. On the other hand, if we maintain that only one world view is correct we not only discount the variety of human systems of thought, we also fail to investigate the assumptions which inescapably underlie any one of them.   Both of these positions are extreme and go against common intuitions; yet, it is unclear how a position between the two of them could be consistent. How can we say that more than one point of view can be valid and yet still be able to advance criteria to pick between views?

In this paper I will argue that we can chart such a middle course through an exploration of Ludwig Wittgenstein's thought (particularly that advanced in *On Certainty* and *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*). I will use his thesis that meaning and certainty are context dependent to investigate how meaning is produced in science and in religion. I will start with the recognition that any system of thought must take certain basic propositions as criteria for further investigation and explore how Wittgenstein defines this idea. Next I will try to establish that religion and science do, indeed, function as two different systems or language games by illustrating their differing criteria for truth. In so doing I will reference both Wittgenstein's works and that of some anthropologists of religion, whose work has explored a definition of religion through its use, which mirrors Wittgenstein's location of

meaning. I will then discuss how we can pick between systems within a given context by requiring that a system stand up to the criteria of justification set up for that situation.

Although we cannot step outside of our system of thought in order to judge between separate systems we can develop criteria to decide whether or not a particular proposition (or argument) falls with in a particular system. This is not an extreme position that tries to completely dismiss one system. It merely allows us to restrict systems to particular realms of explanation. Truth has different meanings in different contexts but can have a very specific meaning in a specific context. Therefore, within a specific context we can say that one system is not producing truth without generally dismissing its ability to do so.

Throughout the paper I will use the example of the debate between Intelligent Design Creationism and evolutionary biology in order to both ground my more abstract points and to illustrate the practical applications of Wittgenstein's discussion of certainty. This debate has brought the conflict between science and religion to the forefront of recent thought and is therefore a good lens through which to view the issues I want to discuss.

Certainty: The Context of Meaning and the Interrelation of Propositions

If a proponent of creationism says that they are certain of something do they mean the same thing by "certainty" that an evolutionarily biologist would mean? To distinguish between these meanings we must, according to Wittgenstein, explore how each person uses the word. How do they establish whether or not something is certain? What criteria do they use in doing so? Certainty is defined by context just like any other concept because all quests for certainty occur within systems with particular criteria for justification. Wittgenstein argues that investigation cannot occur outside of a system because propositions cannot be considered in isolation. "Whether a proposition can turn out false after all depends on what I make count as determinants for that proposition." (*On Certainty*: para. 5) In order for something to be true or to be false we must already have criteria for what would entail its truth. These are not meant to be prior or absolutely foundational, but they do define the shape of our thoughts within a context. "The system is not so much the point of departure, as the element in which arguments have their life." (para. 16) Within a system, the propositions that compose it are not doubtable because they define what it is to doubt.

Phrased differently, this means that there must be rules that define when something is confirmed or rejected inside a given system and these rules cannot be doubted from within the context they define.

> It may be for example that all enquiry on our part is set so as to exempt certain propositions from doubt, if they are ever formulated. They lie apart from the route traveled by enquiry (para. 88).

These propositions are those that we do not explicitly consider in formulating an inquiry, rather they are in the background of our thought processes. However, we must note, that what counts as a rule or a hard and fast proposition is not completely outside the realm of change.

> Some propositions, of the form of empirical propositions, were hardened and functioned as channels for such empirical propositions as were not hardened but fluid; and that this relation altered with time, in that fluid propositions hardened, and hard ones became fluid. (para. 96)

Wittgenstein's view is that any particular propositions can be shifted (in the sense that they no longer define criteria for certainty) but that there must always be propositions in that solid place, held there by everything else. This idea adds a needed complexity to a theory of certainty, in that it allows for change over time. For example, the principles of Euclidian geometry may once have been solid bedrock, shaping scientific inquiries, but now with the advance of other types of geometry, these principles have been allowed to shift.

The interrelations between propositions are key to this interpretation. We do not believe propositions separately, stacking them up one by one. Rather, "[w]hen we first begin to believe anything, what we believe is not a single proposition, it is a whole system of propositions" (para. 141). We cannot relate to propositions individually. On one level this is because that is simply not how they are given to us by experience. There is not one experience which teaches us that "motor cars don't grow out of the earth" (para. 279) but this belief dawns us as we interact with the world. It forms a part of a system that "is something that a human being acquires by means of observation and instruction" (para. 279).

This is not to say that all propositions are inherently connected, but rather that, behind a given proposition, there are lots of others that are assumed. In a specific example, 'the pen is on the table' is not necessarily related to something like 'the book is on the floor' but it is necessarily related to some background propositions. The question of whether or not the pen was on the table could not arise unless we believed something like 'I can check if a pen is on a table by looking at it.' In asking if the pen is on the table, we cannot at the same time be querying if seeing the pen on the table is a reliable justification for our answer.

Therefore, we can only consider a particular proposition in relation to other given propositions. The context is never separable from the individual assertion. "Our knowledge forms an enormous system. And only within this system has a particular bit the value we give it" (para. 410). This is tied to the earlier argument that we cannot doubt everything—that there must be 'hinges that we can swing a door on.' Propositions cannot be justified in a vacuum. When we formulate arguments we assume particular criteria for their justification. We cannot question all of these criteria at once because we must have something which sets the criteria. This also reflects the way we interact with the world in that our senses present us with many pieces of information at once (or at least in a way that seems simultaneous). We can only pay attention to so many things at one time. As such we can only "give value" to propositions relative to the system of thought in which they occur.

Religion and Science: Distinct Systems of Thought

For Wittgenstein, religion is not simply a primitive form of science. Rather, the religion and science separate systems of thought and action. There may be some overlap between them in various cultures at various times but they are fundamentally different because they have different basic, supporting propositions and different criteria for truth. I will explore these divergent criteria with reference to the example of IDC and

evolutionary biology, but, first, I will make the point that in addition to a difference in their procedures for justification they are different systems because they function differently. They have different uses. When we see religion as in conflict with science it is usually because we are defining religion in terms of articulation of belief and interpreting this use of "belief" as the same that we would use in a secular context. Regardless of whether religious belief is the same as a scientific usage of the term, it is important to remember that religion is more than just a statement of belief.

In this discussion I would like to briefly turn to the work of some anthropologists of religion[140]. These scholars, such as Victor Turner[141] and Mary Douglas[142] develop a definition of religion that is based less on creed and more on ritual. Religion can be defined by its outward consequences in the same way that Wittgenstein defines language through its use. It need not be a matter of what you think, so much as a matter of what you do. In many contexts, actions such as pilgrimage or the recitation of prayers are efficacious (by this I mean that the religious consider them to accomplish goals, such as salvation) in and of themselves independently of belief. Religion is not always something that people believe, rather it is something that they do, something in which they participate.

A religion becomes more creed based when it is confronted by other worldviews. During times of reform, belief must be re-affirmed and demarcated. Customs must be explained, but it is important to note, that the explanations can be added on after the fact, as rationalizations of, rather than inspirations for, behavior. Many people hold contradictory religious views (particularly those who are members of a religious tradition what contains mixture of different traditions in its history) but do not find this problematic. An example of such contradictory beliefs can be fond in certain Mexican Catholics who incorporate indigenous polytheistic practices into their monotheistic dogma.[143] These people may speak of their Catholicism in one breath and then shift into an easy reference to multiple gods. This may show that they have a modified version of Catholicism but it nonetheless suggests independence from a strictly creedal definition of religion. Belief is not necessarily what unifies a group of people as belonging to a particular religion. Instead, their traditions and practices may be more important.   To some extent they define their religiosity through their actions rather than their thoughts. This may speak to the difference of religious belief and "everyday belief" but it also implies a focus on customs over beliefs. Religion, like language, is part of culture more than a theory of the world. It is a body of practices, of skills that allow for expression.

Religion and Science: Differing Criteria for Truth

Religion is not, then, just propositions that conflict with science. However, it does generally include such propositions, such assertions of belief and then questions of the nature of religious belief become important. When some one says that they believe in God is that the same as my belief in atoms?

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[140] Macalester Professor Jim Laine first brought this work and these concepts to my attention in his "Catholicism" class in Fall 2006.

[141] Turner, Victor and Edith Turner. *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*. New York: Colombia University Press, 1978.

[142] Douglas, Mary. *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology*. London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1978.

[143] Garcigodoy, Juanita. *Digging the Days of the Dead*. Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 1998.

Philosophers have often asserted that belief in the existence of God is properly treated like belief in the existence of anything else. For example, philosophers as diverse as Descartes and Leibniz have defended religious propositions through rationality. This trend primarily reflects the historical power that religion has had in the western tradition. More recently religious propositions have been considered as containing a different kind of meaning. If we follow Wittgenstein in defining meaning through use we notice that the world "believe" is definitely used differently in many religious instances than in our every day or empirical usage. This is because what constitutes belief in a system, what criteria must be satisfied in order for the belief to be justified differs greatly.

If a scientist is trying to demonstrate that proteins can evolve from simpler substances she will have to produce empirical evidence to justify her hypothesis. If some evidence seems to refute her hypothesis she must adjust her theory to fit this new evidence. Religious thought, on the other hand, does not share this criterion for truth. Rather, it assumes that we cannot know everything through the material world alone and that supernatural (and to some extent unobservable) phenomena form a valid justification for knowledge. For example, in *Lectures on Religion* Wittgenstein discusses the belief of a man who "made this guidance for his life: believing in a last judgment day" (54).   This man has an "unshakable belief" (54) that is not demonstrated by "reasoning or appeal to ordinary grounds" (55). Rather, it is a belief that the man lives by without interrogating it to a scientific standard. In this context "to believe" is very different then that of a scientific hypothesis.

In *Lectures on Religion* Wittgenstein explains how "intellectually distant" we can feel from people who have a different system of thought than we do. For Wittgenstein, it is not that I believe the opposite of a religious person (at least not in the normal way this is meant) but, instead it is that "I think differently, in a different way. I say different things to myself. I have different pictures" (55). It is that religious questions are not dealt with "as a matter of reasonability" (58). This is clear when in overtly religious contexts faith is provided as a belief that does not require justification but we can also see that proponents of IDC have different criteria for justification than scientists do.

For example, when Michael Behe, a biochemist at Lehigh University and proponent of IDC discusses "irreducible complexity" we can tell that he is not treating this as a testable scientific hypothesis because he has not changed his views even though evidence to the contrary has emerged. The thesis of "irreducible complexity" says that certain systems, for example, proteins, cannot be products of evolution because of the way they function.

> A system is "irreducibly complex" if, and only if, it is a complex made up of components that must fit together in the right way. If any of the components is missing, or none is missing but they do not all fit together in the right way, the system cannot perform the function that it performs when it is intact (Nakhnikian, 7)[144].

Behe contends that with this understanding these systems cannot be the result of evolution and that their design by God is a more probable explanation. Behe may claim that this belief is scientific and that his trust in it depends on evidence. However, this

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[144] Nakhnikian, George. "It ain't necessarily so: an essay review of Intelligent Design Creationism and Its Critics." *Philosophy of Science*, Oct. 2004. (In reviewing the essay in that volume written by Behe.)

assertion is not proven by "the mere fact that someone says that they believe on evidence." (*Lectures On Religion* 60) As Nakhnikian notes, in 1997, a paper came out in Science[145] showing that "the evolution of proteins can be observed in a laboratory." (Nakhnikian 8) Behe failed to respond to this finding in essays on irreducible complexity published in 1998 and 2001. If he does not change his theories based on new evidence on what grounds can Behe claim to be practicing science?

Furthermore, the sorts of claims that Behe is making are not ones that appear falsifiable. If he were to admit that proteins are not an example of irreducible complexity, but instead, maintained that some compounds were irreducibly complex this could not be falsified without discovering how every possible complex could have evolved. This is a stronger argument against the scientific validity of his position because it exposes his theoretical framework as unscientific. His hypothesis only requires that somewhere out there in the world there is some organism that did not evolve and that is a criterion that is difficult if not impossible to disprove.

In failing to use scientific criteria for corrigibility Behe has established himself as outside of the scientific discourse. I would argue that the blend of science and religion that he ends up with is not a proper example of either. He tries to use religious criteria for truth in scientific discourse and therefore cannot reach religious truth or scientific truth.

In general, we can tell the difference between a mistake within our own system and something which is rejecting the premises of our system, or which is using a different system. This distinction is captured in *Lectures on Religion* by the difference between what is a "little bit absurd" (a misuse of the system) and what is "altogether absurd" (surely, outside the system). If some one relates an empirically suspect statement, like "I saw my dead cousin," we can see that there are two ways we can react.

> Would we say you are saying this on insufficient evidence? Under certain circumstances I would say this, under other circumstances I wouldn't. Where what is said sounds a bit absurd I would say: "Yes, in this case insufficient evidence." If altogether absurd, then I wouldn't (Lectures & Conversations: 60).

In one context we can see that a proposition is trying and failing to be an empirical truth and in another we feel, instead, that it is simply outside empiricism. We can make this distinction by recognizing the method of justification that is being used. For example, in case A some one thinks that he saw his dead cousin but then accepts that he has been proven wrong when he realizes that the person he mistook for his cousin is in fact some one else. However, in case B the evidence of mistaken identity is ignored based on the 'sense that the person really was his cousin.' These two cases differ on the criteria of justification being used. Case B is on "an entirely different plane." (53)

If we cannot cling to some kind of transcendental certainty we can at least decide in a given context that some one is or isn't following the rules that we are following. Certainty, if defined through its use, is not the same concept in all contexts. A scientific certainty can only be reached through meeting the criteria for truth which the scientific discourse establishes. If we look to the manner of justification being utilized we can tell

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[145] (Atwell et al., 1997) (Noted in Nakhnikian 8)

if someone is making a mistake with a scientific system or using a different system. If they are using a different system their results are not valid within science.

Conclusion

I believe that the position I have developed in this paper and derived from Wittgenstein avoids both the perils of relativism and those of an extreme realism. I want to argue that worries about relativism in the context of science and religion are generally worries that religion produces a scientific truth. Religion cannot reach truth, if truth is defined by empirical justification. Instead, the truth that comes from religion is that which is justified with completely different criteria. Religious criteria might be anything from 'God told me it' to 'it is written right here.' If these are the criteria for 'truth' then 'truth' is not what we, in both or everyday interactions with the world and our scientific/philosophical usage, mean by 'truth.' It is something else entirely, something that is not empirically corrigible. When we are talking of the definition (use) of truth then science is its only producer. Therefore, for example, we can say IDC does not justify its claims in a scientific realm. Furthermore, Wittgenstein spares us the inflexibly of an extreme realist position, because systems of thought can define truth only in their own contexts. Put specifically, in claiming that IDC is not science we do not argue against religion but rather against its masquerading as science.

Clearly, the problem which remains is that the two systems of thought must interact. Although, science and religion have different truth criteria and therefore produce fundamentally different results (which they both call truth) they are often mixed together in difficult ways. I maintain that in particular instances we can tell what rules of justification are being followed and that this comparison can lead to preferring one system or another given the demands of the context. However, throughout history science and religion have influenced each other and to some extent assumed each other's justification methods. The explanation I have put forth in this paper perhaps presents an overly simplified explanation of the relationship between these two discourses in its attempt to explicate the difference in their natures.

Nonetheless, it is useful to remember that religion and science, fundamentally, do not have the same criteria for truth. Each set of criteria is not defensible outside of the system of thought which it supports but each set can be preferred in certain domains. If we are asking a scientific question (as in 'are proteins irreducibly complex in the sense that they could not have evolved from simpler components?') then only scientific explanations can be correct. In a scientific situation one important criterion of truth is supportability by natural observations. A religious proposition is neither supportable nor refutable by such empirical means and therefore must be dismissed from science. Wittgenstein's investigations of certainty and knowledge give ample justification for adjudicating between systems of thought within given situations. Every system of thought has particular criteria for validity and for the most part it is clear when these are not being met, or when their structure does not fit with the type of proposition under consideration.

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