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Sami Pihlström
*University of Helsinki*

## 1. Introduction

In this paper I offer some critical remarks on why pragmatism is an increasingly important philosophical approach today—and, possibly, tomorrow—not only in philosophy generally but in a specific field such as the philosophy of religion in particular. I will try to provide *an* answer to this question by considering, as a case study, the special promise I see pragmatism as making in the study of religion, especially regarding the complex issues concerning the *objectivity* of religious belief, which are obviously entangled with questions concerning the *rationality* of religious belief. My discussion will be partly based on my recent book defending a broadly Jamesian pragmatic pluralism in the philosophy of religion, with due recognition not only of the value of other pragmatists' (including John Dewey's and the neopragmatists') contributions to this field but also of the crucial Kantian background of pragmatism (Pihlström 2013a). Indeed, if one views pragmatism through Kantian spectacles, as I think we should, the topic of objectivity will become urgent; Kant, after all, was one of the key modern philosophers examining this notion, and we presumably owe more to him than we often are able to admit.

In a follow-up paper summarizing some of the key ideas of my above-mentioned book (Pihlström 2013b),[1] I identified two key "promises" of

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[1] I borrow (but revise) here some formulations from that essay; the present paper is a somewhat more comprehensive attempt to sketch a balanced pragmatist philosophy of religion capable of accommodating both pragmatic objectivity and existential significance. I have also incorporated some material from talks delivered in a symposium on rationality

pragmatism in the philosophy of religion. These are based on *two differ-ent philosophical interests in the study of religion*, which can be labeled the "epistemic interest" and the "existential interest". The topic of objectivity is crucial with regard to both. Philosophy of religion could even be considered a test case for pragmatist views on objectivity, because religion is often taken to be too "subjective" to be taken seriously by scientifically-minded thinkers pursuing objectivity. Pragmatists themselves are not innocent to this: as we recall, in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James (1985 [1902]) proposed to study the subjective, experiential phenomena that people go through individually, thus arguably neglecting the more social dimensions of religious experience that Dewey emphasized in *A Common Faith* (Dewey 1991 [1934]).

## 2. Objectivity and the "philosophical interests" in the study of religion

First, it is extremely important, for a thinking person in a modern (or "post-postmodern")[2] society largely based on scientific research and its various applications, to examine the perennial *epistemic* problem of *the rationality (or irrationality) of religious belief*. This epistemic problem arises from the—real or apparent—conflicts between science and religion, or reason and faith, in particular. It is obvious that this problem, or set of problems, *crucially involves the notion of objectivity*: religious faith is regarded as subjective, whereas scientific research and theory-construction are objective. Therefore, typically, scientific atheists would criticize religion for its lack of objective grounding, while defenders of religion might try to counter this critique by suggesting either that religious beliefs do have objective credentials, after all (e.g., traditionally and rather notoriously, in terms of the "proofs" of God's existence, which would allegedly be objective enough for any rational being to endorse), or that science is also "subjective" in some specific sense, or at least more subjective than standard scientific realists would admit (e.g., as argued in various defenses of relativism or social constructivism). The notions of objectivity and rationality are of course distinct, but they are closely related in this area of

and religion at the University of Utrecht, The Netherlands, in December 2012, and at the Templeton Summer School, *Philosophical Perspectives on Theological Realism*, in Mainz, Germany, in September 2013. For a published version of the latter, see Pihlström (2014).

   [2] Larry Hickman's discussion of Dewey as a "post-postmodernist" is also highly relevant to the topic of objectivity: see Hickman (2007).

inquiry in particular. It is precisely because of its pursuit of objectivity that the scientific method is generally regarded as "rational", whereas religious ways of thinking might seem to be irrational because of their lack of objective testability (or may seem to be needing such testability in order to be accepted as rational).[3]

Here pragmatism can offer us a very interesting middle ground. As James argued in *Pragmatism* (1975 [1907]: Lectures I–II) and elsewhere, pragmatism is often a middle path option for those who do not want to give up either their "objective" scientific worldview or their possible (and possibly "subjective") religious sensibilities. Defending the pragmatist option here does not entail that one actually defends or embraces any particular religious views; what is at issue is the *potential philosophical legitimacy* of such views, which leaves room for either embracement or, ultimately, rejection. Thus, pragmatism clearly avoids both fundamentalist religious views and equally fundamentalist and dogmatic (and anti-philosophical) versions of "New Atheism", both of which seek a kind of "super-objectivity" that is not within our human reach. By so doing, pragmatism in my view does not simply argue for the simplified idea that the "rationality" of religious thought (if there is such a thing) might be some kind of practical rationality instead of theoretical rationality comparable to the rationality of scientific inquiry (because, allegedly, only the former would be available as the latter more objective kind of rationality would be lacking). On the contrary, pragmatism seeks to reconceptualize the very idea of rationality in terms of practice, and thereby it reconceptualizes the very idea of objectivity as well. Both objectivity and rationality are then understood as deeply practice-embedded: far from being neutral to human practices, they emerge through our reflective engagements in our practices.

We may formulate these suggestions in a manner familiar from the mainstream debates of contemporary philosophy of religion by saying that pragmatism proposes a middle path not just between reason and faith (or, analogously, objectivity and subjectivity) but between the positions known as *evidentialism* and *fideism*: according to my pragmatist proposal, we should not simply assess religious beliefs and ideas on the basis of religiously neutral, allegedly fully "objective" evidence (in the way we would at least attempt to assess our beliefs in science and in everyday life),

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[3] The concepts of objectivity and rationality cannot be defined here with any technical precision. Rather, what I hope to do is to shed some light on how these concepts could be used within a pragmatist philosophy of religion.

because we do need to understand religion as a special set of engagements in purposive, interest-driven human practices and/or language-games; on the other hand, nor should we, when rejecting the simplifying evidentialist categorization of religion as little more than poor science, step on a slippery slope ending at the other extreme of fideism, which advances faith in the absence of evidence or reason and consequently in the end hardly leaves any room for a critical rational discussion of religion at all—or any objectivity worth talking about.

We might say that pragmatism advances a liberal form of evidentialism, proposing to broaden the scope of evidence from the relatively narrowly conceived scientific evidence (which is something that religious beliefs generally, rather obviously, lack) to a richer conception of evidence as something that can be had, or may be lacking, in the "laboratory of life"—to use Putnam's apt expression (cf. also Brunsveld, 2012, ch. 3). Thereby it also *broadens the scope of objectivity*: when speaking about objectivity in the science vs. religion debate, we cannot take the objectivity of the laboratory sciences as our paradigm. Different human practices may have their different standards for evidence, rationality, and objectivity. Pragmatism hence resurrects a reasonable—extended and enriched—form of evidentialism from the extremely implausible, or even ridiculous, form it takes in strongly evidentialist thinkers like Richard Swinburne, without succumbing to a pseudo-Wittgensteinian fideism, or "form of life" relativism. This is one way in which pragmatism seeks, or promises, to widen the concepts of rationality and objectivity themselves by taking seriously the embeddedness of all humanly possible reason-use and inquiry in practices or forms of life guided by various human interests. To take that seriously is to take seriously the suggestion that in some cases a religious way of thinking and living may amount to a "rational" response to certain life situations, even yielding a degree of practice-embedded objectivity.

It is extremely important to understand the extended notion of evidence (and, hence, rationality and objectivity) in a correct way here. What is crucial is a certain kind of *sensitivity to the practical contexts* within which it is (or is not) appropriate to ask for (objective) evidence for our beliefs. This must, furthermore, be connected with a pragmatist understanding of beliefs as *habits of action*: the relevant kind of evidence, as well as objectivity, is something based on our practices and hence inevitably interest-driven. Evidence, or the need to seek and find evidence, may play importantly different roles in these different contexts; ignoring such context-sensitivity only leads to inhuman pseudo-objectivity. Thus, the pragmatic

question must always be how (or even whether) evidential considerations *work* and/or satisfy our needs and interests within relevant contexts of inquiry. Insofar as such contextuality is not taken into account, the notions of objectivity and evidence are disconnected from any genuine inquiry. These notions, when pragmatically employed, always need to respond to specific problematic situations in order to play a role that makes a difference in our inquiries.[4]

In mediating between evidentialism and fideism and offering a liberalized version of evidentialism, pragmatism also, at its best, mediates between *realism and anti-realism*, another dichotomy troubling contemporary philosophy of religion and preventing constructive engagement with the topic of pragmatic objectivity. Here I cannot explore the realism issue in any detail, though (cf. Pihlström, 2014). Let me just note that just as there is a pragmatic version of objective evidence available, in a context-sensitive manner, there is also a version of realism (about religion and/or theology, as well as more generally) that the pragmatist can develop and defend. Hence, pragmatism, far from rejecting realism and objectivity, reinterprets them in its dynamic and practice-focusing manner.

Secondly, along with serving the epistemic interest in the philosophy of religion and the need to understand better the objectivity and rationality (vs. irrationality) of religious belief, it is at least equally important, or possibly even more important, to study the *existential* problem of how to live with (or without) religious views or a religious identity in a world in which there is so much evil and suffering. When dealing with this set of questions, we end up discussing serious and "negative" concepts such as evil, guilt, sin, and death (or mortality). Here, I see pragmatism as proposing a fruitful form of *meliorism* reducible neither to naively optimistic views according to which the good will ultimately inevitably prevail nor to dark pessimism according to which everything will finally go

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[4] It might be objected that, according to pragmatism, religious thought ought to remain *arational* rather than being either rational or irrational. For instance, some of Putnam's views on religion might be understood in this Wittgensteinian fashion: see Putnam (2008). Certainly "Wittgensteinians" like D. Z. Phillips have often been read in this fashion. However, it seems to me that the distinction between arationality, on the one hand, and the rationality vs. irrationality dimension, on the other, is itself based on a prior non-pragmatist understanding of rationality (and, hence, irrationality). If we do not begin from such a non-pragmatist (purely theoretical) conception of rationality but, rather, view rationality itself as practice-involving and practice-embedded all the way from the start, I do not think that we need to resort to the account of religion as "arational". On the contrary, we can understand religious responses to reality as potentially rational—and, therefore, also potentially irrational—in terms of the broader, practice-sensitive account of rationality that pragmatism cherishes.

down the road of destruction. It is as essential to mediate between these two unpromising extremes as it is to mediate between the epistemic extremes of evidentialism and fideism. And again, I would argue that such a project of mediation is rational (and, conversely, that it would therefore be pragmatically irrational to seek a fully "rational", or better, rationalizing or in Jamesian terms "viciously intellectualistic", response to the problem of evil). Accordingly, pragmatist meliorism must—as it certainly does in James's *Pragmatism*, for instance—take very seriously the irreducible reality of evil and (unnecessary) suffering. Pragmatism, in this sense, is a profoundly *anti-theodicist* approach in the philosophy of religion: it is, or should be, sharply critical of all attempts to explain away the reality of evil, or to offer a rationalized theodicy allegedly justifying the presence of evil in the world. On the contrary, evil must be acknowledged, understood (if possible),[5] and fought against.

What does this have to do with objectivity? If the reality of evil must be acknowledged and understood for us to be able to take a serious ethical attitude to the suffering of other human beings, then we do need to carefully inquire into, for instance, the historical incidents of evil (e.g., genocides and other atrocities) as well as the human psychological capacities for evil. The important point here is that, from a pragmatist point of view, such inquiries serve a crucial ethical task even if their immediate purpose is to obtain objective scientific knowledge about the relevant phenomena. For example, the various historical descriptions and interpretations of the Holocaust may be as objective as possible, humanly speaking, and at the same time implicitly embody strong value judgments ("this must never happen again"). The "objective" psychological results concerning human beings' psychological capacities for performing atrocities, e.g., in conditions of extreme social pressure, can also embody a strong commitment to promote the development of psychological and social forces countering such capacities.

Pragmatists, then, should join those who find it morally unacceptable or even obscene to ask for God's reasons for "allowing", say, Auschwitz (whether or not they believe in God's reality). Pragmatism, when emphasizing the fight against evil instead of theodicist speculations about the possible reasons God may have had for creating and maintaining a world in which there is evil, is also opposed to the currently fashionable skep-

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[5] I am not saying that evil actions and events (or people) can always be understood; nor am I saying, however, that evil necessarily escapes understanding. For a pragmatist account of the problem of evil, see Pihlström (2013a, ch. 5).

tical theism, according to which our cognitive capacities are insufficient to reach the hidden ("objective") reasons for ("subjectively") apparently avoidable evil. Such speculations about God's possible reasons for allowing evil, or about evil being a necessary part of a completely rational objective system of creation and world-order, are, from the pragmatist perspective, as foreign to genuine religious practices as evidentialist arguments about, e.g., the a priori and a posteriori probabilities of theologically conceptualized events such as Christ's resurrection.[6]

## 3. "Objectivity without objects": pragmatism and Kant

When dealing with these two philosophical "interests" in the inquiry into religion—the epistemic one and the existential one—pragmatism should not claim to be an absolutely novel approach. On the contrary, pragmatists (who, in James's memorable words, are offering a "new name for some old ways of thinking") should acknowledge their historical predecessors. One of them is undoubtedly Immanuel Kant, whose great insight in the philosophy of religion was that the religious and theological questions must be considered primarily on the basis of "practical philosophy", that is, ethics (Kant, 1788). I see pragmatism as sharing this basically Kantian approach while not denying the epistemic and metaphysical significance of the philosophical study of religion. Again, this yields a novel account of the peculiar kind of objectivity we are able to pursue in this field. We *are* still interested in the metaphysical (and epistemic) problems concerning the nature of reality, the possible existence or non-existence of the divinity, and our epistemic access to such matters—and these are clearly "objective" issues – but as human beings embedded in our habitual practices of life we are dealing with all this from an ethically loaded, value-laden (and hence partly "subjective") standpoint. For us as the kind of creatures we are, there simply is no non-interested standpoint to occupy in such matters. To admit this, however, is not to collapse objective inquiry into mere subjective preferences.

Insofar as this Kantian-inspired *entanglement of ethics and metaphysics* is taken seriously, we may also say that pragmatism incorporates a modern version of Kantian *transcendental philosophy*. The philosophical issues of religion are examined by paying attention to the ethical context within

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[6] I am obviously again referring to Swinburne's ideas here—ideas that for me come close to being a parody of genuine religiosity. But I am doing so only in passing, without any detailed study of either Swinburne's or anyone else's views.

which they are so much as possible as topics of philosophically interested study for beings like us. This is, in a way, transcendental philosophy "naturalized". Therefore, it also may be suggested that pragmatism simultaneously proposes a liberal form of naturalism, distinguishing between a narrow (or "hard") scientistic naturalism from a more pluralistic (and "softer") form of naturalism according to which even religious qualities in experience can be humanly natural.[7] This liberalization of naturalism is parallel to the recognition that there are pragmatically embedded degrees of objectivity between the "full" rigorous objectivity often associated with natural science and complete subjectivity some people may associate with religious experiences.[8]

In brief, a Jamesian interpretation of pragmatic objectivity may be summarized by saying that there is no metaphysically objective "fact of the matter" regarding, for instance, metaphysical issues or questions (such as, paradigmatically, God's reality or human immortality) in abstraction from our ethical and more generally *weltanschaulichen* contributions; there are no fundamental objective metaphysically-realistic metaphysical truths in that sense. Rather, our ethical perspectives contribute to whatever metaphysical truths there are, and ever can be, for us.[9]

Furthermore, when developing a (Jamesian) pragmatist account of religion, especially an account of the famous Kantian "transcendental ideas", viz., God, freedom, and immortality, as a pragmatically reinterpreted version of what Kant in the Second Critique called the "postulates of practical reason",[10] we arguably may, in addition to steering a middle course between objectivity and subjectivity generally, make a legitimate commit-

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[7] This comes close to the picture sketched by Dewey (1991 [1934]).

[8] Furthermore, the two interests I have distinguished are not dichotomously separable but, rather, deeply entangled (just like ethics and metaphysics are). The pragmatist philosopher of religion, and the pragmatist philosopher more generally, can and should make distinctions wherever and whenever they serve useful pragmatic purposes; what s/he should avoid is turning those distinctions that really make a difference to our inquiries into essentialistic and ahistorically fixed structures and dichotomies, or dualisms that cannot possibly be bridged. Even so, there are problematic and even deeply wrong ways of entangling the two "interests" I have spoken about. For instance, when the problem of evil, which I have categorized under the "existential interest", is seen as a *purely* or even *primarily* epistemic and/or evidential issue having to do with the rationality of religious faith within an evidentialist context, as it is, e.g., in van Inwagen (2006), things go seriously wrong. The existential interest is then reduced to the epistemic one, and such non-pragmatic reductionism should be resisted.

[9] James's early paper, "The Sentiment of Rationality" (1879), in James (1979 [1897]), is highly relevant here.

[10] This is a Kantian rereading of James I propose in Pihlström (2013a, ch. 1). I must skip the details of this discussion here.

ment, from within our religious and ethical practices themselves, to a certain kind of transcendence (that is, the "transcendental ideas").[11] The legitimacy or, perhaps, moral necessity of such a commitment might even be defended by means of a certain kind of (practice-involving, hence "naturalized") transcendental argument: as James argued—though, of course, not explicitly transcendentally—it may be necessary for us to embrace a religious view if we are seriously committed to a "morally strenuous" mood in life and seek to, or find it necessary to, maintain this commitment. However, we cannot employ this account of religion to develop a theory of any religious *objects*, because in the Kantian context only properly transcendental conditions, such as the categories (e.g., causality) and the forms of pure intuition (space and time), are necessary conditions for the possibility of the objects of experience in the sense that all empirical objects must conform to them; religious and/or theological ideas, such as the ideas of God, freedom, and immortality, do not play *this* objectifying and experience-enabling role, even if they can be argued to play a quasi-transcendental role as enablers of moral commitment. More precisely, while the categories, in Kant, are normative requirements of objecthood, this cannot be said about the postulates of practical reason, even if their status is also based on a transcendental argument.

Hence, although there can be a certain kind of pragmatic objectivity in religion and theology—or so my (real or imagined) Jamesian pragmatist would argue—there cannot be religious or theological objectivity in the sense of any legitimate rational postulation of religious objects, understood as an analogy to the postulation of, say, theoretical objects in science serving the purpose of explaining observed phenomena. Here, once again, the pragmatist must be firmly opposed to what is going on in mainstream Anglo-American philosophy of religion dominated by a strongly realist and evidentialist model of objectivity. Indeed, according to Kant himself, the key mistake of the traditional proofs of God's existence was to overlook these restrictions and to treat God as a kind of transcendent object, instead of a mere idea whose human legitimacy can be derived only from moral action.[12] Now, we may see this (Jamesian) pragmatist understanding of religious and/or theological objectivity, analogous to the Kan-

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[11] The notion of "transcendence" is here used in a (broadly) Kantian sense: the transcendent is something that transcends the bounds of experience. It could include the supernatural (which is how the notion is often used in religious and theological contexts), but all Kantian "transcendental ideas" are transcendent in this sense.

[12] I am, of course, referring to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/1787), the sections on "The Ideal of Pure Reason" in the "Transcendental Dialectic".

tian postulates, as a version (or extension) of what Putnam (2002; 2004) calls "objectivity without objects". The examples Putnam provides primarily come from mathematics and ethics. We can, and should, he argues, understand the objectivity of these different practices – and the related fact-value entanglement in ethics—as something not requiring the postulation of mysterious (transcendent) objects out there, whether mathematical (numbers, functions) or ethical (values, moral facts). As Putnam has argued for a long time (since Putnam, 1981), there is no need to think of moral objectivity as needing any ontological commitments to "queer" objects, *contra* metaethical "error theorists" like J. L. Mackie (1977). We should now understand whatever "religious objectivity" or "theological objectivity" there is available along similar lines. The relevant kind of objectivity lies in our practices of engagement and commitment themselves, in our habits of action embodying certain ways of thinking about ourselves and the world in terms of religious notions such as God, freedom,[13] and immortality.

This conception of pragmatic objectivity in philosophy of religion (and, analogously, in ethics) is compatible not only with certain views on religion as a practice or form of life derived from the later Wittgenstein's writings (even though, as was pointed out above, I resist the fideist tones some Wittgensteinians resort to), but also with a transcendental position we find in the early Wittgenstein: God does not appear *in* the world; immortality is timelessness, or life in the present moment, instead of any infinite extension of temporal existence; and my will cannot change the facts of the world but "steps into the world" from the outside.[14] Accordingly, God is not an object of *any* kind, nothing—*no thing* whatsoever – that could "appear in the world". Nor can my freedom or possible immortality be conceptualized along such objectifying lines. The subject philosophy is concerned with—that is, the metaphysical or transcendental subject—is a "limit" of the world rather than any object in the world (Wittgenstein

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[13] The reason I include freedom in this list is of course the Kantian one: these three are Kant's postulates of practical reason. I am not saying that freedom is a religious concept; it is, however, part of the same set of concepts Kant famously saves from the point of view of practical reason after having rejected speculative attempts to ground their objectivity, or objects, in theoretical reason-use.

[14] For specific references, see the 6.5's of Wittgenstein (1974 [1921]). Also note the striking resemblance to Stoicism in Wittgenstein's comments on the will: freedom, and ethics, is about the subject's attitude to the world, whose facts s/he cannot change; the subject is, famously, a "limit" of the world.

1974 [1921], § 5.64).[15] This idea is not as foreign to pragmatism as it might seem; on the contrary, as soon as pragmatism is reconnected with its Kantian background, something like the Wittgensteinian conception of subjectivity, objectivity, and the world can also, in a rearticulated form, be seen as the core position of a transcendental-pragmatic account of objectivity and subjectivity.

## 4. Pragmatism and recognition: toward a processual conception of objectivity

One way of cashing out the pragmatist promise I opened this paper with is by formulating the issues concerning the objectivity and rationality of religious belief and the appropriate reactions to the problem of evil in terms of the concept of *(mutual) recognition*, which must be rooted in not only the Hegelian discourse on *Anerkennung* but also (again) the underlying Kantian idea of there being limits or boundaries that shape human cognitive and ethical life and need to be recognized by people (and groups) engaging in common projects of inquiry, understanding, and moral deliberation. Developing pragmatist philosophy of religion into a pragmatic theory of relations of recognition will be a step toward a processual, hence properly pragmatic, account of objectivity. I cannot develop such a theory here, but I will offer a sketch.[16]

Since Hume and Kant, philosophers of religion have generally acknowledged that it is problematic, or even impossible, to ground theological and/or religious beliefs in rational demonstrations, such as the traditional "proofs". Kant, as was noted above, drew a particularly sharp boundary between our cognitive capacities (that is, human reason and understanding), on the one hand, and matters of religious faith, on the other. Yet, while attempts to demonstrate the reality of God inevitably fail, according to Kant, God's existence and the immortality of the soul must (along with the freedom of the will) be accepted as postulates of practical reason. Religious faith can only be grounded in what needs to be postulated in

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[15] It is from these remarks that the early Wittgenstein's peculiar form of solipsism emerges. In a sense, for the solipsistic subject of the *Tractatus*, all the objects in the world are "mine". But this transcendental solipsism no more sacrifices the objectivity of those objects than the transcendental idealism of Kant's First Critique, which is compatible with empirical realism.

[16] See Pihlström (2013b) for further details. While pragmatism and recognition theory have developed rather independently with little mutual contact, the concept of "pragmatic recognition" is actually employed (in the context of contemporary critical theory) in Decker (2012).

order to make sense of moral duty, not the other way round. Even so, theological issues are not beyond objectivity and rationality; they just require the *practical use* of reason, instead of theoretical or speculative use.

The concept of a *limit* is crucial for the entire post-Kantian paradigm in the philosophy of religion, and post-Kantian philosophy more generally, as Kantian transcendental philosophy examines the necessary conditions for the possibility of, and thereby also the limits of, cognitive experience. Concepts and beliefs reaching out for the transcendent do not fall within those limits. According to Kant's famous dictum, he had to limit the scope of knowledge in order to make room for faith. (Hence there can be no legitimately postulated objects of faith, because all objects would have to fall within the scope of possible cognitive experience.) This creates challenges for acts of recognition across boundaries constituted by the transcendental features of human capacities.

The central role played by notions such as limit, boundary, and reason opens up a number of fundamental issues in post-Kantian philosophy of religion (not only pragmatism) that can be approached in terms of theories of recognition. Most importantly, the boundary between religious belief and non-belief –believers and non-believers—marks an intellectual, cultural, and political division that needs to be examined from the perspective of (mutual) recognition. Such a practice-oriented examination may lead to novel ways of approaching the highly controversial issues of science vs. religion (or reason vs. faith) and thereby also the methodological debates within religious studies today.

The relevant issue of recognition here relates not only to the challenges of *recognizing different groups of people* (e.g., believers and non-believers) but also to the need to *recognize the relevant limits dividing them*, as well as the reasons why those limits are taken to be there. These are often based on whether (and how) the relevant groups are recognized, or denied recognition, *as* certain specific kinds of groups or in some specific capacity. Accordingly, examinations of the limits of reason are, or contribute to, specifications of the *content* of the relevant act(s) of recognition. One must understand how "the other"—a person or a group "on the other side of the boundary"—employs certain concepts, especially normative concepts such as reason and rationality, in order to engage in any acts of recognition at all. Furthermore, one must realize that different people or groups may, for various reasons, recognize the same limits (and each others' ways of recognizing them) or quite different limits. The possible differences here need not (and should not) be reduced to merely intellectual differences

among people (or groups); they are much more deeply embedded in our practices of life, including the existential dimensions of religious beliefs.[17]

For example, from the point of view of atheism, theists simply fail to recognize certain limitations of human reason, or intellectually responsible thought more generally: they postulate an immaterial spiritual being without having adequate objective evidence for its existence (and in many cases even without seeking or evaluating evidence in appropriate ways). As Kant argued, no rational demonstration of God's existence is possible, and as Hume and many others have noted, the traditional "design" argument is highly implausible as well (although it continues to flourish in contemporary "intelligent design" theories). Conversely, theists may accuse atheists for a failure to respect another kind of limitation or boundary: scientifically-oriented atheists may believe in the unrestricted capacities of scientific research, or human reason-use more generally, in providing explanations to all phenomena and thus solving the mysteries of the universe. Believers often find it important to acknowledge that there may be "more things between heaven and earth" than rationalizing philosophy—or science—can ever demonstrate. Accordingly, there is a very important boundary between these two groups—theists and atheists, or believers and non-believers, or their respective ways of thinking—and both groups emphasize certain humanly inevitable limits that according to them should not be overstepped.

Issues of recognition, then, are not restricted to the mutual recognition among persons or groups (e.g., representing different religious or non-religious outlooks) as being epistemically or rationally entitled to their (religious or non-religious) views, but extend to the need to recognize (from the perspective of certain intellectual and/or ethical outlooks) certain limitations or boundaries that define the proper sphere of human experience, cognition, or reason-use, and even to the need to recognize different groups and people as actual or potential "recognizers" of quite different boundaries. The diverging ways in which theists and atheists recognize something as a boundary limiting human capacities should themselves be recognized by both groups—in a way that not merely tolerates these different boundary-drawings but acknowledges that there may be legitimately different ways of drawing them, without simply agreeing with the other party, either.

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[17] I am grateful to an anonymous referee for a helpful suggestion here (and elsewhere).

Various acts of recognition across the boundary dividing believers and non-believers may have as their content at least the following different types of recognition: one party may recognize the other as (i) human beings (e.g., with certain inviolable human rights), as (ii) thinkers capable of formulating thoughts and/or judgments with intelligible content, as (iii) actual or potential participants in political discussion and deliberation, and/or as (iv) "fellow inquirers" (e.g., possibly, philosophers) seeking the truth about the matter at issue (e.g., about God's existence or non-existence). These different specifications and qualifications of the content of the act of recognition involve quite different factual and normative commitments and expectations. The acts of recognition at issue here also presuppose at least some kind of understanding of the ways in which the people or groups to be recognized (or requesting recognition) view life and its problems.

For example, recognizing someone as a (fellow) inquirer in the pursuit of truth yields expectations significantly stronger than "merely" recognizing the same person or group as (a) member(s) of the human species, or even as sharing a common humanity in some stronger sense invoking, say, fundamental human rights. The different contents of the relevant acts of recognition may be crucially related to the concept of rationality: we may recognize someone as rational (as an inquirer, etc.) while disagreeing with her/him on fundamental issues—but can we also consistently disagree about the criteria of rationality itself? And how about the criteria of objectivity?

A key meta-level issue in contemporary philosophy of religion is, thus, *the very possibility of critical discussion of religious beliefs*. In order for such discussion to be possible across the boundary dividing believers and non-believers, both groups must recognize each other *as members of the same intellectual (and, presumably, ethical) community*—as rational discussion partners pursuing objectivity—and must in a sense overcome or at least reconsider the boundaries dividing them. In order for such discussion to extend to ethical and political matters related to religion, the rival groups must also recognize each other as belonging to the same moral and political community. (However, again we should avoid drawing another sharp limit between intellectual matters, on the one side, and moral or political ones, on the other; this division plays only a heuristic role here.) The issues of recognition arising in this situation can be philosophically analyzed by means of the model of recognition developed by scholars of

recognition following Hegel, Axel Honneth, and others.[18] The pragmatist philosopher's job in this situation is to examine critically the conceptual presuppositions for the possibility of the relevant kind of mutual recognition acts. For a pragmatist, such presuppositions are inevitably practice-embedded—in short, habits of action.

Now, if Christian believers and "new atheists" are able to recognize each other ethically, politically, and/or intellectually, can they also recognize each other as belonging to the same community of inquirers (a community that is, arguably, *constituted* by mutual acts of recognition)? Can they recognize each other *as "fellow inquirers" committed to the pursuit of objective truth*? Could they do this even while maintaining very different normative conceptions of the role of reason, objectivity, and evidence in the evaluation of religious thought and beliefs, recognizing quite different (both factual and normative) limits for human thought and capacities? Examining these questions pragmatically, from the point of view of the theory of recognition, can be expected to lead to rearticulations of the traditional issues of, say, evidentialism vs. fideism. Thus, it will also be necessary to pragmatically re-evaluate the mainstream methods of contemporary philosophy of religion, seeking to critically transform the methodology of the field from the perspective of the theory of recognition enriched by pragmatism. The different ways in which objective evidence can and ought to be taken into account in the evaluation of the rationality of religious belief must themselves be subjected to a critical examination in terms of actual and potential structures of recognition: an evidentialist (or anti-evidentialist) methodology in the philosophy of religion must be grounded in (potential) acts of recognition across "post-Kantian" boundaries.

Moreover, emphasizing recognition in this manner contributes to articulating objectivity itself *dynamically* as a mutual process of different subjects' (people's, groups') recognizing each other as co-constructors and -interpreters of common normative standards, instead of simply recognizing some pre-given, allegedly fully objective standards. There is no royal road to recognizing the absolutely correct standards—that is not what it means to be committed to a project of inquiry. Rather, the notion of objectivity relevant to inquiry is itself constantly in the making, open

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[18] In addition to contemporary classics such as Honneth (2005 [1992]), recent works by scholars like Heikki Ikäheimo, Arto Laitinen, and Risto Saarinen should be consulted. See, e.g., Saarinen (2014). In this essay I cannot provide adequate references to this growing literature, but I do hope to address the relations between pragmatist philosophy of religion and theories of recognition on another occasion in more detail.

to creative construction and reconstruction—and, hence, recognition. Just as there are different kinds of acts of recognition, there are also different types and/or degrees of pragmatic objectivity.

## 5. Pragmatism and inquiry

We may now, equipped with a preliminary conception of recognition as a notion potentially useful in making sense of the dynamics of inquiry, pause to reflect on the way in which the notion of inquiry itself should be understood in pragmatist philosophy of religion.

   How does, or how should, the pragmatist understand the concept of inquiry in general terms? We may begin answering this question by emphasizing the pragmatists' *anti-Cartesianism*. While Descartes, famously, started by doubting everything that can be doubted and arrived at the "Archimedean point" at which, allegedly, doubt is no longer possible—that is, the doubting subject's self-discovery, *cogito, ergo sum*—Charles S. Peirce's anti-Cartesian essays in the 1860–70s questioned the very possibility of this traditional approach to epistemology.[19] Skipping the details of Peirce's arguments, we may say that we can never begin from complete doubt; on the contrary, we always have to start our inquiries from the beliefs we already possess. There is no way of *living*—no way of "being-in-the-world", to use terminology well known in a very different philosophical tradition, that is, Heideggerian phenomenology—in the absence of *believing*, that is, holding certain beliefs to be true about the world, at least about one's more or less immediate surroundings with which one is in constant interaction. Doubt does play a role in inquiry, but it is subordinate to belief.

   Moreover, beliefs themselves, as pointed out above, are *habits of action*. This is a key pragmatist point, also shared by those pragmatists that may not be as helpful as Peirce and Dewey in developing a general theory of inquiry, including James. Beliefs do not just give rise to habits of action, but quite literally *are* such habits. To believe something to be the case is always already to act in the world in a way or another, and not only to concretely act but also to be prepared to act in certain ways should certain types of situation arise. Pragmatism, thus, does not reduce beliefs to ac-

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[19] The most important reference here is Peirce's best-known essay, "The Fixation of Belief" (1877), available in, e.g., Peirce (1992). Also the important anti-Cartesian writings from the late 1860s can be found in the same volume.

tions but more generally rearticulates our notion of believing as a notion tied up with the notion of habitual action.[20]

In the emergence of inquiry, the crucial step is taken when a habit does *not* function smoothly, when our action is interrupted or yields a surprise. Then, and only then, does doubt come to the picture. The surprise leads to genuine doubt (instead of the Cartesian "paper doubt" that Peirce ridiculed), a state of doubt that is directed to the original belief(s) that gave rise to, or better *were*, the habit(s) of action that led to the surprise. The purpose of the inquiry that then naturally follows is to settle that doubt and to fix a new belief or set of beliefs that do not yield the same kind of surprising result that the original belief(s) and/or habit(s) of action did. Through this process of inquiry, the original belief(s) and/or habit(s) are either replaced by new and better ones or revised. The way Dewey describes inquiry as an intelligent response to problematic situations that need to be transformed into unproblematic ones is essentially similar, though by and large somewhat more naturalistically phrased, emphasizing inquiry as a continuous "transaction" between a living organism and its environment.

How, then, does an inquiry, pragmatically conceived, proceed in seeking to terminate doubt and fix (new) belief? Peirce's examination of the "fixation of belief" is the pragmatist *locus classicus* here (though the term "pragmatism" does not yet appear in this 1877 essay). Famously, Peirce rejects the three methods of fixing belief he finds unsatisfactory for various reasons—the methods of tenacity and authority, as well as the "intuitive" method of what is "agreeable to reason"—and defends the *scientific method* as the only method capable of truly rational belief-fixation in the long run. The distinctive feature of the scientific method in comparison to the inferior methods is that it lets the "real things" that are independent of us—that is, independent of the inquirers and their beliefs or opinions[21]—to influence the way in which the new beliefs are fixed. Our beliefs must thus be responsive to our experiences of the objective world that is largely independent of us in order for them to be properly scientific.

Peirce's theory of the progress of scientific inquiry is also well known: if the ideal community of rational inquirers (who need not be human)

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[20] This conception of habituality has also been emphasized by pragmatist social theorists, including most famously Hans Joas but also other scholars, e.g., in the Scandinavian context. See, for instance, papers by Erkki Kilpinen and Antti Gronow available at the website of the Nordic Pragmatism Network, `www.nordprag.org` .

[21] "Real things" in this Peircean sense could also be humanly created objects and structures, as of course is the case in social-scientific inquiry. This is not the place to inquire into the ways in which (Peircean) pragmatism can or cannot embrace scientific realism.

were able to engage in inquiry, using the scientific method, for an indefinitely long time, its beliefs regarding any given question would converge to an ideal "final opinion". This final opinion will, however, never be *actually* achieved; it is an ideal end, a "would" rather than a "will".

Now, how does the Peircean-Deweyan pragmatist conception of science and inquiry accommodate non-scientific inquiries, including religious ones? One way of approaching this question is by asking whether the pragmatist conception of inquiry is *monistic* or *pluralistic*. Does it, that is, seek to provide us with the *essence* of objective inquiry? These questions are difficult to answer unless we make the relevant terms clear. It is, I think, helpful to view inquiry as a "family-resemblance" notion in Wittgenstein's sense without any permanent and fixed essence. There are, as we know, quite different inquiries in different areas of life, from our everyday affairs to science as well as art, politics, ethics, and religion, and many other practices. There is no pragmatic need, or point, to force all these quite different modes of inquiry into the same model. In this sense, pragmatism definitely defends a pluralistic conception of inquiry. Hence, there is no reason to a priori exclude religious "inquiries" from the set of pragmatically acceptable forms of inquiry. However, it can simultaneously be maintained that all these quite different inquiries share a similar pragmatic method, that is, the "doubt-belief" method (as it has often been called) and the related scientific method (as distinguished from the inferior methods Peirce attacks) briefly sketched above. The movement from habits of action and beliefs through surprise and doubt to inquiry and new or revised beliefs and habits is general enough to allow an indefinite amount of contextual variation. A certain kind of *context-sensitivity* is, then, a crucial feature of pragmatism—not only of pragmatist theories of inquiry but of pragmatism more generally. Even if we can say that the "same" pragmatist account of inquiry can be applied to inquiries taking place in very different contexts, or different human practices (even practices we consider non-scientific), that is only the beginning of our inquiry into inquiry. The notion of inquiry will only be pragmatically clarified—its pragmatic meaning will be properly brought into view—when its local contexts are made clear.

Moreover, when those contexts *are* made clear, it no longer matters much whether we call the methods used "scientific" or not. This is mostly a terminological matter (though it is also important to keep in mind that terminological issues are often not at all trivial). We may, that is, employ Peirce's "scientific method" also when we are not pursuing science

literally speaking. Political discussion, for instance, may be "scientific" and "objective" in the relevant pragmatist sense if it is genuinely open to belief-revision in the face of recalcitrant experience, argument, and evidence, even if it does not aim at scientific-like results. If it is not open in this way, or if it is, rather, based on stubborn ideological opinions never to be changed no matter what happens, it is simply not a form of inquiry at all. And the same clearly holds for religion. It can be a form of inquiry if (and only if) it genuinely seeks to test and evaluate religious faith in the "laboratory of life" (to cite Putnam's apt phrase).

However, I would like to suggest that we leave the concept of inquiry, quite deliberately, vague enough to cover inquiries that do not "pursue truth" in the sense in which scientific and more generally academic and/or scholarly inquiries can be regarded as pursuing the truth. We should of course admit that the pursuit of (objective, mind-independent) truth is a pervasive phenomenon in academic life, not only in the natural sciences but also in those areas of inquiry (say, literary criticism or religious studies) where truth itself is largely a matter of interpretation, or construction of new illuminating perspectives on certain historical documents, etc.[22] Again this directly applies to religious and theological reflections—or "inquiries", insofar as this notion is appropriate in this context. But we should also admit that inquiry extends even to areas in which it no longer makes much sense to speak about the pursuit of truth. For instance, political discussion may take the form of an (objective) inquiry as long as the participants are responsive to one another's possibly conflicting ideas and the evidence and other considerations brought to the picture by the discussants. Artistic inquiries, in turn, may very interestingly question our received views and conceptualizations of the world much more effectively than scientific theory-formation ever can. And even religious "inquiries" into one's most fundamental ways of relating to the world and to one's individual and communal life may deserve the honorific title of an inquiry even if they are never responsive to evidence in the way science is but are, rather, primarily responsive to the deeply personal existential needs of the subject and the satisfaction of those needs in that person's concrete life situations.

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[22] It might, for instance, be extremely problematic to apply the Peircean "final opinion" account of truth to such areas of inquiry. Still we would hardly like to say that they have nothing at all to do with the concept of truth or that truth would simply be irrelevant in such fields. Here as elsewhere, pragmatism generally seeks to offer a balanced middle ground view.

A critic might argue that we are extending the concept of inquiry too far from its legitimate pragmatic meaning by seeking to accommodate religious inquiries under this concept. If inquiry must be truly objective—responding to Peircean "real things"—how can one's personal struggle with religious faith, or with losing one's faith, be an instance of inquiry? It could be suggested that especially by Peircean (and/or Deweyan) lights, inquiry aiming at the truth must be responsive to experience in a way that religious inquiry can never be. In particular, religious faith might be *defined* in such a manner that it *cannot* be responsive to experience in the relative sense (in order to be religious).²³ This would lead to fideism, according to which religious faith is simply not a rational matter, not a matter of inquiry. Now, needless to say, my pragmatist account of objectivity and inquiry is very different; as explained in the beginning of this paper, pragmatism seeks to transcend the received opposition between evidentialism and fideism by developing a form of religious inquiry that is responsive to experience in a relevant sense without thereby losing the distinctive character of religious thought in comparison to science. The key to this is the general pragmatist account of inquiry, enriched with the concept of recognition outlined above. Religious inquiry may be a genuine inquiry—and even genuinely "objective"—in the relevant pragmatic sense while being very different from standard scientific inquiries. It may still be responsive to experience and evidence drawn from the "laboratory of life", to be distinguished from the scientific laboratory. There is no a priori reason why our *Weltanschauungen*, or views of life and its significance, shouldn't be regarded as pragmatically testable.

Moreover, what if religious inquiry, in the pragmatic sense, is an attempt to *recognize* the different ways—one's own and others'—of being responsive to experiences of different types (or more generally of being responsive to argument, criticism, and other considerations that might lead to revisions in one's belief system)? The notion of recognition would thus be highly central in the pragmatic understanding of inquiry in general, and religious inquiry in particular. Such recognitions would never be "objective" in the sense of being based on a "God's-Eye View" on the

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²³ In particular, at the empiricist extreme, the Vienna Circle logical empiricists famously regarded theistic (but also, symmetrically, atheistic) views as *meaningless* because they are neither verifiable nor falsifiable empirically. (Among the very few twentieth-century logical empiricists who also held religious ideas was Richard Braithwaite.) The standard reaction among scientifically and empiricistically oriented believers would be that religious faith is, precisely, beyond evidence and experience and that precisely for this reason it must not be confused with scientific inquiry at all.

world; on the contrary, they would always, inevitably, be *someone's* actions and perspectives, humanly situated and engaged acts in the social world in which we live in and in which our very identities may depend on our relations (including relations of recognition) to other socially engaged subjects.[24] This kind of inquiry would indeed *be* a species of recognition. From a pragmatist point of view, then, the notions of inquiry and recognition would not just be contingently related to one another but would actually be fundamentally linked, to the extent that for a pragmatist it may in the end be impossible to understand the relevant concept of inquiry without understanding what it is to recognize other inquirers. Nor would acts of recognition be possible without implying dynamic projects of inquiry into the shared world. The religious and theological significance of these ideas, left implicit here, may in fact be enormous.

## 6. Conclusion: science and religion (again)

What *is* it, then, to recognize someone or some group as belonging to the same intellectual community of inquirers? What does it mean to be committed to a membership in such a community? Is this ultimately a matter of recognizing certain *people* ("fellow inquirers") as rational (or attributing some other normative properties to them) or of recognizing certain *methodological norms or criteria* as objectively valid or binding?[25] Are these acts of recognition essentially different from the corresponding acts required for one's being able to live in a moral, political, and/or religious community? One research hypothesis that a pragmatist could examine further is that the structures of recognition at work in these various cases can be used to clarify and evaluate certain important cases of conflict, e.g., situations in which one's "objective" intellectual duties seem to run into conflict with one's "subjective" religious (or, possibly, ethical) commitments. The very notion of an intellectual duty, investigated in what is often called the "ethics of belief", could thereby also be analyzed and redefined.[26] It is clear that the notion of objectivity would have to be invoked here.

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[24] I would even go as far as to claim that the metaphysical relations of dependence among human persons are ultimately based on ethical relations of (mutual) recognition, and that metaphysics (especially the metaphysics of selves) is thus grounded in ethics, but that would be a longer story, possibly also defensible along pragmatist lines.

[25] Such as, e.g., Peirce's characterization of the scientific method in "The Fixation of Belief".

[26] For novel pragmatist contributions to the ethics of belief discussion, inspired by James, see Rydenfelt and Pihlström (2013).

Moreover, it may be asked why the relatively heterogeneous (yet allegedly objective) "scientific worldview" is usually regarded as a single and unified picture of the world maintained by a single, unified community of inquirers based on relations of mutual recognition, even though that worldview is itself undeniably full of tensions and disagreements (and so arguably *fails* to be a unified worldview at all). Why should, e.g., religious views be automatically excluded from such a worldview? This is again a question addressing our practices of recognition. It is not immediately obvious why, for instance, the different philosophical interpretations of basic ("objective") ontological structures of reality—regarding, e.g., universals (realism vs. nominalism) or modalities—would be any less dramatic conflicts of reason or rationality than the opposition between theism and atheism. Why do, say, realists and nominalists belong to the same community of rational inquirers committed to a scientific worldview and to the same rational methods of inquiry, while theists (according to new atheists, at least) do not? Analyzing these relations of recognition, or the lack thereof, is a key task for both pragmatists and non-pragmatists today, regarding both philosophy of religion and interdisciplinary religious studies.[27]

In cases of extreme intellectual conflict (between, say, conservative Christian fundamentalism and militant new atheism), there is little hope for mutual recognition or even tolerance. In some other cases, including the much narrower gap between liberal Christianity and, say, philosophical agnosticism based on some version of non-reductive naturalism rather than eliminative scientism, it is possible to aim not only at tolerance but at deep mutual respect grounded in acts of recognition. Even then, the somewhat conflicting accounts of reason and its role in religion and theology must be considered. It might be suggested that a kind of *intolerance* may already be built into the Enlightenment project of reason-use itself, if the latter is understood as being committed to the idea that the "objectively best argument" necessarily "wins" and that argumentative and/or intellectual considerations always ought to be followed "wherever they lead". Philosophical argumentation may itself have (e.g., ethical) limitations that again need to be duly recognized. The pragmatist will therefore also need

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[27] Furthermore, the challenges posed by "postmodern" trends in the philosophy of religion—e.g., attempts to "save" religion from "onto-theological" doctrines postulating divine reality beyond language—may also be re-examined from this perspective. How does the postmodern project of deliberately blurring all rational, normative, and other boundaries change this problem framework?

to consider models of recognition that can be employed in a self-critical examination of one's ethical limitations, and those of the groups and social practices one engages in: it should be possible to recognize (while disagreeing with) a perspective from which one's argumentation, however intellectually sound, leads to ethically problematic conclusions.[28]

I have in this essay emphasized pragmatism as a critical middle path between the implausible extremes of evidentialism and fideism. In conclusion, I should note that it would be an interesting further inquiry to reflect on this proposal to develop pragmatism as a *via media* by making a comparison to an apparently very different but on a closer look related position articulated and defended by Richard Kearney (2010), also intended as a middle ground option between traditional theisms and atheisms, and also offering an intriguing contribution to the issue of evil. I see Kearney's "anatheism" as analogous to the kind of pragmatism I am defending in relation to both the epistemic and the existential interest distinguished above. The anatheist, just like the pragmatist, rejects mainstream realisms and antirealisms, as well as mainstream conceptions of religious belief either as merely subjective or (alternatively) as objective in the sense presupposed in standard analytic evidentialist philosophy of religion. These conceptions of religion simply do not help us in making sense of the ways in which religion is a distinctive human practice or phenomenon that invites neither militant rejection nor anti-intellectual acceptance.

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[28] Religious believers may also maintain that the scientific and explanatory discourse manifested in, e.g., cognitive study of religion today fails to appreciate yet another kind of limit that must be recognized. This could be called *the limits of scientific explanation*. Religious practices or forms of life, some believers may argue, can only be adequately understood "from within"; to attempt to explain them causally and/or with reference to, e.g., evolutionary history from an external non-religious point of view sets a serious limitation for the adequate understanding of religious life *qua* religious. Here the critical discussion of the recently influential cognitive paradigm in religious studies could be connected with the Wittgensteinian orientation in the philosophy of religion, which emphasizes understanding rule-governed practices and/or forms of life from within them—and comes in that respect close to pragmatism. Again, the limits between these two groups—not identical to the groups of atheists and believers—may be crossed by means of mutual recognition. And again the same kind of questions arise: can, e.g., a cognitive scholar of religion and a Wittgensteinian philosopher emphasizing the fundamental differences between religious forms of life and scientific appeals to reason and evidence even recognize each other as members of the same intellectual community of inquirers committed to shared conceptions of reason, rationality, and science? Is religion a special case here, fundamentally different from science or everyday reasoning? Pragmatism may, by offering its middle path, facilitate such processes of mutual recognition among participants of these and other practices.

In brief, both the pragmatist (in my sense) and the anatheist (in Kearney's sense) seek to move beyond the standard dichotomies between evidentialism and fideism, or theism and atheism; both reject received views of objectivity and realism (as contrasted to subjectivity and antirealism); and both also reject all rationalizing attempts to resolve the problem of evil as manifestations of "vicious intellectualism". Here, however, I only want to *recognize* Kearney's position as a potential discussion partner for pragmatist philosophers of religion pursuing practice-laden objectivity (and rationality). Future pragmatist studies of theological realism, objectivity, and religious inquiry would have to engage with the anatheist alternative as seriously as they have hitherto engaged with the various received views that are now ready to be left aside as potential blocks to the road of inquiry.[29]

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