WITTGENSTEIN, RELIGIOUS BELIEF,
AND HINGE EPISTEMOLOGY

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Abstract: Some hinge epistemologists have recently argued that the striking similitudes between hinge commitments and religious belief help supporting a parity argument to the end that religious beliefs are not less reasonable than ordinary ones. I will argue that both hinges and religious beliefs are able to gain a rational standing, but that their rationality stems from much deeper sources than in previous accounts. It is not, however, as if hinge epistemologists had to shed light through hinges to religious belief. It is rather the opposite —as if religious trust were instrumental to making sense of how trust in hinges might be ultimately rational.

Keywords: Epistemic Agency; Hinge Commitments; Meaningfulness; Performance Normativity; Radical Scepticism; Religious Belief.

1 Introduction

It has been a pet project for hinge epistemologists to read Wittgenstein's remarks on religious belief in light of his way of characterizing so-called 'Moore propositions' or 'hinge commitments', as it is developed in *On Certainty*.

As earlier as in 2001, Iakovos Vasiliou drew attention to the facts that for Wittgenstein neither religious beliefs nor Moore propositions are grounded in evidence, and that while having the form of ordinary empirical beliefs, neither of those two kinds of belief function in the same way as other empirical beliefs. The striking similitude between religious beliefs and Moore propositions would make intelligible Wittgenstein's unusual claim that the religious believer and the non-believer do not in fact contradict each other (Vasiliou, 2001, 31)—they operate within different systems of reference.

However, it has been Duncan Pritchard (2017), as an accomplished Wittgenstein scholar and as one of the greatest representatives of a recent theory of justification and knowledge broadly inspired in *On Certainty* (Coliva, 2016, 6) —*Hinge Epistemology*, who has embraced the program of deriving a particular religious epistemology from Wittgenstein's (or Wittgenstein's inspired) more general epistemology.

Pritchard's main purpose has been that of finding a middle path between what he calls the "epistemic heroism" (Pritchard, 2017, 101) of religious cognitivism and the "epistemic capitulation" (*Id.* 102) of fideistic accounts of religious belief. To this

end, the peculiar 'epistemic status' of hinge commitments, which while groundless, count as eminently reasonable, would be instrumental. The *quasi-fideism* (the reasonableness of groundless, unshakeable commitments) that defines Pritchard's general epistemology might easily be projected to religious beliefs, thus conferring on them, if not epistemic justification, at least a certain rationality. Pritchard thus proposes a "parity argument" (*Id.* 103) according to which religious beliefs are not less reasonable than ordinary ones.

At bottom, it seems as if hinge epistemologists would be making the point that the core beliefs of the ordinary person are no more well-grounded than the beliefs of a religious person.[1] Religious faith and ordinary epistemic practices would thus equally spring from what Wittgenstein called a "trusting" (Wittgenstein, 1980/2006, 82); a point that couldn't but alleviate somewhat the beleaguered religious believer, by placing their commitments beyond the reach of evidential criticism and mitigating the feeling of irrationality, arbitrariness and embarrassment with which their beliefs are prone to be received by the secular hearer. One would thus suspect that behind this strategy, and as its motive force, is the desire to protect faith and offer to the believer what John Cottingham calls "an escape route" (Cottingham, 2009, 204).

In my view, this approach raises more questions than answers.

Let us firstly focus on the notion of 'trust', which for Pritchard would bound up religious belief with hinge commitments.

It is fairly indisputable that for Wittgenstein religious beliefs, apart from being "unshakable" and "the firmest of all beliefs" (Wittgenstein, 1967/2007, 54), are neither supported by evidence nor responsive to it (*Id.* 56). It is also common wisdom that following Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein thought that "religious belief could only be (something like) passionately committing oneself to a system of coordinates." (Wittgenstein, 1980/2006, 73) However, from this it does not follow a purely expressivist account of religious beliefs, one which suggests that religious belief is *nothing but* the unshakeable commitment and the firm 'trusting' necessarily involved in such a kind of belief (see on this point Schroeder, 2008, 86-88). Wittgenstein himself remarks that religious belief "is *belief*" (Wittgenstein, 1980/2006, 64), although not merely ordinary belief. On my reading, this means that religious belief concerns matters of fact, to wit, that, on pain of *ineffabilism*, it has a content and involves propositional elements. That those facts are not available from a perceptive and purely cognitive standpoint, that they are only accessible as a result of either a particular sort of awareness or of the inner transformation of the believer (of the lessons of life to which Wittgenstein refers in Wittgenstein, 1980/2006, 97), it raises an epistemological question unrelated to the semantic issue at hand —that of the factuality of religious belief.[2]

The problem comes from the fact that Pritchard seems to be endorsing a variety of what Cottingham calls the "fruit-juicer" (Cottingham, 2009, 209) model

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[1] This seems reminiscent of familiar ways of using sceptical considerations to make room for faith, as with Montaigne.

[2] It would be tempting to suggest that the only way in which an explanation of Wittgenstein's claim that the believer and the non-believer do not oppose each other could be provided is by conceiving religious beliefs as metaphors and symbols unconcerned with matters of facts. However, there is an alternative explanation —one that accords both with the fact that usually believers *really* believe what they say and with the practical, regulative and *guiding* character that Wittgenstein sees as *essential* to religious beliefs (Wittgenstein, 1967/2007, 53-54), a function that mere metaphors and heuristic presuppositions are not able to play: it is that of considering the non-believer as blind both to the facts to which the believer is committed and to why he is committed to those very facts. To be fair, Pritchard's emphasis on the commitment element of religious statements is helpful to dispel metaphorical construals of religious claims.

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of approaching religious belief. This model abstracts the attitudinal from the propositional element of religious belief, thus attempting to capture the essence of religious experience through a process of distilment which disregards as inessential the unfavored element. It is a procedure common among religious cognitivists that reduce religious beliefs to a series of factual claims on a par with empirical beliefs; but it might also be deployed, as with Pritchard, to reduce religious belief to nothing but passionate, volitional commitment. However, the possibility of taking some elements of a complex phenomenon as content and some as attitude depends upon being able to consider each element apart from the others. But this is precisely what it seems we cannot do —we do not have independent access to formal and content features of religious belief (see Tillich, 1957/1958, 30-40).[3]

The problem becomes more pressing if we note that for Pritchard it is 'trusting' *by itself* that does the real work of conferring rationality to religious belief. However, the fact that I am firmly committed to the belief in the Last Judgment does not make my belief 'more' rational than if I merely clung faintly to the theistic hope (and anguish) about that momentous event. As it is no more rational my firm conviction that there is an external world because of the very fact that it is a belief that stands fast for me. The work is done, not by firm commitment itself, but by the relation, on the one hand, between hinge propositions and epistemic practices and, on the other, between religious belief and moral activities; a relation that it is the responsibility of hinge epistemologists and of religious philosophers to explain, not, indeed, to generate or to replace natural trust, but to enhance it as *nonarbitrary trust* and even to transform it into a *passionate commitment* —that of taking the greatest *risk* (see Wittgenstein, 1967/2007, 54) in the face of utter futility.

A further question for hinge epistemologists arises from the fact that they are eager to distinguish the plurality of hinge commitments in ordinary life —one that matches the motley and variated list of Moore propositions, and the *basic certainty* that all of them express. This basic certainty would be the underlying core that is common to all our epistemic commitments, and that would permit their unification under a common category; one that would remain *constant* despite the flowing nature of its expressions. This fundamental certainty is for Pritchard what he calls the *über hinge commitment* that *we are not radically in error* (Pritchard, 2017, 111).

The trouble comes from the fact that if religious beliefs are parallel to Moore propositions it would be reasonable to expect that, like the latter, and regardless of their content and their context, they would be also expressive of a basic, religious certainty that underwrites all of them. Otherwise, the problem of relativism and the issue regarding the lack of ultimate value of beliefs hospitable to value and about the radical contingency of religious beliefs as guides for life and meaning-bestowing commitments would not be assuaged in the least. However, Wittgensteinian epistemologists keep us uninformed about the content, and even about the existence of such an *über hinge religious commitment*. Since the skeptical question of whether religious belief is rational is raised at the highest level of abstraction, it would be necessary to be clear about what it is that which makes of a belief a *religious* belief, to wit, of the common view whose rational nature is at issue.

As a final worry, let me add that in spite of the striking similitudes between hinges and religious beliefs, there are at least two significant disanalogies between them. On the one hand, and contrary to what Wittgenstein claims concerning epistemic hinges —that they are the implicit background against which cognitive practices take place, and so, that they are neither explicitly learnt (Wittgenstein, 1969/2004, § 279) nor movements within the cognitive game—, one mark of

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[3] In Section 3, it will be argued that content is available to two distinct attitudes: that of *hope* and that of *faith*. However, both of them are expressive of ultimate concern.

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religious belief is that it is like a picture "constantly in the foreground" (Wittgenstein, 1967/2007, 56) for the believer, a picture that explicitly and regularly orientates his conduct. On the other, it seems crucial to note that while it would be usually absurd to depict our commitment to hinges as passionate, and so, to see them as objects of faith, loyalty, and devotion, or as involving a deep, radical change in one's way of living and assessing life, it is such profound transformation of the center of the self, one that includes all the elements of the personal life, that is constitutive of the religious attitude of faith.

Such sharp contrast between hinges and religious beliefs should alert us. It suggests that religious belief, if rational at all, would not be rational as hinges are. The answer to the issue of why hinges are rational in spite of their groundless nature is not thus projectable to the same question as referring to the rationality of religious commitments. For on the religious view, the external world is not just an indifferent background to our practices; it is a world shot through with ultimate meaning and permanent value. Religious belief appears to have a much deeper significance than hinges for a meaningful life. And, as Wittgenstein recalls, it makes an enormous difference to see life as the life of an ant-heap and to see it as the life of a human being (Wittgenstein, 1980/2006, 71).

In section 2, I will focus on the problem of how hinges are able to gain a rational standing. I will argue that hinges are rational insofar as there is a necessary relation between the framework of epistemic evaluation and epistemic agency. To this end, Ernest Sosa's recent approach to some of the main topics of Hinge Epistemology, as well as his diagnosis of the skeptical challenge, will be relevant. Drawing attention to the 'practical turn' in recent epistemology, I will make room for the notions of 'rational faith', 'interest' and 'care' that will be instrumental to the following analysis of religious belief.

In section 3, I will draw heavily on the distinction made by Wittgenstein between faith and superstition. It will be argued that while the question that guides many of Wittgenstein's late remarks on religious belief goes back to the pre-Tractarian problem of how would it be possible an agreement between one's will and an alien will (Wittgenstein, 1961/1979, 74) that in the *Notebooks 1914-1916* he identifies with God, fate, the world (*Ibid.*) and "how things stand" (*Id.* 79), he grows out of his early Stoicism, coming to adopt a position strikingly akin to Kant's view on the significance of religious hope. Religious belief stands as a way of living and of assessing life that sets limits to the human practices in which it is embedded, thus opposing moral fanaticism and idolatrous expectations of earthly fulfillment. It gains rationality since, apart from resonating with our powerful pretheoretical intuitions about ourselves as moral doers, it forces a stark choice upon the unbeliever —a choice between learning to grow out of the illusion of moral struggle and opting for moral struggling against the backdrop of the ultimate concern of faith.[4] For those of us who cannot grow out of the human in us without renouncing ourselves, the ineradicable and unquenchable yearning of a Faust is far from tragic —it is the spring of action.

2 Background presuppositions and epistemic agency

Although internecine war among the different versions of Hinge Epistemology is far from settled, there is common ground for all of them —mainly, in that they

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[4] This 'stark choice' has been forcefully described by John Cottingham in Cottingham, 2013, 110-110. I add to it a further twist, by showing that only one of the options involved in such a choice would be coherent with the conditions that make the choice possible and genuine. This results in a transcendental argument of sorts in favour of the rationality of religious commitment.

oppose the neo-Moorean proposal (as it is expounded by self-called Dogmatists and Liberals such as Huemer and Pryor) that perception or seemings suffice to grant one justification for the corresponding perceptual belief. Hinge Epistemologists' claim is that experience on its own underdetermines the beliefs that could be taken to be justified by it, and that we have to add to appearances a very *general assumption* in order to obtain evidential justification for empirical, quotidian beliefs.

Let us take that *I seem to see a barn*. Given that this seeming is compatible with the fact that I am not really seeing a barn (maybe because I am only hallucinating one or because what I am seeing is a fake-barn), the experience by itself is not enough to warrant my belief that I am seeing a barn. It is also necessary, for that purpose, the relevant default assumption that *if one seems to see a barn, and absent reasons to doubt, one does see a barn*; which in turn would be a particular instantiation of a general, *background presupposition* that might be expressed in different ways — as the assumption that *I am not the victim of a massive perceptual and cognitive deception* (Coliva, 2015, 6), or that *Reality tends to correspond to appearance* (Sosa, forthcoming, 129), or that *We are not radically in error* (Pritchard, 2017, 111). This is why *über hinge commitments* enter the picture, as the first principles in the architecture of perceptual justification; principles that help providing *default justification* to our empirical claims.

The worry about general hinges is that they are intended to be offered as first principles that can neither be proved, nor justified, nor warranted by appealing to something still more fundamental, without losing their claim to be first principles. Notice too that general assumptions function as epistemological primitives that hinge epistemologists adduce in order to explain why and how our empirical claims are justified or even can amount to knowledge. The latter point nips in the bud any prospective claim that hinges may be vindicated for their consequences, as if the very fact that our empirical beliefs are justified, or that our empirical practices are 'paradigm cases' of rationality, might on its own bestow rationality and justification to hinges. This would overturn the whole architecture of epistemic justification as hinge epistemologists themselves depict it.[5]

What is the challenge? It is that since there is nothing to be said for our background, general assumptions, they are rationally on a par with any other general assumption (including the denials of hinges) we could make in their place. The point is that if we take two opposing systems of coordinates grounded in opposing default assumptions, and those fundamental assumptions cannot be supported by any arguments at all, we become mired in a limiting case of

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[5] In my view, Coliva's *extended rationality* argument to the end of vindicating (against the Humean sceptic) the nonarbitrary nature of hinges falls into this class. Coliva comes to the conclusion that hinges are groundless but rational by means of three claims: (i) the very notion of 'epistemic rationality' is taken from our ordinary practices (Coliva, 2015, 129); (ii) Humeans and non-Humeans alike agree in that those practices are essentially rational; (iii) hinges are *constitutive* of our epistemic practices, thus lying within the latter's scope as their conditions of possibility (*Ibid.*). This amounts to a *reductio* of the sceptical view that hinges are arbitrary, and so, nonrational assumptions.

However, Coliva's argument leaves the Humean sceptic untouched. First, because the Humean sceptic is raising the question as to whether our epistemic practices and the background assumptions internal to them are rational, a question that cannot be answered by means of appealing to the very facts that the Humean sceptic doubts or denies. Second, because the Humean sceptic would likely distinguish between the *concept* of rationality and the *use* of it. He might argue that the former does not depend on our practices, and that involving psychologically explainable habituation, the latter is just a contingent fact of human nature; one that does not show that we are within our rights in making basic assumptions. Third, because at the higher order Coliva endorses a naturalistic account of hinges as basic "given the kind of creatures we are" (*Id.* 128), as presuppositions *de facto* that cannot themselves be rationally evaluated. This claim threatens to undermine the proposed solution, and to displace the sceptical question to its proper, reflective stage. Summing up: hinges cannot gain their rationality from ordinary practices since those practices depend on whether hinges are rational to count themselves as rational.

Pyrrhonian equipollence; one in which the two systems are supported by matching arguments because they are equally unsupported (and unsupportable). From equipollence it follows skeptical suspension. The problem is that breaking the stalemate of two equally strong, incompatible views, and thus, breaking the paralysis of suspension, would require an *arbitrary belief* in either side of the equipollence, landing one straight into one of the horns of Agrippa's Trilemma, most specifically the trope of assumption. That hinges are not epistemically rational is thus entailed by their own logical nature.

The challenge might also be expressed in the following way. Hinges are arbitrary insofar as their denial *does not cancel our self-conception as reasoners and deliberators*, to wit, insofar as skeptical scenarios that entail the falsity of hinges *are compatible with their victims' retaining the capacity to make genuine judgments* (to think) —and that, even in spite of the fact that under those unfortunate conditions such judgments would be radically defective.

The point is that the denial of hinges does not appear to affect in the least our conception of ourselves as epistemic performers who, even if doomed, and so, even if impaired to act based on our own choices and to receive credit for our accurate beliefs, are nonetheless able to shape ourselves by epistemic decisions and to arrive at conclusions based on reflection (which would in turn be grounded in misguiding or deceptive information). Hinges hang in the air since they remain *internally unrelated* to being an agent and a thinker. And those elements are not, as with Coliva, a contingent fact regarding how humans act; but the mark on which depends the very possibility of coming to make sense of behavior as *meaningful behavior*. It is precisely the consequence of the skeptical attack to hinges that of making it possible to conceive of logically alien performers *as performers*. It appears as if by detaching our system of references from our view of ourselves as performers, the sceptics were opening up a 'logical space' for describing alternative rationalities that worth the same as another. Thus, the sceptic would make room for the idea of a general, rational evaluation that does not presuppose a backdrop of Wittgensteinian certainties while coming to a negative verdict that, curiously enough, it is entailed by the fact that one's ability to issue judgments and one's normative framework to assess them epistemically are independent factors.

Are they? Let us consider Sosa's recent contribution to the debate of whether background assumptions are rational, and if so, how they are.

Sosa has come to distinguish a particular sub-class of background presuppositions that he calls *domain-defining conditions* (Sosa, forthcoming, 160). On Sosa's view most of our epistemic performances take place against the backdrop of implicit assumptions, as with the following case.

Simone is an experienced fighter pilot that after a long career is subjected to a simulation test. She is unaware of the test, and thinks that, as usual, she is piloting a real plane and shooting at real targets. Let us stipulate that in the present occasion, and despite the fact that she might easily have been led to the simulation screen, Simone is piloting a real jet-fighter, and has just hit a real target. How does the simulation scenario affect the *quality* of her current performance? Since the scenario is not actual, does it affect Simone's performance at all?

It is clear that the actuality of the scenario, as with the actuality of skeptical scenarios, would affect one's performances by making them false. However, it seems also clear that the performer is within her rights to assume by default (insofar as there is no sign to the contrary) that the conditions for the performance are normal and propitious. According to our quotidian, normative framework, Simone is not guilty of epistemic negligence for taking for granted that she is shooting at real

targets. Simone's performance is normatively flawless, and achieves its goal. However, it falls short of a higher epistemic standing in that *the performance's success is too fragile and insecure*, as it can easily be appreciated by comparing Simone's standing with her counterpart's standing in a situation completely safe from simulation (and other defeaters). This is why Sosa places the category of *secure knowledge* at the highest rank of a hierarchical system of grades of knowledge (Sosa, forthcoming, 157).

Let us make, however, two important considerations regarding the case of Simone. On the one hand, there is a significant difference between the unpropitious circumstances for Simone's performance and global scenarios in that the former are *local* conditions that are checkable, while the actuality of global scenarios would be unnoticeable to the victim. It would suffice with our becoming aware of this fact to raise the standards of *nonnegligent performance*, and thus, to raise doubts on whether the reflective agent would retain her rational right to take hinges for granted in the face of those possibilities, which are, as it were, reflectively present to the conscientious performer without requiring any empirical sign to the contrary.[6]

On the other hand, secure knowledge is a quite strict category, one that requires not only the *actuality* of background conditions but also their *safety*. Regarding hinges, this would entail that the conditions that they *must satisfy* to perform their function of making it possible *secure, empirical knowledge*, are two: that they happen to be true, and that they happen to be *safely true*, and thus, unaffected by *modal luck*. To be fair, on Sosa's view it is not required for the performance to be epistemically flawless that the agent knows that those conditions are met. But the safety condition compounds our worries about our rational right to take hinges for granted in the face of global scenarios —it does so because it would suffice to consider that those scenarios, even if false, *might easily be true*, to undermine our default assumptions as arbitrary.[7]

Will the rationality of hinges be regained? Let us consider how Sosa understands *domain-defining conditions*.

To illustrate this notion, Sosa invites us to compare Simone with Fielder, a baseball player in a night game who is performing when, unbeknownst to him, the lights might too easily go out, a situation which makes of his achievement a fragile one. Do the fragile lights downgrade the *quality* of Fielder's performance?

The crucial point for Sosa is that Fielder and Simone differ in that while if the lights go out, Fielder loses his *ability* to perform, Simone would retain her ability to perform (and to issue judgments) even when she is in the simulation cockpit, and her judgments are massively false. Contrary to what happens with Simone, the fragility of the lights does not downgrade Fielder's performance since, if the lights

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[6] It would be useless to claim that global scenarios are too remote, since being compatible with the whole of our experience, there is no external standpoint from which to assess their modal proximity.

Notice that the sceptic is leaving behind the framework of ordinary practices. He is, however, within his rights to go beyond how in deed we act, because the charge of negligence stems from the structure of epistemic rationality itself. Practices can fall short of the very standards constitutive of them. Concerning this issue, it is also relevant to recall that many epistemologists, including proponents of hinge commitments, are prone to question linguistic arguments for different epistemic theories by undermining their underlying methodology, to wit, the methodology that infers the epistemological nature of a concept from its daily uses in ordinary language. On this view, there is a gap between an epistemic concept's linguistic uses and its conceptual nature.

[7] The safety condition would also threaten to undermine Sosa's *telic account of knowledge* as fully apt achievement, that is, as achievement attributable to the agent's animal and reflective competences. On this account, modal defeaters which are unactualized would be irrelevant for the epistemic standing of beliefs. The notion of secure knowledge would thus appear to clash with Sosa's overall program. However, this further problem is tangential to the main topic of this section.

were out, such situation would prevent him to perform at all. A domain-defining condition is thus one that is "constitutive of performing in a given domain, in such a way that performing in that domain requires satisfying that condition." (Sosa, forthcoming, 160)

Recall at this point that the sceptic's attack to hinges depends on the supposed fact that victims would retain their capacity to make genuine judgments, and thus, that familiar skeptical scenarios would only affect the *quality* of their victim's performances. On this view, skeptical scenarios would be alike to the unpropitious circumstances surrounding Simone, if only global; and their victims would be more like Simone than like Fielder. However, and apart from shedding light on a skeptical presupposition that remained mostly unperceived, and thus, from opening up the logical space for the question to arise; Sosa's strategy has the further advantage of raising serious doubts on whether the victim of global scenarios retains her capacity to think and can seriously be conceived as a cognizer. On this view, hinges are *über domain-defining conditions*. As such, we would be within our rights in taking them for granted.[8]

Take, for example, the dreaming argument. It is commonly taken for granted that if one were dreaming one would still be forming beliefs and making judgments —those very beliefs and judgments which one is dreaming of. However, all of the actions, decisions, resolutions, intentions and willful acts that happen *in* the dream, and because they are dreamt of, are cancelled out *as real*, that is, as things that one does, or that are really happening to one, *while* one is dreaming. There is no doubt that thoughts, understood as *mental imagery* that crops up in the mind of the dreamer for any number of reasons unrelated to the dreamer's cognitive achievements, are attributable to the dreamer *while* he dreams of them. However, in dreaming there is no *real thinking*, no genuine act of deliberation, affirmation or even doubt on the part of an agent. The dreamer dreams of himself as thinking and acting, but he is only representing himself as thinking and acting without really being a cognizer and a performer. It is as if the sceptic were adopting a *passive and purely representational view* of the human life and condition. The main objection to the sceptic is that he cannot really conceive of the dreaming world whose possibility he supposes, because he cannot conceive of himself as a thinker and a doubter in such a world. The sceptic is thus guilty of a *performative contradiction* of sorts.

The same argument applies to the whole gamut of global scenarios familiar from skeptical literature. Trading with passive victims that, whether envatted or deceived, are merely spectators of their lives, scenarios such as the BIV are no more than updated versions of the dream argument —BIVs share the fate of dreamers as being cut off from thinking and acting; they live within a dream-like world where everything, even their judgments, are objects of representation. Crucially, skepticism not only makes of *how we relate to ourselves through our actions* a matter of deception, but also raises the question as to whether our feeling of ourselves as *living agents* is nothing more than an illusion. This means that the skeptical attack to hinges is a self-undermining attack to subjectivity and agency.

Notice, however, that the previous reflection is neither a refutation of global skepticism nor a justificatory argument for hinges, one which by providing new grounds for believing hinges, it increases the likelihood of their truth. The former, because it is still quite possible that logically and metaphysically global scenarios are true. The latter, because far from being objects of knowledge, hinges are objects

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[8] There is an obvious disanalogy between Fielder-if-the-lights-go-out and the victim of a global scenario in that the former, but not the latter, is aware of the actuality of the bad conditions. This, however, does not affect the core argument, that neither aims at ruling out the possibility of massive deception, nor does it trade on marks to distinguish real from virtual experience.

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of *trust*. It has been concluded that this trust, far from blind or optional, is rational. But *rational faith* is still *faith*, and as such it differs both from justified opinion and from certainty.

Trust in hinges is rational insofar as it is not an arbitrary choice for epistemic performers fully aware of what agency really entails to make. As it is not an instance of arbitrariness one's refusal to entertain the theoretical possibility that active thinking is illusory. This possibility is not even optative for free agents without destroying their inner selves and thus renouncing themselves. It is problematic even to raise the question as to whether considering ourselves as thinkers is or is not rational, since as predicates of thinking, rational and nonrational are terms that presuppose it.

In any case, it is the *practical certainty* constitutive of our conception of ourselves as *doers* that counters theoretical doubt. Such a practical certainty involves *care about ourselves*. And, as we have come to see, this care about oneself is logically related to conceiving the world, not as a field of possible objects of representation, but instead, as the arena of our practical concerns, something we care about and are interested in. Theoretical doubt undermines any interest in reality and in ourselves; akin to Mephistopheles, it is of that "spirit of perpetual negation" (Goethe, 1808/1987, I 1338) which leads to the vanishing of the world insofar as the world becomes an object of indifference. And it is indifference which opposes trust, hope, and faith as proactive attitudes involving concern. It is only this *interest* that makes the world *real*, and not a mere phantasmagoria of ordered images.

Trust in hinges is no other that the voluntary assent to the system of reference which naturally presents itself to us because only in this view can we fulfill our duty as performers. This is what the above mentioned 'practical turn' in epistemology really means.[9]

3 Meaningfulness and religious belief

It is clear, at first sight at least, that the facts expressed by religious belief are not conditions constitutive of epistemic performance. However, Wittgenstein also underlines the *practical character* and the *practical certainty* essentially involved in religious belief, as well as how religion is intimately related to a *meaningful life* (Wittgenstein, 1980/2006, 71) of care and interest. Care and interest are precisely the existential attitudes that make of the world something *real*; attitudes which stem from a basic duty to ourselves as *responsible agents*. Since religious belief is expressive of *ultimate concern*, would not the world of the believer be a world that is maximally real, one that has waxed to its highest limit? Is it *that*—trust *against all evidence* in the full reality of life, and world, and action—what believing in a judging and redeeming God, in God as creator of the world, in Fate and the Will of God, are expressing?

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[9] Notice firstly that on this approach the rationality of hinges stems from much deeper sources than in previous accounts. It is as if hinge epistemologists had mostly forgot Wittgenstein's advice to put the question marks deep enough down (Wittgenstein, 1980/2006, 71). Our view is also fair to how intuitive and significant are sceptical challenges. Notice too that though hinge epistemologists are prone to underline practices, they are usually blind to their living, existential character. Paying lip service to practice does not necessarily involves appreciation of the practical dimension, as is it easily perceived in how unfair and misguided are familiar charges against Crispin Wright as proposing 'pragmatical' arguments for hinges (mainly in Wright, 2004) when instead, Wright is trading with the 'practical' (in almost Kantian terms) and not with the pragmatic.

It is my view that far from attempting to objectively prove (or disprove) the truth of religion, Wittgenstein's late remarks on hope and faith rather explain the transcendental relation between religious belief and moral activity. I will argue that we may regard Wittgenstein's late view on religion as the continuation of his early preoccupation with the problem of how it would be possible, if at all, overcoming the discrepancy between the metaphysical 'I' that is "the bearer of ethics" (Wittgenstein, 1961/1979, 80) and an alien world indifferent to our concerns — and that, in the face of the humbling truth that there is no evidential connection between our ethical will and the world (*Id.* 73, 77). This momentous question is inherited by Wittgenstein from Kant. It also suffers a long, protracted process of critical purification that, curiously enough, and contrary to the appearances, would result in a deeper agreement between Kant's and Wittgenstein's views on the matter at hand.

As it is well known, Kant offers in the second *Critique* a deduction of the Idea of God (which is one of the postulates of practical reason) as something that we must presuppose as condition for achieving practical reason's final purpose of the *highest good* (see Kant, 1788/2015, 5:108-114). The highest good is for Kant a state in which the greatest possible virtue is joined with the greatest possible happiness; a state which is the object of all of practical reason's endeavors. It is important also to notice that for Kant the highest good is neither an extrinsic end imposed on the will from without, nor a local and temporal end that representational knowledge gives us as a goal. It is duty —the will as determined by the moral law— that gives rise to the highest good as an intrinsic end for the ethical subject.

Thus, Kant is facing two related questions: (i) the more abstract question as to whether a supersensual phenomenon —the ethical will— can be *efficacious* within a sensual world, so that the moral law does not command in vain; and (ii) the problem of whether reason's demand for a world in which happiness and virtue are connected, and the highest good becomes actual, could still be conceived as something that is neither an *illusory command* nor a piece of *wishful thinking, in the face of the obstinacy of appearances to the contrary* (appearances that far from minimizing, Kant is realist enough to underline). Faith in God's governance of the world stands for Kant as the necessary assumption without which morality either would break down or would become an empty object of reverence, one that would be empty because as unrealizable it would not be the spring of purposeful action.

It is clear that the early Wittgenstein of the *Notebooks* and the *Tractatus* was passionately committed to the questions raised by Kant. However, it is far from clear which stance he took. Wittgenstein's answer seems to fluctuate between two opposing views. On the one hand, he seems sometimes to come to agree with the existence of the world as "dependent of an alien will" and "mystical" (see Wittgenstein, 1961/1979, 74, and Wittgenstein, 1922/1995, 6.44). On this view, faith in God's governance of the world would permit us seeing all events as 'the will of God', so that they would be seen as meaningful. The same faith would also underwrite our trust as moral agents in that the ethical will does make a difference in the natural world.

However, Wittgenstein's more frequent attitude in his early reflections is quite other. It is as if he were discouraging reason's demand for the highest good, and thought to resolve the Kantian problem by denying its existence —on this view happiness and virtue are not disproportional because they are, in fact, identical. Stoicism thus permeates Wittgenstein's early tone, and encourages the view of the ethical 'I' as a moral hero who externalizing all phenomena, substitutes an invulnerable inner life of moral triumph for an external life ruled by chance. The ethical 'I' would stand firm in the *righteousness of his will*, no matter whether his will

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has consequences. The moral law stands on its own, independent from the world. The only assurance required for a meaningful life is the certainty of one's intentions. Faith in God is not even required for the self-sustained moral law, because there are neither problems nor constitutive ends that would demand a relation between moral activity and religious belief.[10]

The more Wittgenstein became aware of the complexity of the practical, the more his early, heroic conception of ethics came to be suspected and eventually abandoned, with the subsequent reappraisal of religious belief. It is not only that Wittgenstein came to see his previous Stoicism as positing a moral psychology that cannot apply to human beings, as it involves a denial of our own corporeal nature with its own claims and needs. More importantly, he came to be deeply concerned about several traits of moral activity that open up a logical space for ethics as essentially supported by the contents of religious faith. All of these traits come to the surface in remarks contained in *Culture and Value.*

Wittgenstein's early view took for granted the *authority* of the moral law and of the duties grounded in it as a secure repository of meaning and value. However, his later remarks on ethics (see Wittgenstein, 1980/2006, 95) were written under the shadow of what Bernard Williams called "the radical contingency of the ethical" (Williams, 2002, 20), to wit, under the suspicion that the moral voice within us might be nothing more than an illusion easily explained by biological or cultural factors, a local phenomenon from which as a token of reason's coming of age we must learn to grow out. From this it follows that one is not even at home in the innermost domain of the free determination of the will.

For people like Wittgenstein, who while unable to abandon the sanctity of their duties are not blind to their vulnerability, this situation results in anxiety and torment —they oscillate between conceiving themselves as fools wasting their lives for the sake of delusory commands, or as 'liberated' scoundrels at the actions of which they themselves would "shuddered with disgust" (Wittgenstein, 1980/2006, 99). Faith in God would be a way of expressing the rejection of such self-inflicted torment, as the ultimate trust in the ultimacy of a moral agency that otherwise would break down. This is exactly the same point made by Kant, but at a deeper level —as related, not to the connection between will and fulfillment, but to the reality of the will itself.[11]

There is also the *epistemological issue* of whether moral certainty regarding the motives of one's actions and the ethical significance of one's decisions is even conceivable. On the one hand, Wittgenstein's increasing appreciation of the practical standpoint (and his corresponding denial of the model of the private object in the mind's eye) results in the insight that we cannot be our own spectators regarding our actions, whether present or future; and that even though we are able with proper care to asses our past actions from a more neutral point of view, such evaluation is far from transparent. The point is that we cannot regard ourselves as both moral agents and objects of knowledge, for the capacity to choose necessarily involves an element of uncertainty regarding the purity of one's intentions. How

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[10] Traces of this autonomous view of morality can be found in some of Wittgenstein's late remarks, as when in an implicit discussion of Kant's deduction of the postulates of reason, Wittgenstein writes: "«God has commanded it, therefore we must be able to do it.» That means nothing. There is no «*therefore*» about it. The two expressions might at most mean the *same.*" (Wittgenstein, 1980/2006, 87)
This does not entail, however, that at this point Wittgenstein is still endorsing a self-sustaining conception of the moral law (which in the above text appears as God's command). What is happening is that for the late Wittgenstein the relation between the moral law and religious belief lays at a much deeper level, as it will be argued in the main text.

[11] At the end of this section we will say something more on whether faith in God would be a choice grounded in wishful thinking.

can the consciousness of our virtue be the only genuine happiness then, when even that consciousness is problematic and even our motives are opaque to ourselves? This is why deprived of moral certainty, the only thing that remains as virtue for the moral agent and for him to reclaim as having moral worth is *struggle* —never ending struggle to improve oneself and to look after making oneself decent (Wittgenstein, 1980/2006, 35).[12]

On the other hand, this epistemological issue comes together with the insight that certain virtue is not only no virtue, it is detrimental to morality. Firstly, because it creates in the agent such high opinion of himself that he is prevented from attempting to improve himself and live morally. Second, because the moral arrogant takes himself as the measure of moral worth, easily becoming deaf to the strict commands of conscience while displaying vicious contempt for others. Third, because moral haughtiness is expressed in the everyday practice of sizing ourselves up morally; a practice that while important for our community life, it can become terrifying without the tempering influences of compassion and humility.

One of the many functions of religious belief, most specifically of trust in God as creator and only judge, is that of mitigating moral fanaticism, a point which William Brenner (2001) has wonderfully expounded. It is precisely the point made by Wittgenstein when writing that "(i)n Christianity it is as though God said to human beings: Don't act a tragedy, that is to say, don't enact heaven & hell on earth, heaven & hell are *my* affair" (Wittgenstein, 1980/2006, 21), or when warning himself not to play "with what lies deep in another person." (*Id.* 26) Religious trust thus provides a standpoint from which moral striving is neither annihilated by a certainty of our moral worth that leads to complacency and quietism nor is it mired in the swamp of attenuating circumstances, indiscriminate sympathy and moral luck.

It is, however, Wittgenstein's regained appreciation of the human *yearning for ultimate meaning* as it is (secularly, and thus, distortedly) expressed in the modern world by a life of anxious striving, by promises of earthly fulfillment that when fulfilled, are proved to be empty, and by the spread of neurotic states of mind, which leads Wittgenstein closer to Kant's conception of the highest good as the moral demand of a meaningful life. Not to say that it also bounds up the cultural, the political and the religious anxieties of Wittgenstein himself.

This aspect is intimately related with the distinction made by Wittgenstein between religious faith and superstition, as well as with the further suggestion that science is rooted in the basic attitude proper of the superstitious mind (Wittgenstein, 1980/2006, 82).

Superstition is the drive to acquire and utilize knowledge of the causes of things; an anxious striving that springs from fear (*Ibid.*) and attempts to pry into the entrails of nature and history so as to gain power, and by means of it, to improve the human condition and become at home in the world insofar as it has come to be controllable and intelligible. One may rightly say that superstition (as a primitive science) and science are equally spurred by the ideal of making the highest good actual, and so, that they express a deeply felt *ethical orientation toward the world*. The utopian rails against the existential purposeless of a world without progress, one doomed to ever-repeating and meaningless cycles of birth, reproduction and death.

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[12] Compare with Wittgenstein, 1980/2006, 54: "It is hard to understand yourself properly since something that you *might* be doing out of generosity & goodness is the same as you may be doing out of cowardice or indifference. To be sure, one may act in such & such a way from true love, but also from deceitfulness & from a cold heart too. Similarly not all moderation is goodness. And only if I could be submerged in religion might these doubts be silenced. For only religion could destroy vanity & penetrate every nook & cranny."

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Knowledge and the control that it provides are the proper means to pursue material plenty and social justice.

However, even if the earthly utopia were finally achieved, it would be an ethical disaster. The rational future has nothing to offer but the same endless cycles of birth, reproduction and death, if only sanitized and sterilized. Youthful idealism yields to mature resignation; and the anxiety that comes with our growing suspicion that around the myth of progress (Wittgenstein, 1980/2006, 9) we are building a system of meaning as condemned to ultimate futility as those personal projects with which we inject some ephemeral purpose into our lives, might be repressed, but never appeased. Wittgenstein and Kant coincide in claiming that neither the ends of the moral law nor the yearning for ultimate meaning that is expressive of those ends do lie in the earthly sphere. Religious faith is the opposite of *idolatry* —the latter being the agent's total surrender to an object of ultimate concern that is local and unfulfilling. The breakdown of this pseudo-faith is the malady of the modern world.

The religious orientation toward the world sets limits to the idolatrous drive by emphasizing wonder and trust. Wonder toward the unfathomable nature of events. Trust in those events as God's will. It rebuilds the whole person around a sense of *everlasting responsibility for our actions* that as Cottingham has perfectly expressed "is intimately bound up with the idea that they are morally significant, that they *matter.*" (Cottingham, 2013, 108) The yearning for ultimate meaning expresses our need to be accountable so that our life might not be reduced to a dream which hangs together in a dream of itself; it expresses the hope for a life in the face of ultimate evaluation and transparency. Wittgenstein wrote: "So if you want to stay within the religious sphere, you must *struggle.*" (Wittgenstein, 1980/2006, 98) Since yearning for a meaningful life is yearning for the *ultimate significance* of the ethical, one must also struggle to stay within the sphere of morality. Morality would become a useless passion if not underpinned by hope in the Last Judgment.

However, hope and faith are not (and cannot be) knowledge. If religious believers *knew* that their struggles are not in vain morality itself would be undermined. "This would in fact", as Wittgenstein remarked, "destroy the whole business" (Wittgenstein, 1967/2007, 56). Mainly, because religious believers would become moral automata motivated by the certain consequences of their decisions. Thus, they would become heteronomous 'agents' who would comply with the moral law *not* for the sake of the law. Their actions would lack freedom as well as merit.

This is why knowledge of the objects of faith —faith in our call or vocation to everlasting responsibility as it is expressed by the moral imperative— is not only unnecessary but insufficient. Far from being a poor substitute for knowledge, faith performs a function that knowledge cannot fulfill.

This is also why faith as the attitude expressed by unshakable trust ('Even if all the facts were to contradict me, I will stay firm') is not the result of drawing internal relations between the sense of duty and a meaningful life. Second order reflection does neither create nor destroy faith —it *enhances* faith in moral agency where faith is already in place,[13] firstly by making explicit its essential contents (what it means), and also by appeasing the rational suspicion that one might be knowingly and intentionally deceiving oneself. It is here where the question of whether ethical everlasting responsibility can hold up before the strict tribunal of

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[13] Alternatively, it discloses the rationality of religious belief even for the unbeliever to whom faith has not be granted. The unbeliever can come to act in the light of hope in ultimate fulfilment, while still short of the passionate commitment of faith proper.

theoretical rationality, and thus, of whether trust in that moral struggle is not in vain, appears again.

Even though for the religious believer there is nothing optative in faith, the question is one that, both as a rational being, as a member of the public, and as an announcer rooted in tradition and history, he cannot repress at will. Is one's faith rational? Is within one's rights to hold on to the reality of ultimate meaning?

The question is strikingly similar to the one posed by the radical sceptic regarding hinges, and thus, or so seems it to me, the answer should also be similar. *The rationality of trust stems from duty*, so that *one cannot autonomously will to go any further than willing without cancelling willing itself.* This would seem, however, as repeating the claims of faith in another fashion —as expressing once again one's commitment to the moral imperative as an *ultimate fact* (as a 'fact of reason', following Kant's vocabulary). But this also means that free agents are not permitted to consider the possibility that the ethical is illusory without renouncing themselves. The stark choice (one that *emphatically* cannot be pragmatic for being the kind of choice it is) that the unbeliever faces is between attempting to eradicate from within himself the human yearning for ultimate meaning and responsibility, thus opting for ephemeral purposes and values that eventually will come to nothing —for a life that the contemplative standpoint indicts as delusory and self-alienating—, or, instead, following the intimations of the heart for striving to gain self-respect.

In my view, there is nothing nonrational in being willingly committed to the only option that would not be self-defeating. The naturalistic view would entail that this ultimate choice is not choice at all; that life is a puppet-show and we are deluded in thinking that we can really opt for shaping our life. But the urgency of choosing remains. Is it nothing else than the after-taste of irrational prejudices? Then, there would be no choice to face up to; and there would not even be a space for assessing something as rational (or not). But if rational discourse is real, the choice is also real. It presupposes freedom and responsibility, care for oneself and for the world, deadly seriousness —an *ethical stance* that while unmasking self-generated teleology as self-delusion, only acquires sense by opting for trust, meaning, and ultimate accountability. Again, there is nothing nonrational in a trusting that is no other that *passionate commitment to rationality, even though, as in the case of religious faith, the trust itself does not (and cannot) come out of rational reflection.* The unbeliever claims to be aligning his way of living and assessing life to the truth of our condition, but any way of living short of despair that he might be endorsing is the result of an exercise in wishful thinking and intentional blindness. *Either absurdity or faith* —duty does not permit us to consider the former; theoretical reason is not able to disprove the claims of the latter.

Let us note again, however, that it is impossible to make a decision to have faith in the validity of moral reality. However, the contents of faith are also available to the serious thinker, even if he is deprived of the particular form of conviction proper of faith. He can act in the light of hope; hope being the result of choosing to *give rational assent* to a view which for him is, though a matter of concern, still sustained by an intellectual act underwriting the will. Hope is not conditional assent. It is full assent *coming out of endeavor.* The same content is available to faith and hope, but through different modes of availability. In any case, it is the content that is rational, thus making of faith also rational. The stark choice is for the unbeliever to make, not indeed to achieve faith, but to be entitled to hope. According to his own confession to Drury, Wittgenstein was not a religious man. But surely was he a man of hope.

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As we claimed earlier, hinges are über domain-defining conditions for epistemic performance. This means that epistemic agency and ethical agency are in a certain sense independent from each other. However, it would be premature to conclude that the epistemic domain is sealed off from the ethical. As a normative sphere, epistemological assessment is also a matter of *value*. What is the value of knowledge? Can the value of alethic performances (those whose goal is that of forming true beliefs) be explained, as it is usually assumed, only by means of instrumental and pragmatic ends such as social interaction and the sharing of information? What would the value be that those values themselves possess, if moral significance and care for oneself as accountable for one's claims (which are modes of action) were not involved in epistemic responsibility? Why care for the truth when it would be enough for our social standing to appear as if we care? All these questions, as well as those related to whether, as epistemic agents, we have knowledge of our real motives for acting properly, and even of whether prejudices do not really trump epistemic considerations, suggest that religious belief is after all related to the problems raised by Hinge Epistemology. It is not, however, as if hinge epistemologists had to shed light through hinges to religious belief. It is rather the opposite —as if religious trust were instrumental to making sense of how trust in hinges might be ultimately rational. Hinge epistemologists face the question as to whether thinking is real. Religious epistemologists face the deeper question as to whether thinking —as a way of acting— is in vain. For that purpose, the latter bring to light those aspects of agency that for hinge epistemologists still remain undetermined.

There is a significant difference between the transcendent extrinsicism of the early Wittgenstein as expressed in the *Tractatus*—"*How* things are in the world is a matter of complete indifference for what is higher" (Wittgenstein, 1922/1995, 6. 432)—, and the insight that there is an intimate connection between the existence of the world and the ethical so that the how acquires significance, as Wittgenstein put it to Waismann:

> Men have felt that there is a connection and they have expressed it thus: God the Father created the world, the Son of God (the Word that comes from God) is that which is ethical. That the Godhead is thought as divided and, again, as one being indicates that there is a connection here. (Wittgenstein, 1967/1979, 118)

The Christian faith comes as a gift from outside, but it resonates with a yearning inside the recipient. This yearning for meaning sets up a goal that is as unreachable as it is perpetually consummated in the actual experience of the religious believer as of a deepest *calm* (Wittgenstein, 1980/2006, 61) that anticipates the object of his trust. And yet for all of this reversal that marks the step into faith nothing has changed except our thoughts and orientation.

A complete turnabout of the will, a readjustment of the whole person, a change in everything that changes nothing —the lesson from Wittgenstein regarding religion is that neither the intellect nor, as with Wittgenstein, a detached appreciation of the *real world* that faith offers are able to open its gates. The task of supporting the rational character of religious faith, and thus, of making room for the Kantian category of 'rational faith' within a Wittgensteinian context, is nothing more than an external contribution to this appreciation, and therefore, no other that a philosophical contribution, if at all. The lessons from life are indispensable for faith to happen. Only by doing all that we can to become worthy are we entitled

to hope that God will fulfill our will by completing it. But hope falls short of faith. Faith is after all a gift that coming from God, it is not an achievement.

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