

Belief and Acceptance for the Study of Religion

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Abstract

'Belief' in the study of religion has been vexed by complexities underlying the relationship between language, cognition, and religious behavior. Drawing on anthropological, sociological, and psychological literature, this article discusses the degrees and textures of 'belief' to highlight the inadequacies of language and the variety of motivations for participating in rituals. Particular emphasis is given to discrimination, implicit bias, and the issue of discrepancy. The article argues that dual-process models of cognition provide a richer account of 'belief' and maps an epistemological distinction between belief and acceptance as a viable methodology for the investigation of 'belief' in the study of religion.

Keywords: Belief, Acceptance, Dual-Process, Epistemology, Social Science, Methodology, Theory

1. Introduction

To paraphrase Rodney Needham (1972): belief is dead. The anthropologist famously declared that the concept of belief should be abandoned as a critical category and tool of analysis for the study of religion. Like many great scholars, the conclusion has taken precedent over the analysis and Needham is, if not already, joining that group of scholars frequently cited but least read. Without in-depth scrutiny and interrogation, the study of religion has moved on by arguing that the abandonment of 'belief,' like 'religion' (like 'culture' like 'society'), is untenable (Lindholm 2012). And yet, with the resurgent interest in belief, the issues that troubled Needham have begun to recur in contemporary investigations. In *Belief, Language and Experience* (1972), Needham wrestles with two perennial, yet highly significant, questions for the study of religion. What is belief? And how do we study it? For Needham, the epistemological issue dictates the methodology but methodological difficulties circumscribe and constrict the operative and stipulative parameters for the epistemology; the former dictates the latter but the latter inhibits the former. This mutual dependence of epistemology and methodology ultimately led him to call for the concept's abandonment. Although Needham's argument can be circular and even contradictory at times, the text provides a useful platform to begin re-thinking the concept of belief for the study of religion.

In this article, I draw on Needham to map out the problem of language for the investigation of belief and the need to go beyond language and ritual as the primary sources of evidence for discernment. This becomes apparent when we consider the degrees and textures of belief. Not only are persons capable of holding a range of attitudes toward religious propositions, and various reasons for participating in ritual, but we are also capable of being inconsistent and convey discrepancies. This opens up the domain of implicit biases as well as behaviors that may be incongruent with explicit statements. I argue that dual-process theories can enrich the study of belief, as one of many avenues, and go beyond the constraints of language in differentiating and distinguishing the degrees of belief. Dual-process models, however, have been difficult to operationalize as a methodology in the study of religion. Here, I take up an epistemological distinction between belief and acceptance that

can facilitate the translation of dual-process theory into a working methodology. In conclusion, I argue that beliefs are not simply System 1 or System 2 type processes but a mixture of both. Not only can we discuss intuitive implicit beliefs but we can also consider how non-intuitive explicit beliefs are developed over time. In this regard, it is possible to make a distinction between implicit and explicit beliefs and further consider their influence on reflective System 2 processes and behavior. This enables both propositional and performative accounts of belief and takes into account observations of discrepancy and inconsistency.

2. The Problem of Language and the Performative Turn

One of the issues pervading *Belief, Language and Experience* (1972) is Needham's concern with language, thought, and translation. He begins the text with the question of meaning and translation. Is it possible for a person of a non-English speaking culture, which lacks a comparable term for belief, to say: I believe in God? Needham's query, on one hand, raises the claim whether an English speaking person can 'believe' the non-English speaking person when s/he states a belief in God. It seems Needham had his doubts. This leaves the reader wondering what Needham himself meant by the concept and why he would doubt the 'other' to begin with. More interestingly, his skepticism raises a broader epistemological concern regarding the relationship between concept-acquisition and psychology. Can you have a corresponding psychology if you do not have the concept? Not only does this pertain to 'belief' and 'God' but the same question can be raised with concepts like 'knowledge,' 'guilt,' or 'wonder.' The issue dates back to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, or the linguistic relativity principle, which argues that language structures thought and thereby shapes our experience and interpretation of reality.¹ The acquisition of a concept and its translation creates concerns not only for cross-cultural comparative research but further problematizes investigations within the English speaking world because of the semantic variability of certain concepts. In this case, 'belief' covers a wide range of meanings and, for Needham, there is no "central or essential meaning" provided in its definition (1972: 40).

The dilemma of cross-cultural translation prompted Needham to trace the etymology of 'belief' in the English language. He finds a convergence of "lexical forms in the Indo-European family of languages" with the "religious history that combines Jewish, Greek, and Christian concepts" (1972: 50). Similarly, anthropologist Malcolm Ruel (1982) traces the etymology and illustrates four particular periods of Christian history² and their respective impact on 'belief.' Initially, Ruel states, the term expressed confidence in the gods or an oracle to promote welfare and further denoted a sense of obedience in "acknowledgement of their power to determine human fate." However, in the New Testament, the Greek use of the term, *pistis*, acquired a "technical use" and was "often used in the sense to be converted to become a Christian" thereby representing a "common conviction, a shared confidence that both distinguished and united them as a community" (101-102). In other words, 'belief' shifts from a verb to a noun distinguishing a religious community and a social identity. A second

¹ A modern version of this hypothesis can be found in George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's *The Metaphors We Live By* ([1980] 2003).

² "(1) the critical, initial phase in which Christians, the Nazarene sect, emerged as a distinctive religious movement, a community of believers; (2) the immediately succeeding period leading to the Council of Nicaea that witnessed both the developing formal organization of the Church and the establishment of orthodox creeds, sanctioned by the Church councils; (3) the Reformation and in particular Luther's reformulation of what it means to believe (i.e. to have faith); and finally, since we cannot leave ourselves out, (4) the present period, which might be characterized in both Christian and secular contexts as belief diffused" (Ruel 1982: 101).

shift occurs when the concept becomes associated with the declaration of “confessing Christ,” “something that is explicitly affirmed where the act of affirmation has its own functional value” and establishes the “church as the community who believe in his resurrection” (103-104). The third shift happens when the term is associated with a body of doctrine that would become part of the “authority structure of the church.” Needham notes the Council of Nicaea and the patronage of Constantine (105). At this point, “belief” is a mode of distinguishing true and false Christians by exercising religious authority and power. Lastly, for Ruel, a fourth shift occurs with the Protestant Reformation: ‘belief’ becomes an object of acquisition, an object of possession, synonymous with faith (106-107). In this regard, Christianity’s history renders ‘belief’ problematic. Jean Pouillon (1982) further demonstrated the equivocality of ‘belief’ for English, German, and French, which conjoin three different uses of the term. The first notes the existence of someone or something, often in terms of a cognitive, subjectively committed, fact. The second is the internalization of a statement as true, which is commonly discussed in terms of knowing or having knowledge. The third usage, a “believing in,” designates the “qualification of a bond” by placing confidence, trust, or faith in the object of belief and often pertains to an emotional than a cognitive act (Lindquist & Coleman 2008, 5; Pouillon’s distinction is re-iterated by Robbins [2007] in distinguishing ‘belief in’ and ‘belief that’). In this regard, Needham, Ruel, and Pouillon illustrate that ‘belief’ is not a straightforward concept; ‘belief’ conjoins various semantic possibilities and becomes subject to historical discursive practices (Asad 1982; this article is no exception).

The semantic variability of ‘belief’ not only makes translation difficult but it has prompted persons of various cultures and religions to question and think through what it means to ‘believe’ (Carlisle & Simon 2012). For example, the Minangkabau Muslims in Indonesia will often exploit the multiple possibilities for interpreting ‘belief’ in order to reconcile a subjective state of conviction with “ambiguously Islamic experiences and practices” (Simon 2012: 222). Similarly, evangelical Christians in the United States will reflect on what it means to be authentically Christian (Bielo 2012) and while Thai Buddhists claim that belief is a non-issue or irrelevant, Thai Christians discuss what it means to have belief (Cassaniti 2012). Contrary to what Needham might suggest, these accounts do *not* suggest that ‘belief’ should be abandoned but rather enforces the view that language, as a mediator of thought, is inadequate for the discernment of belief. This renders the use of questionnaires and asking what one believes during interviews problematic.³ The cases above illustrate how people *think* about ‘belief’ rather than what they “actually” believe. As Charles Lindholm (2012) notes, much work has centered on *how* beliefs are justified and practiced and *how* persons convince themselves that their beliefs are true rather than investigating *what* it is that is being justified and practiced.

Over the decades, in the study of religion, ‘belief’ has moved from a propositional declaration and intellectual assent to a behavioral and performative account. Talal Asad noted that “it is a modern idea that a practitioner cannot know how to live religiously without being able to articulate that knowledge” ([1982] 2002: 120). Not all religious practitioners will have a systematic understanding of their religion. To live religiously, instead, is argued to comprise of an ethos and habituated practices. The participation in rituals and the significance of ritual artefacts are often represented in the simplest of terms and a matter of unreflectively

³Although the interpretive ambiguity can be a methodological advantage to consider what persons *think* about belief, which was demonstrated in Abby Day’s study of *Believing in Belonging* in North England (2011).

following convention and tradition (Hicks 2008; Mircea Eliade [1963] noted the justification of ‘following the ancestors’ in the Australian Arunta, the Kai of New Guinea, the Navajo, Tibetans, as well as “Hindu theologians”). Peter Collins, in his discussion of the United Society of Believers in Christ’s Second Appearing (the American Shakers), argued that “practice *is* belief” (2012: 265). A similar position was argued by Thomas Kirsch (2004), in his study of Gwembe Tonga of southern Zambia, as well as Abby Day and Gordon Lynch (2013) in their discussion of belief as ‘cultural performance.’ This marks a performative turn – from an emphasis on cognitive propositional assent to a behavioral performative approach.

3. Degrees and textures of belief

The division between belief as intellectual assent and belief as performative in ritual can be traced back to a division between E. B. Tylor (1871) and William Robertson Smith (1889). The former emphasized religion as belief in supernatural entities while the latter focused on the participatory actions in rituals. Both views have been characterized as ‘belief.’ However, conjoining propositional statements and performative dimensions into a singular category conflates the concept as an analytical tool. This flattens ‘belief’ and includes any and all statements and behaviors made within a religious context. Qualifying both as belief, and providing a taxonomy of different types of belief, without discussing the relationship between cognition and behavior provides little assistance and clarity to the epistemological and methodological questions. If ‘belief’ is, indeed, to be maintained as a conceptual tool for analysis and a critical category for the study of religion, not only should the concept be capable of congregating propositional as well as performative dimensions into a coherent framework (Mair 2012), but it must also account for the degrees and textures of ‘belief.’ In other words, not only does ‘belief’ require an understanding between cognition, language, and behavior to accommodate the complexities between propositional statements and ritual activity but it must also account for views of skepticism, implicit bias, and forms of prejudice that may be motivated by religious institutions and structures.

Skepticism and reluctance to systems of practice and meaning have been documented, at the least, since the time of Evans-Pritchard’s study of Azande witchcraft (1937). More recently, David Hicks (2008), in his account of sacred artefacts in East Timor, illustrated the degrees of beliefs and attitudes persons can have with respect to their religious tradition. Hicks argues that sacred artefacts, in this case a sacred house known as the *uma lulik* and various sacred treasures, can serve as an index to belief in the existence of ancestral ghosts. The *uma lulik* is associated with a “descent group or family” as the sacred houses serve as “reliquaries for the heirlooms of long-deceased ancestors” and are the “sites for ritual activity and the center of spiritual devotion for those who identify themselves with them – a convergence of ideas from the realms of kinship relationships and rituals, past and present, that impart a moral valence to the artefact” (2008: 174). The ancestral ghosts are considered “a source of fertility and life” and the Timorese “maintain a mutually satisfying relationship” with them through the performance of rituals. However, Hicks reports that the *uma lulik* also provokes a range of attitudes: a belief in the existence of ancestral ghosts as a certainty such that the maintenance of the *uma lulik* is “beyond belief”; an agnosticism of the ancestral ghosts; an atheism but still participating in rituals for social or political reasons; and an atheism that disparages the sacred houses and considers them as a “symbol of cultural backwardness” (177-178). Such attitudes to the *uma lulik* convey a range of beliefs about ancestral spirits and the importance of the *uma lulik*. More importantly, Hicks notes that the participation in ritual activity does not necessarily entail a corresponding belief in the reasons for the ritual.

The discrepancies between propositional statements and participation point to a range of attitudes and motivations. Moreover, the issue of discrepancy further opens up the cognitive space of implicit biases; not all statements or behaviors are accurate reflections of our beliefs, thoughts, values, or motivations nor is it the case that we are necessarily aware of them. The investigation and discussion of implicit biases have been duly noted in the philosophical (Saul 2013; Frankish 2010; Frankish 2012; Wylie 2011) and psychological literature (Newell & Shanks 2014; Smith et al 2014; Stanovich et al 2013; Casper & Rothermund 2012; Greenwald et al. 2009; Jost et al 2009). In the psychology of religion, Ralph Hood Jr., Peter Hill, and Bernard Spilka (2009) provide an overview of the relationship between religion, morality, and prejudice, which pertains to the relationship between beliefs, morals and emotions. Implicit biases and various forms of discrimination further point out inconsistencies between explicitly stated positions of equality and incongruent behaviors and practices. For example, in a study (Wright et al. 2015) investigating the receptivity of Christian churches in the United States email inquiries were sent to 3,113 churches from a fictive person moving to the area and looking for a new church. The person's name was manipulated to represent white (Scott Taylor), black (Jamal Washington), Hispanic (Carlos Garcia), and Asian (Jong Soo Kim)-sounding names. Not surprisingly, "Christian churches, as a whole, responded more frequently and more fully to inquiries with white-sounding names." Mainline Protestant churches exhibited the most variation by race in their responses: "most frequently and most welcomingly to emails with white-sounding names, followed by black and Hispanic names, followed by Asian names" (199).⁴ The study presents a pattern of discrimination, explicitly or implicitly, despite official positions of racial equality and inclusion.

Discrimination against women and persons of color have also been issues within academia. A study by Mathew Guest, Sonya Sharma, and Robert Song (2013) investigated the gender imbalance of Theology and Religious Studies (TRS) departments in the United Kingdom. While women are the majority at the undergraduate level, the figures drop dramatically when considering the gender distribution across academic staff in TRS departments; a trend also noted in philosophy departments across the trans-Atlantic (Wylie 2011; Beebe and Saul 2011). In TRS departments, which have historically fostered Christian theology, the "most evident" of reasons attributed to this discrepancy was the "nature of religious communities on which Christian theology has historically drawn." For instance, one interviewee stated:

[O]ne reason might be the relative conservatism of faith communities. Insofar as the sector recruits scholars who come out of faith communities or from faith communities and are motivated by their faith to study Theology or Religion, then that might have something to do with it. [... the gender balance] is made worse in theology because of the general attitude towards women in

⁴ A similar study was conducted by Marianne Bertrand and Sendhil Mullainathan's study (2004) of the U.S. job market. After responding to over "1,300 employment ads in the sales, administrative support, clerical, and customer service job categories" with "nearly 5,000 resumes", they report a 50-percent gap in call returns with "White-sounding-names" receiving significantly more calls than "African-American-sounding names." They further note that "the gap between Whites and African-American applicants widen with resume quality" (2004: 992). In other words, despite having the same resume, there is a prevailing bias against African-Americans or an outright explicit practice of discrimination in the U.S. job market which worsens with resume quality.

Christianity as a whole that affects how seriously women's work is taken by academics in theology...⁵

Yet, the ambiguities around 'belief' have seemingly deterred the discussion of implicit bias; the cognitive phenomena is seldom discussed directly in the study of religion. Instead, studies either utilize statistical methods to note discriminatory practices or descriptively discuss the prejudices against particular demographics in various regions: gay Muslims in Indonesia (Boellstorff 2005), tensions between Christians and the Hindutva in India (Menon 2003), the migration of Ethiopian Beta Israel members seeking citizenship (Seeman 2003), Southern Italian converts to Pentecostalism (Di Bella 2003), and the discrimination against 'Black' in England (Hall 1992; Toulis 1997), all of which imply an implicit bias within their respective contexts. To illustrate this further, sociologist, Samuel Perry conducted a study (2014) demonstrating that, in the U.S., "whites who express a desire for their children and their children's spouses to share the parent's religion tend to be less comfortable with their hypothetical daughter marrying someone who is black, Latino, or Asian [which further suggests that] for whites, religious heritage is infused with racial meaning" (216). In this regard, the intersections between race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, law and religion with regard to implicit bias, prejudice, and discrimination must be investigated further within the context of belief. As psychologist Gordon Allport states, "The role of religion is paradoxical. It makes and unmakes prejudice. While the creeds of the great religions are universalistic, all stressing brotherhood; the practices of these creeds are frequently divisive and brutal" (1954: 444).

In the study of religion, one issue at stake is the discrepancy between, and within, language and behavior – those who explicitly declare one thing, such as a non-sexist or non-racist position, yet behave in a sexist or racist manner – and how to discern belief through the available methods and evidence. The range of beliefs for participating in rituals and the degrees and textures of belief, illustrated through the biases noted above, creates a demand for a more sophisticated and nuanced understanding of 'belief' that can accommodate both performative and propositional dimensions, as well as implicit and explicit forms, in accounts of various religious traditions and lived experience.

4. Dual-process theory of religious beliefs

One promising avenue from the cognitive science of religion, drawing on cognitive psychology, is the framework of dual-process, or dual-system, theories popularized by cognitive psychologist Daniel Kahneman (2011). This article will not go into great detail outlining dual-process theories as they have been illustrated at length elsewhere (Kalkman 2014; Kahneman 2011; Frankish 2010; Evans 2008) but briefly note the distinction as it has been presented by Kahneman and the cognitive science of religion, particularly the view advanced by Nicolas Baumard and Pascal Boyer (2013). In doing so, I argue that religious beliefs should not be delegated to only one type of process and further highlight the interactive dimension between the two systems.

System 1 or Type 1 processes, for Kahneman, are generally intuitive processes that operate "automatically and quickly, with little or no effort and no sense of voluntary control" (2011, 20). They are "fast, automatic, non-conscious" processes (Frankish 2010, 914; Evans 2008). By contrast, System 2 or Type 2 processes are explicit and reflective which allocate

⁵ Guest, Sharma, and Song (2013: 15); the report further notes differences in styles of discussion, academic behaviour, and the alienating and patriarchal environment of conferences.

“attention to the effortful mental activities” (Kahneman 2011, 21) and “activated when an event is detected that violates the model of the world that System 1 maintains” (2011, 24). Generally, these processes are considered to be “slow, controlled, and conscious” and often “rule-based, analytic or reflective” (Frankish 2010, 914; Evans 2008). Baumard and Boyer (2013) in the cognitive science of religion has taken this model on board as an elaboration of Dan Sperber’s distinction (1997) between ‘intuitive’ and ‘reflective’ beliefs. That is, System 1 processes are “intuitive beliefs” grounded in our evolved cognitive architecture (Boyer & Barrett 2005; complementary work has been done in developmental psychology notably by Kinzler & Spelke [2007] in their view of ‘Core Systems’) and occur without deliberation. By contrast, System 2 processes constitute “reflective beliefs” that “explain, extend, or restrict the scope of, comment on, or link intuitions to specific sources” and, according to Baumard and Boyer, religious beliefs fall into this type of cognition (Baumard & Boyer 2013: 297; Sperber 1997); religious beliefs are the result of reflective processes triggered and “strongly constrained by intuitive systems” (Baumard and Boyer 2013: 297). This view is elaborated by a few examples: threat detection and magic, synchrony and collective ceremonies, dead persons and afterlife notions, moral intuitions and penance, attentional processing and attention. In each case, Baumard and Boyer argue, intuitions are activated which are then reflectively elaborated upon to provide a sense of consistency and, as many anthropologists and psychologists have shown, are at the origin of a range of religious beliefs (2013: 297). In this sense, religious beliefs are not *sui generis* but are one emergent form of the interaction between intuitive and reflective processes.

The difference between Baumard and Boyer’s view and Kahneman’s view is the perspective of their approaches. The former emphasizes evolved cognitive architectural systems and their intuitive outputs that contribute and constrain reflective processes. This view is situated within a long-standing debate about the emergence of religious beliefs as an adaptation or a by-product of evolved cognitive mechanisms and our subsequent predispositions towards them (Willard & Norenzayan 2013).⁶ Kahneman does state that “System 1 has been shaped by evolution to provide a continuous assessment of the main problems that an organism must solve to survive” (2011: 89), but he does not extend the discussion into which mechanisms or how our cognitive architecture has evolved and only gives a passing nod to religious beliefs. The focal point of Kahneman’s view is the mechanism and function of cognition involved with reasoning and decision-making processes in navigating our respective realities (analogous to the *default cognitive background* proposed by philosopher Michael Bratman [1992]). In this regard, Kahneman’s account enables discussions of habituated and embodied thought processes through socialization and enculturation, which build upon prior thought patterns and particular dispositions that arise throughout development.

This is not to say that Baumard and Boyer’s position is at odds with Kahneman. They are compatible in many ways but the focus of Kahneman’s view is to highlight and account for reflective beliefs, and System 2 processes, *becoming* integrated into System 1 processes as intuitive beliefs. Delegating religious beliefs into either System 1 or System 2 does not accommodate the affective associations with religious or sacred material, symbols, and icons nor does it account for enculturated religious propositional content such as ‘Jesus is the son of God’; what Roy Rappaport (1999) called ‘Ultimate Sacred Postulates’ or ‘cosmological axioms’ (e.g. the Jewish *Shema*, “Hear O Israel, The Lord our God, the Lord is One”)

⁶ This branches further into the area of ‘cognitive styles’ and its predictability for holding a religious belief (belief in God); see Pennycook et al 2012; Shenhav et al. 2012; Pennycook 2014

developed through the repetition of ritual. Scott Atran and Ara Norenzayan (2004) have also noted that religious beliefs are affirmed and validated through rituals that address the emotions which motivate the religion. This provides them with a kind of immunity against further scrutiny (Atran & Heinrich 2010). The reflective elaborations and learned content (such as ‘Jesus is the son of God’ or ‘God is love’) are not intuitive but rather learned propositions that have become a part of System 1.

In this regard, System 1 is not only composed of our evolved cognitive architecture but incorporates reflective beliefs (System 2), which have been habituated over time. Kahneman states that

...the main function of System 1 is to maintain and update a model of your personal world, which represents what is normal in it. The model is constructed by associations that link ideas of circumstances, events, actions, and outcomes that co-occur with some regularity, either at the time or within a relatively short interval. As these links are formed and strengthened, the pattern of associated ideas comes to represent the pattern of events in your life, and it determines your interpretation of the present as well as your expectations of the future.⁷

This entails that System 1 and System 2 processes are not independent of each other but are intertwined with multiple pathways and processes that function together and mutually inform one another. For example, emotional and affective aspects of cognition are considered to be System 1 processes (Evans 2008) which can influence other System 1 and System 2 processes; “when we are uncomfortable and unhappy we lose touch with our intuition” (Kahneman 2011: 68) as well as reasoning and decision-making processes (Frijda, Manstead & Bem 2000). Carmona-Perera et al. (2014) report that increased experiences of unpleasantness favor utilitarian choice patterns (see also Greene 2013). This is evident in moral evaluations associated with feelings of disgust, anger, sympathy and other affective states (Davies 2011; Prinz 2007). Pedestrian examples can also be readily seen in observations of various cultural cuisines and what is popularly considered to be morally abhorrent behavior. In this regard, while System 2 processes are certainly influenced by System 1 processes, it does not presuppose that System 1 is a static rigid system incapable of incorporating formulations from System 2. In this sense, to designate religious belief to one type of process would be mistaken. As Kahneman (2011) emphasizes, System 1 and System 2 are fictive constructions for heuristic purposes to facilitate an understanding of cognition. In other words, the two systems are “useful fictions” and just as there is no conscious or unconscious part of the brain, “there is no one part of the brain that either of the systems would call home” (29); “I do not intend to convince you that the systems are real” (77).

For the remainder of this article, I will focus on translating dual-process theory into a meaningful methodology for the study of religion within the context of lived experience, implicit biases, and forms of reasoning and decision-making processes that can account for the degrees of belief for participating in rituals.

5. Translating Dual-Process Theories with Belief and Acceptance

While dual-process theories have gained prominence in psychology and cognitive science, as well as behavioral economics, their translation into a viable methodology for the study of religion has been absent. This is not surprising given the difficulties involved with fieldwork (Engelke 2002) and drawing on empirical observations as the basis of establishing, what

⁷ Kahneman 2011: 71

Evans-Pritchard called, a “science of relations” by which religion is understood as a social, rather than metaphysical, fact (Engelke 2002 citing Evans-Pritchard 1965:111). The description of lived experiences and establishing sociological facts for the study of religion must also include the thoughts, attitudes, and embodiment of persons in relation to their respective cultural frameworks, concepts, and social structures; “we can never be sure we have fathomed the meaning and function of an institution if we are not capable of reliving its impact upon the individual consciousness” (Moscovici 1993: 14 citing Lévi-Strauss 1960). The textures and degrees of belief are then significant in understanding the impact of institutions and social structures, as well as how individuals – in their freedom and collective synchronicity of reproducing cultural modes of being – constitute the bases of sociological facts of religion. Here, I will argue that philosophical discussions in epistemology can assist in translating dual-process theories as a viable methodology for the investigation of belief in the study of religion.

One method of translating dual-process theories is to draw on an epistemological distinction between belief and acceptance (Frankish 2010). Not only does the distinction parallel dual-process theories but it has been helpful in pronouncing the degrees and textures of belief that provide nuance to language and behavior. In the philosophy of science, belief and acceptance was used by Bas van Fraassen (1980) to discuss the various attitudes to scientific theories. The distinction has been explicated further by Jonathan Cohen (1989) and since debated over the decades (Stalnaker 1984, 2000; Bratman 1992; Alston 1996; Pettit 1998; Engel 2000; Cohen 2000). The primary features by which this distinction has been made consists of the following: involuntary versus voluntary, context-independence versus context-relative, aim for truth versus no aim for truth (in this article, I expand upon this category to the broader parameters of ‘meaning’). Both belief and acceptance have been noted to be capable of inconsistency and may or may not produce behavioral expressions. In the following sections, I will map out these characteristics and address their possible criticisms through Needham (1972).

5.1 Voluntary versus Involuntary

The first point of comparison between belief and acceptance has been the difference in cognitive activity. Just as dual-process theories distinguish fast and automatic processes from slow and reflective processes, the belief-acceptance distinction discerns between involuntary and voluntary forms of cognition. What is fast and automatic is involuntary; they occur without voluntary deliberation. One does not deliberate that ‘the sky is blue’ or that ‘fire is hot.’ Involuntary associations and inferences can occur without our awareness and, more often than not, taken for granted. The involuntary character of belief, according to Cohen (1992), can be discussed in terms of consequential beliefs that arise from one belief to another such that the “the outcome is conceived of as being involuntary rather than a manifestation of obedience to principle” (23). For example, “once you come to believe that the driver ahead has lost control, you can’t help yourself believing that his car will crash.” In this sense, “beliefs are predicted or explained as resulting from the operations of relevant causal factors, such as sensory stimuli or the transmission of information” (23) and argued to be dispositional (Alston 1996: 7); beliefs are experiential phenomenon possessing a kind of immediacy rather than a thought process (5). Beliefs include feelings that are triggered when faced with a proposition, item, or stimulus, and stem from a disposition to consider things in a certain way, which are, in turn, more pronounced during reflection (again, System 1 and System 2 processes are inter-related). To reach one conclusion over another is due to an underlying disposition and a particular feeling, emotion, or affinity towards a proposition (Cohen 1992: 7; de Sousa 2008). Moreover, such dispositions or feelings are not excluded

from the socialization and enculturation process. The essentialization of gender or persons of color are based on socialized and enculturated heuristics, cognitive shortcuts, creating inferences of what *is* or what *ought* to be the case. In this regard beliefs, as an involuntary cognitive phenomena, include implicit biases and underlie variable reasons for participating in rituals.

In criticism, Needham (1972) dismisses, or rather sets aside, the view of belief as a disposition (103) and its emotional character (96) on the grounds of methodological difficulty. That is, they are unclear as a distinctive feature that could distinguish belief from other “inner states” (98). Searching for a particular emotional character, feeling, or tone that is particular to belief is a dubious endeavor. He notes that in a “confession of faith the tone may indicate, and be intended to indicate, reverence, humility or many another posture of the inner self” (95), however, this does not translate into a tone that can be a recognizable characteristic. Belief is not limited to the religious sphere nor would it be plausible to suggest that a religious belief in the Christian tradition would have a similar emotional character to a religious belief in the Buddhist or Hindu religious tradition. Even within a singular tradition, such as Christianity, there are variable emotions associated with religious beliefs within and across different denominations. Outside of the religious context, the emotions and feelings involved with religion will be different from a belief in, for example, a partner’s infidelity. In this regard, Needham argues, there is no particular emotion, feeling, tone that is specific to belief. He does note, however, that although there is no particular disposition or emotional character for belief, “there *is* a feeling associated with (actually, provoked by) a challenge to a belief” (96). This feeling is much more apparent when a significant belief, with a stronger commitment than other belief, is challenged (97); an observation that is corroborated by the phenomena of cognitive dissonance (Cooper 2007; Aronson 2008). In this sense, while Needham does not consider belief to have any specific emotional component he does observe that emotions are involved with belief. Needham argues a similar line of methodological difficulty with regard to our dispositions: “we know nothing directly, without the mediation of language, about any mental apparatus in connection with knowledge” (1972: 103). And because we cannot observe dispositions, it is a problematic characteristic for discerning belief.

Contrary to Needham’s analysis, although there is no particular emotion or disposition associated with religious belief it is sufficient to qualify *that* an involuntary element, including our affective dimensions, is involved with our intuitions and tendencies of attribution. A particular disposition, emotion, or feeling does not need to be identified. According to Ludwig Wittgenstein and Stuart Hampshire, and pursuant to System 1 processes, belief as a disposition entails durability and stability (1972: 104-105). This pertains to the second characteristic of belief, context-independence, which will be discussed in further detail below. Needham counters this point by noting the inconsistency of belief and its capacity to change over time. However, this contradicts a previous point by which he affirms a dispositional account in negating voluntariness as a characteristic of belief. He states, “after saying that I cannot believe, I suddenly assert ‘Yes, I can,’ I do not thereby switch from disbelief to belief, and I cannot by any firm intention alone bring myself to do so” (83). While it is certainly possible to reserve judgment, and entertain various propositions by suspending truth, Needham states, “we cannot suspend disbelief any more than we can procure belief within ourselves” (1972: 84; Engel 2000). One does not willfully believe that ‘pigs can fly’ unless imagined otherwise (see Luhrmann 2012 for discussion on ‘imagination’ and ‘belief’). In this regard, Needham affirms that beliefs are not voluntary acts of will but involuntary.

Needham is correct, however, to point out the issue of inconsistency. Congruent with System 2 type processes, epistemology introduces the notion of acceptance, which enables voluntary deliberation, inconsistency, and the capacity to change one's mind. By contrast to belief, acceptance is voluntary. It is here that we see additional degrees of belief and a variety of voluntary expressions, behaviors, and attitudes to propositions. Philosopher Robert Stalnaker (1984) distinguishes between passive and active forms of acceptance (which is problematic for reasons stated below). In the latter, 'truth' is suspended or bracketed. For example, a neutral third party who listens to both sides of a story or a judge who must listen to both the plaintiff and the defendant in the advocacy of their respective case will not immediately decide whether one side is 'true' or not but, technically, must suspend explicit judgment until both sides are heard. The judge will then deliberate upon the evidence, the reasoning of law, and rule in favor of one or the other. In other words, a proposition that was initially agnostically accepted is determined as true or false after reflection and methods of deliberation. In this regard, the truth claim of a proposition is the "product of [some form of] methodological decision" (Stalnaker 1984: 81). In other instances, it is "reasonable to *accept* something that one knows or believes is false" (91). For example, if one was playing a game with the premise that $2 + 2 = 5$, one can accept this premise and proceed with the game despite one's conventional understanding that $2 + 2 = 4$. In other words, there are instances when we can accept a false proposition as true for a particular context. This kind of acceptance has been called 'holding as true,' pertaining to cases when one holds a proposition *as if* it was true; it is possible to actively hold a proposition as if it was true despite one's understanding that it is not true. Another form of acceptance is the acceptance of a proposition without understanding the contents of the proposition (Ullman-Margalit & Margalit 1992). For example, if one stated that "multifunctional doxorubicin loaded superparamagnetic iron oxide nanoparticles are effective for chemotherapy" one may or may not accept this statement without understanding what it is that is effective for chemotherapy. Each of these cases illustrates an active and voluntary component to acceptance.

By contrast to active forms of acceptance, for Stalnaker, the adoption of propositions guided by a feeling, disposition, or habit, are passive acceptances. However, passively accepted propositions can also be considered as a form of active acceptance guided by underlying beliefs. In Godfrey Lienhardt's monograph, *Divinity and Experience* (1961), which discusses the "religion of the Dinka" of South Sudan, he documents several episodes of possession in a young man named Ajak. During one of these possession episodes, the local Dinka shout various suggestions for the cause of this possession: he has "the creator in his body," "a ghost in his body," or it was a "Power of his home" (59). Lienhardt accepts these as true statements about the beliefs of the Dinka. This passive acceptance, however, is guided by an underlying disposition to document the statements of a local culture and the assumption that such statements represent what the Dinka believe to be true. This 'passive' acceptance is then an active voluntary act guided by the underlying dispositions of a social scientist in the field. In this regard, what Stalnaker calls 'passive' acceptance can be considered as 'active' voluntary acceptances and that acceptances require an underlying dispositional belief.

Moreover, it is possible to accept a proposition without believing in that proposition. For example, during Lienhardt's analysis, he accepts the attribution of a supernatural power as the cause of possession but makes apparent that he believes the cause of Ajak's possessions were due to the distress from his father's death and the unresolved "breach" between them (57, 60, 62). This is further evidenced by Lienhardt's observation that the possessions stopped after Ajak participated in sacrifice rituals for "Divinity, his clan-divinity, and his father's ghost" with his clan and "since then had been well and at peace" (62). In

other words, Lienhardt accepted and ‘held as true’ that the Dinka attributed the cause of possession to such supernatural entities but believed that the actual cause of the possession was due to an enduring cognitive dissonance. This difference in Lienhardt’s analysis of possession further alludes to another difference between belief and acceptance, which is an ‘aim for truth’ – discussed further below. But first, it is useful to consider how the belief-acceptance distinction (as a translated utility of dual-process theory) extends into context: the when, where, and what. Not the specific content of when, where, and what but rather the extent to which those factors are relevant in whether one accepts or believes some thing or some proposition (perceptual and experiential content as well as linguistic expression).

5.2 Context-relative versus Context-independence

Distinguishing belief and acceptance on the basis of voluntariness or involuntariness can be extended further into their differences regarding context. Acceptance is considered to be ‘context-relative’ while belief is ‘context-independent.’ The dispositional and involuntary character of belief entails that propositional and behavioral expressions and the reception of information is ‘context-independent.’ Beliefs are maintained irrespective of context and the situation or circumstances one is placed in will not influence one’s embodied beliefs. If one believed in a Christian God or that state-sponsored violence is wrong, then that belief will persist irrespective of context. System 1 type processes are consistent propositional attitudes, behaviors, and cognitive heuristics by which persons navigate their realities. This necessitates a longitudinal and multi-contextual investigations for the study of belief.

System 2 type processes of acceptance are ‘context-relative.’ They are contingent and flexible from context to context. If one is voluntarily able to participate or not participate in a ritual, accept or not accept a proposition, one is also able to actively choose when or where to accept or not accept a proposition and engage in reflective activities. Like the $2 + 2 = 5$ game, some propositions may be relevant only to particular contexts (Bratman 1992; Stalnaker 1984). Another example would be household customs: in some households it is customary to take off one’s shoes before entering the home while this is not the case in others. Guests will then behave accordingly; one’s immediate context can influence the decision to accept a proposition. This was decidedly the case for E. E. Evans-Pritchard in his study of witchcraft among the Azande:

I have often been asked whether, when I was among the Azande, I got to accept their ideas about witchcraft. This is a difficult question to answer. I suppose you can say I accepted them; I had no choice. In my own culture, in the climate of thought I was born into and brought up in and have been conditioned by, I rejected and reject, Zande notions of witchcraft. In their culture, in the set of ideas I then lived in, I accepted them; in a kind of way I believed them. Azande were talking about witchcraft daily, both among themselves and to me; any communication was well-nigh impossible unless one took witchcraft for granted. You cannot have a remunerative, even intelligent conversation with people about something they take as self-evident if you give them the impression that you regard their belief as an illusion or a delusion. Mutual understanding, and with it sympathy, would soon be ended, if it ever got started. Anyhow, I had to act as though I trusted the Zande oracles and therefore to give assent to their dogma of witchcraft, whatever reservations I might have.... If one must act as though one believed, one ends in believing, or half-believing as one acts.⁸

⁸ Evans-Pritchard [1937] 1976: 244

Evans-Pritchard illustrates a case of ‘holding as true’ in order to excavate Azande beliefs in witchcraft. In this sense, it is possible to accept a set of propositions, without a belief in them, in a ‘context-relative’ manner. Singular episodes of observations are therefore inadequate for the discernment of belief.

5.3 No aim for truth versus Aim for truth/meaning

The epistemological literature further discerns belief from acceptance through an ‘aim for truth’; beliefs have an ‘aim for truth’ while acceptance does not necessarily have an ‘aim for truth.’ The inclusion of an ‘aim’ serves the purpose of situating belief within a personal subjective framework. The relationship between belief and a subjective commitment to truth is explored further in the 2012 issue of *Ethos*. Steven Carlisle and Gregory Simon state that,

...subjective commitments may be made to the truth of something’s existence, the truth of some proposition about the world or the nature of the self, the truth of someone’s or something’s abilities or the quality of relationship to oneself (and, thus, “trust” in those abilities or that relationship), or the moral truth of an orientation for living one’s life. These truths are not necessarily articulated as propositions agreed to by an individual, and may not even be consciously recognized as beliefs, but they nevertheless form part of an individual’s engagement with the world.⁹

In this regard, a personal commitment to truth presupposes an interactive model between individual persons as centers of “experience and agency” and the “sociocultural structures within which those individuals live” (2012: 223). This gives rise to the framework of ‘believing selves’ which contextualizes the individual and how various persons have problematized the concept of belief, and think through what it means to believe, in the midst of “many possible beliefs their worlds allow and their relationship to them” (223). Charles Lindholm (2012) discusses the various types of beliefs, which may or may not influence our daily lives, and the different ways of believing in these beliefs and their attitudes to truth.

An ‘aim for truth’ then constitutes a subjective commitment that attempts to account for the variability across cultural forms of truth and differing standards of evidence one may accept and/or believe. However, in epistemology, the distinction serves the purpose of discerning ‘correct beliefs’ whose contents are true (Stalnaker 1984: 40; Leeuwen 2014 – distinguishing factual belief from religious credence) from beliefs held contrary to evidence which are labelled as ‘irrational’ or ‘abnormal’ beliefs. Pascal Engel (2000) states that one “whose beliefs are not shaped by a concern for their truth, but by what she wants to be the case, is more or less a wishful thinker or a self-deceiver” (3). An example is a wife believing that “her husband is faithful to her, in spite of all the lipstick she regularly finds on his collars” or a “Pascalian who does not believe in God decides to believe in God when he is shown the immense advantages of eternal bliss provided by that belief” (4). This kind of labelling with regard to beliefs, however, is a discussion of epistemic norms and a value placed on standards of discerning facticity. The concept of ‘rational beliefs’ is subject to cross-cultural variations in what constitutes as ‘evidence,’ which entails a variability of what is legitimated or acknowledged. In other words, the qualification of ‘evidence’ and its interpretation makes normativity problematic; normative conceptions of what *should* or *ought* to be the case is also a belief. What one culture legitimates as evidence or an ‘aim for truth’ may not be considered to be a valid form of evidence in another. Furthermore, the term ‘truth’ can be substituted for ‘correct,’ ‘proper,’ or ‘right’ and includes what can be considered as moral beliefs. That is, an ‘aim for truth’ or no ‘aim for truth’ conflates the dichotomies between correct and incorrect,

⁹ Carlisle and Simon 2012: 223

proper and improper, and right and wrong. Notions of morality and various sets of ethics are not equivocal to notions of truth. This blends epistemic norms with moral norms. The ‘sky is blue’ is not the same kind of proposition as ‘killing is wrong.’ The former is a declarative descriptive statement of perception pertaining to ‘the way things are’ while the latter is a prescriptive normative statement about actions and justice relevant to ‘the way things should or ought to be.’ In this regard, an ‘aim for truth’ can be included within a broader category of an ‘aim for meaning’ which then incorporates both epistemic descriptive claims and normative prescriptive claims with an involuntary character of belief.

5.4 Verification, Commitment and Types of belief

Given the range of connotations ‘truth’ can have with regard to propositional statements, it is useful to consider the different types of belief discerned by “types of verification and degrees of commitment” provided by anthropologist Charles Lindholm (2012: 345). The first two examples, provided by Lindholm, are straightforward propositional attitudes. He states, “I believe that fire is hot” is an indisputable belief proven by immediate experience and “I believe that an ax is a tool for chopping” is a belief learned through “demonstration – or even intuited without instruction” (345). Both are beliefs that can be expressed through different propositional statements and committed to and verified directly from experience. The next two types, “I believe in gravity” and “I believe that the earth rotates around the sun,” are based on “expert evidence and collective consensus that can explain mundane reality” which rely on the “prestige of science” and “general consensus” – “ratified by authority” and “verified by experiment” (346). Another two effectively translate into opinions: “I believe that the bird I saw was a raven” and “I believe you left the light on.” These two examples are contestable beliefs. They are subject to external sources of verification and/or reliance on personal memory and experiential truth. However, unlike the universal characteristics of fire, the subjective truth of a memory can be denied or contested by the memory of others. Lindholm notes that it is in this area of belief where an “acute epistemological chasm” opens. The reliance on inner certainty has the potential to recede away from methods of legitimation by reference to collectively accepted facts; “whether universally felt or intuitively grasped, or ratified by authority, proven by scientific experiment, affirmed by general consensus, or confirmed by eyewitnesses” (347). This type of belief shifts toward a space of idiosyncrasy and unverifiability, which is also to say that they may be far from “the norms of agreed-on-reality.” This is also the case with belief where internal experiences of truth and certainty conflict with external reality, which is subject to various forms of legitimation and verifiability. Lindholm gives the example, “I am convinced that there is a universal conspiracy against me” – a case where personal certainties can conflict with “external reality” (345-348). The last type of belief is an example of what he calls ‘strong belief’ by which persons may state: “I believe God speaks to me and that I am his messenger.” Cases of ‘strong belief’ also include instances when others may recognize and accept such a statement from a charismatic leader as revelation and potentially accumulate fellow believers, acceptors, and followers. Such examples exist not only in Christianity and Islam, but also in Judaism, Buddhism, and smaller movements like the People’s Temple. It should be noted that this kind of belief is not limited to religion and can be seen in many other contexts. One example from the philosophy literature is the ‘jealous husband,’ which describes the case of a husband who suspects that his wife is having an affair without any supporting evidence. Shakespeare’s Othello is a similar case. Although manipulated by the antagonist Iago, Othello suspects his wife’s infidelity and ultimately kills the faithful Desdemona. Others have pointed to paranoid schizophrenics and their delusions of persecution as another example (Bortolotti 2010). This is not to suggest that all religious beliefs are ‘strong beliefs’, nor would it be plausible to

suggest that all religious beliefs are akin to delusions. Lindholm is merely pointing out that such instances of ‘strong belief’ exist within religious traditions.

Each of these beliefs can be considered across a Durkheim-Weber continuum. The Durkheimian camp is based on “affirmations of identity, emotional commitment, belonging, and authenticity within a sacred community” while the Weberian camp discusses the “effort to construct types of legitimated meaning systems that can confirm belief” (Lindholm 2012: 348). Lindholm notes that the two camps should not be understood as mutually exclusive or independent of each other. Rather, they are complementary and necessarily dependent on one another without lending primacy to one. Constructed types of legitimated meaning systems that confirm a belief as true require recipients who affirm and commit to those meaning systems for their efficacy and function as legitimizing and confirming systems. Conversely, the formation of identity and the embodiment of meaning presupposes various social structures which support various constructed systems of meaning independent of one’s existence or choice to abide by them or not. The relationship between identity and society entails a fluid dynamic of relational exchange rather than a singular format of belief maintenance. Lindholm acknowledges that the two camps for “inculcating belief” are limited and that a focus on one camp is necessarily supplemented by the other (353). The meaning-centered and externally verified model is supported by the emotional and internally substantiated model and vice versa.

As mentioned above, ‘an aim for truth’ is a subjective commitment on the Durkheim-Weber continuum which ranges from collectively accepted facts, “norms of agreed-on-reality,” to personal experiences of truth which may or may not be in conflict with “external reality.” The contrast between “there is a conspiracy against me” with what Lindholm qualifies as “external reality” is based on different methods of validation and legitimation by which ‘science’ is one form of epistemic authority. Ludwig Wittgenstein ([1931, 1979] 2002) comments on this in his essay, *Remarks on Frazer’s Golden Bough*, in which he critiques Frazer’s assumption that magic is a “false physics” because our understanding of physics is not the same as their understanding (89). This does not entail that the structures of their culture, religion, or tradition is any less meaningful or less significant for them. In other words, belief is not constricted by an ‘aim for truth’ but better served within the spectrum of an ‘aim for meaning.’

6. Belief and Acceptance as Methodology

For Needham, the methodological difficulties of discerning belief, in its many possible characteristics, entailed that the concept should be abandoned. However, the introduction of belief and acceptance gives further nuance to the different attitudes and performative dimensions of belief that previously obfuscated the category. Given the epistemological distinction, its parallels with dual-process theories, and the various degrees and textures of belief, how does this translate into a methodology for the study of belief? In other words, how does the combination of involuntariness, context-independence, and an aim for meaning (which includes an ‘aim for truth’) translate into the collection of evidence for the qualification of belief as opposed to acceptance? In the observation of persons at least two dimensions of evidence are of concern: language and behavior. Not only do the features of belief and acceptance pertain to the consistency of speech-acts and behavior but also to the inconsistencies within each of these categories of evidence as well as any discrepancies between them. The range of meanings and truths one may hold – which are “not necessarily articulated as propositions agreed to by an individual, and may not even be consciously recognized as beliefs, but they nevertheless form part of an individual’s engagement with the

world” (Carlisle & Simon 2012: 223) – and their behavioral expressions raise questions about inconsistency.

This issue has also been noted by anthropologist Martin Stringer (1996) in his discussion of a ‘situational theory of belief.’ During a discussion group in a traditionalist Anglican church the participants came upon the subject of death. A number of them noted the importance of holding a requiem mass – especially close relatives – which was clearly, to Stringer, an assumption making the inference that “a requiem mass would help those who had died to reach heaven.” However when the question of reincarnation was raised, the “tone and content of the conversation changed.” Stringer states that “practically all of those present” asserted the importance of reincarnation “for their own understanding of what would happen to them after death” (217). In other words, there was “one set of beliefs for those close to them” and another set for themselves; something which was not specific to Anglican churches but exhibited across Christian denominations (218).

Such inconsistencies can first be considered within the scope of acceptances. The characteristic features of voluntariness, context-relativity, and no necessary aim for truth enables the expression of inconsistencies and the compartmentalization of propositional attitudes (Stalnaker 1984: 80-81). In this regard, the different applications of an afterlife for one’s self and for those who are close to them are forms of acceptances and without additional evidence it is not possible to consider which, if either, is a belief or not. Similarly, because persons are capable of acting on various acceptances, inconsistencies will arise in behavior. This was the case for those who participated in *uma lulik* rituals for social or political reasons described above. Another example can be seen with the negotiation of beliefs among the Gwembe Tonga of southern Zambia discussed by Thomas Kirsch (2004). He notes how many will “move between the many Christian denominations of the area in search of healing by the Holy Spirit” (Lindquist & Coleman 2008: 10). The emphasis, he argues, is not on dogma or creed but “practical and experiential efficacy of individual practitioners and episodes of practice” (2008: 11). Hicks noted that, in the 1960s, “none of his Timorese informants – not even professed members of the [Catholic] Church – expressed any doubts” regarding the ‘existence’ of ancestral spirits. Even avowed Catholics would consult their village shamans (*matan do’ok*) and while they might attend Mass, they may still “give ritual offerings to ‘lords of the earth’ – nature spirits linked with specific localities in their countryside – without apparently feeling the least concern about intellectual contradiction or about how priests might interpret their conduct” (2008: 172-3). In this regard, religious premises can be accepted without a belief in them and still engage in practice grounded in different reasons and beliefs.

The task for the researcher, then, is to discern belief from acceptance in both language and behavior. The features of involuntariness and context-independence entail that beliefs can only be established by observing persons in multiple contexts and at different times. This pertains to the various propositions noted by Lindholm and the different kinds of propositional content about one’s self. In this regard, beliefs are consistently expressed in speech and behavior. However, discrepancies may arise between two consistently expressed propositions. In other words, it is possible to hold two beliefs that are contradictory or incongruent with one another. This could also may have been the case with the participants in Stringer’s discussion group. It is possible for those persons to simultaneously hold the beliefs: “I will be reincarnated when I die” and “[m]y friends and family will go to heaven when they die.” Other examples may include persons who claim to be ‘pro-life’ with regard to abortion but support the death penalty for convicted felons. One may believe that ‘killing is wrong’

but hold the view that ‘war is justified.’ As Needham mentions, different propositions may be related in different “logical correspondences” of the mind (1972: 74). Similarly, there are consistent behaviors which may be incongruent with one another. A series of examples can be observed with the cases of pedophile clergy, an environmentalist with investments in BP, a strict Drug Court judge with a cocaine habit, or an employer who attends equal rights rallies but patronizes women and discriminates against persons of color or different sexualities. The examples of discrepant behaviors are abundant and persons consistently doing something in one context and something else in another context are not difficult to find. Much like the inconsistencies of propositional statements, inconsistent behaviors may be due to the acceptance of discrepant propositions or discrepant beliefs. In this regard, a belief is consistently expressed in behavior and language but not precluded from being inconsistent with other beliefs or acceptances.

What is significant from Stringer’s observation of the discussion group is the seeming unawareness that these propositions were inconsistent (1996: 218). In other words, beliefs include ‘implicit biases’ and a distinction between implicit and explicit beliefs can be made. There are beliefs (System 1 processes) that are involuntary, context-independent, with an aim for truth and meaning, which are not consciously recognized as beliefs but nevertheless contribute to and “form part of an individual’s subjective engagement with the world” (Carlisle & Simon 2012: 223). By contrast, explicit beliefs are consciously recognized and exhibit the same characteristic features.

In this regard, the discernment of belief, from acceptance, must then be considered over time and multiple contexts. Abby Day reports such context-independence of beliefs in a follow-up study (from her 2011 publication of ‘believing in belonging’) of adolescents and young adults in North England. Out of 68 initial interviewees from 2003-05, she managed to revisit 38 of the white teenagers from middle to lower socio-economic classes in 2009-11 and formally interviewed 22 of them (2013: 279). In three examples, she shows how these individuals had not changed their ‘propositional beliefs’ (in this case, a metaphysical truth claim) but were reflective about other claims such as the Church’s stance on HIV-AIDS and contraceptives. In her interviews, it was evident that both beliefs and acceptances were being expressed. Beliefs continued to be consistent over time while other propositions were forms of acceptance and reflected upon without any commitment to their “truth” claim; they were context-relative. In other words, the involuntary character of belief as an automatic and fast System 1 process will emerge continuously and consistently. It is not necessary to configure a coherent systematic compilation of beliefs for any individual but sufficient to note that certain propositions and behaviors will be habitual in multiple contexts and over time. Longitudinal approaches are then necessary and the observation of propositions and behaviors should begin with the premise that they are context-relative, context-specific, forms of acceptance; emergent expressions of System 2.

Moreover, as noted with Needham’s analysis of emotions above, and its corroboration by research on cognitive dissonance, the observation of emotions and feelings are significant due to their indication that a belief is involved. While the specifically expressed content during an emotional episode may not be a belief, there is an underlying belief that enables the expression of that content. This includes what Day called ‘felt beliefs’ – grounded in our emotions and felt experiences – and ‘performative beliefs,’ which are the result of rituals, socialization/enculturation and “repeated to reinforce their salience and function” (2013: 287). In this regard, beliefs are not necessarily the result of an intellectualist endeavor in constructing a coherent and systematic understanding (although, as mentioned above, we

should not discount that thoughts and ideas born out of reflection can indeed become habituated propositions and behaviors over time) but rather the development of heuristics through one's socialization, enculturation, and subsequent embodiment, i.e. lived experience. Dual-process theories and the belief-acceptance distinction thereby call for a convergence of embodiment and cognition by which affective processes (also System 1 processes) and felt experiences contribute to justifications of propositions and behaviors just as externally legitimated sources become sufficiently justified references for personal use.

7. Conclusion

Clifford Geertz notes, with Evans-Pritchard, “what you see is what you get, deep reading is not encouraged” (Engelke 2002 citing Geertz 1988: 61). While the study of religion must go beyond descriptive practices, caution must be exercised in any “deep reading(s)” that considers the beliefs of persons. One enduring issue, specifically with the investigation of belief, has been the tendency to gather statements from individuals and reify a group as a singular entity to state in the third person: group X ‘believes’ Y. This form of generalizing belief to an entire group of people or culture has been noted by Dan Sperber (1997) to be a common cognitive process of folk psychology and continues to be discussed in contemporary scholarship (Boyer 2013). The assumption is that the generalized belief does indeed exist amongst individuals composing the collective and that behavior can indeed be explained by the proposed belief. This presumes a one to one relationship with belief and behavior and that those explicit statements of belief are indeed the reasons for ensuing behaviors and rituals. However, as mentioned, there are a myriad of reasons for action and participation. The inadequacy of language and formal statements is paramount. And yet, the study of religion lacks a more nuanced distinction and method by which the complexities of thought, language, and behavior can be considered in further depth. Propositional and performative dimensions have all been collapsed under the category of belief. This obfuscates the category and does not assist our investigations in “what people really believe” nor does it advance a “science of relations” and sociological facts by which the impact of institutions and various social structures influence persons in navigating their respective realities in a world of many possible truths.

In our endeavors to advance a “science of relations” or a “science of society,” as Durkheim states: we cannot deal with human groups “without in the end tackling the individual, the ultimate element of which these groups are composed. For society cannot constitute itself unless it penetrates the consciousness of individuals and fashions them ‘in its image and likeness’” (Durkheim [1914] 2005: 35). In considering this relationship between ‘society’ and individual cognition, this article argued that dual-process theories translated through belief and acceptance can be utilized to develop a more sophisticated understanding of belief as both a personal and social phenomenon. The concept of acceptance – indicative of System 2 processes – from the philosophical literature provides a conceptual tool to analyze propositional statements and behaviors that are non-committal and context-relative expressions. Moreover, the study of religion can utilize the concept of belief as indicative of System 1 processes to discuss embodied and extended forms of cognition as well as both implicit and explicit expressions of bias that require further attention and investigation of how religion as an institution and organizational social structure enables or disables such biases.

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