CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Interpretations of Wittgenstein, Religion and Interreligious Relations

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In philosophical and theological perspectives on interreligious relations – including interreligious encounter, perceptions, practices, differences and similarities, communication and miscommunication, agreement and disagreement, dialogue, and so on – Wittgenstein is not among the most invoked thinkers. More often, one finds references and quotations of the likes of Buber, Levinas, and Gadamer, and perhaps also Krishnamurti, Abe, and Ikeda, if the religions involved include the Asian traditions. This is not to say that Wittgenstein does not feature at all. By certain authors, Wittgenstein has been used as one philosophical resource among others – let’s call such approaches ‘Wittgenstein-involving’. Others have referred to Wittgenstein when distancing their own approaches to interreligious relations from what they have perceived as Wittgensteinian. Finally, a few scholars have relied on, or expressed strong affinities with, Wittgenstein’s thought when interpreting interreligious phenomena, and might therefore be described as ‘Wittgensteinian’.

We can find Wittgensteinian and Wittgenstein-involving approaches dotted across the relevant subdisciplines, such as comparative philosophy of religion, world philosophy of religion, theology of religions, comparative theology, and interreligious theology. Given the notable variety – and quantity – of interpretations of Wittgenstein’s work in general, it should not come as a surprise that across the aforementioned subdisciplines, Wittgenstein’s work and its relevance for understanding interreligious relations have been interpreted in different, sometimes contradictory ways.

The present book reflects this diversity. It is not premised on an agreement in interpretations or applications of Wittgenstein’s thought to the study of interreligious relations. Rather, the contributors explore the relevance of Wittgenstein for this study from different interpretive, methodological and theological angles. There are, however, some common denominators across the essays in this book. One is a conviction that Wittgenstein’s work is an important intellectual resource for understanding and interpreting interreligious relations. Another is the conviction that, despite the exciting references to Wittgenstein in philosophical and theological scholarship on interreligious
relations, Wittgenstein can and should be engaged further, in different and novel ways that illuminate the subject. His work has also been misunderstood by some, which calls for critical discussion.

Accordingly, the essays in this volume bring together and contribute to the following bodies of scholarship: (1) Wittgenstein’s and Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion – the essays offer some novel readings of Wittgenstein on religion, but even more so, original applications of Wittgenstein to matters related to interrelational relations; (2) the aforementioned subfields of theology and philosophy: comparative philosophy of religion, world philosophy of religion, theology of religions, comparative theology, and interreligious theology; and (3) religious studies, particularly in relation to methodological questions of interpreting religious phenomena, as well as the meaning(s) and the utility of the concept ‘religion’ and other related concepts.

The following section contains an overview of Wittgenstein’s philosophy of religion and a brief look at influential ways of interpreting Wittgenstein on religion in philosophy and (mostly Christian) theology. Without this interpretive framework, it would be difficult to understand and develop the subsequent section, in which different ways of applying Wittgensteinian thought to the study of interreligious relations are described. Instead of concluding with brief summaries of all the essays in the present collection, however, such summaries will be introduced at different places throughout this introduction, in relation to the relevant topics in Wittgenstein or previous interpretations of his work.

Wittgenstein and Wittgensteinian Philosophy of Religion¹

It is difficult to ‘map’ Wittgensteinian approaches in philosophy of religion. This is partly due to the nature of Wittgenstein’s philosophy, partly to the style of his writing and lectures, and partly because of the vast and diverse amount of the interpretive work on Wittgenstein’s philosophy in general within which most of Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion finds its place. A similar assessment can be made of the different theological readings of Wittgenstein. Nevertheless, I think an effort to ‘step back’ and give some overview of different interpretations is helpful and important, even if any such overview will have limitations and will itself necessarily assume some interpretation. A way to do this which I have found helpful and which will, I believe, also shed light

¹ Much of the introduction to Wittgenstein on religion and to the interpretations of Wittgenstein in this section is based on my Andrejč (2016).
upon the essays in the current volume, is to look at the ways in which a Wittgensteinian or Wittgenstein-involving approach to religion takes up or engages different depictions of religion – religious language, beliefs, practices, or experience – in Wittgenstein’s reflections.

I suggest that we can call the four dominant ways in which Wittgenstein depicts religion nonsensicalist (early Wittgenstein), existentialist (both early and later Wittgenstein), grammaticalist and instinctivist (later Wittgenstein) (Andrejč 2016, 19–64). I will describe these later in this section. In the first instance, it is good to point out that the ‘ist’ endings are not meant to suggest that these four are philosophical or scientific theses, let alone theories of religion, taken either individually or together. Rather, they can be seen as pictures or conceptions in a particular, later-Wittgensteinian sense of the word. What are these later-Wittgensteinian ‘conceptions’ or ‘pictures’? Following the later Gordon Baker’s reading of Wittgenstein, Oskari Kuusela gives a convincing account. Unlike mutually exclusive “theses about identity or essence”,

a Wittgensteinian picture or conception is meant to articulate a way of seeing or looking at reality ...; it constitutes a mode or form of representing or conceiving the object of investigation (Darstellungsweise or Betrachtungsweise). Importantly, because it is possible to see or look at something, to represent or conceive it in more than one way, Wittgensteinian conceptions are non-exclusionary: they do not exclude other conceptions in the way in which truth claims or theses do.

KUUSELA 2014, 75

Sometimes, Wittgenstein uses the term ‘pictures’ to describe concrete examples of different but similar phenomena. By describing them alongside one another as “objects of comparison” (PI, §130), he hopes to achieve a “perspicuous representation” (übersichtliche darstellung) (PI, §122) and “see the connections” which would otherwise escape our understanding (RFGB_r, 133). An example of such a comparison which, according to Wittgenstein, reveals

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2 For the sake of simplicity, I include the early-Wittgensteinian nonsensicalist picture of religion as one of such ‘conceptions’ which, although dominant in the early Wittgenstein’s thought, still has at least some ‘echoes’ in the later Wittgenstein’s thought. I am well aware, of course, that this would be deemed problematic by, both, many therapeutic readers of Wittgenstein, as well as more traditional readers focused mostly on the later Wittgenstein’s remarks on religion. I address the interpretive question regarding the place of the nonsensicalist picture of religious language in the later Wittgenstein in Andrejč (2016, 35–36, 187–190).
something about religion, is a comparison between “burning [an] effigy” and “kissing the picture of one’s beloved” (RFGB, 123). At other times, a picture can be a fairly complex and abstract conception of a phenomenon, and sometimes it is very difficult to be aware that one is in a grip of it. One such picture, the later Wittgenstein suggests, was the conception of ‘proposition’ that his earlier self had used in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, according to which a form of all propositions is “This is how things are” (PI, §114). The later Wittgenstein, however, thought that this picture held him, as well as some others (he probably had Russell in particular in mind), “captive”. He adds: “we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably” (PI, §115).

Treating pictures as objects of comparison, instead of taking one particular picture as capturing the supposed essence of the phenomenon, is part and parcel of the later Wittgenstein’s practice of philosophy as a descriptive endeavour. “Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can in the end only describe it. For it cannot give it any foundation either. It leaves everything as it is.” (PI, §124) We could call this rule Wittgenstein’s “methodological principle of non-interference” (Plant 2005, 69). This principle constitutes the understanding of philosophy as descriptive or “grammatical investigation”:

[Our] investigation, however, is directed not towards phenomena, but, as one might say, towards the “possibilities” of phenomena. We remind ourselves, that is to say, of the *kind of statement* that we make about phenomena.

Our investigation is therefore a grammatical one. Such an investigation sheds light on our problem by clearing misunderstandings away.

PI, §95

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3 Cf. Mikel Burley’s analysis of this comparison in Wittgenstein on pp. 44–45 of the present volume.

4 We should add that philosophy as descriptive investigation for Wittgenstein does not mean to ‘merely describe’ in an uncritical manner the rules of use for a particular word or phrase. It is, in fact, quite natural to be deceived by the form of one’s own language, or syntax – what Wittgenstein calls ‘surface grammar’, i.e. “the way [the word] is used in the construction of the sentence” (PI, §664), as opposed to ‘depth grammar’, which is manifested only when the form of life in which that word or phrase has its place is clear to us (its usage is revealed in both broader linguistic and pragmatic contexts). According to Wittgenstein, it is very hard not to be deceived by the surface grammar because of the immense power of language to bewitch our intelligence (PI, §109).
In short, since the abstract concepts of philosophical interest, such as ‘proposition’, ‘language’, ‘religion’, or ‘game’, are used in a notable variety of contexts and ways, a grammatical investigation of such concepts will often have to describe and utilize different conceptions or pictures of the ‘thing’ in question in order to elucidate the grammar of the concept in question (Kuusela 2008, 160). In this way, “a clear view of the use of our words”, or perspicuous representation, is achieved (PI, §122), which should illuminate understanding and dispel the confusions normally caused, according to Wittgenstein, by philosophical or other misuse of language.

As this is an introduction to diverse interpretations of Wittgenstein for a particular purpose, I am trying not to get entangled – at least not too deeply – in the debates between the school of interpretation that is sometimes called ‘New Wittgensteinian’ or ‘therapeutic’ (James Conant, Cora Diamond, Alice Crary, Rupert Read, Stephen Mulhall) and the ‘traditional’ interpretations (Peter Hacker, Hans-Johann Glock, Brian McGuinness, Genia Schönbaumsfeld). Such debates are whether Wittgenstein understood philosophy in an exclusively therapeutic fashion, as claim the former, or (ever) also suggested a philosophical or metaphysical theory or definite claims about language or anything else, as claim the latter; whether there is any ‘essential’ break between the early and the later Wittgenstein, as the latter have it, or there is a strong continuity, as the former claim; and the related debate between the resolute and the ineffabilist interpretations of the Tractatus. For the purpose of this introduction, I can, I believe non-problematically, affirm that the therapeutic function is one of the most – if not the most – important functions of philosophy for both the early and the later Wittgenstein. About ‘perspicuous representation’, it seems warranted to say that, at least in the later Wittgenstein’s approach, it is not meant to achieve a total grasp of the grammar of the concept or the phrase under investigation (let alone of a ‘language game’). Rather,

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5 For a good introduction to different readings of both the Tractatus (the difference between the ‘resolute’ and the ‘ineffabilist’ interpretations), as well as Philosophical Investigations and Wittgenstein’s philosophy as a whole (the difference between ‘fully therapeutic’ and all other interpretations which see in Wittgenstein’s writing anything more than just an activity of intellectual therapy), see Stern (2004). For a shorter (article-long) introduction to all sides of the debate and the necessary references for further reading, see Bronzo (2012). To get an overview of different therapeutic readings of Wittgenstein in particular, see Crary and Read (2000), which also includes a ‘traditionalist’ response by Peter Hacker. The most influential work arguing for the ‘resolute’/therapeutic interpretation has probably been that of Cora Diamond, whose relevant essays have been collected in Diamond (1995).
According to Wittgenstein, a common way in which we run into misunderstandings of something is to hold, or expect to arrive at, a particular conception of it as an exhaustive definition. In the case of ‘religion’, this can happen when philosophers or others take one particular aspect or picture of religion as a general and exhaustive thesis about ‘what religion really is’. Countering this, a number of scholars have been inspired by Wittgenstein to abandon, or substantially reframe, the project of establishing necessary and sufficient conditions for something to be deemed religion or religious. Instead, the strategy has been to carefully establish a “complicated network of similarities, overlapping and criss-crossing” (PI, §66) between phenomena deemed religious, with a limited scope of examples for comparison. This means treating ‘religion’ as a ‘family-resemblance’ concept. Only then can a further critical and constructive work on ‘the nature of religion’ locally, if that is the aim, proceed appropriately. This Wittgensteinian move can be observed even in the works of philosophers who otherwise haven’t taken Wittgenstein as their main philosophical teacher, like John Hick (2004, 3–5), Victoria Harrison (2006), and Hent de Vries (2008). (For more examples, cf. Burley, pp. 36–40 present volume)

But, doesn’t declaring ‘religion’ to be a family-resemblance concept mean merely to track all that is deemed religion or religious, giving up on any deeper or further understanding of either the language used or the phenomena being so described? And, what exactly does it mean to say that ‘religion’ is a family-resemblance concept anyway?

In the current volume we find two essays that address these questions head on. Thomas Carroll agrees with the majority interpretation that the upshot of treating ‘religion’ as a family-resemblance concept means a careful and persistent resistance against essentializing ‘religion’ or, what is equally misleading, reifying any particular tradition such as Buddhism or Christianity (Carroll, pp. 69–71 present volume). Discussing the theoretical work on the genealogy and the utility of the concept ‘religion’ in the field of religious studies (Nongbri, Schilbrack, McCutcheon), Carroll carves out the task of philosophy in relation to religion as distinct from religious studies and theology in a recognizably Wittgensteinian-descriptive spirit: philosophy of religion(s) must begin with a
reflective but disciplined attention to the actual discursive practices of *ascript-ing* the term ‘religion’ (or ‘Islam’, ‘Judaism’, etc.). What philosophical elucidation shows – namely, that there is no *sui generis* essence to religion – helps to establish a mutually clarifying communication between members of different religious traditions, which is always “framed by local conceptions of what religion [or ‘Islam’, ‘Judaism’, etc.] is”, whether we are aware of that or not (Carroll, pp. 70–71 present volume).

In another interrogation of the family-resemblance understanding of ‘religion’ in this volume, Mikel Burley relates it to Wittgenstein’s broader appreciation of the diversity of human practices (discursive or otherwise), as well as to what Burley calls Wittgenstein’s *analogical* method: “the method of bridging gaps in one’s comprehension of another’s activities by looking for analogically comparable activities” (Burley, p. 35 in present volume). Burley traces the uses of the family-resemblance understanding of religion within philosophy of religion and religious studies with a focus on Hinduism. As a response to critical perspectives on the colonial resignification of ‘Hinduism’ by Christian missionaries and Indologists, who forced it into signifying a species of the genus ‘religion’, more recent scholars have adopted a family-resemblance concept of Hinduism (Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi calls it a ‘polythetic-prototype approach’). Burley explains the distinction between sloppy thinking and the family-resemblance approach: the latter but not the former resists reducing Hinduism to a common feature in the name of a meticulous attention to the diverse reality of the practices and cultures usually associated with Hinduism. In terms of interreligious understanding, Burley concludes that Wittgensteinian method helps us listen “more attentively to one’s neighbours, both religious and nonreligious: not simply assuming that gaps of understanding will always be bridged, nor pretending that differences do not exist, but allowing both differences and commonalities to be themselves in a spirit of mutual discovery” (Burley, p. 47 in present volume).

Returning to Wittgenstein’s own thought, we need to note that the foci of his religion-related investigations were not so much the concept ‘religion’ itself but concepts used in relation to religion such as ‘belief’ (as Venturinha shows in his contribution to this volume), religious concepts such as ‘God’ and ‘soul’, and the concepts which Wittgenstein contrasts with (‘true’) religion, such as ‘superstition’ or ‘science’. In this way, Wittgensteinian pictures of religion are composed, so to speak, from different angles of investigation. Consider the meaning of ‘belief’: Wittgenstein suggests that primitive reactions are “part of the substance of the belief” (LC, 56), and that the verbal expressions of religious beliefs can only be understood in the context of “the connections” people make between them and their behaviour, experiences, and other claims.
they make. In religious contexts, ‘belief’ – at least very often, in English and German – has a notably different meaning than it has in most non-religious contexts, according to Wittgenstein:

[one] talks of believing and at the same time one doesn’t use “believe” as one does ordinarily. You might say (in the normal use): “You only believe – oh well ...”. [In religious contexts] it is used entirely differently; on the other hand, it is not used as we generally use the word ‘know’. ... Whatever believing in God may be, it can’t be believing in something we can test, or find means of testing.

LC, 60–95

But, one might ask, is this still merely investigating ‘belief’ etc. and leaving it as it is, or do Wittgenstein’s remarks here have a normative side to them? He appears to be saying that an evidentialist belief-attitude, even if deemed ‘religious’ by some, is not really that, i.e. evidence-games are not properly part of what believing in God involves. For Wittgenstein, to use ‘belief’ in an evidentialist way in a religious context amounts to “superstition”.6 This seems to show that Wittgenstein’s commitment to philosophy as descriptive investigation does not mean that he does not have preferences in relation to the meaning of ‘religion’ and religion-related words and expressions (Andrejč 2016, 50–60). In other words, Wittgenstein’s reflections on religion (probably more than on any other topic) do manifest some normative elements.

Wittgenstein’s reflections on ‘belief’ have been hugely influential beyond philosophy. Probably the most influential work on ‘belief’ in social anthropology, Rodney Needham’s Belief, Language and Experience (1972), has been heavily influenced by the later Wittgenstein’s de-essentialization of the concept ‘belief’ as well as other mental concepts. Needham argues that this word does not have any single core or element of its meaning which is stable across time and cultures. Affirming Wittgenstein (Z, §113), Needham observes that most psychological verbs, such as ‘believe’, ‘think’, ‘know’, ‘feel’, etc. have “extremely ramified and extended uses” which often “appear confused” (Needham 1972, 123). But, as Wittgenstein wrote, despite their constitutive scientific imprecision,
they continue to be useful and communicable (Z, §113–115; PI, §69, 71). In relation to the concept ‘belief’ in particular, and in-keeping with Wittgenstein’s later work, Needham claims there are two widespread errors plaguing both academic and everyday discourse: “first, the assumption that there must be something in common to all instances of believing; second, the assumption that there must be a mental counterpart to the expression of belief” (Needham 1972, 122). Most relevantly for the topic of this volume, Needham comes to such conclusions about the concept of ‘belief’ on the basis of a comparative anthropology of religious discourses in European Christianity on the one hand, and the religion of the African Nuer tribe on the other. Needham’s work on ‘belief’ and the complications with its meaning has, in turn, influenced a generation of more recent anthropologists of religion and other Religious Studies scholars, such as Donald S. Lopez Jr. and Michael Lambek, who have applied Needham’s approach to the study of intercultural and interreligious encounters and attempts at communication and translation across (very) different cultures and religions.

Before looking at some of the differences between the interpretations of Wittgenstein on religion which are relevant for understanding interreligious relations (including the interpretations represented in this volume), we need to lay out a bit further what the four Wittgensteinian conceptions of religion mentioned earlier consist of.

Probably most influential in philosophy of religion and theology was the grammaticalist picture of religion in Wittgenstein. According to this conception, religious statements – in Christianity these are especially the “central doctrines”, like “God is the creator of all”, but also statements such as “God’s eye sees everything” (LC, 71) – are to be understood as “grammatical remarks” framing the rules of grammar for talking about God. Since grammar “tells what kind of object anything is” (PI, §373), the doctrines of Christianity determine the grammar of the word ‘God’, i.e. they determine what we can or cannot say

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7 Needham is, at times, an eliminativist regarding the very existence of belief and suggests that this is, more or less, also Wittgenstein’s view: “If grammar tells us what kind of an object something is, then the grammar of belief tells us that there is no such object” (Needham 1972, 131). It is worth noting, however, that Wittgenstein does not abandon the concept of ‘belief’ as (still) useful for understanding Christianity as well as (at least some) other religions. He certainly criticized what we might call the Enlightenment-propositionalist understanding of religion as “a set of interiorized, systematized propositional attitudes or beliefs” (Vries 2008, 29); however, instead of abandoning the concept of ‘belief’ per se, he substantially re-framed (the possibilities of) its meaning in religious contexts in comparison with the ‘ordinary’ meaning of the term.
about God and his relationship to the world. In this way, the doctrines at the same time frame and express the possibilities of Christian believing and living.

Sentences which express central, life-orienting religious beliefs are not like empirical-factual statements about particular objects or processes in the world, but like grammatical propositions such as "objects exist".

Experiences do not show us God as a sense experience does an object, nor do they give rise to conjectures about him. Experiences, thoughts, life can force this concept on us. So perhaps it is similar to the concept "object".

Just as the formal concept 'object' enables us to relate to empirical reality, while trying to prove that "objects exist" does not make sense, so the concept 'God' enables us to speak and relate to reality in a religious way (in monotheistic religions) while trying to prove that "God exists" does not make sense. The misunderstanding of the concept 'God' as referring to an intraworldly object of some sort is, according to Wittgenstein, largely a consequence of being deceived by the "surface grammar" of God-sentences in which 'God' is almost always a noun. The later Wittgenstein was especially concerned with the ways our intelligence can get "bewitched" (PI, §109) by "analyses between the forms of expression in different regions of language" (PI, §90). Sometimes the form of the sentence gives an appearance of an empirical proposition, but it "is really a grammatical one" (PI, §251). So, while nouns or "substantives" usually refer to "a thing or a substance" (mwl, 8:74), in God-talk this is not the case, as indeed the "depth grammar" of "God" shows: if you ask believers "Does [the sentence] 'God helps people in need' mean that he has arms?", most would respond "You can't talk of god having arms." (mwl, 8:77)

Another Wittgensteinian conception of religion which can be found in both early and later Wittgenstein is the existentialist conception. This one has two 'sides', so to speak: one side is Wittgenstein's affirmation of the role of experience in religion, and the other concerns the role of volition and persistence in faith. The sort of experience which 'Wittgenstein the existentialist' sees as central to religion are, first and foremost, particular kinds of feelings. Already in the

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8 According to Alice Ambrose, Wittgenstein stated in the lecture on May 1, 1933: "Luther said that theology is the grammar of the word 'God'" (awl, 32); G.E. Moore was not entirely certain, however, whether Wittgenstein on that occasion said "Luther said, 'Theology is the grammar of the word of God'", or "Luther said theology is the grammar of the word 'God'", or "Luther said theology is the grammar of the word 'God'" (mwl, 8:75).
Tractatus we read that “Feeling the world as a limited whole – it is this that is mystical” (TLP, 6.45). It is the feeling that the world as a whole is a miracle which the early Wittgenstein connects with the mystical, as well as with aesthetics and ethics: “Aesthetically, the miracle is that the world exists. That what exists does exist” (NB, 68). In his transitional period, in the Lecture on Ethics, Wittgenstein perhaps most clearly identifies feelings of particular kinds – the experience of “wonder at the existence of the world”, “the experience of absolute safety”, and (at least some sorts of) “suffering” – as central to religion and ethics (LE, 11–12).

The later Wittgenstein does not talk or write much about the experiential aspect of religion; in fact, he does not talk or write about religion or God very much. Nevertheless, he clearly expresses the importance of experience for religion in remarks such as the one already partly quoted above (this passage, taken as a whole, nicely expresses both the experiential-existentialist and the grammaticalist conceptions of religion):

Life can educate you to “believing in God”. And experiences too are what do this but not visions, or other sense experiences, which show us the “existence of this being”, but e.g. sufferings of various sorts. And they do not show us God as a sense experience does an object, nor do they give rise to conjectures about him. Experiences, thoughts, – life can force this concept on us.

CV, 97

So, while affirming the crucial role of experience in religious believing, Wittgenstein does not think any kind of experience constitutes ‘evidence for God’ or provides support for any other kind of religious belief. The kind of experience which he recognizes as having a role in religion appears (mostly) to be in the category of “existential feelings” (Ratcliffe 2008), i.e. non-intentional, world- or life-encompassing feelings which “constitute a background sense of belonging to the world and a sense of reality” (Ratcliffe 2008, 39). They include “sufferings of various sorts”, the feeling of the existence of the world as a miracle, the feeling of radical or ‘existential’ guilt, and so on, and not quasi-sensory experiences such as visions or hearing voices.

Wittgenstein operated with a definition of ‘evidence’ according to which evidence is in principle public and shareable, according to which internal experience or thoughts should not be considered as such (LPP, 281–282, PI, §243–288).

Matthew Ratcliffe, who has coined the category ‘existential feelings’, explains that “some [existential feelings] are referred to in terms of familiar types of emotion, such as ‘guilt’ and ‘hopelessness’. Although we usually feel guilty about something specific or feel that a
The volitional side of Wittgenstein’s existentialist picture of religion says that “you have to change your life. (Or the direction of your life.)” In Christianity, at least, “you have to be seized & turned around by something”, according to Wittgenstein, and “once turned round, you must stay turned round” (CV_R, 61). From the fact that Wittgenstein emphasises ‘direction’ and ‘stay’ in this remark, we can conclude that Wittgenstein clearly recognizes the possibility of not staying “turned around” (ibid.). Since it is also possible to lose faith, the idea is that one needs to persist in it, which involves conscious effort and exercise of the will. The existentialist picture of religion in Wittgenstein also shows that, for the most part, Wittgenstein holds a “distinctly ethical interpretation of specific religious concepts” (Plant 2005, 108–110). For the early Wittgenstein, ethical and religious discourses come from the “the desire to say something about the ultimate meaning of life, absolute good” (LE, 11), while the later Wittgenstein emphasises the ethical role of religious pictures in one’s life, such as that of the Last Judgement (LC, 54).

The third, instinctivist conception of religion in Wittgenstein is connected with his later remarks on the origins of language. The origins of language are presented, not as a result of an intellectual process, but as arising from primitive or instinctive reactions. In his words, “a language-game does not have its origin in consideration [Überlegung]. Consideration is part of a language-game” (Z, §391); rather:

> The origin & the primitive form of the language game is a reaction; only from this can the more complicated forms grow. Language – I want to say – is a refinement, “in the beginning was the deed”
> CV_R, 36

> The word is taught as a substitute for a facial expression or a gesture.
> LC, 2

The main background to these remarks is Wittgenstein’s dissatisfaction with the way philosophers – at least most philosophers whose work he was aware of in his day – have normally treated language, i.e. as primarily an abstract system of denotation and representation, logically interrelated statements, and so on. In this context, Wittgenstein often contrasts the intellectualist
misunderstanding of religious language and practices to the picture of it which recognizes and emphasises its primitive origins. Even when we seemingly have to do with religious-theoretical explanations of phenomena, “this too would only be a later extension of instinct” (RFGBR, 151). His most extensive expression of the contrast between intellectualist and instinctivist pictures of religion can be found in the remarks collected in Remarks on Frazer’s Golden Bough, where Wittgenstein criticizes the anthropologist James Frazer for his intellectualist distortion of religious beliefs and practices, especially in the ‘primitive’ religions. Magic rituals and native beliefs are not hypotheses or attempts to causally influence the world.

Burning in effigy. Kissing the picture of one’s beloved. That is obviously not based on the belief that it will have some specific effect on the object which the picture represents. It aims at satisfaction and achieves it. Or rather: it does not aim at anything at all; we act in this way and then we feel satisfied. … In the ancient rites we have the use of an extremely developed gesture-language.

RFGBR, 123, 135

Notably, Wittgenstein also interpreted the religious belief-impulse that appears to remain at the centre of highly complex systems of doctrines, ethics and practices, such as Islam or Christianity, to stem from instinct. The following comment during a lecture on religious belief concentrated on Christianity:

A man would fight for his life not to be dragged into the fire. No induction. Terror. That is, as it were, part of the substance of the belief.

LC, 56

Noting the parallels between the language of pain and the language of religion in the later Wittgenstein, Brian Clack writes that, just as “the language of pain is said to develop out of instinctual, non-linguistic behaviour”, so too

the language of religion (the articulation of religious beliefs) is an extension of certain primitive reactions, say a natural expression of wonder or of fear. Note, however, that the religious belief is not equivalent to that expression of wonder (the expressivist view). … What [Wittgenstein] is saying is that it is inconceivable that an elaborately worked-out doctrinal system could come into existence without the initial, affective, primitive reactions he emphasizes.

Clack 1999, 85–86
Finally, there is the conception of religion that is characteristic of the early, but also the ‘transitional’ Wittgenstein (late 1920s and very early 1930s): the nonsensicalist conception, according to which all religious, as well as ethical, aesthetical, philosophical and other metaphysical ‘propositions’ are nonsensical. Such statements have the appearance of factual statements, but do not depict either possible or actual states of affairs in the world – in this regard, the nonsensicalist conception is similar to the grammaticalist perspective. But the discursive regime of the *Tractatus* is strict and straightforward on the boundary between sense and nonsense: language is said to consist of propositions, and propositions are described as depictions of (possible) states of affairs (*TLP*, 2.202). Any linguistic endeavour which tries to do anything else/more than state propositions wants to do the impossible, i.e. to go beyond ‘what can be said’, and is therefore nonsensical. This includes all theistic utterances which strongly seem like statements of empirical fact but are not. The *Tractatus* connects the concept of God with “view[ing] the world *sub specie aeterni*, which means to view it “as a whole – a limited whole” (*TLP*, 6.44). But, “logic pervades the world: the limits of the world are also its limits” (*TLP*, 5.61), so saying anything about the world *as a whole* is impossible according to the *Tractatus*. So is saying anything ‘about God’, as “God does not reveal himself in the world” (*TLP*, 6.432). In the *Lecture on Ethics*, Wittgenstein is reported as saying, “[The] tendency of all men who ever tried to write or talk Ethics or Religion was to run against the boundaries of language” (*LE*, 11). He continues:

This running against the walls of our cage is perfectly, absolutely hopeless. Ethics so far as it springs from the desire to say something about the ultimate meaning of life, the absolute good, the absolute valuable, can be no science. What it says does not add to our knowledge in any sense. But it is a document of a tendency in the human mind which I personally cannot help respecting deeply and I would not for my life ridicule it.

*LE*, 11–12

An attentive reader will have noticed that I already quoted from the very same pages – and also the same context – of the *Lecture on Ethics* when presenting Wittgenstein’s existentialist picture of religion. In fact, Wittgenstein’s expression of a deep appreciation of “the peculiar significance of uttering such nonsense” (Mulhall 2015, 33) in the final sentence above arguably goes beyond the ‘mere’ nonsensical conception and reflects more the existentialist understanding of religion. So why, one might ask, should we prise these apart at all? Why talk of different conceptions of religion in Wittgenstein if two or more of...
these conceptions are normally intertwined in Wittgenstein's works, lectures or notes which touch on religion or ‘God’?

I see at least two good reasons for this. The first is that each of these conceptions can stand on their own, so to speak, rather than necessitating the other(s). Staying with the above example from the Lecture on Ethics, where the existentialist and nonsensicalist picture of religion are very much intertwined, one can also recognize that the nonsensicalist understanding – that religious statements necessarily run against the boundaries of language – can stand on its own. It is a perfectly intelligible view, even without the existentialist perspective that this particular nonsense is in some sense important, that it expresses experience par excellence such as “wondering that the world should exist”, etc. Furthermore, it also works the other way around: one can affirm that volition has an important role in the life of faith and that religious language expresses existential feelings – or, more pointedly and normatively, that what is most interesting and relevant about religious language is that it does this – without holding the view that religious language is nonsensical. In a similar fashion, it is possible to take, say, the grammaticalist conception of religious language from the later Wittgenstein and affirm it without affirming, or with little attention to, the instinctivist, existentialist, or nonsensicalist understanding; and so on.

The second reason for naming different conceptions of religion in Wittgenstein is that it helps us understand some of the differences between different interpretations of Wittgenstein better. Often, a philosopher or theologian will emphasise one or two of the Wittgensteinian conceptions of religion and use them as an interpretative framework (or, alternatively, as a target to criticize), while downplaying or even neglecting the other conceptions. The particular way in which this is done partly depends on whether the interpreter perceives more or less continuity between the earlier and the later Wittgenstein.

We can compare two influential approaches in Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion, those of D.Z. Phillips and Stephen Mulhall, to illustrate this point. Phillips puts the grammaticalist picture in the centre of his philosophy of religion. His life-long preoccupation was to show why evidentialist and theodicy approaches to justifying theistic religious belief-systems do not work. Rather, religious statements are to be understood as grammatical remarks: “[Theological] or doctrinal statements [in Christianity] ... are giving us rules for the use of the word ‘God’”; and “only [within] this use we may disagree about a

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11 Such a position is advocated by Matthew Ratcliffe, who rejects the “nonsense charge” against the expression of existentially-felt experiences, including the wonder of being or feelings of the loss of the meaning of life (Ratcliffe 2008, 57–61).
particular application of the concept” (Phillips 1988, 216), since the “[issues] of sense are logically prior to issues of truth and falsity. It is only when we appreciate the sense of religious beliefs that we can see what calling them true or false amounts to” (Phillips 2000, xi). This heavy emphasis on the grammaticalist picture of religious language was intertwined with Phillips’ understanding – and promotion – of philosophy as descriptive grammatical investigation only. Phillips also draws upon the existentialist and the instinctivist pictures of religion, in particular when reflecting on religious “concept formation” and the “place of mystery” in religious understanding (e.g. Phillips 1988, 273–303), but puts less emphasis on them overall in comparison to his use of the grammaticalist picture. Finally, as a thoroughgoing later-Wittgensteinian who sees a notable discontinuity between the early and the later Wittgenstein, Phillips was not impressed by the nonsensicalist picture of religion.

Stephen Mulhall, on the other hand – especially in his recent position, which has developed under the influence of Stanley Cavell, Cora Diamond as well as Wittgensteinian Thomism (see below) – reads Wittgenstein on religion very differently. His approach takes the nonsensicalist conception of religious language as an interpretive framework that determines philosophy of religion as a whole. Both Diamond and Mulhall read not only the early but also the late Wittgenstein on religion and ethics through the lens of the nonsensicalist picture and the ‘resolute’ reading of both the *Tractatus* and *Philosophical Investigations*. Understanding “Wittgenstein’s view of ethico-religious utterances (early and late) … [as] … sheerly nonsensical” (Mulhall 2015, 21), Mulhall holds that affirming “deliberately nonsensical formulations”, and “imaginatively entering into the seeing” the religio-ethical utterances as sensible, just is what constitutes a Wittgenstein-inspired religious attitude that is exegetically credible (ibid. 33–34). Regarding the grammar of religious language, it is most appropriate to say that religious sentences are “grammatically distinctive in that they have no grammar, but only a ‘grammar’” (ibid. 38). Unsurprisingly, Mulhall is critical of D.Z. Phillips’s unproblematized grammaticalist approach, which presupposes that “religious concepts are just like those non-religious uses, only different – distinctively religious, but equally viable”. For Mulhall, this is a serious misunderstanding (Mulhall 2015, 18). In short, then, the nonsensicalist picture of religio-ethical language overshadows and re-frames the grammaticalist aspect of religious language in Mulhall’s (recent) work, as well as the existentialist and instinctivist aspects.

Yet another philosophy of religion results from taking the Wittgensteinian instinctivist picture of religion as central. An influential interpretation of Wittgenstein of this kind is that of Brian Clack, introduced earlier:
Similarly ... [as] the language of pain is said to develop out of instinctual, non-linguistic behaviour ... [,] the language of religion (the articulation of religious beliefs) is an extension of certain primitive reactions, say a natural expression of wonder or of fear. Note, however, that the religious belief is not \textit{equivalent} to that expression of wonder (the expressivist view). ... What [Wittgenstein] is saying is that it is inconceivable that an elaborately worked-out doctrinal system could come into existence without the initial, affective, primitive reactions he emphasizes.

\textit{Clack 1999, 85–86}

This is not to say that Wittgenstein's view was that "a fully developed religion essentially \textit{is} a pre-reflective response to the world" (Clack 1999, 85). But interpretations such as Clack's do emphasise the instinctive aspect of religion \textit{more} than they do the grammatical role of religious remarks, or the “running against the boundaries of sense” when expressing them, and it is the former that sets the tone for their overall interpretation of religion (instinctivist approaches do, however, often combine well with a strong emphasis on the existential aspect of religion). The anti-intellectualist and anti-evidentialist focus distils into seeing the “primitive, natural human activities ... associated with mortality, the parental relation, and suffering” as central to religious lives and religious concept formation (Plant 2005, 106). Such activities are also good candidates for salient commonalities across (most) cultures and religions, as demonstrated by the essays, in the present volume, of Ramal, Cortois, and to some extent Venturinha.

It is probably ‘natural’ that most Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion is concerned with Christianity (e.g. Phillips, Mulhall), and some of it also with ‘primitive religions’ (e.g. Clack). But there are well-developed Wittgensteinian engagements also with other traditions, and comparing those with Wittgensteinian approaches to Christianity and tribal religions can be very informative in terms of the potentialities of Wittgenstein's philosophy for comparative philosophy of religion. For the sake of brevity, I will briefly mention only two: Judaism and Buddhism, but we can also find Wittgensteinian perspectives on/within Hinduism and Islam. A Wittgensteinian interpretation of religious belief can be found in the work of one of the giants of analytic philosophy, Hilary Putnam, who in his later life expressed a commitment to his Jewish tradition. However, Putnam's interpretation of Wittgenstein does not really engage with

\footnote{See Choudhary (2007) for an examination of the parallels between the Advaita Vedanta philosophy and Wittgenstein, and Alpyagil (2010) for a reflection (in Turkish) on chosen themes of Islamic philosophy from a Wittgensteinian lens (among others).}
Judaism in particular, but rather warns against the common simplifications of Wittgenstein's understanding of religion, such as “emotivism” or strict “in-commensurabilism” (Putnam 1992, 152–4). In agreement with D.Z. Phillips' and other 'mainstream' Wittgensteinian interpretations of the day, Putnam reads Wittgenstein as emphasising that “religious discourse can be understood in any depth only by understanding the form of life to which it belongs” (ibid., 154). In his late work, *Jewish Philosophy as a Guide to Life*, Putnam finds commonalities between Wittgenstein and the Jewish philosophers Rozenzweig, Buber and Levinas, especially regarding “the idea that for a religious person *theorizing* about God is, as it were, beside the point” (Putnam 2018, 6). Beyond that, however, we do not find much that would be particular to a Wittgensteinian engagement with Judaism.

A closer engagement with the Jewish traditions of reflection, prayer and other practices from a Wittgensteinian perspective can be found in Howard Wetstein's work. Building on Jewish thinkers such as A.J.Heschel and Max Kadushin on one hand, and on Wittgenstein on the other, Wettstein claims that, in Judaism, “We should see the institution and its practices as primary, the interpretation secondary” (Wettstein 2012, 28). More precisely, the Jewish religion consists, firstly and most importantly, in a primitive “awe-responsiveness” as that which is most fundamental, as *k'neged kulam*, suggests Wettstein. Secondly, it consists in *faith* and not cognitive ‘beliefs’, which are understood as intellectual and bipolar attitudes towards a propositional content (ibid. 29). From this, we can see that Wettstein takes from Wittgenstein the existentialist and the instinctivist conceptions of religion, as well as a strong emphasis on practice. Thus, faith in Judaism is understood to be nurtured within characteristic practices, including prayer and the study of the Torah and the Talmud, which are aimed at character development, achieving awe of God, *yirat shamayim* (38). According to Wettstein, Wittgenstein's anti-evidentialist and anti-theoretical approach to religion helps us appreciate that Biblical, first-order religious language – normally poetic or narratival or expressive – is alright as it is, but that the philosophical-theological explanations of religious statements and concepts are a misguided perversion. Wettstein laments the marriage between the Greek philosophical and Hebrew-Biblical cultures of reflections which are “very different” (108). The bad result of that marriage can be seen in Maimonides, Wettstein explains, who de-legitimizes the ‘ordinary’ Hebrew-Biblical language about God, and correspondingly introduces philosophy as a necessary intermediary to explain the “possibility of meaningful discourse about God” (107).

Accordingly, while Judaism includes a strong emphasis on study, including the study of the Torah and the Talmud, the “traditional rabbinic education makes little room for theology” (42):
The rabbi is an expert then, not necessarily or primarily in theology, but in the practices – both their details and their legal-theoretic analysis – that constitute the life of the community. …

The Bible’s characteristic mode of ‘theology’ is story telling, the stories overlaid with poetic language. Never does one find the sort of conceptually refined doctrinal propositions characteristic of a philosophical approach. (42, 108)

In the present volume, a somewhat similar approach to Wittgenstein interpretation and Judaism, and an accordingly similar critique of ‘philosophical religion’ in relation to Maimonides, is taken by Daniel Weiss. His critical engagement with David Burrell’s use of Wittgenstein in comparative theology (Christian-Jewish-Muslim) is described in the next part of this introduction.

Perhaps ‘the least religious’ are the Buddhist interpretations of Wittgenstein and, vice versa, the Wittgensteinian interpretations of Buddhism. The focus is normally on the parallels between Wittgenstein’s understanding of philosophy, which is interpreted as exclusively therapeutic, with the Buddhist conception of what it means to be(come) enlightened. Not surprisingly, we find a strong emphasis on *practice* alongside a sharp de-emphasis on doctrines, and accordingly, Wittgenstein’s nonsensicalist picture of (anything resembling) religious or metaphysical claims dominates. Thus, John Canfield proposes a form of “secular mysticism” which, in his view, is compatible with scientism, since “the fact that enlightenment is ineffable … gives enlightenment a free pass through scientism’s barrier” (Canfield 2007, 164). Similarly, Rupert Read, a leading proponent of the therapeutic interpretation of Wittgenstein, sees an “extreme closeness of Wittgenstein and Zen” (Read 2009, 17):

> Zen and Wittgenstein alike find life and reality to be paradoxical, and they work intensely with that paradoxicality. ... Exposing nonsense (delusions) to the light is necessarily paradoxical. ... For one necessarily practices by means of doing things that are absurd (“answering” absurd riddles, thinking so as not to think, engaging with one’s temptations to speak what one is oneself inclined to judge as nonsense as if it were not). (ibid. 21)

In the current volume, Sebastjan Vörös and Varja Štrajn take a related approach to Buddhism. They share the strongly nonsensicalist picture of religious language, a therapeutic understanding of philosophy and a strong emphasis on

13 See also Borowitz (2007), an influential work in Talmudic interpretation from a Wittgensteinian point of view.
practice as opposed to religious doctrines. However, they suggest their “enactive apophaticism” as a grounding for interreligious dialogue between traditions, not merely as an interpretation of Buddhism (their examples are mostly Buddhist and Christian).

Finally, we need to add that Christian Wittgensteinian theology, just like Wittgensteinian philosophy, consists of a family of different approaches and includes very diverse interpretations and applications of Wittgenstein, which can also be illuminated through noticing the Wittgensteinian conceptions of religion they tend to emphasise. The (mostly Protestant Christian) postliberal theology which today enjoys significant influence in Anglo-American academia has, somewhat one-sidedly, taken from Wittgenstein the grammaticalist conception of religion and theology, and largely neglected the other conceptions. We can see this in the writings of George Lindbeck, Hans Frei, and Stanley Hauerwas. An important reason for their neglect of the existentialist and the instinctivist conceptions of religion in Wittgenstein is, as I have argued elsewhere (Andrejč 2016, 65–95), their anti-experiential approach to theology which arose as a reaction to the existentialist and experiential liberal theology that was dominant until early 1980s. It should not come as a surprise, then, that David Tracy, one of the main voices of liberal theology since the 1970s, has, conversely, been most impressed by Wittgenstein’s existentialist conception of religion and combined it with a revival and reinterpretation of the mystical theologies of being by Maister Eckhart and Jan van Ruysbroeck (Tracy 1990, 85; 1988, 86–87).

Another strand of Western Christian theology, called Wittgensteinian or Grammatical Thomism (mostly Roman Catholic), has produced yet another distinctive approach to Wittgenstein interpretation. Thinkers like Fergus Kerr, Herbert McCabe and David Burrell have combined Aquinas’ and Wittgenstein’s conceptual worlds and methodologies of investigation of language in ways which have brought to the fore especially the nonsensicalist and the grammaticalist conceptions of religion. David Burrell outlines the Grammatical Thomist’s understanding of the methodologically crucial Part 1 of the Summa Theologica, explaining that Aquinas is there engaged, not in establishing the arguments for the existence of God (as the Five Ways, in particular, have been interpreted very often), but “in the metalinguistic project of mapping out the grammar appropriate in divinis. He is proposing the logic proper to discourse about God” (Burrell 1979, 17). The grammaticalist reading of Aquinas in this particular theology, however, includes strong emphasis on the limitations of our very ability to form any sentences ‘about’ God – the emphasis which, in the vocabulary I have proposed, we can safely call ‘nonsensicalist’ (despite the fact that theologians do not like this term as it is normally understood pejoratively). From the Grammatical Thomist perspective, Aquinas’ philosophical
theology as a whole is premised on the understanding of religious language according to which we are not only “unable to say the right things about God, we can never even put our statements correctly” (Burrell 1979, 14).

Elucidating Interreligious Relations with Wittgenstein

The examination in the previous section, of the ways in which Wittgenstein has been interpreted in philosophy of religion and theology, enables us to address with enough understanding the central question of the present volume: how can Wittgenstein’s thought – beyond the relatively popular utilization of ‘religion’ as a family-resemblance concept, noted earlier – be applied to the philosophical and theological reflection on interreligious relations in an illuminating way? The contributors to this volume will demonstrate some of the creative and fruitful ways in which this can be done. Most of them, however, at least partly build on the previous relevant work. Therefore, I combine the summaries of the rest of the essays in this volume with brief presentations of the ways in which Wittgenstein’s thought has previously been applied to the topic of interreligious relations.

Let us begin, this time, with Christian theological approaches. As noted above, George Lindbeck’s influential framework for understanding relationships between different religions is determined by his vision of the nature of religion and theology, which draws heavily on the Wittgensteinian grammatical conception of religious language and his understanding of grammar more broadly (as well as on Clifford Geertz). Rejecting the understanding of religion as essentially a set of propositional beliefs, Lindbeck bases his own understanding on a strong analogy between religion and a “cultural-linguistic system” (Lindbeck 2009, 19). Religion is

similar to an idiom that makes possible the description of realities, the formulation of beliefs, and the experiencing of inner attitudes, feelings, and sentiments. Like a culture or language, it is a communal phenomenon that shapes the subjectivities of individuals rather than being primarily a manifestation of those subjectivities. (ibid.)

To this, Lindbeck adds a thoroughly grammaticalist understanding of the central religious doctrines and theology as “second-order activities”:

Just as grammar by itself affirms nothing either true or false regarding the world in which language is used, but only about language, so theology
and doctrine ... assert nothing either true or false about God and his relation to creatures, but only speak about such assertions.

Lindbeck 2009, 55

The application of Lindbeck’s notion of religion to interreligious relations makes the categorial disparities between the forms of life in different religious traditions the defining features which determine (the limitations of) interreligious communication. Such communication or dialogue can hardly be theological – Lindbeck contrasts interreligious with ecumenical in this regard – since the position affirms both “incommensurability” as well as “untranslatability” between some of the central concepts and claims of different religions (ibid. 28–39). Any similarities or analogies between religions are only “remote”, i.e. “a banality as uninteresting as the fact that all languages are (or were) spoken” (ibid. 28). Even less significant for Lindbeck are the seeming analogies in religious experiences across religions, as he conceives of the experiential as practically created and strictly limited by the conceptual and cultural.

In other words, Lindbeck privileges the supposed depth-grammatical differences between religions above anything else that we might want to say about interreligious relations. His application of Wittgenstein to interreligious studies is best encapsulated in Wittgenstein’s remark – found in the recently published book of Wittgenstein’s lectures based on the notes taken by G.E. Moore – that “different religions treat something as making sense, which others treat as nonsense: they don’t merely one deny a proposition which other affirms” (mwl, 8:78).

Rhiannon Grant’s essay in this volume takes the Wittgensteinian understanding of theology as grammar along with Lindbeck’s analogy between religions and languages, and applies these conceptions to reflection on a phenomenon of multiple religious belonging (neither Lindbeck nor later postliberal theologians were particularly interested in multiple religious belonging, and were often theologically prejudiced against it). Grant finds particularly useful the Lindbeckian idea of ‘fluency’ (or a lack of it) in a religious tradition, which is a part of the bigger religion-as-language analogy. Analysing multiple religious belonging – often seen as a legacy of a particularly ‘individualistic’ interpretation of religious meaning and life (cf. Schmidt-Leukel 2009, 46–89) – through the lens of grammaticalist and socially-oriented interpretations, according to which even a solitary prayer “is not a private matter” (Grant cites D.Z. Phillips), gives original results. It is hard to disagree with Grant’s conclusion that multiple religious belonging is “a form of interreligious communication and learning”, and that a careful application of the Wittgensteinian-Lindbeckian perspective on the fluency of more than one ‘religion-game’ makes multiple
religious belonging more intelligible than most philosophical and theological perspectives allow.

There is a specific later development of Wittgenstein’s grammaticalist picture of religious language which is also relevant for the theology and philosophy of interreligious relations and which receives scholarly attention in the present volume. In recent Wittgenstein scholarship, a focus on Wittgenstein’s reflections from the final few years of his life – especially the remarks collected in *On Certainty*, but also *Zettel* and *Remarks on Philosophy of Psychology* – has produced a body of literature on the understanding of belief, knowledge and certainty by the so-called ‘Third Wittgenstein’ (cf. Moyal-Sharrock 2004). This work is relevant for our purposes also because of the parallels between Wittgenstein’s depictions in *On Certainty* of what since become known as “hinge certainties” (Moyal-Sharrock 2007) or “hinge commitments” (Bennett-Hunter, pp. 157–158 in present volume) on the one hand, and his depictions of religious beliefs on the other.

Hinge certainties are so called because Wittgenstein uses the metaphor of hinges (Angeln) on which the door turns for those certainties on which all other beliefs, doubts, and even basic procedures of reasoning turn (OC, §341). Most clearly, convictions such as ‘I have a body’, ‘the world existed yesterday’, ‘I exist’, definitely belong to this category. We do not doubt these, at least not normally (and, the moment we do, they cease to function as ‘hinge certainties’), as trusting such things and keeping them ‘stable’ and beyond doubt makes intelligible doubting and believing, in fact any epistemic life and criteria that we might have, possible at all. In addition to those most basic hinge certainties such as ‘I exist’ and ‘the world has existed yesterday’, however, various kinds of beliefs which are not universally held can also work as ‘hinges’ more locally, for a certain civilization, culture, or, say, epistemic community within a culture. Wittgenstein describes the network of one’s hinge certainties as a *Weltbild* or world-picture, and compares it to “a mythology” that is beyond epistemic justification: “propositions describing this world-picture might be part of a kind of mythology. And their role is like that of rules of a game; and the game can be learned purely practically, without learning any explicit rules” (OC, §95).

It is not difficult to notice parallels between religious beliefs and hinge certainties in Wittgenstein’s remarks. Verbal expressions of both kinds of belief are described as “grammatical remarks”, both are manifested in acting or “simply doing”, and both are categorically different from evidentially justified and justifiable beliefs (OC, §174). This invites depictions of the networks of central religious beliefs as co-constitutive of one’s – or, perhaps, the believing community’s – world-picture. But, is this way of depicting the place of religious beliefs universally applicable, beyond certain forms of Christianity? Is this conceptual
move useful for understanding interreligious relations or interreligious communication?

In this volume, Guy Bennett-Hunter proceeds from the perspective that some religious beliefs – the central ones, like “God exists” in most versions of theistic traditions – are Wittgensteinian hinge certainties, while most other religious beliefs within the belief-system are not. Bennett-Hunter builds on Duncan Prichard’s “Wittgensteinian Quasi-Fideism” (Pritchard 2011), which is based a reading of On Certainty according to which “all rational evaluation (and therefore all rational support) is essentially and inherently local: it cannot take place ‘wholesale’, but only relative to hinge commitments” (Bennett-Hunter, p. 158 in present volume). Bennett-Hunter argues that Wittgensteinian Quasi-Fideism of this sort constitutes a useful theoretical tool to address the complex reality of interreligious communication. On the one hand, it makes understandable the areas which are, in interreligious discussions and dialogue, non-negotiable, while, on the other hand, it makes understandable that some beliefs and interpretations are matters for discussion, i.e. in the space of reason-giving, since they are not hinge-certainties but in-principle dubitable for the members of one or the other tradition involved. A Wittgensteinian perspective that is based on the epistemology of On Certainty also, however, enables some flexibility, since what is religiously indubitable at one point or in one context can become dubitable in another, perhaps interreligious context – or the other way around. Finally, and most daringly, Bennett-Hunter suggests a theoretical innovation: he introduces the concept of Über-hinge convictions which can enable rational interreligious disagreements and arguments even over some otherwise deeply-held beliefs, that is, over “apparent hinge disagreements” (Bennett-Hunter, p. 166 in present volume).

In his contribution to this volume, Klaus von Stosch also considers the understanding of religious beliefs as hinge certainties, recognizing the parallels in Wittgenstein’s descriptions of the two. However, von Stosch points to the notable problem with this parallel – and with the grammaticalist picture of religious language, if taken on its own, more broadly – from the majority of theologically-committed perspectives on religious language (at least in Abrahamic religions, but also beyond). According to a Wittgensteinian grammaticalist picture, hinge-beliefs or ‘grammatical remarks’ are not bipolar (i.e. they cannot be either true or false). If this were so for central religious beliefs always and in all contexts, such beliefs would be necessarily indubitable and “it would be silly to argue in favour of [or against] the truth of religious belief” (von Stosch, p. 76 in present volume). Von Stosch’s solution to this problem comes via an interpretation and use of Wittgenstein that balances the grammaticalist picture of religious language with a strongly existentialist aspect of religious
believing: essential religious beliefs are, at least within Jewish and Christian traditions, a peculiar kind of regulatory belief, such that they can, nevertheless, accommodate “internal doubt ... without them losing their regulative status” (ibid.). He calls this the “double contingency” of religious beliefs, since such beliefs are dubitable, first, because of their “factual plurality” in today’s context of religious diversity, and second, because of “their universal need of compatibility with our experiences” which makes the internal questioning of them a constitutive part of religious life (ibid.).

In the second part of the essay, Klaus von Stosch lays out methodological guidelines for the interpretation and practice of interreligious communication, based on the above-mentioned interpretation of Wittgenstein and a particular theological perspective. A leading proponent of Comparative Theology, von Stosch introduces some unique foci into this theological research programme by suggesting: that the comparative philosophical or theological enterprise “has to start from a concrete case study” and “deal with real problems”; that religious beliefs have to be understood firmly in the context of “their language games and forms of life”; that, similarly, all theological investigation needs to be “correlated with practice” in order to be intelligibly communicable across religious boundaries and to hold the promise of bringing fruitful results. Importantly, “Wittgensteinian enquiry will always be vulnerable to revisions” due to its dependence on “the fallible insights of our language games” (von Stosch, p. 85 in this volume). In accordance with the above guidelines, von Stosch advocates patient intercultural sensitivity in comparative theology, without sliding into cultural and alethic relativism.

What kind of approach to interreligious relations do we get if we allow the Wittgensteinian nonsensicalist picture of religion to have a greater say in our overall understanding of religious language? In the present volume, Sebastjan Vörös and Varja Štrajn develop an approach to interreligious communication which they call enactive apophaticism. In it, a Wittgensteinian intertwinement between nonsensicalist and existentialist conceptions of religious language – examples given are from Buddhism and Christianity – takes centre stage, and is combined with a strong emphasis on action. A religious endeavour can only

14 Comparative theology, in the sense which this term has acquired in interreligious studies and in which Stosch uses it, means ‘acts of faith seeking understanding which are rooted in a particular faith tradition but which, from that foundation, venture into learning from one or more other faith traditions’ (Clooney 2010, 10). It is best pursued when guided by a theological theme and by then comparing, in-depth, what two (or more) traditions have to say on that theme in the search for religious truth and interreligious understanding. See also von Stosch (2012a, 2012b).
be respectable if it is compatible with Wittgenstein’s philosophical enterprise, understood as therapy that “shows the fly out of the bottle”, and involves “un-saying” and a “de-construction or even un-construction of the linguistic ‘web of beliefs’” (Vörös and Štrajn, p. 116 this volume). Vörös and Štrajn argue that such an approach can illuminate and, if followed, enable the sort of existential encounter which happens “beyond saying” even if the discourses of different religions have substantially different grammars. An existential encounter with the ineffable can show us that “there is, as it were, life ‘behind’ or ‘underneath’ the confines of our discursive activity and thus realizes the scope and limits of not only our own, but of all language games” (ibid. 131).

A brief comparison with another approach to Christian-Buddhist dialogue (not fully represented in this volume), likewise oriented towards apophatic mysticism, can help us appreciate how differently Wittgenstein can be used even within such a shared focus. David Tracy’s existential-theological reading of Wittgenstein, instead of developing an overall Wittgensteinian-philosophical framework for interpreting mystical practices like that of Vörös and Štrajn, does it the other way around. Tracy sees not only a resemblance but a (indirect) genealogical link between the Christian apophatic-mystical tradition of Eckhart and van Ruysbroeck on the one hand, and Wittgensteinian on the other, claiming that Wittgenstein’s “apophatic meditations” represent a “modernized remnant ... of [these] traditions” (Tracy 1990, 85). Tracy sees a strong connection between Wittgenstein’s remarks of the character, “It is not how things are in the world that is mystical, but that it is”, (TLP, 6.44) and the experience of “the sheer giftedness of reality” of which the Western mystics of the past wrote (Tracy 1988, 86–87). In the interreligious realm, the family resemblances between the existential-mystical writings of Christianity and Buddhism are taken, not as evidence that both Christianity and Buddhism have developed ways to transcend language altogether (Vörös and Štrajn), but as an invitation to develop an “analogical imagination” or mutual interpretation which notes both grammatical analogies and disanalogies. For Tracy, a dialogically-involved Christian theologian, such analogical imagination facilitates deep interreligious learning not only about each other but, through this, also ‘about’ God/the Ultimate Reality/Emptiness (Tracy 1990, 73).

If the above comparison shows how a theology that uses Wittgenstein’s existentialist conception of religion approaches interreligious communication, another example shows that an emphasis on the nonsensicalist conception also leads theologians towards a notably different approach to interreligious communication than it does for philosophers (with the possible exception of Mulhall). David Burrell, proceeding from a Wittgensteinian-Thomist starting point, builds his vision of comparative theology on the nonsensicalist and
the grammaticalist pictures of religion. Burrell’s contribution to interreligious studies consists especially in his comparative reflection on the central conceptual and doctrinal features of philosophical theologies in Christianity, Judaism and Islam. These three religions share many references to the same revelatory stories and theological motifs, of course. But equally or perhaps more importantly for Burrell, they also share much of their philosophical vocabularies, especially in their philosophically advanced varieties in the Middle Ages.

Burrell’s approach proceeds as interreligious ‘grammatical investigation’ and hopes to achieve a philosophical-therapeutic dissolution – instead of a doctrinal agreement or resolution – of the central religious disagreements between the Abrahamic traditions (Burrell 2011, 166–178). His perspective is determined by a programmatic emphasis on the ‘nonsensical’ nature of the monotheistic languages (although Burrell, as a theologian, rarely uses the concept ‘nonsense’): it is a structural feature of theistic religious languages, for Burrell, that “no Jew, Christian, or Muslim is in a position to make the final and definite judgement over whether our sentences about God are even sensible” (Andrejč 2016, 208). The logical peculiarity of theistic statements implies that the idea of ‘verifying once and for all who is right’ about God’s ways and will is, in fact, incoherent. This has important practical implications for inter-Abrahamic communication: the only right way to communicate, agree or disagree across religions is with a genuine sense of intellectual humility, for “[neither] adherents nor interlocutors are in a position to assess the truth of a revelatory tradition, which is why doubt remains endemic even to a faith which regards itself as ‘strong’ ” (Burrell 2011, 180).

Daniel Weiss’ essay in this volume examines Burrell’s approach critically in the light of a close reading of Maimonides and of Wittgenstein’s commitment to leave the ordinary (religious and other) language ‘as it is’. Burrell takes the interreligious communicability established by medieval philosophers, such as Ibn Sina, Al Ghazali, Maimonides and Aquinas, as a philosophical-theological foundation for his own Christian-Jewish-Muslim comparative project. Weiss’s concern is that the “philosophical common discourse that bound these thinkers [mentioned above] together also had the similar effect of cutting each of them off from important elements of their inherited conceptual traditions” (Weiss, p. 179 in this volume). Perhaps most clearly in Maimonides, Weiss notices a tendency towards intellectual elitism which determines Maimonides’ religious epistemology and even his view of what the most appropriate relationship to God is: “the very notion of ‘proper love of God’ also becomes an intellectually elitist activity” (ibid. 190). Weiss argues that it is not so much the ordinary religious discourses of Abrahamic faiths that need Wittgensteinian intellectual therapy (understood as a philosophical-critical awareness of the
peculiar limits of all theistic language, as it is in Burrell’s work) but, rather, the philosophical discourse of the medieval Aristotelian philosophical theologians themselves, which assumes that there is something wrong with the ordinary religious language of their respective traditions.

Finally, we have three essays in the present volume – those of Randy Ramal, Nuno Venturinha and Paul Cortois – that share overlapping foci but cannot easily be grouped together or in relation to the other essays. Two of them, those of Ramal and Cortois, take the Wittgensteinian instinctivist picture of religion in Wittgenstein as primary and offer it as elucidating of interreligious encounter, while two of them, those of Venturinha and Ramal, share a focus on religious pluralism.

Randy Ramal takes on the challenge of ‘radical pluralism’ of irreducibly diverse religious concepts and languages for interreligious communication. The way to meet this challenge is, Ramal argues, via a careful investigation of “the unreflective, prior-to-rationalization primal reactions, as Wittgenstein describes them” (Ramal, p. 151 in this volume). This reveals the logical grounds of religious diversity which, in turn, show that the radical conceptual pluralism of religions is “ultimately rooted in the irreducible diversity and plurality of our primal responses to the world” (ibid, p. 145). Ramal combines his Wittgensteinian perspective on the significance of the primitive or ‘animal’ reactions with a Derridean view (and Derrida’s experience with the ‘cat’s gaze’) that the forms of life of humans and animals are even closer together than Wittgenstein seemed to have recognized. Furthermore, the observations of animal behaviour scientists such as Jane Goodall have shown that the occasional behaviour of some animals – in Goodall’s case, chimpanzees – exhibit strong family resemblances to human ritual behaviour. Ramal stays cautious with his conclusions, however: he does not argue that the shared similarity with non-human animals observable in most human cultures, “constitutes a basis for finding necessary universal agreements in human reactions”. He does, however, propose that this similarity and the link between the primitive reactions and religious concept formation in humans does suggest a basis for interreligious communication across the radical diversity of religious languages. Ramal does not spell out how this should be done, however, instead leaving this task to the normative disciplines of ethics and theology.

Paul Cortois’ essay, ‘Names, places and ritual practices – Wittgenstein and The Way of Tea’, also proceeds from the Wittgensteinian interpretation of the primitive reactions and their place in religions both ‘primitive’ and ‘developed’. Cortois reminds us that, in order to illuminate magic and religious rituals, Wittgenstein points to the ritual-like practice of “kissing the picture ... [or] the name of the loved one” (RFGB, 21, 32). More generally, Cortois suggests, the
name or a picture of a person represents that person in a “stronger sense ... of being its representative, ... in brief: its symbolic substitute” (Cortois, p. 215 this volume), which can be seen as a kind of a ‘magical view’ of proper names according to which revering someone’s name is an act of treating that person as “a soul” (PPF, §22). In Cortois’ application and broadening of this perspective, the attitudes towards particular religious names either of God/gods or saints (‘Christ’, ‘Mary’, ‘Buddha’, ‘Francis’, ‘Mohamed’, ‘Allah’, ‘Jahweh’, ‘Abraham’, ...), particular religious places (‘Rome’, ‘Lourdes’, ‘Mecca’ ...), and even traditions or identities (‘Roman Catholic’, ‘Muslim’, ...), are “comparable to the kind of attitudes we have towards persons as ‘souls’” (Cortois, p. 221 this volume). Cortois’ demonstration of the interreligious potency of the above interpretation of religious naming is very interesting and equally ‘particularist’. He examines the Japanese tea ritual or Chadô, cultivated especially within Japanese Zen Buddhist tradition, which embodies an in-depth interreligious encounter between the Jesuits and Japanese Zen Buddhists (several elements of the Chadô ritual have ‘analogies of practice’ with elements of Christian liturgy, and at least some of the ‘Seven Sages’ of Chadô from the 16th Century have been Christians). The Chadô rituals are full of minutiae that are replete with significance: hospitality is cultivated and ritualized via symbolic representation, through naming the important objects used in the ritual with their ‘proper names’, of “those who have made them, admired them, broke them into pieces, glued them together, handed them over” (ibid. 232). To offer hospitality to someone through the tea ritual means to turn him from a ‘somebody’ into somebody close, a person ‘with a soul’. Cortois concludes by using his attentive description of Chadô as a kind of Wittgensteinian critique of the established dichotomy between pluralist religious universalism and religious particularism.

Nuno Venturinha’s argues that, despite the strong Christian influence behind Wittgenstein’s reflections on religion, “There is not, from a Wittgensteinian point of view, the correct religion” (Venturinha, p. 111 in this volume). But neither does Venturinha take the family-resemblance understanding of religion as programmatic, as do Carroll and Burley. Rather, he claims that it is “exactly what subsists [across religions] despite all differences that Wittgenstein is interested in”, affirming, according to Venturinha, a “shared sphere” which is said to underlie the “different interpretations and manifestations” found in different traditions (Venturinha, p. 104 in this volume). In other words, Venturinha reads Wittgenstein, especially on the basis of the Remarks on Frazer’s Golden Bough, as a particular, anti-dogmatic kind of religious pluralist.

A particularly valuable contribution of Venturinha’s essay for the current volume is his contextualization of the Wittgensteinian approach to religion in its historical contexts of both philosophical (Frege, Bolzano) and theological
(Newman) thought that influenced Wittgenstein and his contemporaries. We read that the conception of belief in Wittgenstein’s mature philosophy could not have originated with Frege but was, rather, notably influenced by Cardinal Newman’s anti-foundationalist perspective in An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent. Newman’s view of the three so-called “modes of holding propositions” – doubt, inference and assent – find strong parallels in Wittgenstein’s affirmation of the variety of attitudes which we call ‘belief’ – some dubitable and evidence-sensitive, others, like religious ones, not so at all. Venturinha’s exegetical argument is that that this and other strong parallels between Newman’s and Wittgenstein’s thought can be traced back to Wittgenstein’s work of 1936, earlier than the more common view has it, which focuses on Newman’s influence on Wittgenstein’s work of the final few years, collected in On Certainty (Venturinha, pp. 107–111 in this volume).

Conclusion

While not representing all – not even all the established – interpretations of Wittgenstein on religion, the contributions to this volume, taken together, do represent a remarkable diversity of interpretations. More to the point, they teach us different ways of applying Wittgensteinian philosophy to the study of interreligious relations. Minimally, the essays show that the relevance of Wittgenstein for interreligious studies is much greater and wider than the declaration, based on a partial understanding of the later Wittgenstein, that different religious languages are ‘incommensurable’ because of their grammatical disparities. More ambitiously, we hope that scholars and students of interreligious studies – and, especially, of their philosophical and theological aspects – will find the interpretations, arguments and constructive suggestions in this volume illuminating and useful.

Bibliography


