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Consequences for the Theory of Action and a
Pluralist Theory of Religion”

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Margolis's Critique of Bivalence and its Consequences for the Theory of Action and a Pluralist Theory of Religion

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In the following, I discuss Margolis's critique of bivalence and its consequences for ethics and the philosophy of religion. In particular, I reconstruct Margolis's views in section I, discuss his thesis of the link between alethics and ontology/epistemology in section II, draw out its moral consequences in section III, and demonstrate how it can be used to sketch a pluralist theory of religion in section IV.

I Margolis's Critique of Bivalence

1

At least, since his 1986 book "Pragmatism without Foundations. Reconciling Realism and Relativism" (see 56–8, 73–5, 99–100 et al.), Margolis has become famous for his defense of relativism. He uses the term "robust relativism" which will play an increasingly important role in his later work. In commenting on the difference between the kinds of relativism Quine and Goodman favor, he distinguishes "robust" from "radical relativism" (1986, 21–2). Although Margolis' use of the term "robust relativism" changes later slightly (see below), relativism is connected to truth-related concerns at this point already.

This relation of relativism to truth-related concerns is preserved in his systematic defense of relativism in his 1991 book "The Truth about Rela-

tivism". There, he calls relativism an *alethic* thesis. By this term, he means that it is "a thesis about the nature of truth or about constraints on the use of the values 'true' and 'false' or similar truth-like values"¹. Since it is on the *nature* of truth or its use, it is a *second-order* thesis. That is, it is not a first-order thesis on different ways to distribute truth-predicates over given phenomena. An example of the latter would be a theory of cultural relativity which emphasizes, say, cultural differences in distributing truth predicates. Margolis's relativism differs from theories of relativity of that sort by focusing on second-order, i.e. *metareflections* on truth rather than on first-order reflections concerning its actual use (and possible differences implied in it).

Margolis distinguishes between two different kinds of alethic relativism: In 1991, robust relativism is contrasted with relationalism. According to *relationalism*, truth-predicates are to be relativized to a particular language, perspective, or something along those lines. What are considered to be contradictions under conditions of bivalence, i.e. under the assumption that only the values 'true' and 'false' exist, can under relationalist auspices be reconciled with each other: What is considered to be true in language 1 does not necessarily have to be true in language 2. It may be false.

Margolis rejects relationalism for the well-known paradoxes it implies. It leads to self-referential inconsistencies since the relationalist must presuppose at least one *non-relational* proposition in order to get her theory off the ground, viz. the proposition that all truths are to be relationalized to a language. This proposition holds not only in the relationalist's language or perspective but in non-relationalist languages or perspectives as well.

Thus, the relationalist is confronted with a dilemma: Either she stops being relationalist when it comes to legitimizing her own relationalism. Or, else, she is relationalist all the way down—in which case she forfeits the basic legitimation for being relationalist.

Since relationalism is plagued by this problem, Margolis abandons it in favor of its alethic relativist alternative, *robust relativism*. This kind of relativism does not relationalize truth values but systematically *replaces the bivalent values with logically weaker truth values or truth-like values*:

¹ Margolis, 1991, 7. Later, he explains the alethic domain to be concerned with the "choice, assigned meaning, and formal constraints on the use of truth and truth-like values" (Margolis, 1995, 66).

...[W]here, on the bivalent model, logical inconsistency or contradiction obtains, now, on the replacement model and in accord with appropriate relevance constraints, such logical incongruences (as we may call them) need no longer be treated as full logical inconsistencies, incompatibilities, contradictions, or the like.

Margolis 1991, 8; original italics

Those weaker truth values are *many-valued as a matter of principle*, i.e. not only as a concession to contingent circumstances, such as a temporary lack of evidence. This being the case, they are principally different from probabilistic values which remain committed to the bivalent ideal (c.f. Margolis, 1991, 9).

I understand this to mean that probabilism is not excluded on a priori grounds, according to Margolis's robust relativism. Where appropriate, probabilistic values may be applied. Yet, his point is that they should not be squeezed into the straitjacket of a bivalent ideology. Probabilism is not a convenient way to avoid acknowledging the reasons that speak in favor of abandoning bivalence (see below). This being the case, probabilism can be applied *within* the parameters of a many-valued logic.

Margolis does not criticize bivalence as such but only its alethic monopoly. It should not be applied universally. He does not then suggest abandoning bivalence but, rather, that in certain domains of inquiry it should be replaced by a many-valued logic.

This many valued-logic embraces values such as 'undecidable' or 'indeterminate'. Margolis's point is that the indeterminacy involved is not just an emergency measure, say, caused by a temporary lack of cognitive capabilities, to be remedied by further research. Rather, his point is that the distribution of truth values is indeterminate as a matter of principle *because of the nature of the objects* at stake: Certain objects are of such a kind that the values 'true' and 'false' cannot be reasonably applied to propositions pertaining to those objects.

...[T]here is a run of phenomena—events and particulars—that 'have natures' that intrinsically include complex *intentional* properties, such that those natures or features are vague or indeterminate enough to invite incongruent judgments regarding what they are, or such that their natures and properties are so alterable by interpretation alone that incongruent judgments cannot be avoided in specifying them. The principal site of such phenomena is, of course, the world of human culture—artworks, actions, histories, the psychological nature of persons, institutions, theories, practices, and whatever is similarly

affected when colored by cultural interests (even the schemes for individuating natural phenomena, for instance). Margolis, 1991, 20–1²

Certain "events and particulars" have thus intentional³ properties which are intrinsically complex to such an extent that a bivalent logic has to give way to a many-valued logic. In addition to the "world of human culture", other phenomena come to mind, such as (certain interpretations of) quantum theory: Given that the "nature" of the phenomena at stake cannot be construed as being logically independent from the observer's point of view according to those interpretations, they are prime candidates for being "alterable by interpretation alone" so "that incongruent judgments cannot be avoided in specifying them".

In sum, there is a range of phenomena which belong to domains of inquiry in which bivalence has to give way to a many-valued logic.

2

How does Margolis's critique of bivalence relate to comparable points of view, such as Michael Dummett's? Dummett rejects "the semantic principle of bivalence", viz. that "every statement is true or false". The reason for his rejection involve scruples concerning the question of decidability regarding determinate statements (Dummett, 1978, xxviii–xxix).

Yet, Dummett distinguishes between bivalence and the "law of excluded middle" or *tertium non datur*. The latter implies that no statement is neither true nor false. Dummett preserves the latter in spite of having sacrificed bivalence. He suggests that—once the question of decidability is answered positively—*tertium non datur* holds. He explains that for no statement "can we *ever* rule out both the possibility of its being true and that of its being false, in other words, the principle that there can be no circumstances in which a statement can be recognized as being, *irrevocably*, neither true nor false" (Dummett, 1978, xxx; emphasis mine). Margolis criticizes Dummett by taking up the issue of decidability. He provides the example of Clerk Maxwell who thought that the question of the velocity of light is indeterminable, thus that the velocity of the ether is undecidable.

² Other domains include more specifically "literary and art criticism, . . . the interpretation of history, . . . moral, legal, and prudential matters, and wherever explanatory theories are thought to be radically underdetermined in principle" (Margolis, 1991, 20).

³ In his later writings, Margolis combines intentional with intensional under the heading "Intentional" (uppercase I; see e.g. Margolis, 2010, 34) which has become something of a trademark of his thinking (see e.g. Aili W. Bresnahan, How Artistic Creativity is possible for Cultural Agents, in this volume).

But shortly thereafter Michelson invented a procedure for observing a signal of light on the earth by which to study its motion, and he did indeed calculate its velocity. Now, did light *have* a determinate velocity at the very moment Maxwell thought the question undecidable? It seems difficult to deny that it did... Margolis, 1991, 45

This example draws on a point Margolis had raised in "Pragmatism without Foundations" (1986, 118–23) already, viz. that focusing on decidability is vacuous unless indexicalized: Unless we come up with reasonable time-constraints and related considerations, telling us that something is not undecidable as a matter of principle is not telling us very much. And the same holds for Dummett's promise that nothing is "irrevocably neither true nor false". In the absence of reasonable time-constraints, decidability or effective decidability has no operational value. Margolis thus shows that Dummett's confidence in *tertium non datur* is misplaced. It shares the same fate as bivalence does: It has to be abrogated—at least, its universal pretensions have to be abrogated.⁴

Yet, although Margolis's 1991 critique of Dummett resembles his 1986 critique, its purpose changes. In 1986, Margolis' critique of *tertium non datur* was directed primarily against one particular tenet in Dummett's approach, viz. against Dummett's treatment of the realism/anti-realism issue. From 1991 onwards, though, Margolis puts this critique in the service of more comprehensive purposes: He argues now against all attempts to fix alethic considerations in abstraction from considerations on the objects at stake. He suggests now that "decisions about the logic of any inquiry are not unconditionally *a priori* to that inquiry... They are instead internal to and part of the cognitively pertinent characteristics of the domain itself" (1991, 42).

This point is of crucial relevance to Margolis's approach. He insists that the alethic question concerning whether we are capable of distributing bipolar truth values over pertinent statements cannot be answered satisfactorily without taking into account the nature of the objects at stake. Thus, Margolis's point is that *alethic considerations cannot be fixed indepen-*

⁴ See Margolis, 1987, 7. I agree in principle but would like to restrict this critique explicitly to questions of operationalizability: Unless indexicalized, Dummett's insistence on *tertium non datur* is pointless for operational purposes (as will become clear below, in section 5). Yet, in other respects, this insistence may make a difference. For example, if we muse about the metaphysical structure of the world, human cognitive capabilities, etc., the promise that no statement "can be recognized as being, irrevocably, neither true nor false" may have some payoff.

dently from ontological considerations. I call this point Margolis' rejection of alethic *a priori*ism.'

The rejection of alethic *a priori*ism is a thread which runs through Margolis' later works as well. For example, in his "Historied Thought, Constructed World" from 1995, he holds that "the choice of truth values... assigned... to any sector of inquiry is a function... of what we take the nature of the domain in question" (65) to be. This choice is thus conceptually linked to the domain in question and the ontological characteristics of the objects of which it consists.

Furthermore, the question what sort of truth values to apply is not only dependent upon the nature of the objects at stake but, also, upon how we are able to access them. Thus, ontology and epistemology determine the alethic choice. In "What, after all, is a Work of Art" from 1999, Margolis goes even so far as to declare that alethic, ontic, and epistemic considerations are "no more than distinct aspects of a single indivisible inquiry" (45). In sum, *Margolis rejects alethic a prioriism in favor of alethic a posteriorism.*

Margolis's account as described above, i.e. what he calls "relativism"⁵, can thus be summarized by two main theses:

First, a rejection of alethic *a priori*ism in favor of alethic *a posteriori*ism. He suggests that our reflections on truth are not conceptually independent from what we think reality to be like in a given domain of inquiry and how we think we are able to access it.

Second, given alethic *a posteriori*ism, he suggests that bivalence should be abandoned in certain domains of inquiry in favor of a many-valued logic.

In the following, I will comment on both theses: In section II, I will take up alethic *a posteriori*ism, in sections III and IV, I will draw out the consequences of abrogating insistence on bivalence into ethics and philosophy of religion.

⁵ Although I follow Margolis' critique of bivalence and his thesis of the link between alethics and ontology/epistemology, I do not follow him on his use of the label 'relativism'. The critique of bivalence and this link can be had without using this provocative label.

II The Link between Alethics and Ontology/Epistemology

3

I will begin my discussion of alethic *a posteriorism* through what I view as a useful detour, viz. by discussing *semantic issues*. By "semantic considerations (issues)" I mean the activity of representing reality in language or some other form of expression.

It is hard to deny that semantic considerations are conceptually dependent upon ontic and epistemic ones. Our ability to represent reality depends upon what aspects of reality are at stake and how we think we have access to them. Whether the phenomena under consideration are middle-sized physical objects or foundational physical ones, quantum-mechanical phenomena, objects of art, religious ones, etc. makes a difference in the way in which we regard ourselves as capable of representing them.

And the same goes for the way in which we conceive ourselves to be capable of accessing the phenomena under consideration: Whether we are direct realists, anti-realists, choose a middle-position between both extremes, are realists with regard to some aspects of reality but not to others—say, realists with regard to middle-sized physical objects but not with regard to religious phenomena—affects the way we conceive ourselves to be capable of representing the reality at stake.

Let me provide an example which may seem to be rather exotic at first glance but will help to make this dependency clear: Karl Barth, one of the foremost Protestant theologians of the 20th century, suggests that there is an infinite distance between God and human beings. Given God's transcendence and human sinfulness, there is no way from humanity to God. God can thus not be cognized by humans and cannot be represented adequately in human language (Barth 1958, 200vv).

My point is obviously not that those presuppositions about God and his cognitive (in)accessibility are true but rather, that *if* you presuppose ontic and epistemic assumptions of this sort, it cannot but have consequences for the semantic realm. If you presuppose that God is radically transcendent, that human beings are cognitively incapable to grasp this radically transcendent God and that there is no relationship between this God and humanity, you will necessarily have to raise doubts about the capability of human language to represent the transcendent state of affairs in an adequate fashion. My contention is thus that there are conceptual linkages between the semantic realm and the ontic and epistemic realms.

Yet, I do not suggest the existence of one-to-one relationships between those realms. For example, Barth draws from the above mentioned ontic and epistemic assumptions the consequence that, since humans cannot cognize God, God can only be cognized by God himself.⁶ Others may simply draw the consequences that it is impossible to represent God adequately in human terms and suggest that this is precisely the reason why we shouldn't try. Still others will acknowledge that but will claim an exception for certain forms of knowledge, mostly *immediate* ones, which allow for some kind of mystical perception of the transcendent. Still others will hold that the transcendent can indeed not be cognized and represented adequately but that it fulfills *transcendental* functions and, thus, although not being cognizable, must be *postulated* in Kant's sense.

Thus, the onto-epistemic⁷ presuppositions do not fully determine the semantic choices made. The question what sort of semantic choices are made precisely depends thus upon the background assumptions held: Coming from his background assumptions, the Barthian chooses different semantic options than somebody coming from atheist or agnostic background assumptions, and the mystic and Kantian will make different semantic choices as well. Thus, onto-epistemic presuppositions do not fully determine semantic considerations. Yet, they determine them to a significant extent. For example, coming from Barths' presuppositions it would be impossible to suggest that humans are capable of representing the transcendent reality in a straightforward, direct fashion. In sum, *onto-epistemic considerations determine semantic ones* to a significant extent.

4

Where does the insight that onto-epistemic considerations determine semantic ones to a significant extent leave us with regard to our initial question concerning alethic *a posteriorism*? I think that it does not definitely settle the question but goes a long way towards providing a reasonable answer. The reason is that, once we acknowledge that semantic

⁶ See Barth, 1958, 200. This is for Barth a convenient way to introduce Jesus Christ as the God through whom true knowledge of God can be acquired. His "solution" is to substitute the Cartesian "cogito" with a "cogitor", a "being recognized" from God's side. The human task consists only in following epistemically and semantically that which has been made possible by the "cogitor" (Barth suggests the term "*Erkenntnisgehorsam*" in this context; see Grube, 2008, 120–4).

⁷ For the purposes of this paper, "onto/epistemic" serves as a summary term including the ontic and epistemic realms which are to be distinguished from the semantic and alethic realms.

considerations are conceptually depend upon ontic and epistemic presuppositions, it is natural to suggest that alethic ones are dependent in a similar fashion.

Let me formulate that point more precisely:—If it is acknowledged that our capability to represent reality adequately is conceptually dependent upon what we think the reality at stake to be like and how we are able to access it—and hold that the rationale behind alethic issues is some kind of semantic relationship since the notion of truth is intimately linked with the activity of representing reality⁸ it would be counterintuitive to suggest that our conceptualizations of truth have nothing to do with onto/epistemic considerations. Thus, the most obvious conclusion is that since onto-epistemic considerations affect the semantic realm, they must affect the alethic realm as well. Thus, alethic *a priori*ism should be rejected in favor of alethic *a posteriori*ism.

The above argument does not provide a knock-down case against alethic *a priori*ism. Yet, it makes clear where the burden of proof lies: It lies with him who rejects alethic *a posteriori*ism in favor of alethic *a priori*ism. Thus, the above argument shows that the burden of proof rests upon the shoulders of the person claiming that how we conceptualize truth is independent from how we think to be capable of representing reality. He⁹ must provide reasons why he thinks that our alethic considerations should be construed in abstraction from our semantic plus onto/epistemic considerations. Unless he provides those arguments, we have good reason to believe in alethic *a posteriori*ism.

⁸ I presuppose here that the basic rationale behind the discussion of the notion of truth lies in the human need to orient oneself properly in one's environment and to use this orientation as a foundation for action. *This* is the reason why representing reality is important. This importance lying at the roots of the notion of truth is independent from the issue of its *definition*: It is not linked to a correspondence theory of truth nor any other definition of it. It is even consistent with the rejection of all attempts to provide a definition of truth—as long as the basic rationale mentioned is maintained (which e.g. Richard Rorty fails do to so that his musings on truth are ultimately pointless).

⁹ I use the male pronoun deliberately because I think that insistence on bivalence is related to a certain ideal of "masculinity": There *must* always be a truth to the matter because if there weren't we would not be in control of things but would have to admit being uncertain—and losing control and admitting uncertainty is what a "good man" seeks to avoid at all costs. However, here I will not delve into that issue more deeply—nor into Margolis' account of how the fear of what (he calls) relativism is related to fears about reality having a variant rather than invariant structure, admitting the flux of history, thus, contingency, etc. (see 1991, xi–xvi). Let it suffice here to say that I reject the search for invariant structures as much as I reject this ideal of "masculinity".

Embracing *a posteriorism* implies giving up all universal alethic pretensions. Above all, we have to give up a principled insistence on bivalence. Rather, we have to look at the ontological characteristics of the objects at stake and their epistemic accessibility and make the question whether or not to insist on bivalence dependent upon those onto/epistemic presuppositions.

In the following sections, I will further investigate what consequences giving up a principled insistence on bivalence has for the theory of action (III) and the philosophy of religion (IV).

III Bivalence and Action

5

In the philosophy of arts, the moral significance of our alethic choices is usually very limited. At least, under normal circumstances, making wrong alethic choices in the arts will be considered only to be imprudent or something along those lines but not to be morally irresponsible.

Yet, there are realms of inquiry in which making wrong alethic choices is morally highly relevant. Examples are some of the realms of inquiry Margolis mentions under the heading "Intentional" (see above, section 1). They belong predominantly to the domain of the human sciences. In the following, I would like to make a case which belongs to the domain of *nature* and in which making wrong alethic choices is morally highly relevant. In my view—which is not at all at odds with Margolis'—there exist certain objects of inquiry which are not susceptible to bivalent treatment and where insistence on bivalence has morally dubious consequences. I will explain the basic features of those objects of inquiry first in this section before demonstrating why insistence on bivalence is harmful in those cases in the next section.

Within the realm of nature, there are cases which are highly complex because they consist of a significant number of sub-phenomena which are contested or of sub-phenomena which inter-react with each other to such an extent that, given our current knowledge, the consequences of this inter-reaction are difficult to predict. An example is the question whether the current changes of global weather patterns¹⁰ are caused predominantly by an increase of CO₂ and other pollutants. The statement

¹⁰ I mean the phenomenon of "global warming". Yet, since this term and its implications are sometimes contested, I use the more neutral "changes of weather patterns" or simply "weather-changes".

that they *are* predominantly caused by this increase is an example of a statement on highly complex cases. Given our current knowledge, we are incapable of distributing the bipolar pair of truth values over it.¹¹

Within the set of highly complex cases over which we cannot distribute the bipolar pair of truth values, there are some where we can 'wait and see'. These are cases in which not much is at stake. An example may be the question whether extraterrestrial life exists. At least, under normal circumstances—i.e. unless it is assumed that this life exists and e.g. threatens all life on earth—the answer to this question satisfies our curiosity but does not possess a significant existential relevance. In this case, it is reasonable to suggest that we should 'wait and see' with providing an answer until we do know the truth (if ever).

Yet, there are other instances within the set of highly complex cases where we *cannot* apply the 'wait and see' -maxim. These are instances in which we have to take action one way or the other and cannot wait too long with it. I will call them '*burning issues*' in the following.

The question of the changes of the weather patterns is an example of such a burning issue. The reason is that if we fail to take action, the exhaustion of CO₂ and other pollutants will continue and if they are indeed predominantly responsible for the changes of the weather patterns, those patterns will change further. The result will be that the living conditions on the earth will seriously deteriorate—or, according to some scenarios, life on our planet will become next to impossible for large numbers of people.

This is not to suggest that the weather-changes *are* predominantly caused by the increase of those pollutants. Yet, it is to suggest that the uncertainty on the issue does not relieve us from our obligation to act. The reason is that failure to act implies having made a decision on the issue already. That is to say, if we fail to act, the status quo will be prolonged and CO₂ and other pollutants will be continued to be emitted. Yet, this is morally legitimate only under the provision that they are not predominantly responsible for the weather changes. If, however, they *are* predominantly responsible for those changes and we fail to reduce them,

¹¹ Being very concerned with environmental issues, I would like to point out that there is sufficient evidence suggesting a causal connection. The claim that this is not the case is unwarranted (see e.g. Roser/Seidel, 2013, 9). Yet, the *extent* to which the changes of our weather patterns are caused by the increase of pollutants is contested (see *ibid.*). Thus, the question whether they are *predominantly* caused by this increase is currently undecidable to my knowledge.

we act in a morally highly reputable fashion since this failure is the cause of the deterioration of the living circumstances on earth.¹²

In sum, there exist highly complex cases whose truth is difficult if not impossible to decide. Some of those cases are "burning issues", meaning that we cannot wait for too long with taking action on them one way or the other. In the next section, I will analyze how this feature is related to making alethic choices.

6

Truth and (the provision of reasons for) action are obviously related to each other. The relation is complex, though, and I will not discuss it extensively here. Let it suffice for our current purposes to suggest that it is intuitively clear that holding the statement x to be true is action-relevant for many kinds of x : Given that x is specified in a relevant fashion, say, as the statement that a particular individual is responsible for the Lockerbie bombings, x is undoubtedly action-relevant.¹³

Given this link between truth and action, insistence on bivalence can have morally very questionable consequences. It can be used as a *license for inaction*. The reasoning to that effect can be made as follows: "Truth provides reasons for action. In a given case, y , however, we are incapable of distributing the bipolar pair of truth values over y . Since we are incapable of determining y 's truth and truth provides reasons for action, we fail to have reasons to act." I will summarize this reasoning by the maxim '*no bivalent truth, no action*'.

The '*no bivalent truth, no action*'-maxim may be prudent in some cases, such as e.g. highly complex cases for which the '*wait and see*'-maxim is applicable (say, that of the existence of extraterrestrials; see above, 5). Yet, in other cases in which '*burning issues*' are at stake, it is very imprudent. Using the link between truth—i.e. the capability to distribute the bipolar pair of truth values over a given statement—and

¹² I neglect here suggestions which are prominent in the US, viz. to invent climate engineering-measures, such as introducing "Carbon Dioxide Removals" on a grand-scale (see e.g. Roser/Seidel, 2013, 36–42). All I wish to say here on the issue is that, even if we believe in their success and the insignificance of their side-effects, it may still be necessary to reduce pollution.

¹³ My point is *not* that x is a foundation for action in any foundationalist sense of the word. The foundation of action is some kind of moral framework. Yet, within almost all moral frameworks, what we hold to be true in this case makes a difference with regard to the particular course of action to be taken: If we hold that individual to be responsible for the bombing, we will treat him differently than as if we hold him to be irresponsible for it.

action as a legitimation for inaction means falling back on the default status. Falling back on this status means *de facto*—i.e. independently from whatever intentions are involved—prolonging the *status quo*. Yet, as indicated above, prolonging the *status quo* as a means to avoid taking action is imprudent or morally irresponsible in case ‘burning issues’ are at stake.

Furthermore, there is also the risk that a bivalent conception of truth can be put into the service of morally reputable intentions: The link between truth-construed-along-bivalent-lines and action has a history of being (ab)used for questionable purposes. This history goes back, at least, to the days when the statement that smoking causes cancer was considered to be still under dispute. That is to say, the maxim ‘no bipolar truth, no action’ can be easily abused as a blank check for legitimizing reputable economic, political, and related purposes.

Thus, people benefiting from the *status quo* can use this maxim for their purposes. For example, the person who benefits from exhaustion-intensive production-processes can use it for his purposes: ‘Since we do not know for sure that the climate changes are predominantly caused by the exhaustion of CO₂, we should not take action on the exhaustion of CO₂—or should not take action as strongly as if we would know’.¹⁴ Another example is the first-worlder who thinks that it is not worth sacrificing part of his wealth for measures against global warming because it will not affect him anyway¹⁵: Both can abuse the maxim ‘no bivalent truth, no action’ for their morally doubtful purposes.

¹⁴ Most current environmental ethicists suggest that we *do* know that the climate change is human-made (see Roser/Seidel, 2013, 9). Although I sympathize with their goals, I find their reasoning questionable at times. For example, when they suggest that it is *scientifically proven* that the reputation of those who dispute those claims is ‘*signifikant schlechter*’ (ibid.), significantly worse, I am worried about the (ab)use of the notion of science as an instrument of power to silence deviating voices. After the insights on science and its abuses as instruments of power which were developed by Thomas Kuhn, Michel Foucault and others, we should be very careful with such crudely scientific presumptions. Positions such as that of Roser/Seidel have to retreat to such crude scientist measures because they have deprived themselves of the resources to handle the problem of deviating voices in a more responsible fashion. Below, I will provide an argument for enriching our argumentative resources by pointing to mechanisms which allow to take rational action under conditions of uncertainty and thus allows to deal with the problem of deviating voices in a more responsible fashion.

¹⁵ The consequences of global warming will be more serious for poorer countries than richer ones. The reason is that the richer countries will be better capable to protect themselves against the rise of the sea level, the floods resulting from it, and other comparable consequences. But apart from the question whether first-world countries will really remain unaffected in the long run—think e.g. of increase in migrations from more affected to less affected countries—it is obviously morally questionable to contribute to the misery of the disadvantaged in order to increase or maintain one’s level of wealth.

Given '*abusus non tollit usus*', I do not suggest that this critique provides a knock-down argument against bivalence. The possibility that it can be abused does not categorically rule out the possibility of its proper use. Yet, it increases the burden of proof on the shoulders of its defender. As indicated above (see 4), the defender of bivalence must carry the burden of proof, not its critic. That being the case and given the above argument for its potential to be abused easily, the defender must provide even stronger arguments for a principled insistence on bivalence.

At some point, the defender of bivalence should ask himself whether the burden of proof is so heavy that defending a principled insistence on bivalence is too strenuous (if not hopeless). He should ask himself whether it is not wiser to devote his energies to more promising endeavors, such as developing mechanisms for rational decision-making under uncertainty. I will make a suggestion for that below.

7

Fears about admitting contingency, a certain concept of masculinity (see above, f. 9), and probably a number of other phenomena¹⁶ have contributed to implant the belief of the universal applicability of bivalence in modern men (and women). Yet, I would like to suggest that we should follow Margolis in being skeptical about its universal applicability. We should be prepared to admit that, given certain objects of inquiry, we are not capable of distributing the bipolar pair of truth values over them and will probably not be able to do so in the foreseeable future. These are cases in which we are either uncertain on the truth of those statements as a matter of principle—as is presumably the case concerning statements on arts—or cases in which the probabilities available are so low that they do not warrant the ascription of the predicates 'true' or 'false'—as is the case with statements on highly complex phenomena, such as that of the CO₂ pollution being the cause of the current weather-changes. If those statements are in addition also 'burning issues', we should reject the insistence on the bipolar pair of truth values.

We should rather follow Margolis' proposal to retreat to a many-valued logic in those cases. This logic admits the possibility of there being a third value (or even more than three values, if required). This value can be specified as 'objectively indeterminate', 'indeterminate to the best of our current knowledge' or in a similar fashion.

¹⁶ For example, the success of computer technology, being based upon bivalent presuppositions.

The point of retreating to a many-valued logic can be brought out in a comparison with comparable suggestions, such as Putnam's notorious introduction of the Polish Logicians' insistence on "mereology": Their point is that not only physical objects are candidates for being individuals but also "the calculus of parts and wholes"¹⁷. Putnam emphasizes that in order to point out that the notions of 'object' and 'existence' have a multitude of meanings. The "idea that there is an Archemidean point from which the question "'How many objects *really* exist?'" makes sense is an illusion"¹⁸. Putnam presses this point into the service of his well-known critique of metaphysical realism in the name of an internal realism.¹⁹

Insofar as Putnam's internal realism is more than a purely semantic affair, i.e. moves in a pragmatist direction, I think that he is on the right track. Yet, I would like to emphasize more strongly than Putnam does that the introduction of a many-valued logic has at its purpose the recognition of the *limits of logics*. That is to say, my point is not primarily to suggest that logic is relative in some sense but, rather to suggest that the invocation of the value 'indeterminate' serves as an invitation to go *extra-logical*. Distributing this value over a given statement implies to (at least, consider seriously the possibility to) *move beyond the logical realm into the pragmatic realm*.

By 'pragmatic realm' I mean for our current purposes resources which go beyond syntactic logical and semantic truth-related questions and have to do with developing mechanisms which regulate action. More precisely speaking, I think of *decision-theoretical* and related action-regulating resources. My point is thus that in cases in which the value '(objectively) indeterminate' is distributed over a statement (or set of related statements), we should consider developing decision-theoretical and related mechanisms which help us to act in a rational and morally responsible fashion.

In order to avoid a possible misunderstanding at the outset, let me point out here that I do *not* mean cost-effectiveness or cost-benefit²⁰ analyses nor anything of that sort by 'decision-theory'. Rather, I think of '*rules of wisdom*' which help us make rational decisions under (a significant amount of) *uncertainty*. One such mechanism would be the example of a rule to proceed as cautiously as possible under conditions of (a significant amount of) uncertainty and where much is at stake.

¹⁷ Putnam, 1989 (174).

¹⁸ Putnam, 1989 (175).

¹⁹ See (Putnam, 1981, 49–56) and Honenberger's contribution in this volume.

²⁰ See for the difference between both e.g. Marc McCarthy, 1985 (333–6).

There has been quite some discussion on rules of this sort²¹ and they would certainly need to be specified in order to be helpful for guiding action in the case of the weather changes.²² But whatever the outcome of that specification is: My point is that we will potentially benefit from invoking decision-theoretical and related pragmatic resources. Going extra-logical in this fashion will provide us with *additional resources* for determining reasons for action in a rational and morally responsible manner once our bivalent logical resources are exhausted.

My prime concern lies with securing the possibility of invoking pragmatic resources of the kind suggested when our bivalent logical resources are exhausted. That is, I wish to avoid the (ab)use of bivalence as a license for inaction and suggest that action and the provision of reasons for it should be secured along different than strictly logical lines, where necessary.

To *that* end, I suggest to introduce the third value '(objectively) indeterminate': Distributing this value over a given statement (or set of related statements) is meant to be an invitation to go extra-logical. Thus, I suggest to use *intra*-logical considerations, viz. the introduction of a third truth value as replacing the bipolar pair, as a springboard for pragmatics.

At least, in principle, the introduction of the extra-logical, pragmatic dimension can be secured via a different strategy as well. This strategy consists in insisting on bivalence but admitting at the same time that its *applicability* is restricted. A defender of this strategy can reject the suggestion to introduce a third truth value and insist on bivalence and at the same time admit that this insistence is incapable of handling cases such

²¹ I think e.g. of John Rawls' famous theory of justice (see 1971, in particular, pp. 152–3, the discussion of the "maximin rule", i.e. the rule to choose under uncertainty in such a way that even the worst possible outcome of our choice is still acceptable) and critiques of it, such as David Wong's (1986, 147–8).

²² Rawls's theory of justice and this case differ in significant respects. For example, the person having to decide on questions of the distribution of economic goods under Rawls's 'veil of ignorance' is predominantly affected *herself* from her decisions. Yet, in the case of the weather changes, all humanity (including future generations) is potentially affected. Thus, moral issues enter into the discussion over and above prudential ones. This being the case, the argument that 'maximin's' acceptance depends upon the psychological make-up of the chooser—a gambler by nature will be inclined to take more risks than a more cautious person—loses much of its relevance. In the case of the weather changes, the gambler is not only affected herself from her decisions but other people are affected as well, among them many who are thus far marginalized anyway. Considering this should make her more careful in following her inclination to accept high risks. Differences such as this one would have to be taken into account when applying 'maximin' to the case of the weather changes.

as highly complex, 'burning issues', Intentional phenomena (in Margolis's sense) and a whole range of other cases.

Although both strategies are conceivable in principle, I have doubts about the latter strategy. The reason is that insistence on bivalence has a 'questionable record' in my view. Historically, this insistence has been (ab)used for immunizing logics from critique rather than to acknowledge its limits—and, by extension, as a convenient means to avoid acknowledging the limits of using syntactical resources and the necessity to augment them with pragmatic ones. For example, the admittance of '*truth value gaps*'²³ has been used in the history of philosophy as a means to neutralize critical questions concerning its universal applicability rather than to admit that we should augment logical with extra-logical resources in order to maintain our capability for rational action and decision-making.

Thus, a principled insistence on bivalence does not necessarily undermine our capability for rational action. When coupled with an acknowledgement of the limits of its applicability, it does not necessarily do so. Yet, this acknowledgement is all too easily 'overlooked' and 'overlooking' it can be put into the service of some 'logician' ideology (of a Russellian or related sort) which refuses to acknowledge the limits of logics which I do not wish to support.

IV Bivalence and Religion

8

I think that Margolis's approach in general offers a whole range of interesting consequences for the pursuit of the philosophy of religion. Generally speaking, his critique of excessive empiricist claims—say, along the lines of emphasizing the Intentional (in Margolis, i.e. capitalized sense)—without, however, falling into irrationalism is of particular interest: It provides the possibility of construing this philosophy as a safe passage between the Scylla of reducing religion to some kind of empiricist endeavor without all metaphysical pretensions and the Charybdis of licensing irra-

²³ I wish to thank Dale Jacquette for bringing up the notion of 'truth value gaps' in the discussion following the presentation of my paper. Yet, when reconstructed in e.g. a Russellian sense, I reject this notion. The reason is that Russell attempts to reconstruct questions of reference (see 1905, 485–93) in such a way that suits his 'traditional British Empiricis[t]' (Rorty 1982, 113) agenda rather than to admit that they raise questions about the universal applicability of logical resources such as the principle of bivalence.

tionalism with regard to religion—as is the case in much postmodernist and some Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion.

Thus, I have applied several of Margolis's suggestions to religion on a number of different occasions.²⁴ Here, however, I restrict myself to applying his contentions that were investigated above, viz. his critique of bivalence and his suggestion to introduce a third truth value, 'indeterminate'.²⁵ In particular, I will restrict myself to analyzing its consequences for a *pluralist theory of religion*. Before delving into that in the next section, however, I will first explain this theory.

In the philosophy of religion, one of the currently most pressing issues is that of characterizing the relationship between different religions and their at times deviant or even contradictory truth claims.²⁶ The standard way to map the different fashions is to distinguish between *exclusivism*, *inclusivism*, and *pluralism*: The exclusivist holds that only *one* religion is the true one, viz. her own. The inclusivist softens that absolutist position somewhat, e.g. by suggesting that there is only one true religion but different ways to achieve the goods religion has to offer, such as salvation.²⁷ The pluralist holds that other religions than her own religion contain truths as well and provide viable ways to salvation.

Those of us who are interested in a pluralist option of one kind or another²⁸ are faced with a problem, though: The standard ways to legitimate

²⁴ For example, I have applied his 'non-relational theory of reference' (see Margolis, 1989, 257–62) for the purposes of suggesting that the references of theological terms should be construed without all realist pretensions (see Grube 1998, 218–20) not because I necessarily think that they have no realist import but, rather, because I think that the field of reference is not the proper field to discuss the issue of realism.

²⁵ In passing, I would like to point out that the alethic *a posteriorism* that follows from Margolis' suggestions is also useful for a constructive treatment of religious issues: It can be used as frame of reference for discussing the theologians' complaint that truth is too often construed in an 'imperialist' fashion which fails to do justice to the onto/epistemological specifics of theological claims (see e.g. Paul Tillich, 1956, 121–4).

²⁶ Let it be noted that for many European countries which have a strong Muslim population the question how the relationship between the different religions to each other is characterized has serious political implications. The reason is that *the* very tool to neutralize the political consequences of religious claims prevailing in the us, viz. the distinction between the public and the private, is unavailable in Europe—at least, it does not have the same operational value in Europe as it does in the us

²⁷ The standard example being Karl Rahner's concept of 'anonymous Christians', embracing the set of people who are nominally not Christians but, by way of their conduct or patterns of belief, will still receive salvation (see e.g. Peterson, 1998, 270–3; for a discussion of the distinctions between exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism, see 262–78).

²⁸ In a sense, I happen to belong to this group although I have serious doubts about the viability of the distinction between pluralism, in- and exclusivism. Here, however, I cannot

pluralism in religion are found wanting. I will demonstrate that by way of a short analysis of *the* most influential defense of pluralism, John Hick's theory of religions.

Hick holds that the empirical religions—at least, some of them—are manifestations of what he calls the '*Real an sich*' which is construed analogously to Kant's *Ding an sich*.²⁹ Being only manifestations of it and not the absolute reality itself, the followers of those religions should abstain from making exclusive truth claims.³⁰ The difference between the empirical religions and the *Real an sich* is thus the theoretical foundation for a pluralist theory of religions and everything that follows from it, such as tolerance.

Yet, by construing the *Real an sich* analogously to Kant's *Ding an sich*, Hick imports the problems of Kantianism into his theory of religion. More precisely speaking, what is a serious difficulty in Kantianism, viz. to squeeze some operational value out of the postulate of the *Ding an sich*, becomes hopeless in Hick's hands. The reason is that, by using it as a basis for his theory of religious pluralism, Hick manoeuvres himself into the following dilemma.

Either the *Real an sich* is ineffable indeed (Hick's own solution, if I understand him correctly). In this case, however, nothing meaningful can be proposed about it, certainly not that the empirical religions, let alone only *some* of them, are manifestations of it.

Or the *Real an sich* is ultimately not ineffable. Yet, in this case, Hick owes us an explanation by what means he thinks to be capable of accessing it cognitively. And if cognitively accessible, it should become the prime source of religious claims: If Hick believes to be capable to access the *Real an sich*, then he should make *it* the basis for his religion—in which case Hick would not have invented a new theory of religious pluralism but a new religion.

Hick fails to realize that there is a serious difference between his postulate of a *Real an sich* and Kant's *Ding an sich*:³¹ Whereas for Kant this postulate stands in the service of—in a sense—securing the basic possibility of human cognition, nothing comparable is at stake in Hick's case. In Kant's hands, the transcendental apparatus is necessary for securing the possibility of well-structured cognition, of making meaningful syn-

delve into this point more deeply. Let it thus suffice to say that I am interested in some of the consequences of a pluralist theory of religions, such as the possibility to tolerate and interact constructively with religious claims which differ from one's own claims.

²⁹ Hick (2004, 233–46).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 362–76.

³¹ See the discussion in Hick, 2004, XIX–XXVII.

thetic (e.g. scientific) claims. Thus, Kant's argument is that, if we wish to be able to make those claims, we need to make certain transcendental postulates.

Yet, where for Kant a basic epistemic category is at stake, viz. the possibility of human cognition, nothing comparable is at stake in Hick's case: As desirable as a pluralist theory of religion is, it has obviously a different epistemic status than securing the possibility of human cognition. The latter is—in a sense—logically indispensable, the former certainly not. Thus, whatever transcendental postulate is necessary to secure the possibility of human cognition has much more important epistemic functions than whatever is necessary to secure the possibility of a pluralist theory of religion.

Thus, there is a straightforward counterargument available against Hick which is not available against Kant. In Hick's case, the critic can argue 'no pluralist theory of religion, no necessity to postulate a *Real an sich*.' Yet, the critic can on pain of self-contradiction not argue 'no human cognition, no necessity to postulate a *Ding an sich*' (at least, according to Kant). That is, the possibility of human cognition cannot be sacrificed as easily as the possibility of a pluralist theory of religion. There are thus no overriding logical reasons why the transcendental postulate of the '*Real an sich*' and the pluralism it is supposed to secure should not be abandoned whereas there are good reasons not to abandon the transcendental postulate of the '*Ding an sich*' and the possibility of human cognition it is supposed to secure.

In sum, Hick fails to recognize the serious functional asymmetry between his '*Real an sich*' and Kant's '*Ding an sich*'. This undermines the basis of his pluralist theory of religions—a fate Hick's account shares with most other pluralist theories.

9

The question I wish to raise is whether Margolis's suggestion to substitute a bivalent logic with a many valued logic can contribute to providing a better basis for a pluralist theory of religion. In the following, I will sketch how an argument for pluralism can be construed along the lines of introducing a many valued logic being based upon values such as 'aptness'. I will do so by falling back on two of the arguments provided above and by using them as a platform for my argument.

First, it should be acknowledged that alethic *a posteriorism*—at least in the absence of convincing argument to the opposite (see above, section 4)—is to be preferred over alethic *a priorism*. That is to say, alethic considerations are to be fixed by taking into account the onto/epistemic peculiarities of the domain of inquiry at stake.

Second, given alethic *a posteriorism*, it should be acknowledged that there exist certain domains in which bivalence should be abandoned. Examples are the theory of arts and, more general, Intentional phenomena in Margolis's sense of the word. As suggested above, highly complex phenomena which are 'burning issues' are another example.

I wish to propose that religion or, at least, certain religious claims, belong also into the category of claims for which bivalence should be abandoned. Examples are religious claims for which there is insufficient evidence in order to determine their truth or falsity.

Abrogating bivalence provides a promising basis for a pluralist theory of religion, in my view. The reason is that, if the believer considers her beliefs to be true under bivalent parameters, she must by definition conceive all competing religious beliefs to be false. And given that we have a right or even obligation to maximize true beliefs and avoid false ones, she is in her epistemic right to reject those competing claims in favor of her own religious claims. Thus, conceiving one's own religious claims to be true under bivalent parameters has, at least, the potential to denigrate competing religious viewpoints. Given a link between denigrating alternative religious viewpoints and intolerance, making religious truth claims under bivalent auspices has a potential for promoting intolerance.

However, if the believer conceives her own religious claims under the parameters of a many valued logic which relies on values such as 'aptness', this will make her potentially more sensitive and tolerant towards competing religious claims. Under those parameters, she is *not* forced to denigrate other religions: Holding her own religion to be apt, does not necessarily imply to hold other religions to be not apt.

Thus, a many valued logic provides a better environment for tolerating deviating religious claims than a bivalent logic. *A many-valued logic is therefore a suitable candidate for providing a basis for a robust theory of religious pluralism.*

I wish to conclude by suggesting that considering religious truth claims to be 'apt' rather than 'true' is *not* hostile to the religious inside-perspective. It does *not* imply the abandonment of those claims. But the believer can continue to be entitled to hold on to her beliefs.

The master story for how the religious believer can be entitled to hold on to her beliefs while leaving the question of truth proper open is Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's ring-parable: Lessing suggests that the truth of the three competing religious claims, viz. the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic claims, is indeterminate. Yet, he suggests that this does not imply that the believer would have to abandon her right to continue believing in her Jewish, Christian, or Islamic beliefs.

Lessing is capable of securing the possibility that the believer can legitimately pursue her beliefs by separating issues of truth proper from issues of justification: Although questions of truth are not (yet) fixed for the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic belief³², the believer can still be justified in holding on to her Jewish, Christian or Islamic faith on other grounds.³³

In sum, I hope to have demonstrated that a robust theory of religious pluralism is possible which avoids the pitfalls of the standard theories, such as Hick's. The basis for it is Margolis' suggestion to abandon bivalence: Under bivalent parameters, holding a religion to be true implies by definition to hold all other religions to be false. This is not necessarily the case under the parameters of a many-valued logic which relies on values such as 'aptness'. And relying on those values does not imply that the believer would have to give up her beliefs, as the example of Lessing shows.³⁴

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³² That Lessing focuses exclusively on those three religions has to do with the specifics of his narrative: The ring parable is part of the theater play 'Nathan the Wise' which is situated in Jerusalem during the crusades and where all three Abrahamic religions encounter each other. Yet, apart from the constraints that this narrative provides, the basic rationale for tolerating other religions can be extended beyond those three religions. That is, it can be applied to non-Abrahamic religions as well.

³³ This is at least the way I reconstruct Lessing: By way of historicizing the theory of justification, he is able to provide the notion of *trust* a fundamental place within our legitimacy resources (see Grube, 2006, 41–6).

³⁴ I wish to thank Rob Sinclair for valuable corrections and comments on this paper.

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