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# HOW TO DEFEND RELIGIOUS REALISM

Michael Scott

This paper defends a realist theory of religious language and truth, the view that religious claims are truth-apt and that religious truth requires a realist non-minimalist construal. Two varieties of religious antirealism, expressivism and minimalism, are considered in detail and rejected. A realist theory is advanced using the Fregean distinction between thought, force, and tone, which aims to accommodate differences between religious and other fields of discourse. Alongside this discussion, Wittgenstein's remarks on religion are considered and a realist interpretation proposed.

This paper has two interrelated aims. First, to evaluate two leading types of antirealism about religious language: *expressivism*, the view that religious claims lack truth-apt content but rather express attitudes, stances or other non-representational states; and *minimalism*, the theory that religious claims have truth-apt content but that religious truth is epistemically and evidentially constrained. I believe that both these theories are mistaken, though not for the reasons usually offered against them in the literature, and will argue this in Sections One and Two. Second, I will argue that while wrong, both antirealist theories correctly identify features distinctive of religious language that individuate it from other fields of discourse, and about which a satisfactory realist theory needs to give us an account. I will propose a way in which the realist can do this in Section Three. The kind of religious realism I will defend, therefore, concerns religious language and truth: religious claims are truth-apt, and we require a realist construal of religious truth. I will not be arguing here that religious claims are true, or discussing in detail the kinds of properties to which they refer.

Alongside the arguments about antirealism I will discuss Wittgenstein's work on religion, which remains important source material for religious antirealism. Throughout his writings and lectures on religion, Wittgenstein provides examples of differences between religious language and other fields of discourse, notably science and history. Although Wittgenstein never (quite) explicitly endorses antirealism, his emphasis on differences has given rise to two rival antirealist readings: expressivist and minimalist. On the former account, the differences Wittgenstein highlights show that religious discourse is not really descriptive; on the latter, they show that religious discourse has its own internal rules and standards of truth. Although inconsistent with each other, both theories find support in Wittgenstein's work, and I will review the evidence in Sections One and Two. I will argue however, that while Wittgenstein is right about many of



the differences between religious and other discourses, his interpreters—and Wittgenstein to the extent that he endorsed them—is wrong about their antirealist implications. The differences can be accommodated by the realist, as I will show in Section Three.

### 1. *Expressivism*

Expressivism is the view that religious statements serve primarily to express (and possibly also evoke) non-representational states. Accordingly, the expressivist has a straightforward explanation of the differences between religious discourse and other judgements about what the world around us is like: the standards of evidence, the reasons given for belief, the prosecution of religious disagreements and arguments, etc. that are distinctive of religious discourse, can be understood as due to the underlying expressive function of religious claims. One crucial but disputed difference that expressivism is particularly suited to explain is the motivational force of religious belief. Religious beliefs are intimately tied up with desires, decisions, intentions, actions, feelings, and they typically dispose the believer to engage in certain forms of activity (confession, worship, etc.) when the circumstances arise. The earliest expressivist account of religious discourse comes, rather surprisingly, from George Berkeley. Berkeley defends expressivism exclusively for the Christian mysteries such as original sin, the Trinity and grace, and puts the point about motivational force as follows: 'Faith, I say, is not an indolent perception, but an operative persuasion of the mind, which ever worketh some suitable action, disposition, or emotion in those who have it.'<sup>1</sup> Whether religious beliefs have this practical role is contentious, and I will return to the issue later in this section. But if religious beliefs do motivate, then the expressivist has an elegant account of their psychology, for religious beliefs express attitudes and, unlike cognitive states, are already inherently motivational.

Despite the occasional defender, such as R. M. Hare<sup>2</sup> or R. B. Braithwaite,<sup>3</sup> expressivism has never been a popular or even much considered antirealist option in philosophy of religion, despite having many pockets of support in theology (such as Don Cupitt, Gordon Kaufman, and Paul Tillich). Contemporary discussions of expressivism are typically brief and dismissive, and the objections against it are widely considered conclusive. For example, Richard Swinburne, in rejecting Braithwaite's attempt to analyse religious claims in terms of intentions to carry out a particular behaviour policy, offers arguments that he believes may be extended to all varieties of expressivism:

(A) A religious belief such as 'There is a benevolent God' cannot be merely an intention to behave such as 'show great consideration of all' (or whatever non-representational state the expressivist posits), because one may have the relevant stance without expressing it in religious terms. Similarly, to affirm the behaviour policy would not be enough to have the religious belief.<sup>4</sup>

(B) The only way for us to settle the truth of expressivism would be 'a sociological and literary survey of what people who use credal sentences think that they are doing and have thought that what they were

doing over the past two thousand years.' Swinburne believes that the realist will clearly be favoured in such a survey.<sup>5</sup>

In his discussion of Kaufman's variety of expressivism, Plantinga offers a different line of argument:

(C) It 'encourages dishonesty and hypocrisy; it results in a sort of private code whereby one utters the same phrases as those who accept Christian belief but means something wholly different by them. You thereby appear to concur with those who accept Christian belief; in fact, you wholly reject what they believe.'<sup>6</sup>

Notwithstanding the forcefulness with which these objections are expressed, none of them pose serious difficulties for a sophisticated expressivist theory.

Argument (B) is clearly wide of the mark. Both expressivism and realism are theories about whether religious statements address a real subject matter; they are not theories about religious believers' opinions on this issue. Analogously, if we found that most people believed that arithmetic statements refer to entities independent of mind and language, even if the polled sample was drawn from professional mathematicians, we would have established only that mathematical realism is popular. Swinburne's argument is perhaps based on the assumption that expressivism must be a revisionary theory of religious language, such that it would be apparent to the religious believer if religious claims expressed attitudes rather than representational states. Expressivism is at its most effective, however, when it argues that utterances that result from the expression of attitudes can exhibit *all* the realist-sounding talk of truth, facts, etc. characteristic of discourse which trades in truth-apt content. On this basis, we should not expect a poll to elicit any relevant information regarding the realism debate, because the behaviour of religious language can be accounted for on either expressivist or realist theories. One could not usefully ask, e.g., whether when it was claimed 'God exists' what is meant is that it is *true* that God exists or that God *really* exists or that it is a *fact* that God exists, since the expressivist can accommodate these claims. 'True' and 'really' and 'is a fact' have the expressive function of presenting an attitude or stance with more pronounced conviction.

If the expressivist is to argue that religious claims can mimic the features of cognitively contentful claims, we are owed an account of how and why they behave as if they are stating truth-apt content.<sup>7</sup> However, the expressivist should have the resources to assuage this concern. For why shouldn't perceptions which in some contexts generate thoughts about the world that are articulated as the truth-apt content of sentences and beliefs, in other contexts stimulate attitudes which are expressed using similar sentential forms? Attitudes have no less claim than thoughts as integral and important features of human life, and their clear presentation and communication to others is no less crucial. By way of comparison, consider Simon Blackburn's useful discussion of an expression of gustatory delight: 'Yummy!'<sup>8</sup> Blackburn observes that this utterance expresses a non-representational state which could also be expressed by the sentence 'It tastes yummy.' This sentence looks and behaves like a claim that has truth-apt content (someone could disagree: 'It's not yummy!'); but it does

not thereby cease to serve the same expressive function—on the surface it may appear as though it should be presenting a thought, but it still only expresses a pleasurable impression of taste. The surface syntax and behaviour of a sentence with non-representational content can, therefore, imitate that of a sentence with truth-apt content.

Argument (A) addresses Braithwaite's attempt to identify religious beliefs with commitment to particular behaviour policies. In contrast, the kind of expressivism we have been considering, which takes religious claims to express attitudes, allows for a more complex variety of behaviour as well as a wider range of non-representational states. An attitude may stimulate action or enter into decision making, depending on the circumstances, but the expressivist does not need (and would surely be wrong) to maintain that a religious belief has the intention to pursue a specific course of behaviour as part of its content. In this respect, Berkeley offers a superior model for the expressivist to Braithwaite.

A man may believe the doctrine of the Trinity, if he finds it revealed in Holy Scripture . . . although he does not frame in his mind any abstract or distinct ideas of trinity, substance, or personality; provided that this doctrine . . . makes proper impressions on his mind, producing therein love, hope, gratitude, and obedience, and thereby becomes a lively operative principle, influencing his life and actions, agreeably to that notion of saving faith which is required in a Christian.<sup>9</sup>

Berkeley broadens the account to include non-representational states other than just intentions to behave, and allows that different particular courses of (good and Christian) action and habit may be effected by these attitudes.

(A) would still be an effective objection against an account tied to the implausible thesis that each type of religious belief is an attitude-type—such as Braithwaite's risible example of 'There is a God' and love of humanity. Such an account is unsustainable against plentiful examples of different attitudes associated with the same type of belief. However, all that the expressivist needs to maintain is that the psychological history that results in religious judgement does not essentially involve truth-apt content at all, but only non-representational states; in short, the origin of religious judgement is found in our conative rather than our cognitive side. The difficulty in settling which particular attitudes are expressed by a religious belief, therefore, is not a serious consideration against expressivism. The attitudes in question may be varied and have complex relationships with other attitudes, as well a complex history to disentangle. So, contrary to Swinburne's argument, we should not expect, on the expressivist account, either that possession of an attitude is enough to have a religious belief, or that a religious belief always requires a type of attitude. What is needed for a serious realist challenge is a demonstration that the expressivist story about the conative origin of religious judgement is false or at least incomplete.

While it may have merit as a criticism of Kaufman, the charge of hypocrisy in argument (C) against the kind of expressivism we are considering is clearly unwarranted. The expressivist claims to offer a general analysis

of the meaning of religious claims; there is no attempt to dishonestly buy into realist sounding religious claims without also believing them. Indeed, it would be straightforwardly inconsistent for the expressivist to maintain that religious claims have an expressive role while also secretly believing them really to be false (i.e., to believe that religious claims have a truth-apt content which is false). A genuine religious belief, for the expressivist, consists in genuinely partaking in the relevant attitudes and behaviour; hypocrisy is to make a show of expressing attitudes that one does not really have, e.g., upholding one attitude in public and maintaining a different attitude in private. It might be argued that since the expressivist is claiming that religious beliefs are really expressions of attitudes they are *not really beliefs*, so it is dishonest to pretend as if they are. This argument is easily bypassed, however, by presenting the expressivist's case as distinguishing two different types of belief: 'input' beliefs about the world with truth-apt content, and 'output' beliefs related to practical states. According to the expressivist, religious beliefs are of the latter kind.

Plantinga's argument would have more bite in the following case. Suppose one has concluded that religious claims are false, but that they have a useful *secondary* function of expressing attitudes. Moreover, that although religious discourse fails in its primary role of representing the world, it is still worth engaging in because the secondary expressive function is particularly valuable. Such an option is suggested by Robin LePoidevin<sup>10</sup> and is a plausible reading of Cupitt.<sup>11</sup> Someone who actually adopted this position would be using religious claims purely instrumentally as a means to express attitudes, and also in the uncomfortable and morally questionable situation of claiming that, e.g., there is a God (thereby displaying the relevant attitudes), while at the same time not really believing that it is true that there is a God. This is not, however, a problem for the expressivist.

Although expressivism can be defended against the main objections in the literature, the theory should be rejected as a general account of religious claims. There are, I think, two main difficulties. The first, akin to the Frege-Geach objection to ethical expressivism, is that by denying truth-apt content to religious claims, expressivism is unable to do justice to the logic of religious claims and arguments. For example, take a simple modus ponens with the first premise

(P1) Jesus is risen

which the expressivist takes to express an attitude or a complex of attitudes. Suppose the second premise is

(P2) If Jesus is risen then there will be a Last Judgement for all.

From which follows with validity

(P3) There will be a Last Judgement for all.

The conclusion (P3), as with (P1), can be interpreted as an expression of attitudes. But it is not clear how the expressivist should interpret the conditional. If (P2) is to get us from (P1) to (P3), then it must express something like: if you accept the attitudes expressed in the antecedent (P1) then you must also accept the attitudes expressed in the consequent (P3). The problem, however, is what 'must' means here. Since (P1) and (P2) do not

trade in truth-apt content, one would not contradict oneself by accepting them and rejecting (P3). To do so would at most count as some practical confusion of attitudes. Similar considerations will apply to all religious arguments, everything from the ontological argument, arguments about God's properties, the reasons for pluralism rather than exclusivism, inferences drawn from biblical considerations, etc. Now, the expressivist could bite the bullet here and accept that it follows that none of these areas of religious discourse should be taken at face value, but must be construed in terms of attitudes and commitments. The problem, however, is that there is a profusion of logically well-formed arguments in religious discourse. This makes expressivism a hugely revisionary project, and highly implausible without compelling reasons to pursue it in the first place.

A second argument concerns the explanatory relationship that religious discourse has with claims in other fields of discourse for which expressive theories are not commonly advanced, such as history or science. It is not just that scientific and historical evidence are used in supporting religious claims, it is also that religious claims are used as explanations of historical and scientific facts. God's action in the world is taken as an account of why certain events occur; his existence may be posited as an explanation for, say, fine tuning conditions of the universe or laws of nature, etc. If religious claims express attitudes, how can claims with truth-apt content provide evidence and justification for them, and vice versa? Short of taking the heroic path of trying to advance an expressivist account of those areas of discourse with which religious claims enter into an explanatory relationship, the only option for the expressivist is to argue that religious explanations should not be taken at face value. For example, perhaps it could be argued that a religious explanation effects a change of attitude to the facts that it 'explains' or which 'explain' it. So when one posits God as an explanation of fine tuning conditions, for example, what one really does is express a certain attitude towards those conditions. This argument stretches plausibility, for it is entirely possible to evaluate many of these explanations by using formal techniques. For instance, some design arguments can be assessed using Bayes' theorem, where God's existence is taken as a hypothesis with a certain probability. It is difficult to see a viable expressivist reading of this use of religious language.

Expressivism is not, therefore, satisfactory as a general theory of religious discourse. However, this does not absolve the realist from accounting for those features of religious discourse which motivate expressivism in the first place. For example, in confession, prayer, ritual practice and day to day religious activities, there is religious discourse which has an expressive and evocative purpose. When such examples are used to support an expressivist account, the realist can reasonably point out that the expressivist has lost focus on core beliefs such as 'God exists' for which the expressive role is harder to place, and the truth-apt content of the claims seems evident. But this strategy delays acting on the realist's obligation to explain how the evocative and expressive role of religious claims fits with a realist theory. For all that expressivism has been criticised, short of denying that religious claims have any expressive function at all, we need some account of how this sits alongside a truth-apt content as components of the same utterance.

A second respect in which the expressivist case has merit is that religious beliefs seem to have motivational force. According to religious internalism, it is essential to religious belief that it is linked to some modification of one's outlook and dispositions. So someone who believes in, e.g., the Last Judgement (and who is not psychologically dehabilitated), should engage or be disposed to participate or abstain from certain behaviour. Religious internalism is disputed by Swinburne, who asserts that we can imagine a person who has faith but does not act on it. If this is to be an effective counterexample to internalism, the agent would have to have a belief that is, as Berkeley puts it, 'wholly inert.' Is such inert faith possible? It would not be inert if, for example, the agent had other attitudes, such as a determination not to act on faith under any circumstances, which had the effect of suppressing the belief's effects. But in other apparent cases of inert belief, the religious internalist will argue, the total failure to act on the belief is precisely what shows that the belief is not sincere or genuine. So Swinburne's claim that we can imagine someone who has a religious belief but is not disposed to act on it does little to progress the argument, for whether such a case makes sense is precisely what is at issue. The religious internalist will have to concede that, unlike an ethical belief concerning the rightness or wrongness of a type of action, a religious belief does not commit one to a *specific* form of behaviour; but this does not undermine the intuition that to be sincere, a religious belief should have a direct impact on one's life and behaviour that goes beyond it merely adding to one's stock of beliefs.

It is not my aim here to press the internalist case against Swinburne, but only to show that the internalism is a plausible position and that motivational force is something the realist needs to account for. However, there is some room for compromise between the internalist and those who think that inert religious beliefs are possible. For it would be enough for the internalist to argue that inert religious beliefs constitute a special and unusual class of cases. Consider, for example, an inert belief in God. If the belief is inert, the agent adds the fact that there is a God to their stock of information, but there is no affective aspect to the belief, and the agent's desires and motivations are otherwise unchanged. The internalist could plausibly argue that while the agent has a religious belief, in the thin sense in which it is a belief with a religious subject matter, we would nevertheless not say that this agent has *faith*, for which some change of outlook seems requisite. That is, the internalist could defend the thesis for religious faith, while allowing for the possibility of inert beliefs with religious content.<sup>12</sup>

If attitudes play a constitutive role in the meaning of religious claims, then the religious realist needs a theory that accommodates attitudes alongside truth-apt content. I will outline such a theory in Section Three. To conclude this discussion of expressivism, I will consider whether Wittgenstein is an expressivist. Many contemporary commentators are keen to clear him of any taint of the theory:<sup>13</sup> Wittgenstein may have emphasised differences between religious and other areas of discourse, but not with the aim of casting doubt on the cognitive content of religious discourse. Such writers typically prefer the minimalist interpretation I will set out in Section Two. However, there is plenty of evidence that Wittgenstein was



sympathetic to an expressivist position about religion (and ethics). Since the evidence for this has been considered in detail elsewhere,<sup>14</sup> I will give here some choice examples. For instance, in 'A Lecture on Ethics' from 1929, Wittgenstein distinguishes two states, a 'wonder at the existence of the world' and 'the experience of feeling absolutely safe.' He then proceeds with a fairly crude expressivist analysis:

the first of [these experiences] is, I believe, exactly what people were referring to when they said that God had created the world; and the experience of absolute safety has been described by saying that we feel safe in the hands of God. A third experience of the same kind is that of feeling guilty and again this was described by the phrase that God disapproves of our conduct.<sup>15</sup>

Evidence of Wittgenstein's expressivism is found throughout his later career. Expressivist remarks are found in Wittgenstein's comments on particular types of religious belief, notably predestination: 'this is no opinion—also not a conviction, but an attitude towards things and what is happening.'<sup>16</sup> Wittgenstein also appears to adopt expressivism with regard to religious discourse more generally:

Religion says: Do this!—Think like that! But it cannot justify this and it only need try to do so to become repugnant.<sup>17</sup>

A remark that can be understood as claiming that religious belief is not about the acceptance of truth claims, but the adoption of a range of firmly held attitudes.

A frequently cited reason for supposing that Wittgenstein is not an expressivist is his response to a lecture student in a discussion of belief in life after death.<sup>18</sup> When asked whether this belief is the same as expressing a certain attitude, Wittgenstein answers: 'I would say "No, it isn't the same as saying "I'm very fond of you"'—and it may not be the same as anything else.'<sup>19</sup> Unfortunately, this argument founders on a basic distinction between subjectivism and expressivism, or between reporting and expressing an attitude. The theory that in uttering a religious claim one is reporting one's attitudes entails that religious claims have truth-apt content, i.e., that one has such and such mental states. Wittgenstein appears to take the student's question as asking whether religious claims report attitudes, and so could be replaced by a statement of how one feels. Moreover, Wittgenstein is surely right to reject subjectivism: if religious claims have truth-apt content it is not about the believer's feelings or dispositions. If one wanted to claim that one felt fondness, there is a language of mental states in which to do so. On the expressivist's theory, in contrast, religious claims express attitudes, and there may no other way for the believer to convey the particular attitudes in question.

There is therefore much in Wittgenstein's writings which tallies with an expressivist account, but there are difficulties in providing a comprehensive expressivist account of Wittgenstein's position. In the following discussion of minimalist readings of Wittgenstein I will set out some evidence which supports a different antirealist theory according to which

religious claims do have a truth-apt content. I will argue that neither anti-realist reading is satisfactory, and in Section Three present a different (realist) theory that accounts for those aspects of Wittgenstein's work on which expressivism and minimalism draw. I intend, of course, that this will converge with the aim to set out a theory of religious language that preserves realism while doing justice to the important role played by attitudes and other non-representational states in religious life.

## 2. Minimalism

Minimalist theories of religious discourse, rather like more sophisticated forms of expressivism, allow that religious claims may be true or factual or refer. However, while the expressivist believes that religious claims lack truth-apt content, and that the talk about truth, facts, etc. is the upshot of the expression of attitudes mimicking realist sounding discourse, the minimalist argues that religious claims *do* have truth-apt content, but sets minimal standards for satisfaction of these properties. There are different minimal analyses of these terms available, but in general any field of discourse that possesses a functioning truth predicate and has disciplined internal standards will allow for their application. For example, a minimalist may argue that the content of truth is largely exhausted by the disquotational schema:

(DS) 'S' is true if and only if S

where 'S' may be replaced by any sentence of the discourse in question. On this view, DS, and anything deriving from it, gives us all that is informative that can in general be said about truth. A minimal reading of DS is that it links the truth of a sentence (the left hand side) with the case in which we may assert S (the right hand side), and vice versa. Prima facie, given this reading of DS, the schema is preserved if we analyse truth in terms of warranted assertibility within the discourse. In practice, this particular analysis has proved philosophically problematic and other readings have been proposed; Crispin Wright's superassertibility has so far proved philosophically resilient.<sup>20</sup> In general, however, the minimal approach takes truth to be a characteristic of sentences that, subject to various conditions, satisfy internal standards of warrant within the discourse. As such, truth is 'evidentially constrained' because it cannot outstrip our ability (in principle) to justify (or warrantably assert or superassert) sentences. It is 'epistemically constrained' because, for the same reason, all truths are in principle knowable.

The minimalist strategy can be extended to other controversial terms. Such and such is a *fact*, for example, just in case the sentence reporting it is true (minimally understood). Reference might be analysed as a feature of singular terms which occur in true sentences (minimally understood). The minimalist might also make use of the notion that true sentences *correspond* to reality, since it is merely platitudinous that true statements correspond with 'the facts.' When applied to religious discourse, it can be seen that the minimalist can quickly win through to the notion of religious truth, reference and facts. For religious language has a functioning truth predicate, sentences with relevant syntactic complexity and generally acknowledged

internal standards of appropriateness for religious judgements. By setting such a low bar for the possession of the core concepts at issue in the realist/antirealist debate, minimalists can help themselves to realist terms without conceding anything to realist theory.

The most familiar form of religious minimalism is associated with Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein, on this account, takes religion to be a field of discourse (or 'language game(s)') independent from other fields of discourse such as science or history by virtue of its distinctive religious standards of warrant. Since truth-apt content and religious truth are already minimally secured, the philosophical debate about realism is taken to be 'dissolved,' and the main philosophical task is to describe differences between religious and other areas of discourse. For example, Hilary Putnam—highly sympathetic himself to minimalism—argues:<sup>21</sup>

The Wittgensteinian strategy, I believe, is to argue that while there is such a thing as correctness in ethics, in interpretation, in mathematics, the way to understand that is not by trying to model it on the ways in which we get things right in physics, but by trying to understand the life we lead with our concepts in each of these distinct areas.

Similar thoughts are found in D. Z. Phillips' recent work on Wittgenstein.<sup>22</sup> Following the structure of Section One, I will consider the merits of minimalism as an account of religious language, then proceed to whether Wittgenstein upheld such a view.

An argument against minimalism, as well as the most cited objection to Wittgenstein, is that the theory has the effect of quarantining religious discourse from other areas of discourse, in particular science and history. The approach is seen as leading to fideism, where religious discourse is compartmentalised and unsusceptible to intellectual evaluation. For example, Kai Nielsen argues that 'What, however, Wittgenstein does stoutly argue for, and Malcolm and Winch follow him here, is that the giving of reasons, justifications and explanations comes to an end . . . at the existence of the language-games and the associated forms of life.'<sup>23</sup> As a result 'no philosophical or other kind of reasonable criticism, or for that matter defence, is possible for forms of life or, indeed, of any form of life, including Hinduism, Christianity and the like.'<sup>24</sup> However, while this objection may be appropriately directed against some Wittgensteinians, it is ineffective against a properly thought through minimalism (or, on this reading, Wittgenstein himself). For there is nothing about looking at or describing the internal standards of religious discourse that precludes the possibility that scientifically or historically well founded evidence informs religious judgement. The minimalist is in no position to claim *a priori* that 'scientific discourse' and 'religious discourse' (or language games) constitute discrete, independent entities. These are simply terms for broad areas of language, roughly distinguished by practices, standards of evidence and subject matter. A description of religious discourse, therefore, cannot assume but must establish its relationship with science with evidence from language use. Moreover, since historical evidence clearly *is* weighed in debate about Christ's resurrection, or the cre-

ation of the world, etc., any description of religious discourse would be seriously remiss and self-defeating in not acknowledging it. Where the minimalist analysis gets interesting is, once the use of evidence has been acknowledged, specifying what its role is in the justification of religious claims. I will return to this point shortly.

Minimalism provides a useful starting point for debates about realism, because it sets out the very minimal sufficient conditions for truth and truth aptness that could be satisfied by any reasonably sophisticated and disciplined field of discourse. Where minimalism becomes antirealist is in maintaining that no more robust conception of truth is found in the discourse in question. I.e., we are not entitled to say that religious truth is anything more than warranted assertibility (or some other evidentially and epistemically constrained notion). With regard to religious discourse, therefore, a key question will be whether religious truth exhibits features that show that the truth of religious claims depends on a religious reality and is not merely determined by the internal standards of religious discourse. Crispin Wright sets out the debate as follows: 'if the realist wins . . . we shall be forced to think of the truth of [the discourse's] statements as conferred by functions other than those with determine proper practice within the discourse, and hence as being, in whatever sense is thereby imposed, not of our making but a matter of a substantial relationship between language, or thought, and independent states of affairs.'<sup>25</sup> Wright goes on to set out a number of other tests for more than minimal truth. I believe that religious truth can be shown to be realist on *all* of these tests. For current purposes, however, I will briefly present just one respect in which religious discourse is not minimally truth-apt, which concerns the relationship between religious claims and evidence.

Where we are considering, e.g., talk about what is funny, the minimalist account of truth seems about right: it isn't plausible to posit truths about what is funny that lie beyond our ability (even in principle) to establish. Insofar as we allow that there are truths about what is funny, they seem to fall firmly within what can be known. The same case is at least arguable, though considerably more controversial, for ethics, aesthetics and mathematics. However, it is not arguable for religion. Religion posits facts that lie beyond what we can know; it is an integral part of many religions that there are limitations on what religious truths humans have access to. An obvious class of cases are statements about God's actions and thoughts. Such statements the religious believer will maintain are determinately true or false, but human knowledge of them is strictly limited to what God reveals about them. Truths that God has not revealed may entirely outstrip human capacities to determine them.<sup>26</sup> In this respect, therefore, religious discourse must be more than minimal, for it cannot plausibly be maintained that religious truth is epistemically or evidentially constrained.

I suggested earlier that minimalist readings of Wittgenstein have become increasingly popular, and there is plenty of evidence in favour of this account. He certainly supports a minimal theory of truth: "'p" is true = p, "p" is false = not-p, and to say that a proposition is whatever can be true or false amounts to saying: we call something a proposition when *in our language* we apply the calculus of truth functions to it.'<sup>27</sup> Also, much of what he says about religion is consistent with a minimalist reading.<sup>28</sup>

However, there is contrary evidence. On the minimalist reading, one would expect Wittgenstein to happily admit truth, facts, etc., as entirely unproblematic ways of talking about religious claims. Yet Wittgenstein rarely talks in these terms, and whenever he addresses the status of religious belief he appears to question whether it is a genuine belief at all—an approach one would expect from an expressivist. In addition to this, there is all the evidence that Wittgenstein was an expressivist cited in the preceding section. The expressivist and minimalist disagree on whether religious claims have truth-apt content. So it seems that either Wittgenstein himself is confused about the issue, or one or both of these interpretations is mistaken. In the following section I will take this last option and suggest a further possibility.

While I have argued that the minimalist theory is mistaken as an account of religious discourse, there is one important feature of religious discourse to which Wittgenstein and the minimalist draw attention and which a realist should account for. This is the distinctive standards characteristic of religious language, specifically with regard to the role of evidence. Wittgenstein is usually taken to have a radical view about this, primarily because of his notorious contention that ‘the Gospels might, in the historical sense, be demonstrably false, and yet belief would lose nothing through this . . . because historical proof (the historical-proof game) is irrelevant to belief.’<sup>29</sup> Wittgenstein is generally taken to mean that empirical evidence is unrelated or to has a marginal role in religious considerations. Unsurprisingly, this has fuelled the fideist charge against Wittgenstein. But I want to suggest another reading according to which Wittgenstein is offering a somewhat more modest proposal. The modest proposal is that the evaluation of the historical evidence is not a standard or norm against which the religious claim is deemed acceptable. Religious claims may form part of scientific or historical explanations, and scientific or historical information may play a role in religious reasoning, and provide supportive evidence for religious beliefs; good evidence may indeed be desirable, but its role is not *normative*. That is, it is not a standard of religious discourse that a religious belief must be historically or scientifically well-founded.<sup>30</sup>

It is consistent with the modest reading of Wittgenstein that the evidence for, say, the empty tomb would provide welcome supportive evidence for the religious belief that Jesus is risen. Supporting evidence may be desirable to the religious believer because, e.g., it assists in leading non-believers to faith, or at least impedes the non-believer’s rejection of the religious belief. So Wittgenstein is not recommending disavowal or even disinterest in historical or scientific evidence on the part of religious believers. The position is rather that historical and scientific evidence is neither sufficient nor a necessary condition for making a true religious judgement or accepting a religious belief. Consequently, it is possible that there should be a belief against which there is a great deal of historical/scientific evidence, but which is nevertheless religiously acceptable—and this is the point being made in the quoted passage. Moreover, irrespective of its merits as an interpretation of Wittgenstein, the proposal seems correct. It seems right to say, for example, that the degree of belief accorded to an article of faith is not proportioned to the scientific or historical evidence in favour of it. Nor is someone who believes, for example, that Jesus is risen,

remiss or mistaken according to the standards of religious discourse for not considering the historical evidence in favour of that belief but rather, e.g., trusting in the Bible. Now, the relationship between religious belief and evidence is a question typically raised in religious epistemology, but it also bears on the problem of religious realism. That is, the religious realist needs to accommodate the distinctive role played by evidence in religious reasoning and belief, while also maintaining a non-minimal account of religious truth. I will do this in the following section.

### 3. Force and Content

In the first two sections I considered and rejected two leading antirealist accounts of religious language. I argued that there are certain distinctive features of religious language to which expressivism and minimalism appeal which, while not enough to justify antirealism, need to be accounted for by any satisfactory realist theory: the intimate connection between religious belief and attitudes, and the use of evidence in religious discourse. Wittgenstein also emphasised these differences in his remarks on religion, which have given rise to antirealist interpretations. In this section, I will set out a realist theory that accommodates these differences, and apply it to Wittgenstein.

The realist is primarily concerned to uphold the truth-apt content of religious claims, where truth aptness and the truth predicate in religious discourse are construed as robust and non-minimal. However, it is possible to combine this realist theory of the content of sentences with various accounts of other components of their meaning. Some distinctions due to Frege and Michael Dummett are useful here.<sup>31</sup> Frege takes there to be three ingredients of the meaning of a sentence: the thought (or sense), tone and force. The thought is constituted by only those features of a sentence's meaning which are relevant to its truth value, and corresponds to what I have been calling truth-apt content. The thought is what an assertoric sentence asserts; what a sentence *suggests* or *conveys* belongs to its tone. A particularly striking example of Frege's is sentences of the form 'X and Y' and 'X but Y.' While instances of these sentences express the same thought—in that whatever makes for the truth of one also makes for the truth of the other<sup>32</sup>—there is a difference in their tone, because 'X but Y' conveys or suggests a contrast between X and Y, which 'X and Y' does not. More characteristically, tone may be used to express a certain attitude towards the subject or the hearer, such as awe, respect, disinterest, regret, etc.; or else to evoke a certain attitude in the hearer. The latter is particularly important if, for example, pathos or comedy are to be appropriately understood or have the desired effect. When evocative tone is in play, the beliefs and dispositions of the hearers may well be crucial. Consider, for example, a sentence intended by the speaker to be pathetic which has for the hearer a comedic value. Notably, in some cases the evocative or expressive component of a sentence's meaning may be in part determined by the thought, such as a double entendre or a pun where the ambiguity of the thought is crucial. However, where the choice of words or manner of expression of a thought serves to suggest different ideas, it forms part of a sentence's tone.

It serves to define the proposed *style* of discourse, which, in turn, determines the kind of thing that may appropriately be said. We may speak to one another solemnly or light-heartedly, dispassionately or intimately, frankly or with reserve, formally or colloquially, poetically or prosaically; and all these modes represent particular forms of transaction between us. These complex social aspects of linguistic meaning are signalled by our choice of words; and, in so far as it is capable of serving to give such a signal, that capacity is part of the meaning of a word.<sup>33</sup>

The third ingredient of a sentence's meaning, its force, distinguishes the particular kind of linguistic act performed in uttering the sentence. Making an assertion, asking a question, giving a command, expressing a wish, are different examples of force. Two points to note about force are, first, sentences with different force may have the same truth-apt content. To entertain a thought *q*, to judge or assert that *q* is true, to ask 'Is *q*?' or wish for *q*; the assertion, interrogative and optative involve the same thought *q*, but have different force. Second, force is determined in part by the linguistic form of the sentence such as word order or verb inflections, as well as associated linguistic and social conventions. For example, someone is asserting a thought *if*, subsequently convinced that the thought is untrue, they withdraw the claim or endeavour to make what was said true. If I assert 'we are driving to London' and discover that I am driving in a different direction, I must either concede the claim or make it true by changing route. To understand that a sentence is a question, in contrast, is to know that it calls for an answer, that the answer should depend on the content of the question, etc. However, the distinction between different types of force is more fine grained than provided for by the moods of sentences. For example, the interrogative form can be used to make a request or ask a question, 'Do you speak French?';<sup>34</sup> the imperative mood can also be used to make a request, as in 'Pass the sugar, please.' Where context is not enough to determine the force of the utterance, we need further information such as the speaker's intention.<sup>35</sup>

To show how these distinctions might be applied to a field of discourse, I will briefly look at how they might be used to understand fictional discourse. My aim here is not to defend a particular account of fiction, but to show how the distinctions might be used to clarify the meaning of fictional utterances.<sup>36</sup> *Prima facie*, fictional sentences should have a force distinct from their use in non-fictional contexts, because when an author writes 'I went to the hotel, registered my alias, paid my day's rent, and was taken up to room 321,' we do not take this, and it is not intended, as asserting that any of these things happened. Consequently, fictional sentences do not satisfy the conventions characteristic with assertion: Presented with evidence that these claims are false would not be a reason for the author to change or withdraw them; if it were, that would be a reason to suppose that the material was non-fiction. Similarly, if an actor in a performance tells us what he is thinking, the audience do not take what is said to be true. So it seems that in fictional discourse, a distinctive force is in play.

However, as Dummett points out,<sup>37</sup> we are able to distinguish between assertions, questions, commands, etc. made by characters in a play, or

novel. If there were a conventional gesture that went along with asserting a sentence in speech or a conventional mark that preceded an asserted written sentence, we would expect the actor and author also to make use of them. For example, a fictional sentence being false is not a reason for changing it, but if a *character* within the context of the fictional work makes a claim which is found to be false, we would be puzzled if the character failed to withdraw the claim or at least not repeat it. Fictional sentences may not be genuine assertions, questions, etc., but we expect sentences presented as assertions within a fictional work to adhere to the relevant conventions. So works of fiction or dramatic performances can be understood as settings in which familiar types of force are transposed and modified such that we take them as *pretend* assertions, questions, etc. While pretend-assertion has a different force to *assertion*, there are similarities that allow us to distinguish pretend-assertion from pretend-question, etc. With respect to thought and tone, fictional statements should not in any general way differ from ordinary non-fictional sentences, since one finds similar thoughts expressed, and in a similar manner, both in fiction and non-fictional discourses.

How does the force-tone-thought distinction apply to religious language? I argued in Section One that religious claims have truth-apt content, and in Section Two that religious truth is robust, but also that the realist needs to accommodate an intimate link between religious beliefs and attitudes, and different standards of evidence in religious discourse. The force-tone-thought distinction indicates how these features of religious language may be brought together in a realist theory. The theory is realist because it takes religious claims to express thoughts which are apt for truth which is not evidentially or epistemically constrained. However, given this realist core, there is room to negotiate with regard to force and tone. The strategy here is straightforward. Insofar as the minimalist is right about there being distinct standards of religious discourse, these can be seen as modifying the force of religious utterances. That is, the non-normative role played by evidence for religious claims can be seen as forming part of the explanation of the force of religious assertions. So rather than opening up the truth-apt content of religious claims to question, the resistance of religious claims to contrary evidence is a feature of the appropriate use of the vehicle of that content—in this case, religious assertion. Insofar as the expressivist is right about the intimate relationship between religious claims and attitudes, we can allow that certain attitudes are both expressed and evoked by virtue of the tone of religious sentences without compromising their truth-apt content. Moreover, allowing the expression or evocation of love, devotion, and other attitudes as part of the tone of religious claims, gives them a constitutive role in the meaning of claims in religious discourse. Not to appreciate the expressive and evocative component of religious language is akin, on this account, to sitting through a comic performance and, while grasping the thoughts conveyed, failing to see why they are (or might be) funny.

In practice this strategy should allow the realist to concede to the minimalist and expressivist their strongest insights about the nature of religious language, by channelling them into features of the force and tone of religious language, without also conceding the truth-apt



content of religious claims. Moreover, by showing that attitudes can coexist with thoughts, and distinct internal standards can coexist with a robust truth predicate and truth-apt content, there remains little motivation to resist religious realism. Realism, as I argued in Sections One and Two, provides a better account of religious truth than either of its antirealist rivals; if it can also account for the distinctive features of religious language that stimulate antirealist accounts, then religious realism is in a commanding position.

If the strategy here is viable, then it should be applicable to Wittgenstein's remarks about religious discourse and belief. That is, it should be possible to understand Wittgenstein's examples of the behaviour and attitudes of religious believers, and the role of evidence in religious discourse, which the minimalist and expressivist have used to support antirealist interpretations, as instead feeding into a characterisation of the force and tone of religious claims. Take, for instance, the following claim by Wittgenstein:

Christianity is not based on a historical truth, but presents us with a (historical) narrative & says: now believe! But not believe this report with the belief that is appropriate to a historical report,—but rather: believe, through thick & thin & and you can do this only as the outcome of a life. *Here you have a message!—don't treat it as you would another historical message!* Make a *quite different* place for it in your life.—There is no *paradox* about that!<sup>38</sup>

Unsurprisingly, this remark has been seen as endorsing one or other kind of antirealism, either as arguing that while Christian claims might look on the surface like historical beliefs they are really attitudes, or else as promoting a kind of fideism by claiming the invulnerability of Christian belief from historical criticism. However, two important points to note are, first, Wittgenstein allows that historical claims form an essential part of the content of many Christian claims. Indeed, it is clear that a historical event is the subject of the belief in question. Second, Wittgenstein nowhere suggests that the historical evidence does not matter, or that it might not be crucial to the believer that the events in question really happened. So Wittgenstein does not question whether religious claims have truth-apt content (or whether they are true). He does, however, propose that in stating a religious belief one does more than merely assert the truth of its truth-apt content—i.e., assert a historical fact. Rather, the sentence expresses a judgement which should have a certain role in the believer's life, such that it is not qualified or proportioned according to the strength of the evidence for it.

Wittgenstein's proposal can be seen as pertaining to the *force* of religious claims. Recall that a conventional feature of assertion is that the speaker primarily intends to say something which is true, and will withdraw or alter the claim or change the circumstances that it describes, if it is shown to be false. I want to suggest that on Wittgenstein's account a religious claim is a modified form of assertion, along the lines suggested above. For while a religious assertion has a truth-apt content which the speaker intends and judges as true, it differs from non-religious assertion because the relative

flimsiness of the evidence or strength of contrary evidence will not lead the speaker to withdraw or alter it, nor (obviously) would the speaker attempt to change the circumstances it describes.<sup>39</sup> Wittgenstein's remark, therefore, can be seen as bearing on the distinct function of religious assertion, rather than the truth-apt content that it conveys.

Some less considered remarks of Wittgenstein's are also susceptible to the force-tone-thought interpretation. For example, commenting on a passage in *1 Corinthians*, Wittgenstein writes

I am reading: "& no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost." And it is true: I cannot call him *Lord*; because that says absolutely nothing to me. I could call him "the paragon", "God" even or rather: I can understand it when he is so called; but I cannot utter the word "lord" meaningfully. *Because I do not believe* that he will come to judge me; because *that* says nothing to me. And it could only say something to me if I were to live *quite* differently.<sup>40</sup>

Wittgenstein's point here can be understood as bearing on the *tone* of religious claims. The two sentences 'Jesus is God' and 'Jesus is Lord' may convey the same thought, i.e., have the same truth conditions, but they have a different tone. While both claims convey with their sincere utterance certain attitudes and commitments, to say 'Jesus is Lord' expresses in an overt way religious devotion and obedience. The contrast in tone between the two sentences can be brought out by considering what would be involved in supposing that one of these claims is true. In supposing (or conjecturing or hypothesising) a claim, one does not judge or assert that the claim is true or take into account its implied meaning, but considers what difference is made were it true, that is, one entertains the thought stripped of its usual tone and force. In the case of 'Jesus is God' there is little difficulty in entertaining the thought that Jesus is God, or understanding what would be meant by asserting it, without believing it. Similarly, one can consider what difference would be made were Jesus *Lord*, since both utterances convey the same thought. But in the latter case, 'Jesus is Lord' clearly means significantly more than just what is given by the thought, for this way of expressing the thought is tied to a much more complicated background of attitudes and religious practice than 'Jesus is God.' As a result, the meaning of 'Jesus is Lord' is more difficult to appreciate for someone such as a non-believer (or in this case Wittgenstein) who does not share or is not familiar with those attitudes.

Wittgenstein's example brings out two features of religious tone. First, there is the importance of an appreciation of tone in understanding what is said; grasping the intimacy, seriousness or—most clearly in this case—the devotion with which something is said may be as important in comprehending its meaning as grasping what the sentence is about. Second, in general, for tone to be meant by the speaker or understood by the audience depends on the appreciation of possibly highly nuanced distinctions in language, and this requires training in language and developed sensitivity to context, the speaker's attitudes and impressions that should be conveyed by a sentence. So Wittgenstein can be read as saying that religious devotion, and more generally sharing religious commitments

and attitudes, is required not only for the sincere utterance of certain religious claims but also for sensitivity to their meaning, and specifically their tone. Wittgenstein makes a related point in the following remark: 'In religion it must be the case that corresponding to every level of devoutness there is a form of expression that has no sense at a lower level. For those still at the lower level this doctrine, which means something at the higher level, is null & void; it *can* only be understood *wrongly*, & so these worlds are *not* valid for such a person.'<sup>41</sup> With regard to Wittgenstein's example of 'Jesus is the Lord' and 'Jesus is God,' the point is not that the latter lacks a tone, but rather that its tone is sufficiently familiar to be accessible to the non-believer.

In the opening section of his lectures on religious belief Wittgenstein writes

Suppose that someone believed in the Last Judgement, and I don't, does this mean that I believe the opposite to him, just that there won't be such a thing? I would say: "not at all, or not always."

If someone said: "Wittgenstein, do you believe in this?" I'd say: "No."  
"Do you contradict the man?" I'd say: "No."

These comments have been much discussed and are clearly open to an expressivist reading: Wittgenstein and the believer do not contradict because they are merely expressing different attitudes. But it is a problem for the expressivist account that Wittgenstein does allow that there is such a thing as believing the opposite, and that it may sometimes (though 'not always') consist just in believing that there will not be a Last Judgement; also, Wittgenstein nowhere suggests that the beliefs are compatible. On the reading that I am suggesting there is a respect in which the beliefs are clearly inconsistent—they express inconsistent thoughts about the occurrence of the Last Judgement. But this captures only part of the story of what is *meant*. Regarding tone, the belief in the Last Judgement expresses an attitude to human behaviour and its end result, whereas disbelief in the Last Judgement only requires that one does not have such a stance. Regarding force, the denial that there will be a Last Judgement is an ordinary assertion, the truth of which is evaluated according to the evidence for and plausibility of the belief; the religious assertion that there will be a Last Judgement is not similarly dependent on an evaluation of evidence. For example, the religious believer may recognise that the available empirical evidence is not persuasive, indeed strongly against the belief, but not see that as a reason to doubt its occurrence.

When the different components of meaning are considered, while Wittgenstein and the believer have contrary thoughts, they do not 'mean the opposite,' because their claims have different force and tone: they play different roles in their lives and convey different attitudes. To mean something genuinely opposed to the believer in the Last Judgement would require the assertion of, e.g., a rival eschatological theory (i.e., a contrary thought with similar force and tone but inconsistent thoughts). The non-believer, in contrast, while disagreeing with the believer about the fact of whether the Last Judgement will occur, in other respects does not address

what the religious believer means. Not meaning the opposite in this sense, however, is consistent with the realist view that the two claims convey truth-apt and inconsistent thoughts.

On the reading of Wittgenstein that I have proposed, he is not primarily concerned to comment on that aspect of religious meaning with which the realist is most interested to secure, namely its truth-apt content and the robust kind of truth for which religious sentences are apt. Indeed, the truth-apt content is assumed. Rather, he focuses on the kind of linguistic act a religious utterance is, the use and context of religious claims, and the atmosphere, attitudes and experiences appropriate to religious expression; in short, the force and tone. The aim of this interpretation is to provide an account of a substantial and insightful component of Wittgenstein's remarks on religion, i.e., the differences that he observes between religious and other fields of discourse. I do not claim to offer an exhaustive realist account of everything Wittgenstein says about religion (his comments on miracles is one problem example); however, neither expressivist nor minimalist can claim this for their interpretations either. More to the point, realism has the advantage of being a good theory; insofar as Wittgenstein diverges from it, therefore, so much the worse for Wittgenstein.

I will conclude this section by looking at a couple of objections. It may seem that the account of the content and particularly the force of religious claims is inconsistent with the variant of the Frege-Geach argument used in Section One to show that attitudes cannot do justice to the logic of religious belief. Surely the same difficulty will arise if the expression of non-representational states is built into the meaning of religious claims by way of their tone?

However, this is simply answered: the laws of logic are preserved within religious discourse because religious claims have truth-apt content. The validity of a religious argument is, as in other fields of discourse, the preservation of truth from premises to conclusion. If religious claims have a tone, such as expressing devotion, that is part of the meaning of assertions of faith, but will not affect what makes for a logically valid religious argument. If the conclusion to an argument does not logically follow, then the argument will not be valid even if the sentence has an appropriate tone. Moreover, since religious discourse is informed by standards of logic, a claim with the right tone but inconsistent with other accepted religious beliefs will not be acceptable, once the inconsistency is discovered.<sup>42</sup> Tone is important to the way in which a content is expressed or the suitability of expressing a content in a given context, but it has no bearing on the specific question of validity or consistency.

A second objection is that Wittgenstein does not himself make use of the notions of force, tone or thought, and to apply it to his remarks on religion may seem to saddle him with Fregean distinctions that he would have rejected in favour of considerations about the *use* of religious claims. Moreover, doesn't Wittgenstein's family resemblance argument, which shows that there need be no common component to all the uses of an expression, tell against the proposal that an account of the meaning of religious claims could be divided into thought, force and tone?

One motivation for Wittgenstein rejecting the Fregean distinctions as an account of sentence meaning is that he accepts a very minimal

(indeed a redundancy) theory of truth. If 'It is true that A' is equivalent to 'A' then the meaning of 'A' cannot be given by explaining the conditions under which it is true, for the latter would presuppose an understanding of the former.<sup>43</sup> Consequently the 'thought' component of a sentence cannot play a substantial role in accounting for its meaning. However, if, as I have argued, religious truth cannot be given a satisfactory minimal construal, then the conditions under which a sentence is true should play a substantial role in the characterisation of its meaning (and use). Moreover, a sentence's thought and tone should also typically feature in an analysis of its use, so in general the force-tone-thought distinction should present the Wittgensteinian with a convenient way of carving up an investigation into a sentence's use. The family resemblance argument might be thought to show that the Wittgensteinian should eschew broad categories of sentence use in favour of a more piecemeal approach, i.e., classification of the features of individual sentences or small groups of them. However, the family resemblance argument only supports the conclusion that there need be no common feature to all the different uses of a concept or expression; it does not show that such common features are usually lacking, or that we cannot delineate a class of uses of an expression with common features. Moreover, it is not being claimed that force, tone and thought completely exhaust the content of a sentence: if any important feature of meaning is missed by this approach, it is open to the Wittgensteinian to point this out and add it to the account. So, short of finding any failing in the force-tone-thought account, the Wittgensteinian can take a conciliatory approach to its use in understanding religious claims.

#### 4. Conclusion

This paper offers a realist defence of religious language and truth. Moreover, the arguments offered here give some flexibility to someone sympathetic to a realist position: someone unpersuaded by the case for distinctive internal standards for religious discourse, or the motivational force of religious belief, can still make use of the arguments establishing the falsity of expressivism and minimalism, and adjust the account of force and tone accordingly.

The case for realism about religious language and truth does not, of course, constitute a defence of religious realism broadly construed. In two notable respects, the realist will want to address further questions: first, to show that religious claims are actually true; second, to resist a reductionist thesis about religious ontology. Realism about religious language does, however, have a significant bearing on both of these issues. First, expressivism must be ruled out for issues concerning either religious ontology or truth (of the relevant kind) to come into play. Second, religious truth needs to be non-minimal for the question about whether religious claims are true or false to be a substantial philosophical concern; if truth is minimal, then the truth of religious claims would be governed—and at least in some cases trivially established—by the satisfaction of the internal standards of religious discourse.<sup>44</sup> Third, if religious truth is non-minimal, the reductionist will have to provide a model con-

sistent with this, i.e., one that shows how the supposed class of entities to which religious ontology is to be reduced support an epistemically and evidentially unconstrained truth predicate. While there are possible reductionist theses that are consistent with a realist account of religious truth, the onus will be on the reductionist to provide a plausible class of entities that satisfy these semantic conditions.<sup>45</sup>

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#### NOTES

1. George Berkeley *Alciphron* in *The Works of George Berkeley* vol. 3, ed. A. A. Luce and T. E. Jessop (London: T. Nelson, 1950), p. 301.
2. 'The Simple Believer' *Essays on Religion and Education* (Oxford University Press, 1992).
3. 'An Empiricist's View of the Nature of Religious Belief' in ed. Basil Mitchell *The Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).
4. Richard Swinburne *The Coherence of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 90.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Alvin Plantinga *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 42.
7. See J. L. Mackie *The Miracle of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982), p. 220.
8. Simon Blackburn 'The Land of Lost Content' in *Value, Welfare, and Morality*, ed. R. G. Frey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 14–15.
9. *Op. cit.* note 1, p. 297.
10. Robin LePoidevin *Arguing for Atheism* (New York: Routledge, 1996), chap. 8.
11. Don Cupitt *Taking Leave of God* (London: SCM Press, 1980).
12. Note that the expressivist could *not* strike up this internalist compromise, because it concedes that some beliefs have truth-apt content.
13. See, e.g., Hilary Putnam *Renewing Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), chaps. 7–8, Brian Clack *Wittgenstein, Frazer, and Religion* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994).
14. See, e.g., M. Scott 'Wittgenstein and Realism' *Faith and Philosophy* 17, 2000, pp. 170–90.
15. *Philosophical Occasions, 1912–1951* ed. J. C. Klagge and A. Nordmann (Cambridge: Hackett, 1993), p. 42.
16. *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Public and Private Occasions* ed. J. C. Klagge and A. Nordmann (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), p. 225.
17. *Culture and Value* ed. G. H. von Wright (Oxford: Blackwell, 2nd ed. 1998), p. 34.
18. See, e.g., Putnam *op. cit.* note 15, pp. 152–53; Clack *op. cit.* note 15, p. 36.
19. *Lecture and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief* ed. Cyril Barrett (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966), p. 71.
20. A statement is superassertible if available information justifies its assertion, and will continue to do so in the light of any new or improved information. See Crispin Wright *Truth and Objectivity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

21. See his 'Thoughts Addressed to an Analytical Thomist' *The Monist* 80, 1997, pp. 487–99; 'God and the Philosophers' *Midwest Studies in Philosophy XXI: Philosophy of Religion* ed. P. French (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 1997).

22. See, e.g., 'Philosopher's Clothes' in *Relativism and Religion*, ed. C. M. Lewis (London: Macmillan, 1995).

23. 'Wittgenstein and Wittgensteinians on Religion' *Wittgenstein and Philosophy of Religion*, ed. R. Arrington and M. Addis (Routledge, 2000), 146.

24. *Ibid.* p. 147.

25. *Op. cit.* note 20, p. 78.

26. Notably, if we ground ethical truths in divine judgement, then ethical claims could in principle outstrip our knowledge of or evidence for them, and ethical truths would also require a more-than-minimal analysis. It is not, of course, necessary for the realist to maintain that such evidence transcendent ethical truths actually exist, but only that they are possible; if they are possible, then ethical truth is not evidentially constrained.

27. *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* ed. G. H. von Wright, R. Rhees, and G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), p. 117. Cf. *Philosophical Investigations* ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and R. Rhees (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953), 136; *Lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics* ed. Cora Diamond (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976), pp. 68–69, 188.

28. For a review cf. *op. cit.* note 14.

29. *Op. cit.* note 17, pp. 37–38.

30. On this reading, Wittgenstein's position intersects with the reformed epistemology project to the extent that the latter aims to show that religious belief can be rational without being historically or scientifically well-founded. Wittgenstein's point, on this account, is not about the rationality of religious belief, but the standards of religious discourse, i.e., there is no normative pressure from the standards of religious discourse to make religious claims historically or scientifically well-founded.

31. See Michael Dummett's seminal work *Frege: Philosophy of Language* (London: Duckworth, 1981).

32. Dummett notes some exceptions, such as 'all but he' or 'husband and wife' where replacing one term would result in a meaningless sentence (*ibid.* p. 85). It works however where X and Y are whole clauses.

33. *The Logical Basis of Metaphysics* (London: Duckworth, 1991), p. 122.

34. *Ibid.* p. 118.

35. This point is controversial, but falls beyond the scope of this paper to discuss further; Davidson, e.g., regards all force to be a matter of distinguishing the speaker's intention. See his 'Moods and Performances' *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford University Press, 1984).

36. For the view that religious claims *are* fiction, see Robin LePoidevin *op. cit.* note 10, chap. 8.

37. *The Seas of Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 212.

38. *Op. cit.* note 17, p. 37.

39. Wittgenstein can be seen to make a similar point when he suggests that a religious belief may function like a *picture*. (*op. cit.* note 19, p. 54) Again, a picture may have a representational content. Moreover, a picture may have a regulative role in the believer's life, and is not changed or withdrawn in the face of contrary evidence; not, however, because the picture is non-representational but because the evidence is not seen as sufficient to render the belief false.

40. *Op. cit.* note 17, p. 38.

41. *Op. cit.* note 17, p. 37.

42. In contrast with, e.g., comedic discourse, where an utterance with the right tone may be appropriate even if it overturns logical principles.

43. Michael Dummett *op. cit.* note 31, p. 359.
44. See Wright *op. cit.* note 20, pp. 86–87.
45. Thanks to Hami Verbin and Graham Stevens for comments on an earlier draft.