



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Wisdom and methodological diversity in philosophy of religion

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Abstract

There exists wide methodological diversity in philosophy of religion and many of the ways of responding to it are inadequate. This article argues that resources from virtue epistemology can help respond better, specifically connecting the issue to the notion of wisdom. A framework for this is articulated and then applied to Aquinas and Wittgenstein, chosen as utilizing starkly different methodologies in dealing with problems from philosophy of religion.

Keywords: Wisdom; diversity; Aquinas; Wittgenstein

Introduction

The rational evaluation of religious belief is a central concern of philosophy of religion. The discipline has burgeoned over the last few decades, but there is a bewildering multiplicity of approaches. Such are the differences that some practitioners fail to recognize others as pursuing the same questions or issues, or even being in the same discipline. The status of natural theology is contested, the role of practice is disputed, the value of religious experience debated, religious pluralism praised or rejected, Asian, Black, and Latino philosophers question the Eurocentrism of the tradition, Feminist philosophers challenge the gendered pre-suppositions of the debates. There are various responses to such methodological diversity, but they tend either to suppress diversity dogmatically or else allow diversity at the expense of critical evaluation, embracing insouciant pluralism.

This article seeks to evaluate methodological diversity positively, offering a way of engaging with and critiquing different approaches by demonstrating that the biography and context of the philosopher are epistemologically relevant to justifying method. It seeks to articulate and defend a form of reflection which can be seen as continuous with the traditional philosophical virtue of wisdom. Virtue epistemology puts the focus of epistemological analysis on the person as a concrete individual in a specific historical and cultural context, rather than the more usual decontextualized, deracinated approach of twentieth-century analytic epistemology. Clarifying and articulating how features of the philosopher's life and context are rationally relevant to their choice of method is the core task of this article. This significantly changes the approach of the discipline, which typically discounts these factors as incidental.

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To flesh out this proposal and also to justify it through exploring examples, two leading figures in the history of philosophy of religion will be analysed using this framework. Aquinas and Wittgenstein are selected as having had maximal impact on the discipline, having excited strong polemical positive and negative reactions to their work, and having wildly contrary approaches to both philosophy and religion. This article seeks to show how their methodological choices reflect specific needs, pressures, and demands from their historical, social, and biographical contexts and, furthermore, how their accounts of religious belief are deeply shaped by these personal elements.

This conceptual framework is not merely useful in considering historical figures, but is a helpful tool for contemporary practitioners. Rather than being shaped by contingent factors which are out of awareness, or airbrushed away, the article seeks to remind philosophers of the significance of their personal sense of well-being in their choice of methodology and so allows a more fruitful forum for debate across deeply different approaches, rooted in the common goal of attempting to achieve well-being.

Methodological diversity

The rationality of religious belief

While many intellectuals in the mid-twentieth century held that religious belief would soon disappear as a phenomenon, this has not been the case. It is a major socio-political force in the contemporary world. Assessing the rationality of religious beliefs is therefore an important task, and this is carried out in theology, religious studies, and most especially in philosophy of religion. Philosophy of religion is flourishing as a subfield in philosophy in the early twenty-first century. In the mid-twentieth century it had largely retreated to a rather narrow defence of the intelligibility of religious utterance under the sustained assault from positivism and naturalism. With the waning in influence of positivism, and the prowess of philosophers of religion in fields such as epistemology (Alston 1991), metaphysics (Plantinga 2000), and philosophy of science (Swinburne 2004), it has re-emerged with renewed confidence. New fields such as comparative philosophy of religion (Hick 1985), analytic theology (Crisp and Rea 2009; van Inwagen 1995), and the religious turn in phenomenology (Caputo 2018) have also been developed.

However, a pervasive problem is the massive diversity of methods and approaches, such that practitioners can frequently fail to recognize others as being engaged in the same discipline. This is a general issue across all areas of philosophy, but this article focuses on the circumscribed area of philosophy of religion as a test case of the bigger issue. The problem emerges with particular force there, as the issues have wider cultural impact than more recondite explorations in, for example, philosophical logic or philosophy of language. As to diversity, there is, of course, the analytic/continental divide. But even within these broad divisions further splintering occurs. For example, there are Thomists, who apply themselves to the work of Thomas Aquinas, but who splinter into Neo-Thomists (McInerney 1982), Transcendental Thomists (Lonergan 1967), Analytic Thomists (Kenny 2002), Wittgensteinian Thomists (Kerr 2002) and Postmodern Thomists (Milbank and Pickstock 2001), among others. There are Reformed Epistemologists who reject natural theology and seek to argue by parity for the rationality of religious beliefs as basic (Alston 1989; Plantinga 2000). There are the Naturalists who seek to explain religious phenomena by appeal to causal mechanisms in psychology or evolutionary theory (Dennett 2006), others who allow religion but reject religious metaphysics (Wettstein 2012). There are Phenomenologists of different kinds who eschew the atheism of Sartre and Heidegger, and have taken a theological turn in their work (Kearney, 2001). There are Postmodernists, many of whom were fascinated by

Augustine (both Derrida and Lyotard worked on him at the end of their lives), or who use postmodernism to attack secular liberalism (Milbank 2006). There are Critical Theorists, such as Habermas, interested in the role of religion in the political sphere and who seek to articulate an account of rationality which can accommodate religious thought (Habermas 2002). Pragmatists such as Rorty seek to privatize religious belief (Rorty 1999), but are attacked by other pragmatists who claim they are being false to their own pragmatist principles (Talisie 2001). Further pragmatists have challenged the narrowness, intellectualism and insularity of traditional philosophy of religion (Wildman 2010; Schilbrack 2014). Asian philosophers challenge the chauvinism and assumptions of the western tradition, and argue for the recognition of alternative conceptualizations of religion, philosophy, and psychology (Garfield 2015). A recent radical pluralist approach (Burley 2020) has criticized the shortcomings of earlier pluralists, such as Hick (1989). The field is riven with dispute and methodological heterogeneity, as evidenced in a recent volume edited by Gutting (2016). It has led at times to division, factionalism, intolerance, and mutual ignorance of major movements.

Responding to diversity

There are, of course, familiar ways of responding to this diversity. The first can be styled a kind of dogmatism, which seeks to dismiss such plurality as insignificant, and which operates with clearly defined methods, goals, and success criteria (of whichever kind – for example, using analytic metaphysics, phenomenology, critical theory, etc.). One is inducted into a tradition, taught the required skills and techniques, and applies them with a community of like-minded scholars. While there may be an awareness that others do things differently, there's not much concern about this; the real issue is attending to the logic of the argument. Problems with this are on the one hand the contingency, both historical and geographical, of the method one uses, a kind of insensitivity to difference which can be procrustean, and the false belief that mere logical consistency is the main issue in assessing arguments. A second response is more sensitive to diversity, but regards it as a scandal and seeks to overcome it, typically comparing philosophy unfavourably with natural science in this respect. Famously, philosophers such as Descartes, Kant, Husserl, and Carnap all devised methods which would resolve the differences and disputes within philosophy. In each case, however, the method becomes another option in a plurality of approaches and actually increases the diversity rather than diminishing it. A third response is to become sceptical about the possibility of achieving objective knowledge about such issues. One version of this is to naturalize inquiry, or turn things over to empirical research. Many worry that this merely changes the subject, asking different questions. A different version of scepticism is postmodern playfulness. While the sceptical stance is important (especially when faced with dogmatism), it gives up too soon on the possibility of philosophical gain. A fourth response is to acknowledge diversity, not to become sceptical, but to think that one's choice of approach is a matter of taste or temperament. David Lewis (1983) articulates this clearly, as does Quine (1953). Arguably, William James and Fichte express similar views. The problem with this is that taste is a conversation-stopper. It is difficult to account for it and unnecessary to justify it. None of these ways provide an adequate way of dealing with methodological diversity in philosophy in general, and especially in dealing with the problems of philosophy of religion.

Problems and paths

There is therefore a challenge in the contemporary debate. Variety abounds, but none of the current ways of engaging with the variety are adequate – being either dogmatic,

ineffective, sceptical, or defeatist. To substantiate this claim I want to examine two towering figures in the history of philosophy of religion, Aquinas and Wittgenstein. Both excite strong responses. There are devoted disciples of both, who are convinced that the method of their master is the correct paradigm and model, and who devote themselves to detailed exegesis and to defending their views. There are vigorous opponents who challenge their views and seek to refute their positions. They seem diametrically opposed at almost every level. Aquinas believes that philosophy offers substantive truths about reality, Wittgenstein rejects this. Aquinas believes philosophical theology is a valid enterprise, Wittgenstein does not. Wittgenstein is a Viennese modernist, interested in physics, engineering, psychoanalysis, high musical culture. Aquinas is a medieval friar, rooted in a worldview which included astrology, alchemy, slavery, and much that can be regarded as superstitious. Wittgenstein could not bring himself to adhere to a specific religious tradition; Aquinas was a Catholic priest and saint. It is hard to think of figures more opposed. Yet they both devoted themselves to issues which are central to philosophy of religion – the place of religious belief, its rationality, the meaning of 'God' – and their writings have had profound impact on religious studies, theology, and philosophy of religion. Finding a way of making sense of such profound differences, without having either uncritically to endorse a specific way or reject them out of hand, is a significant task.

The core of this article is to articulate a way of dealing with this problem. Drawing on recent work in Virtue Epistemology, and in particular the study of the virtue of wisdom, I wish to highlight a pressing problem in contemporary philosophy of religion as what I shall call Forgetfulness of the Self, and propose a novel wisdom-based approach to the choice of method in philosophy of religion. My argument will be that it is a more fruitful and attractive approach to methodological diversity than the current alternatives. Should it be adopted it offers resources to change the manner in which these issues are debated, allow greater understanding and dialogue, and help include approaches that have been marginalized. The process of reflection I shall suggest is not itself a competitor method in dealing with first-order issues in philosophy of religion. Neither does it bemoan the diversity of approaches and attempt to replace them with a new better method. Rather it offers a way of thinking about the choice of approach one takes (e.g. Thomist, Wittgenstein, Feminist, etc.) and suggests ways of thinking about that which relates to the context of the philosopher using it, evaluating how effective the specific approach is in the light of contextual factors in the life of the philosopher.

Articulating a wisdom-based approach

To justify an approach or method, first one needs to deal with the problem of question-begging or norm-circularity. One needs to appeal to the resources of Virtue Epistemology and specifically the virtue of wisdom as a fruitful approach to develop such a justification. Finally, a key goal is to spell out in detail the elements involved in the kind of reflection called wisdom.

Norm-circularity

Few nowadays believe that undemonstrable first principles exist, or at least will have to concede that the existence of such is controversial. The classic epistemological position, foundationalism, which posits the existence of non-inferentially justified beliefs (basic beliefs) that are the basis of all others, faces serious challenges. Examples of such basic beliefs either are too primitive to be useful, or else are shown to be inferentially

connected to other beliefs. Coherentism is the obvious alternative, where beliefs are justified by virtue of their inferential relations to each other. However, the problem of alternative, conflicting systems or crazy systems makes this position problematic. There also is the problem of circular justification – if my belief in *p* rests on a chain of inferences that circle back to *p* itself, this seems vacuous. The problem is especially pressing when dealing with an attempt to justify one's method. The very methodology, style of argumentation, standards of correctness, and models of good practice will be justified by appeal to those very criteria themselves. This is the problem of norm-circularity, that the norms of correctness are themselves justified by appeal to themselves. And if we think of philosophers as different as Aquinas, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, or Nagarjuna, it seems very difficult to supply non-circular justification of method.

An attempt to solve this problem can be seen in Nelson Goodman's use of the method of reflective equilibrium (Goodman 1955). He initially proposed this as a way of justifying logical inference. Since logic is so fundamental to reasoning, how can a justification for it be supplied? He drew a distinction between basic level inferences, which are accepted and used by agents, and higher-level principles, which regiment and structure the basic level. He introduced the notion of reflective equilibrium to describe the process of moving back and forth between basic inferences and higher principles, so that an acceptable coherence is found between them. Adjustments are made in the system of inferences and principles until they achieve equilibrium. John Rawls (1971) adapted and popularized this approach by using it in value theory to establish principles of justice. He developed a system where one's considered moral judgements are systematized and then regimented by principles. The basic level judgements are not brute, but reflected on, freely chosen and persistent, rather than episodic. Principles then systematize those judgements and one's general picture of justice emerges from the reflective equilibrium between judgements and principles. A further element in developments of this view (wide reflective equilibrium) is a third level of background general theory to which the principles must cohere.

Both approaches seek to justify method at a very fundamental level and establish basic norms in logic and in morality, and they belong to the coherentist family. However, they face the kind of deep challenges levelled against coherentism. What of inferences that are accepted by people, which are systematized into a regimented structure, but which are wrong? Many people uncritically accept logical fallacies – such as affirming the consequent – or endorse informal fallacies such as the gambler's fallacy. How would such a coherentism distinguish between correct and incorrect systems? If mere coherence suffices, there is no critical purchase available to reject the fallacious system (or even to identify it as fallacious). Similarly with the moral case – a wicked system could easily cohere, and who is to say that it is really wicked?

The foundationalist approach sought to ground justification in giving privileged starting places which anchored the system in reality, and the worry was that such starting places were illusory. An alternative way of anchoring the justification and connecting the system to reality is to appeal to outputs, or what flows from acceptance of such a system. Quine famously remarked that creatures whose inductions proved habitually wrong had the pathetic but praiseworthy tendency to die out before reproducing. The endorsement of basic methodological norms has impact on behaviour and agency. Some support us in our agential and behavioural goals, others do not. I shall label a positive outcome in agential and behavioural outcomes 'well-being'. Granted there are alternative conceptions of what this might be, but at a minimal level it is characterized by whatever is endorsed by the person using those norms and principles. A reality check on a coherent set of norms and principles is whether it contributes to the perceived well-being of the agent endorsing that set.

Virtue theory and wisdom

This connection of concepts belonging to epistemology (justification, methodology) and those belonging to ethics (agency, well-being) emerges clearly in recent work in virtue epistemology. It is argued that the kind of normativity sought in epistemology is at root the same as that found in ethics. The key paradigm shift brought about by virtue epistemology is the shift from focusing on abstract beliefs and the possible properties they might possess (basicity, coherence, infallibility, etc.) to focusing on persons and the properties they have. A belief is derivative from and dependent on a person holding it. The epistemological properties of such a belief are likewise derivative from and dependent on those possessed by the person. If a person is reliable, diligent, honest, painstaking, responsible, and accurate, the beliefs held by such a person have a much greater likelihood of being true than those of someone who is unreliable, feckless, dishonest, slipshod, irresponsible, and inaccurate. These character traits are identified as virtues. Just as in ethics, well-being can be construed as living a virtuous life. Epistemological well-being is constituted by living a life of intellectual virtue. Of course, giving a precise characterization of the nature of virtue and the good life is itself a major task, but here I wish to draw attention to the general framework within which one can think about this problem of justifying method, drawing particularly on the work of Linda Zagzebski and responsibility virtue epistemology (Zagzebski 1996).

The novel idea of this article is that I wish to argue that justification of method (the most general kind of justification possible) is connected to individual well-being. The specific virtue which deals with the connection between intellectual life and individual well-being is wisdom. There is an internal connection between the notion of wisdom and goodness; wisdom cannot be misused. However, in traditional accounts there is a tension between practical wisdom and theoretical wisdom. The former may be possessed by someone with little academic skill (e.g. a village elder) while the latter may be possessed by someone with little practical ability (e.g. the archetypal absent-minded professor). The notion of wisdom being explored here draws on both practical and intellectual aspects. It is being appealed to as a way of justifying one's fundamental philosophical commitments, hence it is firmly in the intellectual realm. Yet it appeals to the well-being of the person possessing it, and so has a connection to the situated, contextually rooted existence of that person.

Engaging in philosophical reflection on matters such as the rationality of religious belief, the existence and nature of God, religious diversity, etc. never starts in a vacuum, it is always already contextualized. It emerges from an historical and cultural environment with values, ideals, needs, norms, and expectations. To pursue inquiry without reflecting on these elements which deeply colour and inform the inquiry is to miss something deeply important. Yet the dogmatic response to diversity does precisely this, air-brushing these elements, focusing outwards on the topics and leaving matters of method to chance or custom or convention. It is a manifestation of what I have identified as Forgetfulness of the Self. The theoretician pursuing these inquiries is not a blank canvass, but rather has a history, a temperament, has teachers, preferences, and values, all of which feed into a sensibility and a choice of topic, method, approach, style, and evaluation of strength of argument. Thomas Nagel adverted to this when he famously stated that he *wanted* atheism to be true, that he didn't want the world to be as it would be under theism (Nagel 1997). Without attending to these elements it would be impossible to determine the relationship between well-being and theoretical commitments. So once again I am not attempting to replace approaches to questions in the field with a new method. Rather I am suggesting a way of explaining and indeed justifying choice of approach in

the specific personal context of the philosopher using it. What sort of elements are relevant in that context?

Clarifying the framework

If the justification for the adoption of a style of philosophy is being characterized as a kind of reflective equilibrium that contributes to well-being, what are the elements involved in this, and what is its structure? There are three main elements to this. The first is the *historical-cultural context* within which the philosopher is working. There will be assumptions which are accepted and which constitute the matrix from which the philosophy emerges. Of course, philosophy challenges assumptions, but not all at the same time. There will be what passes as the best science of the period and what status science has. Social assumptions about gender, power, wealth, status, race will inform the work. Recent challenges to early modern philosophers about views on race and/or gender show how they shift across different periods. All of this constitutes a broad context which colours many of the other elements. The second element is the narrower *philosophical context* from which the philosopher emerges. Who are the teachers, role models, formative influences? What is the tradition in which they have been educated and do they absorb it or rebel against it, assimilate or destroy it? What are their expectations of philosophy, what job does it do, and what role does it have in society? Is it like a science, uncovering deep truths, or is it a kind of mental hygiene, supporting other kinds of intellectual enterprise? Who is the preferred dialogue partner, is it theology, natural science, literature, politicians, the educated public, the isolated individual? Finally, there is the *personal context* of the philosopher. What are their values? Not simply moral values but what is preferred, how are things ranked or ordered in precedence? How does one think of the relations between duty, love, clarity, kindness, etc.? What are the kinds of thing that are relevant to philosophy – everything or a small group of specific issues? Finally, temperament has a role to play. How does that influence what is thought interesting, worthwhile, valuable?

From this rich matrix of elements, a way of approaching philosophical questions emerges. The role models and traditions experienced will shape the style and questions asked. The broad cultural and historical contact will colour the answers given. Who one writes for will have an impact on whether one writes poetry or formal treatises. The way in which one presents philosophical reasoning is informed by all these elements and is assessable in the light of them. Does it do what is required? Does it subserve the goals, aspirations, and expectations of the writer? Are their values and temperament expressed through it? To reject such a framework and argue that such issues are irrelevant to philosophy is merely to adopt unreflectively one from a multiplicity of options and think it obvious because of its familiarity.

This framework works both as a form of first-person reflection and as a third-person analysis of other philosophers. It is easier to apply it initially to a third person, a canonical philosophical figure about whom we have a lot of information. We can put together an account of these elements of context in order to explicate why certain choices were made and how they served to make them the great figure they were. But it can also be used to make sense of one's own philosophical path and to serve as an 'internal' justification of it. Let's turn to two case studies, to see how this might be applied.

Application of the approach: Aquinas

The work of Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) excites strong reactions. There are true believers who faithfully explore and develop his work, showing how other philosophers go

wrong. Others attack specific infamous parts of his text – his ‘five ways’ arguments are regularly subjected to more or less informed critique in philosophy of religion courses. Neither option is attractive – the former is too uncritical, the latter tending to anachronism and unfair challenge.

How does Aquinas approach philosophical method, what are the elements at play in his adoption of a specific way of developing positions and arguments, and how does this inform his rational assessment of religious belief? Many of the detailed studies of this question work within the parameters of an acceptance of Aristotelianism and/or Christian Revelation and tend to be inaccessible or uninviting to those not sharing such commitments.

One of the motivations for outlining the framework just discussed is to connect such questions to Aquinas's life and context. The socio-historical context is that of the mid-thirteenth-century Christendom. His assumptions are medieval (general views about science, women, feudalism, astrology, slavery, witchcraft, etc.). He comes from feudal nobility, his father and brothers are soldiers, most of his life is devoted to academic and religious practices, and he absorbed the received wisdom of his time, evident in examples from science or military lore. Religion is a central element in social life and it is important to note his lifestyle as a preaching friar, committed to evangelical poverty and devoted to study, following the example of St Dominic. The more narrowly philosophical context shows him influenced by the standards of the University of Paris and the new-found works of Aristotle, united to a more Augustinian theological tradition. His expectations about philosophy are marked by Aristotle; many of his contemporaries viewed him as being too rationalistic, as evidenced in the post-mortem condemnations of some of his views by archbishops of Canterbury and Paris. Nevertheless, he adapts and bends Aristotle to his needs, leaving scholars to debate how exactly he did this. His primary dialogue partner is theology, understood here as a revealed tradition with special authority. Indeed, his real job was as a theologian, but he believed philosophy was essential to the proper conduct of this. While he wrote few works which have an explicitly philosophical focus (Aristotelian commentaries and short treatises), there are extended parts of his major theological works which are wholly philosophical. Occupying this position on the borders of philosophy and theology is a significant shaping feature of his work.

On a personal level, his values are deeply shaped by his religious form of life (a Dominican friar), espousing poverty, chastity, and obedience, but attuned to the need to reflect rationally on his beliefs. In his account of well-being he seeks to reconcile the tension between a this-worldly Aristotelian account of human flourishing with a religious view in which genuine happiness only is achieved after death. He relates these accounts as incomplete to complete, or preparatory to final accounts of happiness. By temperament he was devout, silent, abstracted, focused, hard-working. He became a saint and doctor of the Church, yet he firmly believed in the independent power of rational argument and strongly rejected the use of poor arguments in defence of religion, as it makes his position weaker. Torrell's monumental biography of Aquinas is shaped towards illuminating the theologian (Torrell 2003), and accepts without cavil the religious and philosophical framework used by him. In contrast, this approach seeks to illuminate the philosopher, showing how the various elements in the explanatory framework led him to develop a modified Aristotelianism as his mode of philosophizing, even to those who don't share his beliefs or assumptions.

Arguably the major innovation in Aquinas's metaphysical work is his account of existence. Yet this account is deeply theological, inspired by Exodus 3:14. He unites robust Aristotelian rationalism with Neoplatonic themes of participation, influenced by Pseudo-Dionysius and Arabic thinkers to develop a profound account of the nature of God which combines deep religious sensibility with a thoroughgoing apophaticism,

repeatedly saying we do not know God's nature. His account of divine simplicity is subject to much criticism by contemporary philosophers of religion (e.g. Plantinga 1980; Kenny 2002). One way of rejecting his work is to reject the philosophical framework he uses. There are challenges to Aristotelian metaphysics, to the realism it entails, to his account of essence, of causal powers, his teleology, his reliance on potentiality and actuality, a worry that it is embedded in outmoded science. Yet by using this wisdom-based approach, using data from his life and context, one can make sense of his use of that framework relative to his goals and aims. His commitment to his religious worldview was basic, existentially and conceptually. But he also believed that the framework of rational reflection afforded by modified Aristotelianism could help clarify, systematize, and rationally defend his religious views. Hence, for example, he strove to show that monotheism understood through divine simplicity was nevertheless compatible with Trinitarian theology, uniting talk of processions with subsistent relations and persons, all drawn from the philosophical tradition he inherited.

With the tools he so inherited, the context he inhabited, and the set of values he was committed to, the method he deployed made good sense and was defensible. It helped him further his intellectual goals and achieve a state of well-being. As noted above, he theorized about the nature of well-being, distinguishing a temporal, incomplete version, and an eternal, complete version, to be achieved after death. This focus on the connection of method to biographical and contextual factors is significantly different from typical studies of Aquinas, as noted, which accept much of his framework as a given and make elaborations within that context. Using this approach allows for a wider range of readers to appreciate what he was doing and why – making sense of the daunting edifice of his work using a framework which is applicable to their own lives and experience. It would hopefully facilitate non-polarized engagement with his work.

Application of the approach: Wittgenstein

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951) is, in some ways, a more accessible figure than Aquinas. He is historically closer, he engages with modernity, there is a wealth of biographical data and still living testimony about him. Yet the cult of personality, his genuine oddness, and the gnomic nature of much of his writing distances him from us. He excites adulation and rejection as readily as Aquinas, and his impact in the general field of philosophy and in philosophy of religion is enormous. Applying the framework to Wittgenstein, we see how significantly different his context is from that of Aquinas.

His historical and social context is *fin de siècle* Vienna and inter-war Cambridge. He was from an enormously wealthy but troubled family (three of his brothers killed themselves). He trained in aeronautics, served as a soldier, and worked as a gardener, architect, hospital orderly, and professor. His assumptions are modern, he trained in engineering and mathematics, produced modernist architecture, built machines. Yet he also rejected the modern adulation of science, retreating to places such as the west of Ireland, one of the last pools of darkness, as he called it. He admired the egalitarian ideals of the Soviet Union and gave away his vast wealth. He relaxed after teaching by immersing himself in western movies. He wasn't conventionally religious, but famously told his friend Norman Malcolm that he saw things from a religious point of view. On two occasions in his life he considered joining a monastery.

Philosophically, his work was much narrower and less systematic than Aquinas. He began with issues in philosophy of logic and eventually broadened out to philosophical psychology as well as epistemology. His expectations of philosophy were significantly different from those of Aquinas. He came to believe that philosophy did not offer truths about reality, but could clarify matters, and so he developed two significantly different

ways of doing philosophy. As dialogue partner, he admired Frege's and Russell's work in philosophy of mathematics, and knew the work of physicists such as Boltzmann and Hertz. Yet he didn't fit well with the scientific Vienna Circle (reading mystical literature to them), and knew Augustine and Tolstoy well enough to quote them at length. He eschewed academic philosophy and boasted that he had never read a word of Aristotle.

His values were those of a high-culture Viennese, admiring Beethoven and Brahms, yet pointedly wearing simple, worn, clothes. He valued spirituality and religion, yet was militantly atheist in Cambridge, never fitting easily into a religious tradition. By temperament Wittgenstein was troubled for much of his life, difficult and scathing with friends, yet capable of great sensitivity and kindness. All these elements fed into the conception of philosophy he developed. He avoided history of philosophy. His work is nearly entirely devoid of traditional explicit argumentation. The crystalline limpid style of the earlier *Tractatus* changed into the descriptive, discursive style of the *Philosophical Investigations*. Philosophy doesn't offer theories, explanations, or truths. It helps one see what is already known in a better light; it also weeds out unhelpful tendencies in thought.

In both phases of his work there are elements which have been influential in philosophy of religion. His discussions of mysticism, solipsism, and the meaning of life in the *Tractatus* have been well explored. His use of 'grammar' in the *Philosophical Investigations* has also been thoroughly studied. However, what is less clear is the relationship of his life experiences to the formation of such important and influential methods in philosophy. Defenders of Wittgenstein have been accused of uncritical adulation of his work. Russell was as scathing in his criticism of Wittgenstein's later work as he had been in awe of the earlier work. In the context of such great polarization about Wittgenstein's work, the framework of using the notion of wisdom to see how his life and work were interrelated offers a way of making sense of it and appraising it in its own terms.

Specifically in relation to philosophy of religion, his last work, *On Certainty*, is of great interest, exploring the relationship of practice to belief, the kind of certainty involved in religious faith, and the diversity of beliefs. Using the framework presented above to explore this work follows Wittgenstein's own suggestions about grounding theory in a form of life, and allows one to evaluate to what extent the work succeeded in achieving his aims. The differences between Aquinas and Wittgenstein are stark, and it is difficult to evaluate them without methodologically prejudging (e.g. taking firm views on the requirement of explicit argument, or the role of history of philosophy). However, using this approach, to see how the method arises from its context and fulfils the goals of the philosopher, allows for a more nuanced and fruitful treatment of such differences.

General application of the person-centred approach

Having articulated the elements in the framework and utilized it to situate the very different work of Aquinas and Wittgenstein, the final objective is to offer the framework as a mode of self-reflection for contemporary philosophers of religion. The kind of analytic precision associated with philosophy is usually completely detached from any consideration of the life of the philosopher engaged with it. Indeed, it is thought to be a kind of fallacy to examine the personal roots of philosophy, a kind of reduction of proper philosophical argumentation to biography. However, what I have been arguing is that in dealing with questions of the justification of method, where there is no more fundamental level to appeal to or ground it, it is reasonable to look at the relation of method to the context, goals, aims, and values of the philosopher. And this is not merely a search for causal factors, but has epistemological significance in offering a justification for the choice of that method.

Each philosopher is contingently positioned in an historical and social context which provides a host of initial assumptions about the world and themselves. Through accident and individual choice they are trained with certain methods. They may well rebel, adapt, or change their approaches. Their values are formed – with greater or lesser weight given to clarity, depth, dialectical skill, big picture thinking, iconoclasm, and tradition. These weightings offer different evaluations of the positive and negative aspects of their received training. A conception of what philosophy is about is developed and they learn to debate this with their peers. They determine who the important people to talk to are, who needs to be taken into account. Finally, their own individual temperament plays a role in choice of topic, mode of working, style of writing. Typically, none of this is adverted to – work is standardly articulated in a resolutely third-personal style as if the person who writes has no subjective input into it.

When applied to questions about religious belief it becomes clear that this lacuna impoverishes the discussion. Philosophers usually write under the pretence that purely formal argumentation and objective argument is all that matters. However, I wanted to suggest, through the presentation of the initial framework and the analysis of key historical figures, that the personal does play a significant role in philosophy, and that forgetfulness of this is a deep gap in contemporary debate. Indeed, it is an abandonment of the traditional philosophical goal of wisdom, the crucial link between knowledge of important matters and how one lives one's life. To remedy this, I would like to suggest modes of self-exploration for philosophers. How do we conceptualize our own well-being? How do our intellectual activities relate to that? What are our goals? What has shaped our value systems? Why do we pick our topics of specialization? How has our writing style evolved? Who are the theorists we admire and why? All of these issues are active at greater or lesser levels of awareness. The job here is to find ways to make it more explicit, bring it to awareness, integrate that awareness into their reflective practice as theoreticians, and argue for the benefits of this in terms of enriching the possibility of dialogue within the discipline.

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