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The Aporetics of Religious Diversity

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Ph.D. Thesis. Submitted April 2016

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Abstract

My thesis situates itself within the field of the Philosophy of Worldviews. Specifically, it aims to address the normative question of what the task should be of such a philosophy when faced with the problem of conflicting beliefs between religious worldviews. To answer this question, I turn to the procedure of aporetic analysis, in short, aporetics. Firstly, aporetics offers a distinct method of consistency restoration within inconsistent sets on the basis of thesis rejection and thesis modification. Secondly, aporetics leads to an understanding of the availability of aporetic exits on the basis of epistemic criteria. On the one hand, this leads us to opt for an orientational monism/pluralism, which steers the middle course between the epistemic stances of exclusivism and pluralism. On the other hand, it allows us to identify epistemic criteria for worldview acquisition on the basis of three distinct superclasses. These superclasses can be derived from Jürgen Habermas' validity claims, and applied to the self-understanding of contemporary theories of religion.

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Introduction

Setting the Stage

The problem of religious diversity has arguably been one of the main topics within the academic field of the Philosophy of Religion since the latter half of the twentieth century. This problem is rooted in the fact that different religious traditions exist in the world that seemingly make differing and contradicting claims. This diversity effectively introduces choice and begs the question which of those claims we should accept, and how we should proceed from here. Thus, a commonly asked question is whether, on religious matters, only one religious tradition is right or whether multiple traditions are right, even if they happen to contradict each another.

A general consensus exists amongst scholars — and, of course, no consensus is without its detractors — that we have four options to choose from, to wit, (1) naturalism, (2) religious exclusivism, (3) religious inclusivism, and (4) religious pluralism. The first option, naturalism, represents the idea or belief that only natural forces exist and that there are no supernatural forces. More generally, naturalism denotes a catch-all concept for all specifically non-religious approaches. Proponents of the naturalist option deny all religious claims — no one is right as all religious claims are false — and often hold a worldview dominated by science.

Since naturalism is a non-religious approach, the tendency exists amongst religious scholars to reduce the quadripartite typology to a tripartite typology centred around the three religious options of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. On an exclusivist approach, one typically accepts the claims of just one religious tradition. The claims of other traditions are claimed to be unacceptable, or false. On an inclusivist approach, one accepts the claims of just one religious tradition, but grants truth or value to other religious worldviews as long as these are consistent with one's own. Finally, the pluralist grants equal validity to multiple religious traditions.

A common framework for understanding religious traditions is to see them as being centred not just on truths but on salvific truths, i.e., truth claims that set the believer free from a certain undesirable predicament, be it sin, evil, negative karma, and so on. On this basis, the exclusivist claims that his or her own tradition is the only true religion, and therefore the only one that can offer salvation. The inclusivist on the other hand accepts that people in other religious tradition can still find salvation, although perhaps in an inferior way, and as long as the basic precepts of one's religion have not been denied. The pluralist will argue that salvific truth is present in multiple religions, either because they all share in the same universal truth, like mountain climbers as-

cending the same mountain from multiple directions, or because they represent different types of (salvific) truth — rather than versions of truth.

Despite a consensus on the nature of these four options, no agreement has yet been reached on the issue of which one of these options is the most appropriate one to take. Therefore, to our initial question of how we should approach religious diversity, we currently have four answers, but no consensus as to which option is best. Each one of the four options — or three, depending on who you ask — has been defended by numerous scholars. This has often led to entrenched positions. Arguably, the strongest voices within these debates have been the religious pluralists, undoubtedly reflecting broader tendencies within our contemporary post-modern world, where no single foundry of knowledge is deemed to exist. Moreover, the pluralist's desire to argue against religious exclusivists — who they regard as their main opponents — has not only kept the debates fuelled, but has also forced the exclusivists to repeatedly defend their own stance.

Reflecting on these matters, Perry Schmidt-Leukel (2005) has argued that (1) the choice between these epistemic stances towards religious diversity is a forced choice, where we have to choose one and only one of these options and that (2) we can achieve such a decision by giving reasons for or against each epistemic position. Doing so, Schmidt-Leukel has defended the pluralist option as being the most appropriate one.

Since the choice of epistemic stances is a forced choice, it follows that on this matter only an exclusivist option is available: only one epistemic option is acceptable or right. One might deem it ironic that this exclusivist route should be the only option available to all parties involved, that is, to both religious exclusivists and pluralists. This is especially so given that Schmidt-Leukel himself supports a pluralist stance. Of course, a religious pluralist is by no means forced to also hold a pluralist position towards the epistemic positions. However, given the fact that religious pluralism is seemingly a viable and — according to pluralists — preferable option in the matter of religious diversity, should we not also consider the same option with respect to the epistemic options themselves? If so, what would the consequences be for the present typology?

The upshot of a pluralist perspective to the different stances will be that multiple epistemic stances become acceptable and not just one. This begs the question whether we would not benefit from having a “fifth option” available to us — despite Schmidt-Leukel's insistence that we can only access four — namely a *higher-order stance* that allows for open access to the different variations in epistemic positions. Furthermore, despite Schmidt-Leukel's suggestion that a solution to the problem can be found by giving (more) reasons for or against each option, all parties involved have already put their cards on the table. This event has neither forced a consensus, nor a deliberate deci-

sion. Seemingly, therefore, the mere giving of reasons has been unable to answer the question. This leads me to conclude that what Schmidt-Leukel suggests is an insufficient strategy.

In my dissertation I will argue that the problem of epistemic positions is an example of an aporetic situation — or *aporia* —, as defined by Nicholas Rescher (2009).¹ On this account, an *aporia* is a cognitive impasse where we have good reasons for a number of contentions, but taken together the contentions are inconsistent, and thereby incompatible. Giving more reasons is not a viable solution, since all the available reasons are already on the table, this being the inherent assumption of the *aporia*. The crux of the matter is that the *aporia* exists because no single standard can be found by which we are able to assess the reasons given for or against each of the different positions.

Given the aporetic nature of the problem of religious diversity, an inquiry into the mechanics of how to dissolve *aporias* — what Rescher calls “Aporetics” (Rescher, 2009)— seems warranted; Such an aporetics has broader implications for our field of study (i.e., religious diversity) if we take into account that the diversity of religious worldviews is itself of an aporetic nature. To recapitulate, the different epistemic positions represent different solutions to the problem of religious diversity, which consists of the coming together of worldview claims. These worldview claims, forwarded by the religious traditions, are backed up by good reasons — the condition for being awarded plausibility, and thereby gain entry to rational discourse between peers — but taken together those claims are inconsistent and incompatible. Hence, they constitute a *first-order aporia*. However, as I have shown, the solutions available to this problem (i.e., the epistemic stances) also represent an aporetic situation: we thus end up with a *second-order aporia*.

An Aporetics of Religious Diversity — the title of my dissertation — is relevant from the point of view of several formal and informal interests. Firstly, it is relevant to all who are interested in the structural and comparative analysis of worldviews, specifically pertaining to coordination problems at the boundaries between worldviews. An aporetics, understood as the management of cognitive conflict, can therefore aid in understanding the issues and providing a procedure for conflict dissolution. It is also relevant for those interested in the problem of conflicting epistemic stances, arguably a persistent issue in the theology and philosophy of religions; arguably, because the proponents of each position deem that their solution settles the problem. In that sense, my proposal contributes to the same purpose.

¹ The Oxford English Dictionary (1989) defines “aporetic” as both an adjective and a noun. Used as an adjective, the common meaning is “to be at a loss,” “impassable,” and “inclined to doubt, or to raise objections.” Used as a noun, the common meaning is “state of the aporetic” and “a perplexity or difficulty.” Following Rescher, I will solely use the term in its philosophical and specialised meaning as a group of individually plausible but collectively incompatible theses.

Aim(s) of the Dissertation

My dissertation deals with the normative question of which one of the epistemic stances we should take towards religious diversity. The most defended position for the last few decades has been pluralism, spurring responses from exclusivists and inclusivists. Given that the camp of non-pluralists — as we may call them — has offered equal amounts of justification for their stances, it should behoove us to take this camp equally serious. This would amount to a pluralist stance towards the typology. The implication of such stance is that all of the epistemic stances towards religious diversity suddenly become available for acceptance, including those stances rejected by religious pluralists. My research question is how we go about achieving this.

Moreover, a certain analogy appears between what is a first-order problem, namely the diversity of religious worldviews and the claims they contain, and the second-order problem of which stance we should take towards this diversity. Both represent aporetic situations where we can find enough reasons to be rationally justified to take up our own position, but the same is true for the positions of others. Thus we are faced with two aporias: (1) the aporia of religious diversity, and (2) the aporia of epistemic stances. This analogous situation therefore holds the promise that our aporetic efforts might be useful — and hopefully successful — in both cases.

Rather than defending one or the other of the different epistemic positions of the quadripartite typology, I will argue for an integral application of the different epistemic positions in matters of aporetic decision making to worldview questions. From this follows that I will not merely argue for the viability of each one of the different epistemic positions separately; this case, as it were, has already been made by the defenders and apologists of the different positions (see *supra*). Instead, I will make a claim for an integrated approach that sees each of these four options as useful aporetic procedures for the purpose of worldview formation and worldview maintenance. This then is the central thesis (or aim) of my dissertation. Tied in with the above aim is my intention to take on board Rescher's theory of Orientational Pluralism, and apply it to the problem of the diversity of epistemic stances. Concretely, I will argue that Orientational Pluralism offers a solution to the *second-order problem* of epistemic stances that steers the middle between exclusivism and pluralism. However, I will show that Orientational Pluralism itself is a *third-order theory*, and should therefore not be confused with the second-order epistemic stances of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism.

To be clear, Orientational Pluralism has been applied to religious diversity before.² The most well-know case is the work of S. Mark Heim, particularly his *Salvations* (1995) and *The Depth of*

² Cf. James, 2003; Kiplinger, 2005; Saarinen, 2003; Thomas, 1994.

the Riches (2001). My approach however differs from Heim's: where Heim opts to be an inclusivist, on my approach the full spectrum of epistemic options remains open. The crux of the matter is the distinction (see *supra*) between the second-order epistemic stances, forming an aporetic problem, and the third-order solution of Orientational Pluralism. Orientational Pluralism allows access to all three epistemic stances of the tripartite typology, but only under two conditions: (1) one must take up a specific stance to the first-order issue of religious diversity, and (2) one must recognise that different epistemic orientations are always possible.

Although it can be shown empirically that the main world religions readily avail themselves of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism, my dissertation remains fully philosophical - I will leave the empirical research to the historians of religion. Nevertheless, the fact that the different world religions make ample use of those options agrees well with my own thesis. In contrast, someone who takes the classic approach to the epistemic stances, will be burdened by either having to explain the presence of contradictory strategies, or otherwise denouncing what religious people already do themselves.

Further, since I do not deliberately delve into the cognitive content of actual religious claims, I will *prima facie* accept that religious traditions have warrants or justification for their claims. Similarly, I will leave further analysis of particular claims to the comparative philosopher, or the scholar of comparative religious studies. Although my interests are in Aporetics as the dissolution of cognitive conflict between religious claims, I will deliberately limit myself to meta-philosophical concerns. Specifically, I will inquire into the following issues: What do we need to know so that the aporetician — a word we can coin to denote any scholar involved in Aporetics — can do his or her work? More specific to the field of religious diversity, what does the aporetician interested in religious peer conflict need to know? Finally, is the existing aporetic procedure sufficiently equipped to tackle religious worldview issues, or do we need to add anything to it? The latter concern derives from certain critiques on Rescher's work. For instance, Stephen Boulter argues that, while Rescher has a very clear insight in the nature of aporias, his pragmatic procedure fails to "provide a principled way of making the less plausible give way to greater plausibility" (Boulter, 2013, p. 38), and thus resolving the aporias. A further elaboration is therefore needed. Firstly, I will qualify "plausibility" by making a distinction between (a) initial plausibility, to be established by the giving of reasons and evidence, and (b) final plausibility — which I will call acceptability — to be established by the use of right-of-way criteria. While initial plausibility offers good reasons for the contentions on the table, final plausibility (or acceptability) decides on what makes some reasons "better." Secondly, I will suggest that the structural analysis of worldviews shows that different

types of claims are present within worldviews. Each type of claim will (a) have conditions for acceptability, as well as (b) form incompatibles when mutual acceptance of claims within that type leads to absurdity. However, claims will only compete on the basis of a similar set of injunctions, and therefore within the same validity claim. Therefore, at least some aporias will turn out to be *prima facie*. Contentions that are subject to different validity claims will still, however, lack a solution. Our only way out in that case will be to force a solution based on our specific epistemic values, our epistemic stance, and the goals of our deliberations. In conclusion, although we can get rid of aporias temporarily, diversity is likely to persist, and therefore the potential for new aporias to arise. However, this should not be seen as a failure: the more diverse worldviews are, the richer human experience becomes.

Philosophical Method

To establish my thesis, I will rely on a cognitive *instrumentarium* or toolkit that includes such concepts as worldview, aporia, speech acts, validity claim, and so on. Each of these terms represent a particular field of study, such as Worldview Theory (Smart, 1983, 1995; Aerts & Apostel, 1994; Heylighen 1993, 1997; Vidal 2008), Aporetics (Rescher, 2009, 2011), Speech Act Theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969), Universal Pragmatics (Habermas, 1984), and so on.

Firstly, I approach these disciplines with a certain *philosophical naiveté*. Secondly, I tie the different strands together by means of a *philosophical bricolage* of some sorts.³ Given that this concept is rather an uncommon one in the English-speaking world — being derived from the French “*bricolage philosophique*” — I will pause here to explain it further. Most scholars who use the term (philosophical) bricolage refer to the structural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, and his classic work *La Pensée Sauvage* (The Savage Mind, 1962). For Lévi-Strauss, the “*bricoleur*” stood in opposition to the “*ingénieur*” or engineer (i.e., the modern scientist). Joan E. DeJean writes on this:

The bricoleur, firmly anchored in origins and the past, is less an inventor than a remodeler. “La règle de son jeu est de toujours s’arranger avec les ‘moyens du bord,’ c’est-à-dire un ensemble à chaque instant fini d’outils et de matériaux” [Lévi-Straus, 1962] (p. 26). From his already formed stock of materials, the bricoleur chooses those appropriate for the job at hand. His means are always already there, while the scientist is constantly forced to create

³ One could argue that religious worldviews are also typically the product of philosophical bricolage. In fact, Claude Lévi-Strauss made use of the term *bricolage* in particular to describe and refer to the structure of mythopoetic worldviews.

his. The bricoleur manipulates a stock of secondhand remnants, fragments with a past that he deconstructs, reconstructs, and reshuffles. Even when he shapes these borrowed fragments into new formations, the bricoleur does not sever them completely from the context of their origin (DeJean, 1984, p. 101; between square brackets mine).

In other words, the engineer starts from a worked out project plan, and then asks what kind of resources he will need. The bricoleur, on the other hand, starts from what is at hand, and then works towards a solution to his problem.

The moral philosopher Jeffrey Stout, in his *Ethics After Babylon* (2001), refers to bricolage as the “selective retrieval and eclectic reconfiguration of traditional...elements in hope of solving problems at hand” (Stout, 2001, p. 293). Cornell West argues that Stout’s use of creative of moral bricolage —what West himself likes to call “improvisational criticism” — amounts to bringing together “fragments of traditions” and “strands and streams of our traditions” (West, 1989, p. 66-68). This serves to “disclose common ground between supposedly antagonistic positions,” while avoiding “relativistic versions of eclecticism” (ibid.). West also cogently points out that, while Stout’s approach is fundamentally dialectical, it is Socratic rather than Hegelian. This means that Stout’s methodological process does not lead him to a “grand third moment or emergent synthesis with elements of both positions intact, but rather [to] a mutual recognition by both sides of fallacious assumptions and convergent values that bond them” (ibid.). The latter comment is particularly valuable since N. Rescher and J. Habermas have often been at odds in defending their respective positions. However, I will therefore not engage in the polemics between both authors — particularly on their notions of pluralism — but rather take what I need from both to establish my own position.

Structure of the Dissertation

I consider Worldview Theory, Aporetics, Speech Act Theory, and Universal Pragmatics to be the primary *dramatis personae* in play.⁴ As such they will fulfil multiple roles, firstly, in defining the problem of religious diversity (i.e., a diagnostic role), and secondly in formulating a solution (i.e., a therapeutic role), both in the context of (a) the first-order problem of religious diversity, as well as (b) the second-order problem of a forced choice between the epistemic positions towards religious diversity. I deal with the diagnostic aspect in chapters 2, 3, and 4, while in chapters 5 and 6 I dis-

⁴ From the Greek verb δράμα, to act. The focus of drama therefore is on the performance of actions by actors. Similarly, speech and communication perform acts, as the pragmatists have made clear. However, whether our focus is on the communicating subject or on the speech act itself is a matter of epistemic orientation (cf. the debates between Habermas and Nicklas Luhmann)

cuss some of the tools for dissolving cognitive conflict. In chapter 7, I present a solution to the second-order issue of epistemic stances and argue for an Orientational Pluralism that consists of a *locative exclusivism* and *non-locative pluralism* while preserving access to each one of the different stances.

In Chapter One, The Philosophy of Worldviews, I argue for an inclusion of the term worldview into our cognitive *instrumentarium*. Ever since Immanuel Kant first introduced the term, it has been extensively used in philosophical discourse. Moreover, Scottish philosopher Ninian Smart (1983, 1995, 1997) has passionately argued for the inclusion of the term in the Philosophy of Religion. Hence, my use of the term worldview can be seen as an extension and continuation of this work. Firstly, I will define a worldview as a coherent whole of statements by means of which we attempt to understand ourselves, others, and the world. Following the work of Leo Apostel and colleagues (Aerts & Apostel, 1994), I will argue that the function of a worldview is to provide answers to fundamental questions on the nature of reality and life, the kind of actions we can take, and so on. Secondly, I will define religious traditions both in terms of worldviews, as well as in terms of an intentional object. Thirdly, I will define the tasks of a Philosophy of Worldviews, which finds its purpose in the coordination of worldviews, as a (at least) three-fold agenda of *structural analysis*, *comparative analysis*, and the *categorisation of criteria*.

In Chapter Two, The Problem of Religious Diversity, I will categorise the different answers to worldview questions as the formal elements of a worldview, comprising at least three different types of speech acts: descriptive, normative, and practical. Those answers that are deemed most important to the community will form the base or centre of the worldview to which all other beliefs are related in systemic fashion. I will focus on how different answers to the same questions, — and a cornucopia of answers abounds — will give rise to different worldviews and garner support from different communities of peers. As William A. Christian (1972) has noted, these three types of speech acts (i.e., descriptive, normative and practical) can and will also form incompatibles. Thus, incompatibles will occur both within the confines of a worldview, as well as across worldviews, giving rise respectively to intra-faith and inter-faith cognitive conflict. While the diversity of answers to worldview questions leads to different worldviews, it is only the coming together of worldviews that will create incompatibles at their mutual boundaries, i.e., at the boundary between centre and field. The mapping of such boundary issues will therefore constitute a specific task for worldview analysis. I will further argue that the problem of religious diversity constitutes a *first-order* problem of conflicting worldview claims, and a *second-order* problem of four epistemic stances of the quadripartite typology — which I will subsequently categorise as aporetic (chapters 5 & 7).

This will also allow me to state (chapter 7) that the four stances in fact represent generic strategies for exiting the first-order problem. However, they themselves cause another aporia to appear: we have good reasons for accepting any of the four exists, but taken together they form an inconsistent set.⁵ From this follows that the first diagnostic role of aporetics is to identify two different aporias constituted by: (a) the problem of religious diversity, and (b) the problem of the forced choice between epistemic stances. The second diagnostic role is to show how aporias defy solutions that merely insist on providing good reasons for one's claims, since what makes a reason good will depend on certain value orientations by means of which criteria of judgement get pre-selected. This guarantees a diversity in positions.

In Chapter Three, Jürgen Habermas and Validity Claims, I will present an analysis of Habermas's cognitive architecture in defence of a Universal Pragmatics that aims to identify the formal structures of communication. I will show how speech acts are typically oriented to three different *quasi-ontological worlds*, i.e., a subjective, intersubjective, and objective world, by means of three different and related epistemologies. I will specifically refer to Habermas's concept of a validity claim which denotes in what way claims can be redeemed. Objective claims will be redeemed in reference to truth, subjective claims in reference to authenticity and sincerity, and intersubjective claims in reference to normative rightness. This is of particular importance to the first-order problem of religious diversity. Given that this problem is constituted by the coming together of different types of claims, how such claims are to be redeemed will be crucial for resolving mutual conflict.

In Chapter Four, George Lindbeck and the Nature of Doctrine, I will compare Habermas's conclusions to George Lindbeck's classic work *The Nature of Doctrine* (1984). In this work, Lindbeck identified three different types of religious understanding of doctrines found within the scholarly literature. These three types can be equated to the three functions of language identified by Habermas, namely, to express one's subjective life world, to refer to a normative background of shared meaning and social relationships, and to describe objects and events in the external and objective world. I will further show these three types of religious language also present a divide in the literature on religious diversity, causing scholars to interpret such conflict in different ways, namely either as a conflict between truth claims, or as a conflict between normative rules, or as a conflict between subjective appropriations of symbol systems. While Lindbeck prefers the normative approach to religious conflict in order to explain doctrinal reconciliation without change, I will argue that such strategy puts the cart before the horse, i.e., because this strategy seemingly allows for rec-

⁵ The reason this aporia is indeed of a second-order nature consists of the fact that the second aporia is caused by the solutions to the first aporia.

conciliation, we should therefore understand religious language as being intersubjective and normative. Instead, I will argue for an integral understanding where religious doctrines can raise all three validity claim. The task of the aporetician will therefore be to identify which validity claims are raised in which pragmatic contexts.

In Chapter Five, Nicholas Rescher and Aporetics, I will category religious worldviews as representing aporetic situations, i.e., displaying an aporia, or cognitive impasse. Rescher (2001) has defined an aporia as a group of contentions that are individually plausible but collectively inconsistent. In other words, the different religious traditions forward claims they believe to be plausible and acceptable. However, taken together, those claims form a collective inconsistency. In particular, I will analyse Rescher's aporetic strategy of consistency restoration by means of a plausibility analysis designed to find the weakest link of such aporetic sets. While the *initial plausibility* of claims is dependent on the giving of good reasons, the *final acceptability* of claims will be dependent on preferential right-of-way criteria.

In Chapter Six, Worldview Criteria, I will reflect on Rescher's right-of-way-criteria by applying Habermas's validity claims. In particular, I will discuss the work of Francis Heylighen (1997, 2000) and Clément Vidal (2008, 2012) who have identified three classes of selector criteria in worldview formation, namely subjective, intersubjective and objective superclasses. Heylighen shows how objective criteria aim for selection for fit to the outside object, how subjective criteria deal with selection for acceptance by the individual subject, and finally how intersubjective criteria aim for selection for sharing between subjects. From this follows that the acceptability of claims will depend on three superclasses. Whether any given claim will fulfils any of the three functions of language will be measured on the basis of objective, subjective and intersubjective parameters found within the three superclasses of selection criteria. The more of these parameters are fulfilled, *the more likely* it is that the particular claim will be able to redeem its associate validity claim of objective truth, subjective authenticity, and intersubjective normativity.⁶ In other words, redemption of the validity claim will determine the *plausibility or acceptability* of the claim, understood here in terms of *truth, truthfulness, and rightness*. Once redeemed, the claim will become or remain part of the worldview as an objective claim *per se*, or as an *objectively charged claim*, leaving room for other validity claims. A similar process will take place when claims come into contact with conflicting claims where we not only have to establish initial plausibility, but also final acceptability.

⁶ Note that such a process is not an absolute guarantor of truth.

Finally, in Chapter Seven, Orientational Pluralism, I will discuss the second-order aporia of the different epistemic stances. Firstly, I will present Nicholas Rescher's responses to cognitive pluralism and how this leads him to an Orientational Pluralism. Such a pluralist stance combines a *rational preferentialism* to the issue of *final acceptability*, with a supra-locative pluralism to the issue of *initial plausibility*. Secondly, I will present Schmidt-Leukel's quadripartite typology of epistemic stances as constituting an aporia. As stated *supra*, in order to solve this aporia, we cannot suffice by merely giving reasons for or against claims: we also have to establish final acceptability which is based on a rational but preferential orientation.

1. The Philosophy of Worldviews

1.1. Introduction

On numerous occasions throughout his distinguished career, Scottish philosopher and historian of religion Ninian Smart persistently made an argument for the inclusion of the term *worldview* into the cognitive *instrumentarium* of the philosophy of religion. To wit, the concept of worldview was by no means a novel one. Starting with Immanuel Kant's first use of the term "*Weltanschauung*" — in his *Critique of Judgment* (1790) —, the term has had a longstanding history in both philosophy and other disciplines.⁷ Smart's proposal was nevertheless notable for its insistence that so central a role should be given to the term that it warrants the transformation of the discipline into "the Philosophy of Worldviews."

Such a startling statement no doubt deserves closer examination. Even more so because Smart's proposal, commendable as it might have been, has not been taken up. It is my intention to revisit Smart's worldview model and investigate whether we can employ it as a platform for an Aporetics of Religious Diversity. The overarching question of such a project is how worldview theory can help us understand religious diversity, how it can offer insights into the epistemic peer conflict that between different religious traditions, and more importantly how it can provide inroads into a satisfactory solution or dissolution of such conflicts.⁸ While these are the tasks for my dissertation *in toto*, in this chapter, I will provide a necessary introduction to the Philosophy of Worldviews: (1) what constitutes a worldview, (2) what makes up a religious worldview, and (3) what are the tasks of a Philosophy of Religion.

1.2. A Turn to the Philosophy of Worldviews

Smart's argument for primacy of the term worldview has to be seen in light of his views on what we can call *traditional philosophy of religion*. Smart understood that, historically, the philosophy of religion had focussed solely on philosophical questions relevant to Western theism, and that it had therefore been wanting in two areas, both internal and external to the existing philosophical agenda.

⁷ For an excellent historical overview, see Naugle (2002). Other researchers have conducted more in-depth studies of the use of the worldview concept by particular authors, for instance, Kreiter (2007), or Basso (2012). Note that I prefer to use the composite word worldview rather than the more lexical form of world view.

⁸ John Valk similarly argues that the "use of the term *worldview*, rather than exclusively *religion*, might enhance dialogue, broaden the discussion and expand the parameters to create a more level playing field" (Valk, 2009, p. 1). It is important to note here that what determines a satisfactory solution depends on our goals and values. For instance, Valk is interested in the coordination of values and actions in the public sphere, which might or might not require a disposition of being consensus-oriented. My aims are to discuss Aporetics from a meta-philosophical point of view, which remains neutral to both options of consensus and dissensus.

Internally, the philosophy of religion — and by this Smart meant British analytic philosophy⁹ — had been cut off for too long from continental theology, in particular the modern systematic interpretations offered by scholars in the German-speaking world. Furthermore, the philosopher of religion had ignored the study of religions in terms of religious practice and "forms of life," as well as the means by which to do so, namely the burgeoning field of the history of religion.¹⁰ Externally, the philosophers of religion had not sufficiently considered the challenge posed to Western theism by other religious traditions. It was here also that the history of religion revealed remarkable contrasts between the different religions in both practices and beliefs. Moreover, Western theism was equally, if not more, challenged by non-religious ideologies, and for this reason, Smart argued, the struggle between ideologies and religions should be in the purview of the philosophy of religion.

Smart framed his critique in such a way that the introduction of the term worldview could help us overcome these ills. Making the term *worldview* a primary concept would not only assist us in understanding our own religion more fully, but also other religious traditions and non-religious ideologies. On the basis of this, Smart argued for the idea that both religions and ideologies could be seen as examples of *existential worldviews*:¹¹ both ideologies and religions guide people regarding the meaning of life, and have some fundamental properties in common.¹² Thus, the concept of an existential worldview was meant to provide the philosopher of religion with a common framework to help us map religious and non-religious traditions. This was possible because both types were in fact not radically different, but vied for the same kind of territory, i.e., to provide answers to the same existential questions. To strengthen his argument, Smart further demonstrated that theology itself was often the result of the struggle between a religious tradition and an ideology. Thus, for all these reasons, Smart argued that the discipline would better be called "philosophy of worldviews."¹³

⁹ In his much quoted 1995 article he mentions such names as John Wisdom (1904 - 1993), Antony Flew (1923-2010), John Hick (1922-2012), Ronald Hepburn (1927-2008) and D. Z. Phillips (1934-2006).

¹⁰ This harks back to the well-known insight that religions do not just make "truth claims," but also include religious practices and symbolism. Christianity does not just include theism, that is, a philosophy, but also "living sacrament."

¹¹ The idea that ideologies are worldviews is also defended by Michael Kearney in his 1984 monograph, *Worldview*.

¹² He suggests the following properties, in random order: (a) closely relating theory and practice, (b) not being straightforward verifiable or falsifiable, (c) calling for dedicated commitment, possessing an account of human history, implying ethical principles, possessing a doctrine of human nature, being capable of intellectual and practical development, having an eschatological orientation, possessing a cosmology, having a theory about the genesis of religion. Smart adds that "importantly some religions and some ideologies are thus" (1995, pp. 18-19).

¹³ Smart also suggested that we call it *Weltanschauungswissenschaft*. Clearly, this German term would too cumbersome to use in the English languages. Although it translates as "worldview science," my preference lies with calling it "worldview theory."

Not every philosopher of religion might agree that we should indeed include ideologies. If so, this would at least take some justification away from rebranding our field. However, whether we should rename the discipline should matter less than what we can learn from including the concept of worldviews into our philosophical deliberations. Therefore, I am less interested in rocking the boat of the discipline by rebranding it than I am in investigating the potential of an aporetic worldview analysis to help us address the so-called problem of religious diversity. Having said this, I do believe the inclusion of ideologies into our purview to be pertinent to the very same discussion on religious diversity. This is despite the fact that, within the scholarly literature on religious diversity, it is not at all uncommon to find that ideologies — usually under the moniker of non-religious or atheistic forms of thought — are being dismissed as irrelevant for both inter-religious dialogue and theories of religious pluralism. The argument goes that such a delineation allows scholars of religion to focus on what they hold to be the real problem, viz., the diversity in religious traditions. Given that the naturalist position rejects religions altogether — by rejecting super-natural explanations — it makes the debates between the religious traditions pointless, thereby undermining the project that these scholars of religion have set out for themselves.

In contrast, I will argue for a criterion-based approach to the settlement of cognitive conflict. On this view, the delineation between religious and non-religious worldviews is *imaginary*, since both types of worldviews can be beholden to the same kinds of criteria. For instance, if we take a propositionalist stance to religious language, both religious and non-religious camps can engage in the same type of propositional discourse centred on truth claims. Such a discourse is legitimate since the same type of criteria — guidelines for the acceptability of claims — are applied to both areas. Such criteria allow us to perform a comparative analysis of the total set of claims where we judge how each worldview responds to the same set of criteria. On such a view, both religious and non-religious camps (i.e., science) can take religious claims *seriously*: that is, they forward such claims as truth candidates. However, more often than not such a comparative analysis is avoided because it is deemed that religious claims, one way or another, escape the confines of strict empirical truths. For instance, John Hick quotes Mircea Eliade, who writes:¹⁴

Because religion is human it must for that very reason be something social, something linguistic, something economic, — you cannot think of man apart for language and society.

¹⁴ Hick adds that Eliade expresses Hick's own premise here (ibid., p 15).

But it would be hopeless to try and explain religions in terms of any one of those basic functions (Eliade, 1958, xi; also quoted in Hick, 1989, p. 15 f1).

John Hick, who describes religion as a human response to the transcendent, argues that two different attitudes exist towards Reality: a religious and a non-religious attitude (Hick, 1989, p. 3). Each one of these is persistent in the sense that neither can be easily refuted. On the basis of this, Hick attempts to formulate a hypothesis on Reality that would be acceptable to both. Hick's theory, however, is based on the presupposition that the transcendent is *noumenally* Real, and that the religious traditions represent authentic but *phenomenally* diverse responses. The hidden premise is that the mere existence of religious traditions implies that the transcendent is at least noumenally real. Science is unable to refute this because its realm of investigation is the phenomenal, and Hick's synthesis does not require one to state that the transcendent is also phenomenally real (i.e., deities phenomenally exist). The upshot of this is that the naturalist worldview — a poison that could erode the religious traditions — has not only been rendered powerless in any subsequent inter-religious debates, but also irrelevant. Hick's hypothesis therefore does not represent a bridge between naturalist and religious worldviews; rather, its main function is to show how it can accommodate the diversity of religions.

Not every scholar of religion will understand religious doctrines in a propositional way. However, even this will fail as a basis for excluding non-religious worldviews from our debates, since the raising of different types of truth is congruent with the various possibilities for discourse. The demand for explicating how one understands one's claims is equally present in the debates between science and religion as it is in inter-religious debates. Put differently, if debates between science and religion demand that we raise the question of what constitutes (religious) truth, then the same question can and should be raised in inter-religious dialogue, given that our answers to this question determine how we understand our particular claims. Not only would this render the perceived differences between both endeavours moot, it would also allow us to employ a common framework for both types of discourse, and not just for inter-religious discourse.

1.3. Definition of a Worldview

Before we look at what kind of tasks the Philosophy of Worldviews is supposed to perform, it behooves us to have a closer look at the term worldview itself. Smart himself does little effort to provide us with a definition. This omission might have its roots in the fact that Smart is equally loathe

to define the phenomenon of religion. Moreover, as I have stated, the term has been frequently used in both philosophy and the cultural sciences. Arguably, Smart is therefore relying on a philosophical *a priori* understanding of the term.

I will return to Smart's writings on the topic when I discuss the tasks of the philosophy of worldviews (see 1.4). For now, I will have a look at some of the historical developments of the term while focussing on the work of Wilhelm Dilthey (1.3.1), discuss some contemporary definitions (1.3.2), and finally look at what makes religious worldviews religious (1.3.3).

1.3.1. A Brief Historical Overview

The English term worldview is a direct translation from the German concept of "Weltanschauung." This term was first coined by Immanuel Kant in his *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (1790) — despite Gadamer's insistence that Hegel was the first (Gadamer, 1993, p. 98)—, as a simple compound of *Welt* and *Anschauung*.¹⁵ Although for Kant a worldview denoted "an intuition of the world based on sense perception" (Naugle, 2002, p. 61), it soon acquired a different and more complex meaning.

Olthuis argues that a technical definition of the term was first formulated as early as 1838 by Søren Kierkegaard, but fails to mention the actual definition (Olthuis, 1989, p. 55 f3). Despite this, Kierkegaard only mentions the term five times in his whole oeuvre. Instead, he makes ample use of the semantically related concept of life view (Naugle, 2002, p. 73). For Kierkegaard, a lifeview is "a deep and satisfying view of life that would enable him to become a total human self" (Naugle, *ibid.*, p. 74).¹⁶

Arguably, the concept of a Weltanschauung received its greatest attention in the work of Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911), Wilhelm Windelband (1848-1915), and Heinrich Rickert (1863-1936). This allows Wolters to conclude that the popularity of the term reached its peak in

¹⁵ Kant writes: "Das gegebene Unendliche aber dennoch ohne Widerspruch auch nur denken zu können, dazu wird ein Vermögen, das selbst übersinnlich ist, im menschlichen Gemüte erfordert. Denn nur durch dieses und dessen Idee eines Noumenons, welches selbst keine Anschauung verstattet, aber doch der Weltanschauung, als bloßer Erscheinung, zum Substrat untergelegt wird, wird das Unendliche der Sinnenwelt, in der reinen intellektuellen Größenschätzung, unter einem Begriffe ganz zusammengefaßt, obzwar es in der mathematischen durch Zahlenbegriffe nie ganz gedacht werden kann" (2012, p. 176-177). Since Kant mentions the concept only once, it was hardly an important concept to his philosophy. Albert Wolters (1983) calls Kant's coinage "incidental."

¹⁶ Danish: livsanskuelse; Ger.: Lebensanschauung. Albert Wolters calls life-view the "central category" in Kierkegaard's philosophy (Naugle, *ibid.*, p. 384 f.24). Clément Vidal (2012, p. 314) makes a distinction between a "lifeworld" (Ger.: Lebenswelt), which is experiential and subjective, and a "worldview," which is social or intersubjective. However, he sees the "lifeworld" as but one aspect of a worldview. Hence, the term worldview for Vidal is an ambiguous term, since it can both include and exclude the concept of lifeworld. Alternatively, we could state that lifeview denotes the lifeview of the individual, while worldview denotes the worldview of the community, or society. Note that here as well I prefer to use lifeview instead of the lexical form of life view.

1910 (Olthuis, 1989, p. 55 f3). Given that Dilthey's work is instrumental in understanding contemporary definitions of a worldview, I will briefly outline Dilthey's work on a typology of worldviews (Ger.: Weltanschauungstypologie), specifically in *Das Wesen der Philosophie* (1907) and *Die Typen der Weltanschauung und ihre Ausbildung in den metaphysischen Systemen* (1911). Firstly, Dilthey was a personal student of Friedrich Adolf Trendelenburg, and therefore influenced by his worldview theory (Kreiter, 2007, p. 13). In his *Naturrecht auf den Grunde der Ethik*, Trendelenburg, defines a worldview as a "fundamental conception" (Ger.: Grundgedanke), which cannot be "deduced from other conceptions or principles" (Kreitner, 2007, p. 13). As a foundational notion, a worldview underlies a philosophical system and attempts to elicit from it the answers to a metaphysical question, namely, how thought and being are related. The possible answers to this question can then be used to classify philosophical systems into three categories, generating three corresponding types of worldviews, namely: (1) naturalism, (2) idealism (Platonism, or the "organic" worldview), and (3) Spinozism. Each Weltanschauung gives a unique answer to the question how thought and being are related. Furthermore, a worldview functions as an ordering principle which brings together all knowledge into a coherent totality (Ger.: zum Ganzen einigt), by bringing it into relation with the fundamental metaphysical conception.

Secondly, Dilthey distinguishes between different *kinds* (i.e., religious, artistic, and metaphysical) and *types* (i.e., naturalism, the idealism of freedom, and objective idealism).¹⁷ Dilthey argues that each type of worldview is rooted in a particular concept of life (Ger.: Leben). He writes: "Die letzte Wurzel der Weltanschauung ist das Leben" (Dilthey, 1911, p. 78; quoted in Kreiter, p. 65). Therefore, it is the particular life world of the individual (Ger.: Lebenswelt), or his lived experience, that gives rise to a worldview.¹⁸

While, according to Berend Kreiter (2007), even in Dilthey's work the life concept remains vague, we can nevertheless identify some important features (Kreiter, 2007, p. 63). Kreiter observes that, for Dilthey, life acts as a *medium*, and that it therefore exhibits two essential features: (a) a medium is not directly accessible or visible, and (b) connects distant parts together. Similarly, life is neither rationally accessible [a] in the immediate moment, nor [b] in its totality. Although life happens immediately, it cannot be known immediately. For this reason, life is irrational. However, as rational beings we can still reflect on the products of life, which are (i) *our own subjective life experiences* (i.e., recollections of immediate life experiences), and (ii) *cultural objectifications*. Each

¹⁷ Cf. Kreiter, 2007, p. 64-65.

¹⁸ For Dilthey, knowing what constitutes life is equally fundamental to a worldview as it is for Kierkegaard. For Kierkegaard's influence on Dilthey, see Basso (2012, p. 94 and onwards).

individual subject, in order to understand life (and the world), has to engage in an interpretative reconstruction of it, and these reconstructions or interpretations make up a worldview. Thus, although life as such cannot be known immediately, it can still be known medially; although life cannot be known in its totality, it can still be known partially. The individual subject is connected to life in two different ways: firstly, through *Lebendigkeit* — what I translate as *vitality* — understood as individual consciousness (e.g., emotions, thoughts, feelings, etc.), and secondly, through *Welt*. The latter is everything to which *Lebendigkeit* is connected by means of so-called *Lebensbezüge*, i.e., life-connections (Kreiter, 2007, p. 67).

In Dilthey's metaphysics, life creates its own world from the perspective of every individual.¹⁹ That is, life gives rise to reflection on life in each and every individual.²⁰ However, the individual, monadic as he/she might be, is not alone in the world. The world, seen as exteriority, is primarily a human world. A worldview cannot emerge without other people, since "my self-interpretation and individuation [are only] possible through processes of learning and individuation" (Nelson, 2011, p. 19; between square brackets mine). The subject is dependent for his or her formation on a social world of other subjects. Hence, the individual lifeview is equally dependent on the socially accepted worldview. This shared life experience (Ger.: *allgemeine Lebenserfahrung*) of individual subjects, all engaged in the same activity as life expresses itself, also gives rise to certain patterns behind worldviews: life yields the same questions over and over again for each individual (i.e., hence the existence of so-called cultural objectifications). Dilthey writes:

The riddle of existence faces all ages of mankind with the same mysterious countenance; we catch sight of its features, but we must guess at the soul behind it. This riddle is always bound up organically with that of the world itself and with the question what I am supposed to do in this world, why I am in it, and how my life in it will end. Where did I come from? Why do I exist? What will become of me? This is the most general question of all questions and the one that most concerns me. The answer to this question is sought in common by the poetic genius [i.e., art], the prophet [i.e., religion] and the thinker [i.e., metaphysics] (Dilthey, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 8:208-9; quoted in Naugle, 2002, p. 82; between square brackets mine).

¹⁹ Typen, 79: "So schafft das Leben von jedem Individuum aus sich seine eigene Welt."

²⁰ The individual is therefore not a single event, but a plural event. Hence, life becomes known in multiple ways, giving rise to multiple world and life views.

Dilthey adds, again reminiscent of Kierkegaard's view, that these riddles of existence — specifically the experiences of birth, death and the finitude of man — prevent the individual from being able "to unite his life-experiences into a meaningful totality" (Kreiter, 2007, p. 68). Eric Nelson points out, in this regard, how Dilthey from his earlier to his later works was consistently occupied with the question of *interconnectedness* or *unity* (Ger.: *Zusammenhang*). One of Dilthey's enduring quests was to investigate how [a] explanatory scientific thought, [b] interpretive understanding of others, and [c] self-reflection (Ger.: *Selbstbesinnung*) could arise together (Nelson, 2007, p. 109-110). These three elements together can be seen to foreshadow Karl Brünner's work on *Realitätsbezüge* (i.e., relations to reality), as well as Jürgen Habermas's work on the notion of *Sprechhandlung* (i.e., speech act). To preview what is to come (see chapter 3), as subjects we are simultaneously oriented towards (1) ourselves (i.e., the subjective world), (2) towards others (i.e., the social and intersubjective world), and towards (3) things and events (i.e., the objective world). Each of these three domains generates *data* for the subject, on the basis of which he or she formulates beliefs about him or herself, about others, and about the external world. Although both the subject and others can equally be considered to constitute objects and events within the one objective world, the *data* from those object domains are in fact "mined" in different ways. Hence the need for different methodologies, respectively, *self-reflection*, *interpretive understanding* (between subjects), and *explanatory scientific thinking*, as the trifecta for all discourse, including religious discourse.²¹

Dilthey also discusses the conflict between worldviews at great length (Ger.: *Widerstreit*).²² He claims that the historically proven fact of a multitude of mutually exclusive metaphysical systems — each claiming universal validity — produces a tension of unbearable proportions (Naugle, 2002, p. 85). He writes that "every single one of these systems excludes the other, each one refutes the other, and none can prove itself fully" (Naugle, *ibid.*, p. 85). Thus we end up with a paradox: while a worldview serves to provide cognitive unity for the individual, the fact is that a diversity of worldviews exists that are seemingly equally plausible. Therefore no such cognitive unity seems to exist for the community of all people. A similar observation is what motivates Nicholas Rescher to develop his Aporetics (see Chapter 5). First of all, Rescher argues that the overdetermination of answers to life's questions creates paradoxes, or *aporias*. Secondly, Rescher argues that we can develop aporetic strategies that allow us to develop exits out of the inconsistencies generated. Thirdly,

²¹ Moreover, while our own subjective life experiences, and their cultural objectifications, can be said to be irrational, we can still *rationaly reflect* on them.

²² Cf. Nelson, 2011, p. 27 and further.

Rescher claims that we can validly claim *universality* for our preferred solutions under the condition that we recognise that other orientations are possible from which different sets of claims are equally plausible.²³ The latter point allows him to develop a so-called *orientational pluralism*, which serves as an alternative to the options of exclusivism and pluralism (see *chapter 7*).

1.3.2. Contemporary Definitions

Fast forward to the present day, and a cornucopia of related definitions can be found, more or less influenced by previous historical developments. Given that a full overview of the various definitions would lead me too far afield, I will only present a small selection of such definitions, by such authors as Olthuis, Valk, and Apostel.²⁴

1.3.2.1. James H. Olthuis

Firstly, there is the often cited article *On Worldviews* by James H. Olthuis (1985), republished in *Stained Glass: Worldviews and Social Science* (Marshall et al., 1989, pp. 26-40). Olthuis writes:

A worldview (or vision of life) is a framework or set of fundamental beliefs through which we view the world and our calling and future in it. This vision need not be fully articulated: it may be so internalised that it goes largely unquestioned; it may not be explicitly developed into a systematic conception of life; it may not be theoretically deepened into a philosophy; it may not even be codified into a creedal form; it may be refined through cultural-historical development. Nevertheless, this vision is a channel for the ultimate beliefs which give direction and meaning to life. It is the integrative and interpretative framework by which order and disorder are judged; it is the standard by which reality is managed and pursued; it is the set of hinges on which all of our everyday thinking and doing turns (Marshall et al., 1989, p. 29; also quoted in Naugle, 2002, p. 349).

Jacob Klapwijk writes that for Olthuis a worldview is “an ultimate vision of life, in which people integrate their daily experiences” (1989, p. 41).²⁵ This implies that religious claims can only be

²³ Universality implies that under the same conditions we should arrive at the same conclusion.

²⁴ See also Walsh and Middleton (1984), Wolters (1983, 2005), Fowler (1996), etc.

²⁵ Interestingly, Klapwijk adds that Olthuis nowhere gives a definition of the term worldview (Klapwijk, 1989, p. 41). In fact, he deems it “impossible to present a closed, rationally adequate definition of it” (ibid., p. 42). However, Naugle regards the quote given to be in fact Olthuis’s definition (2002, p. 349).

properly understood within the context of the integrative framework that is a worldview. Such a view is consistent with what Berger and Luckmann (1997) call “plausibility structures,” that is, “socially accepted patterns of beliefs by which all other beliefs are judged” (Valk, *ibid.*, p. 10).

David Naugle also writes that on Olthuis’s view worldviews have both *descriptive* and *prescriptive* functions (Naugle, 2002, p. 350). Not only do worldviews present beliefs about what constitutes the world, but they also provide us with courses of actions that define how we should act in the world.²⁶ Similarly, Klapwijk writes:

Olthuis shows how a worldview functions in concrete human existence simultaneously as a vision of life and a vision for life. He points very convincingly to the practical and normative implications involved in a worldview. A worldview is not just a view of how the world is but also a view of how the world should be. It not only a view of the world but also a view of how to shape the world; it is, in short, a deeply rooted, inspiring source of action... It is not just a framework for a set of beliefs. Rather, it is a fundamental awareness of the meaning of life, of our calling in the world, and of my own personal responsibility (Klapwijk, 1989, p. 43).

However, Klapwijk is critical of Olthuis’s idea that worldviews are mediators between faith commitment and all other modes of human experience. He writes that mediation presupposes two opposite poles standing in need of mediation on account of their opposition (Klapwijk, *ibid.*, p. 44). This would mean that Olthuis’s definition of worldview as a “mediator” implies that faith stands in opposition to all other modes of human experience. However, Klapwijk argues that everyday experience is characterised by “the unity and unbreakable coherence of human experience in all its different *modes*” (*ibid.*, p. 44). Accordingly, “in every possible act of experience... all *modi* are present simultaneously” (*ibid.*, p. 44). Klapwijk’s view therefore comes close to Dilthey’s understanding of a *unity in experience* between three different modes of experience. Throughout my dissertation I will refer to these three modes of experience as the *subjective*, the *intersubjective* (i.e., social), and the *objective* (see my discussion of Habermas in chapter 3).

²⁶ Shortly, I will show how this understanding was also already present in Dilthey’s definition of worldview (see *infra*). It is therefore part of a *classical* understanding.

1.3.2.2. John Valk

A pertinent and elegant definition of worldview can also be found in John Valk's *Religion or Worldview* (2009). Valk, no doubt influenced by Olthuis, defines a worldview as follows:

Worldviews are comprehensive and integrative frameworks by which we understand ourselves, others, and the world in which we live. They are the lenses, glasses or filters that inform our perceptions of reality, and in turn form our perceptions of reality. But as much as worldviews are visions of life, they are also ways of life. Though individual and personal in nature, worldviews become communal and public in scope and structure when common visions bind adherents together in communities of thought and action (Valk, 2009, p. 6).

Of note here is that, for Valk, a worldview is a comprehensive framework by which we understand (1) ourselves, (2) others, and (3) the world. This view is congruent with Habermas's understanding of three relationships to reality, the so-called *Realitätsbezüge*, which I will discuss in depth *infra*. While for Valk a worldview orients us to the world in three different ways, Habermas argues that these three relationships are always already present in speech itself.

Similar to Olthuis, Valk points out that worldviews are “ways of life,” and that they lead believers to perform actions. This also implies that individuals and communities will reflect on such actions, and include these reflections within their worldview as specific worldview claims.

1.3.2.3. Leo Apostel

The late Belgian philosopher Leo Apostel, together with collaborators (Aerts, Apostel et al., 1994), defined a worldview as follows:

A world view is a coherent collection of concepts and theorems that must allow us to construct a global image of the world, and in this way to understand as many elements of our experience as possible. Societies, as well as individuals, have always contemplated deep questions relating to their being and becoming, and to the being and becoming of the world. The configuration of answers to these questions forms their world view (1994, p. 8).²⁷

²⁷ Key concepts: coherent collection, concepts, global, image of the world, elements of experience, societies and individuals, deep questions, being and becoming, (self and) the world.

A world view is a system of co-ordinates or a frame of reference in which everything presented to us by our diverse experiences can be placed. It is a symbolic system of representation that allows us to integrate everything we know about the world and ourselves into a global picture, one that illuminates reality as it is presented to us within a certain culture (1994, p. 9).²⁸

Firstly, a worldview is a coherent collection of concepts, and represents a symbolic system of representation.²⁹ Hence, concepts and symbols within the worldview cohere with one another, and are systematically related. However, the elements of worldviews are typically not concepts, but rather beliefs (i.e., statements that are acceptable to the religious believer). Beliefs, as such, are made up of *sentences*, rather than mere *concepts*. Similarly, worldview conflicts between religious traditions will consist of conflicts between sentences that are integrally connected to a worldview.³⁰

Secondly, if a worldview is a system of representation, we need to state what it is that is being represented, viz., a worldview offers a global “picture” or image of the world. A worldview is therefore what it says on the tin, i.e., it represents our view of (i.e., image) or outlook on the world. If the term worldview relies on the concept of world, to fully understand the meaning of the former we first have to understand the latter.³¹ The authors of the manifest write:

The “world” is the broadest environment that is cognitively, practically and emotionally relevant. We thus talk about “the world” in which we live, the “Lebenswelt” (Edmund Husserl). This “world” can differ, depending on the culture that we consider. Therefore we can speak of “the world of Antiquity,” or “the world of the Eskimos.” “The world” should not be identified with “the earth,” nor with “the cosmos,” nor with “the observable universe,” but with the totality in which we live and to which we can relate ourselves in a meaningful way (Apostel, et al., 1994, p. 8).

²⁸ Key concepts: system of co-ordinates, frame of reference, our diverse experiences symbolic system of representation, (what) we know about the world and ourselves, global picture, illuminates, reality as it is presented to us, within a certain culture.

²⁹ The dictionary definition of a symbol suggests: (especially in semiotics) a word, phrase, image, or the like having a complex of associated meanings and perceived as having inherent value separable from that which is symbolised, as being part of that which is symbolised, and as performing its normal function of standing for or representing that which is symbolised: usually conceived as deriving its meaning chiefly from the structure in which it appears, and generally distinguished from a sign.

³⁰ This serves as an argument also for my preference for the concept of a worldview, rather other related terms such as a *conceptual scheme*.

³¹ Some bootstrapping must take place: how we define “the world” will be dependent on our worldview.

Thus, on Apostel's interpretation, a worldview offers a picture or view of the world as the totality in which we live, to which we can relate ourselves, in a meaningful way, both (a) cognitively, (a) practically, and (c) emotionally.³² In other words, we orientate ourselves to the world in at least three different ways: cognitively (i.e., producing propositional content), pragmatically (i.e., interacting with the world), and emotionally (i.e., expressively).³³

The ideas contained within Apostel's world definition are undoubtedly influenced by Dilthey's. For Dilthey, there was an "identical structure" to the mind of all humans — what Noam Chomsky (1965) would call a "deep structure" — that consisted of three parts: mind, emotion, and will. These three structures of the mind accordingly influenced the generation of worldviews. Dilthey understood these aspects in terms of "levels of consciousness" where the "upper level of consciousness" consisted of the highest ideals and the greatest good. The resultant of all three structures on a worldview was a "comprehensive life plan, a highest good, the highest norms of action, an ideal of shaping one's personal life as well as that of society" (Dilthey, 1957, p. 25; also quoted in Naugle, 2002, p. 87). David Naugle (2002) concludes:

Thus for Dilthey, the metaphysical, axiological, and moral structure of a worldview is derived from the constituents of the human psyche — intellect, emotion, and will respectively (Naugle, *ibid.*, p. 87).

In brief, worldviews spring from the totality of human psychological existence: intellectually in the cognition of reality, affectively in the appraisal of life, and volitionally in the active performance of the will (Naugle, *ibid.*, p. 88).

From this follows that for Dilthey — and similarly for Apostel — every worldview contains at least a metaphysical, axiological, and moral structure.

Thirdly, for Apostel, a worldview answers deep or big questions about the being and becoming of ourselves and the world. Naugle, writing on Dilthey, calls this function "the interrogative

³² And we could add 'spiritually.' These different categories will reappear throughout my dissertation.

³³ Examples of such interaction would be, respectively, science, crafts, and the arts. The concept of emotionality will be taken up again by Vidal, for whom it becomes a criterion for the acceptance of worldviews (see *infra*). Also note that I equate the emotional relationship with the world as an instance of subjective expression (see the discussion on Habermas).

mood” (Naugle, 2002, p. 83): worldviews constitute answers to questions on life and the world. Instead, I will call this the *erotetic function of a worldview*, since its function is to answer questions. Apostle and colleagues identify seven such returning questions, which they believe structure and define worldviews:

1. What exists? What is reality?
2. Why is the world the way it is? Where do we come from?
3. Where are we going? Will the world come to an end?
4. What is good and what is evil? What should we strive for?
5. How should we act? How can we tackle our problems?
6. What is true and what is false? How can we know?
7. Where do we start answering these questions?

These same authors also point out that the first *six fundamental questions* can be equated with philosophically relevant categories, respectively, (1) ontology, (2) metaphysics, (3) futurology, (4) axiology, (5) praxeology, and (6) epistemology.³⁴ They do not, however, categorise the seventh question. Therefore, I suggest we make use of the term *methodology* to refer to the seventh question, namely, the systematic and theoretical analysis of the methods used to generate data in a certain field (i.e., ontology, metaphysics, etc.).³⁵

As we have seen, Dilthey also formulated worldviews in terms of questions: what I am supposed to do in this world, why I am in it, how will my life end, where did I come from, and so on. For Dilthey’s teacher Trendelenburg a worldview contained an ordering principle that gave a unique answer to the question how thought and being were related, and which brought together all knowledge into a coherent totality. While such an idea was still present in Dilthey’s presentation, —leading to different types of worldviews — Apostel’s definition does not rely on such “ordering principles.” However it can be said that, here, the “configuration of answers” to the different life and world questions function as an “ordering principle” for what we believe about the world, how we act, and so on.

³⁴ Futurology is, arguably, an unfamiliar concept to philosophers. Manifestations of futurology are, for instance, eschatology and teleology, concepts which are familiar to philosophers (e.g., of religion). Also note that all worldview questions come in doubles. In some cases, as we will see, this expresses a double nature of some of the categories.

³⁵ James Sire, in *The Universe Next Door* (2009), also defines worldviews by reference to seven questions.

As a corollary, Apostel's worldview categories make for a useful heuristic with which to analyse and compare worldviews. Firstly, by means of a structural analysis (see *infra*) we can identify those claims that pertain to ontology, metaphysics, futurology, axiology, praxeology, and epistemology, as a simple instance of cataloguing claims. Secondly, we can then compare claims from one ontology with the claims of another ontology, such as a Christian ontology and a Buddhist ontology.³⁶ Of course, the same could then be done with the other categories. Thirdly, we can then address the differences between category-specific claims by means of an aporetic method. I will return to the question of the different functions of worldview theory shortly (see *infra*).

1.3.3. Religious Worldviews

The question what defines a religious worldview hinges on the question what defines a religion. As many authors argue (Hick, 1989; Harrison, 2006; Hedges, 2010; Fitzgerald, 2000), this is not a question with a simple answer, due to the fact that no single definition captures all of the religions: one definition will typically capture too little, while another will capture too much, including belief systems that nobody, including the worldview holders themselves, considers to be religious in nature. This has lead some scholars to accept Wittgenstein's analogy of family resemblances: some traditions will share some characteristics while sharing other characteristics with other traditions (Hick, 1989, p. 3). Others, such as Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1962), argue that we drop the term religion altogether. Smith, in *The Meaning and End of Religion* (1962, 1991), writes:

Neither religion in general nor any one of the religions, I will contend, is in itself an intelligible entity, a valid object of inquiry, or of concern whether for the scholar or the man of faith (Smith, 1991, p. 12).

Timothy Fitzgerald makes a similar argument in *The Ideology of Religious Studies* (2000) critiquing the category of religion as a cross-cultural analytical concept by arguing that there is no clear way of distinguishing between “a religion” and “a quasi religion,” or between these and “secular ideology” (Fitzgerald, 2000, p. x). In other words, there is no clear way of distinguishing a religious worldview from a non-religious worldview: hence, we should abandon the search for a *sui generis* definition of a religious worldview (Fitzgerald, *ibid.*, p. 3). Moreover, Fitzgerald concludes that the

³⁶ Note that this does not need to imply that there is such a thing as a singular Christian ontology, or a singular Buddhist. Rather, the Christian worldview — if we must use a singular term — will represent a family of worldviews, and by extension, a family of ontologies.

field of religious studies is akin to ideology, i.e., it delivers specific first-order, positioned points of view on the basis of putative presumptions. However, the fact that there is no consensus on what constitutes a religion, or even on whether it is a useful category or not, does not imply that there is no definition of religion to be found. In fact, a plethora of definitions exists within such diverse fields as the philosophy of religion, theology and religious studies, anthropology and sociology, psychology of religion, and so on.³⁷ Since an in-depth analysis of such definitions would lead me too far, I will suffice here by only mentioning a few types of definitions that I deem useful.

Firstly, some of the definitions of religion come close to our definitions of a worldview. As such, they would be good candidates for use in the philosophy of worldviews. For instance, Paul J. Griffiths, in his *Problems of Religious Diversity* (2001), considers a religion to be "a form of life that seems to those who belong to it to be comprehensive, incapable of abandonment, and of central importance" (p. 22). He writes:

Your religion... by definition provides answers to (or at least a mode of addressing) those questions that seem to you of central importance to the ordering of your life. Such questions might include: Should I kill other humans? Is sensual pleasure the highest human good? Are there duties to God? — and so on (Griffiths, 2001, pp. 34-35).

Similarly, Paul Tillich in *Dynamics of Faith* (1968) argues that the dynamics of faith are "the dynamics of man's ultimate preoccupation," or what he calls "ultimate concern" (Tillich, 1968, p. 19). On this account, a religious worldview contains a central pre-occupation, or an overarching concern, to which anything else within the worldview is subjected. William A. Christian writes that religious doctrines are "generated by a certain vision of life, and this vision is suggested and shaped by particular historical and social settings" (1972, p. 15). Peter Cottrell, writing on Christian missiology, defines religion as "any coherent philosophical system which attempts to answer the fundamental questions" (quoted in Ferdinando, 1995, p. 16). Ninian Smart, who obviously understands religions in terms of worldviews, argues for a model that explicates the logical structure of religious systems in terms of six dimensions, viz., experiential, mythic, doctrinal, ethical, ritual and social dimensions (Smart, 1969, 1983). However, Michael Levine (1997) points out that implicit or "un-

³⁷ For instance, the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Society* (Swatos and Kivisto, 1998, p. 129-133), focusing on anthropology and sociology, offers a number of definitions according to four different classes: substantive, functional, *verstehende*, and formal definitions.

derstated” in Smart’s understanding is a Geertzian view on religion. Clifford Geertz (1973), as an anthropologist of religion, defines religion as follows:

[A religion is] a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these concepts with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic (1973, p. 90)...and by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life (ibid., p. 89).³⁸

Geertz’s definition (1973, pp. 112-114) comes close to what we understand by a worldview. Therefore, Levine agrees that the idea that “religion is after all a worldview...is consonant with Geertz’s conception of religion” (Levine, 1997, p. 18).

Secondly, it can be argued that the most common type of definitions are those that define religion “by a common faith in the transcendent or the divine—belief in superhuman agencies, or preferably in one supreme being who gives meaning and purpose to human history” (Fitzgerald, 2000, p. 3). British philosopher and theologian Keith Ward (2004) offers such definition that states that religion is “a set of practices for establishing relationship to a supernatural or transcendent reality for the sake of obtaining human good or avoiding harm” (p. 3). Pluralist philosopher of religion John Hick writes that religion involves “an understanding of the universe, together with an appropriate way of living within it, which involves reference beyond the natural world to God or gods or to the Absolute or to a transcendent order or process” (Hick, 1993, p. 133).³⁹ Such definitions can seemingly still be framed in terms of worldview for any references to supernatural entities or transcendent realities can be incorporated into the ontologies and metaphysics of worldviews. The difference between a naturalist and religious ontology is that the latter “presupposes the reality of the intentional object of religious thought,” defined as a super-natural or transcendent reality (Hick, 1993, p. 3), while the former rejects it. While Ward stresses the *normative* aspects of worldviews, Hick also refers to the *practical* or *praxeological* dimension of worldviews. Thus, by applying the worldview concept to the study of religion we can in fact leave room for a variety of different interpretations of what constitutes religion.

³⁸ For “Religion as a Cultural System,” see chapter 4, pp. 87- 125; for ‘Ethos, World View, and the Analysis of Sacred Symbols,’ see chapter 5, pp. 126-141.

³⁹ Also published in Pojman, 2008, p. 509-516. Joseph Runzo follows a similar view (Pojman, ibid., p. 542).

Given the lack of a consensus on what constitutes religion, we can also sidestep the question of what makes a worldview religious — at least for the purpose of the Aporetics of religious diversity —, by referring to religions not just as *generic* worldviews, but rather as *specific* worldviews. For instance, for both the Christian and the Buddhist (and so on), what it means to be *religious* will coincide with what it means to be a Christian or a Buddhist respectively. Rather than looking for an *etic* approach to religion we can suffice by relying on *emic* descriptions for the purpose of aporetic deliberations. For instance, in the case of a Christian religious worldview, claims will be selected on the basis of their being Christian, i.e., corresponding to Christian criteria, rather than their being (generically) religious. An argument could therefore be made that, at least in the case of Aporetics, the distinction between a worldview and a religious worldview is superfluous. In a similar way, the distinction between religious and non-religious worldviews will often be pragmatically irrelevant for our aporetic purposes (i.e, what I previously called an imaginary distinction).

1.4. Tasks of the Philosophy of Worldviews

Having defined both generic and religious worldviews, I will now proceed with a brief analysis of the tasks of the Philosophy of Worldviews. Ninian Smart, who instigated the field of Philosophy of Worldview, mentions two such tasks, namely *worldview analysis*, consisting of *structural analysis* and *comparative analysis* (1.4.1), and *clarification of criteria* (1.4.2). However, before I proceed, I should note that these tasks are specific tasks for a Philosophy of Worldviews that *knows its purpose*. It is one thing to discuss *what* we will be doing, but another as to *why* we are doing it. In this regard, Stephen Boulter sees it as the aim of philosophy in general “to provide a description and explanatory account of the nature of reality and the place of human beings within it” (ibid., p. 33):

The idea, explicit in some and implicit in others, has been that knowing something about the nature of the world we live in, and something of our own human nature, is bound to shed light on what kind of lives human beings should lead and what kinds of actions human beings ought to perform and which to avoid. It is for this reason that philosophy is always associated with the “Big Questions” (Boulter, 2013, p. 33).

However, despite Boulter’s insistence that it is philosophy’s role to provide an account of the world, he also argues that a division of labour exists between philosophy and other (first-order) sciences.

Philosophy itself does not necessarily provide the basic materials out of which the *Big Picture* is to be developed.

The contribution of the philosopher qua philosopher to the grand project is to draw on pre-existing materials derived from the special sciences and truth-directed subjects of the humanities, as well as out store of pre-theoretical beliefs, and to coordinate this material into a coherent picture of human beings and our place in the Universe. It is this second-order task of coordination, lying outside the remit of any special science, which is specifically philosophical, and the problems encountered in the pursuance of this task are specifically philosophical problems (Boulter, 2013, p. 33).

Boulter further writes that coordination problems arise when “one notices a tension, real or otherwise, between beliefs or lines of thought that one is otherwise inclined to accept” (2013, p. 34). When worldviews come in contact with one another — for instance, through dialogue between worldview holders⁴⁰ —, a worldview system can become stressed at its boundaries. Claims belonging to other worldviews put cognitive stress on our beliefs by force of being different, that is, by being inconsistent with ours. This means that we are in need of *a clear and practical approach* to effect the dissolution of such cognitive stress. It is here that worldview philosophers, including philosophers of religion who reflect on religious diversity, will find themselves called to action to bring to bear their particular heuristic methods. Thus, Boulter argues that the second-order task of *solving the coordination problems* between our Big Pictures belongs to the *specific tasks* of philosophy, rather than to the first-order disciplines that produce the cognitive problems. In fact, Boulter goes one step further by claiming that such second-order problem solving is the “raison d’être of the philosopher qua philosopher,” and constitutes his or her “specific contribution to the general intellectual economy” (2013, p. 34). In this, Boulter also follows Nicholas Rescher who writes that the impetus to remove such problems is a prime mover of “philosophical innovation” (2006, p. 17). Both Rescher and Boulter turn to the “aporetic method” of Aristotle, viz., the *aporetikê technê*, or the art of solving *aporiai*. With this turn, aporia resolution — what Rescher calls Aporetics — becomes the philosopher’s principal occupation.

⁴⁰ What Smart calls an “informal project” (see *infra*).

1.4.1. First Desideratum: Worldview Analysis

Smart argues that a *first desideratum* is that we conduct a "worldview analysis" (1995, p. 21; see also Smart, 1986, pp. 72 and further). Smart sees this as a "vital task," which should either be undertaken by the philosophy of religion, or at least for it (1995, p. 21).⁴¹ Worldview analysis consist of two aspects: (a) a structural analysis of worldviews (i.e., internal), and (b) a comparative analysis of worldviews (i.e., external). Concerning worldview analysis, Smart writes:

From history and from the comparative study of religion we can begin to piece together the so-to-speak logical structure of systems — how the different dimensions of religion, such as doctrine, myth, ritual and experience are bound to one another in relations of implication and suggestion, of expression and definition; also too how within the range of doctrines in a system they are mutually related and organically influence one another (Smart, 1995, p. 20).

In short, worldview analysis represents an analysis of a worldview in terms of it being a "suggestive web of interconnections" (ibid., p. 20). This is congruent with the different definitions of worldviews that I have presented. Smart adds that such interconnections between claims are rarely ones of direct entailment, but will exhibit "significant kinds of mutual dependence" (ibid., p. 20). As I will show, such interconnections will be specifically relevant for Aporetics. When worldview claims conflict between different religious worldviews, the interconnectedness of claims will ensure that such conflict will both be pervasive and run through the whole belief system — particularly if the beliefs that conflict are essential to the worldview (see chapter 2, 5). Smart states that a structural analysis also allows us to inquire into the *grammar of gesture and symbolism*, as well as into the grammar of symbolic action. For Smart, symbols have emotional impact. He writes eloquently:

There is a major task of analysis to unravel the modes whereby things and acts are especially charged with existential meaning, for it is such symbolic meaning which provides the bridge between pure cosmology and a world picture, between pure history and a philosophy or theory of history, between scientific and value-free descriptions and expressions of the symbolic substance of things. Even a kind of agnostic nihilism has to reject meaningful patterns: it does not simply fail to affirm them (ibid., p. 23).

⁴¹ This seems to imply that the philosophy of worldviews is an interdisciplinary field, where some of the tasks might be fulfilled by, for instance, a historian of religion, or a comparative or cross-cultural philosopher.

Thus for Smart, an important dimension of worldviews is the experiential and emotional dimension which gets expressed through value-laden symbols. This points to what we could call an *irrational* component to worldviews. In chapter 5, I will show how epistemic values are the driving force behind Aporetics, but that such a fact should not *a priori* be deemed irrational. Even though Aporetic management is based on values, and values are preferential, they can still be grounded by reasons.

While *structural analysis* studies the web of interconnections within a particular worldview, *comparative analysis* — its methodological twin — studies the connections *between different worldviews*. Smart argues that one of the main questions of a comparative analysis of worldviews is what kinds of evidence there are for and against the truth of a religious claim. He suggests that the impact of and answer to this question will depend on the "actual organic version of a religious faith under inquiry" (ibid., p. 21). This, of course, is also one of the main concerns of an Aporetics of religious diversity. The study of Aporetics shows us that cognitive disagreement can and will originate between claims on the basis of different kinds of evidence. What counts as evidence is decided by a certain evaluative stance tied in with the epistemic value system — what I will call an epistemic orientation — inherent in each worldview. Since different answers can be legitimately given to the same basic worldview questions, this will lead us to conclude to what is essentially an epistemological pluralism based on orientational differences (see *infra*).

By no means does Smart suggest that worldview comparison is solely to be used to demonstrate *how worldviews conflict*. We can equally show how worldviews converge, or how they are similar to one another. Ideally, comparative analysis is therefore a dialectical method, where studying similarities point to differences, and vice versa. However, we can easily take up vantage points from which either one of the poles of similarity and divergence, or consensus and dissensus, appear preferential. Smart also distinguishes between two different types of projects, one *formal* and one *informal*. The formal project is one of arm-chair philosophy where worldviews, and particularly the claims contained within worldviews, are studied from an observer or *third-person* point of view. The informal project is one of dialogue between worldview holders, where participants representing a certain faith tradition enter into *second-person dialogue* and encounter with one another. He writes: "The Christian, say a Catholic, who engages in serious conversations with a Marxist is probing to see how far there are collisions and tensions between the two systems" (ibid., p. 21). Smart adds the caveat that the formal project systematic theology can be both descriptive and constructive. The constructive project equates to "the fashioning of a new Christian (or Jewish, etc.) system of belief: a new worldview" (ibid., p. 21). Similarly, the informal dialogue of mutual exploration can

equally lead to new positions on both sides of the dialogue. Of course, this is dependent on how one understands the function of such dialogues in the first place. For instance, for George Lindbeck, the purpose of such talks is to come to a reconciliation between dialogue partners but without capitulation of claims and without change (1984). Lindbeck's solution will equate to a *functional dissensus*, where the different partners in dialogue will agree to different cognitive frameworks (see chapter 4).

This peculiar phenomenon of *dissensus* versus *consensus* can also be seen to divide the scholarship on religious diversity. As I stated in my Introduction, not only are exclusivists pitted against pluralists, even within the pluralist camp some will argue for unity or identity between all of the major religious systems (i.e., consensus), while others will argue for difference (i.e., dissensus). The same issue also divides two of the main authors referenced in my dissertation, namely Jürgen Habermas and Nicholas Rescher, where the former aims at consensus and the latter defends dissensus. While indeed Aporetics finds a starting point in doctrinal differences between worldviews, where claims are in contradiction with one another, I should note that the outcome of our aporetic deliberations can either be a *dissensus* or a *consensus*.

1.4.2. Second Desideratum: Clarification of Criteria

Having exposed a first desideratum, Smart continues by proposing what he thinks should in fact be the main task of the philosophy of religion, namely "to clarify the criteria for determining the truth as between worldviews" (1995, p. 24). Thus, in Smart's view, structural and comparative analysis come first, followed by the *pièce de resistance*, which is *the higher-order question of criteria*. Smart writes that there is a "special valuational weight" to tensions between worldviews where one range of data "is existentially more significant than another seen from within the perspective of the worldview which is making sense of the data" (1995, p. 24). He writes:

Looked at from the angle of experience, the history of religion is a ballet of different kinds: prophetic, mystical, shamanistic, psychedelic, conversional. How much weight to place upon each of these of these varieties? Both epistemologically and spiritually, that is, both as regards authority and application to one's own life, the answers will be important. Since the differing experiences tend to lead in differing directions, of calm, fervor, dualism, monism, fullness, emptiness, worship, meditation, ethical resolve, quietism, and so forth (ibid.).

Valuational weight is not only relevant to *worldview formation*, it also plays a pivotal role in the aporetic resolutions of boundary conflicts between worldviews, and is in fact what drives the diver-

gence in aporetic solutions. As Rescher shows, epistemic criteria play a crucial role in aporetic management (see chapter 5). Smart also argues that it is not just a question of criteria of *truth*, but truth wedded to *practice*, and so also a matter of criteria of “correctness or appropriateness” (ibid., p. 24). This implies that criteria can be used as measures by which we judge or determine the truth of worldview claims understood as correctness and appropriateness. In the course of my dissertation, I will show how *criteria for truth* are only some of the criteria that are at play: equally relevant will be criteria for determining the *subjective* and *intersubjective* correctness and acceptability of claims (chapter 6). This particular issue is a bone of contention for Michael Levine (1997), a fervent critic of Smart’s project of a Philosophy of Worldviews. Levine writes that Smart never explains his notion of truth, and that, when he lists his considerations relative to the truth of worldviews, it becomes apparent that he is not talking about truth in the ordinary objective sense. Levine writes:

Instead, he is talking about something more like subjective plausibility or ‘acceptability,’ and how various factors affect the acceptability of particular worldviews in context. For example, worldviews that have more ‘internal tensions’ (e.g., inconsistencies about doctrines, or serious divergences between theory and practice or experience), or less ‘comprehensiveness’ may be less ‘true’ than others. Those that have less tension or are more comprehensive may be, according to Smart ‘superior’ (Levine, 1997, p. 21).

He further adds that Smart’s considerations, such as “ethical insights, “social fruits of differing systems,” the capacity to exhibit a sensitive epistemology,” and “psychological utility” are not, as Smart claims, “criteria of truth” (ibid., p. 22). While Levine’s observations are undoubtedly correct, there is however little here in terms of a critique. We can easily admit that *objective truth* is not the only determining factor when it comes to solving the tensions between different worldviews. Thus, as Levine states, it makes more sense to use the concept of plausibility or acceptability. For instance, as I will show in chapter 5, Rescher’s Aporetics is not framed in terms of truth as such, but rather in terms of the *plausibility and acceptability of claims*, where plausibility is determined by the giving of reasons, and acceptability is determined by epistemic right-of-way criteria. In other words, the acceptability of claims is a *rational plausibility and acceptability*, and not just a “subjective plausibility,” as Levine claims. This does not take away the fact that, for the individual, subjective factors (i.e., subjective criteria) will equally be at play in formulating a worldview or in making aporetic decisions (see chapter 6).

1.5. Conclusion

As I wrote in my Introduction, one of the aims of my dissertation *in toto* is to provide a *diagnostic* analysis of the problem of religious diversity as well as the *therapeutic* means to effect a solution to that problem. Both aspects can be understood in terms of worldview theory. We can understand the problem of diversity as deriving from the fact that worldview claims will conflict across different worldview. I will return to Smart's heuristic of "higher-order questions" in my next chapter. In particular, I will apply his heuristic to define the problem of religious diversity in terms of a first-order and second-order problem.

2. The Problem of Religious Diversity

2.1. Introduction

In my previous chapter, I have introduced the concept of a worldview and defined it as a cognitive belief system that represents everything we come to know and believe about ourselves and the world. I further argued that worldview systems typically contain different types of claims reflective of the kind of questions that we ask about life and the world. For instance, we want to know what exists, what we should do, what is wrong and right, and so on. The resultant answers to these questions allow us to position ourselves in the world, and take a stand. They define what we believe and hold dear. However, different individuals and groups of individuals will give different answers to the same questions leading to a variety of worldviews, both religious and non-religious. Thus we end up with a number of distinct faith traditions, each of which provide their own sets of worldview claims. Moreover, many faith traditions are also internally diverse, where faith adherents have rallied around different interpretations of traditional beliefs.⁴²

However, in matters of religious faith, as in most matters, one would expect agreement to at least some of these worldview questions. As human beings operating in the world we expect a single account of how things are: does the Sun come up everyday or not (and why), is it wrong to steal someone's property or not (and why), and so on. This is as true for everyday reality as it is for religious matters. Some of the basic questions in religious traditions are, for instance: is there a divine being or not, is there something like an afterlife in a heavenly realm or not, and so on. Here too we expect consistency and coherence from our account of the world. From this follows that *the fact of religious diversity* also presents a *problem of religious diversity*, namely, a problem of disagreement between peers on how to answer worldview questions.

In the present chapter, I will analyse the problem of religious diversity as consisting of two separate but interrelated issues: (1) a *first-order* problem of conflicting claims, and (2) a *second-order* problem of epistemic stances. From a *first-order perspective*, the problem of religious diversity consists of a conflict between worldview claims that belong to different traditions. Such a conflict is best approached through the application of aporetic methods as I will discuss in chapter 5. However, we can also approach the same problem through a *second-order* question, which reflects on the nature of those particular conflicts: what kind of stance should we take towards the set of conflict-

⁴² Religious diversity, on a broad understanding of the term, includes both intra-religious and inter-religious diversity.

ing claims? This distinction will allow me to state that both problems are aporetic in nature, from which I derive a *first-order* and *second-order aporia*.

The structure of this chapter is as follows. First, in 2.2, I will discuss the notion of different orders of philosophical activities. Next, I will present the *first-order problem of conflicting claims* (2.3) and the *second-order problem of epistemic stances* (2.4), respectively. Concerning the first-order problem, I will present a *structural analysis* of worldview claims — one of the first desiderata of a Philosophy of Worldviews. I will show how worldview claims can be classified into different types and how they can form incompatibles accordingly. Concerning the second-order problem, I will introduce the so-called tripartite typology of stances towards religious diversity, and discuss the different options contained therein. The purpose of this chapter is therefore an analytical one (i.e., diagnostic).

2.2. Higher and Lower-Order

In the previous chapter I introduced one of the main protagonists of the Philosophy of Worldviews, namely Ninian Smart. In his early work *Reasons and Faiths* (1958), Smart pointed out that we can make a “somewhat crude distinction between higher and lower-order utterances” (1958, p. 2). A lower-order statement, in this context, is a religious statement made from the point of view of a faith adherent belonging to a certain tradition. A higher-order statement, on the other hand, is “a statement about a statement, not a straight statement” (idem, p. 2). According to Smart, as philosophers of religion, we are primarily concerned with making higher-order observations, and thus with *maintaining doctrinal neutrality*. The role of the philosopher of religion is to “classify [religious] statements and expressions” by excavating “properties relevant to two main questions — namely (1) how we confirm the truth, correctness, etc., of statements, commands, etc.; and (2) how statements, etc., are logically connected or disconnected” (ibid., p. 2). Smart argues that both activities are in fact “neutral” since the task of the philosopher is not “to establish particular truths (however wide-ranging these may be), but to elucidate their nature” (ibid., p. 3).

However, Smart adds that it is still possible to speak of “the philosophy of the Christian religion,” and so on. To preserve the above distinctions, he refers to the philosophy of a certain religious tradition as “metaphysics,” rather than philosophy, with the understanding that this does not restrict the philosopher from doing metaphysics. To abate possible confusion of terms, Smart chooses in his later work to opt for the term “worldview” instead of metaphysics, while reinterpreting the philosophy of religion as the higher-order analysis of such worldviews. He further adds that our view on higher-order claims should somewhat be modified “when we recognise that a theology,

for instance, may have a philosophical component, a view of how one tells the truth" (ibid., p. 24). In other words, the answers to this question might already be built into the worldview itself.⁴³ Although this seemingly muddles the concept of higher-order levels, Smart thinks that the concept can still be useful as "a kind of heuristic device or as a mode of orientation" (ibid., p. 24).

John Hick (1991) makes use of a similar distinction between first-order and second-order religious language.⁴⁴ For instance, he writes that we can find *first-order religious language* in "prayer and prophecy and proclamation, in the confession of sin and the spontaneous utterances of love and joy, and awe in the presence of God" (Hick, 1991, p. xi).⁴⁵ Second-order religious language is the language of theology "which treats the first-order expressions of faith as data to be interpreted in systematic theologies" (Hick, 1991, p. xi).

Clément Vidal, writing on Apostel's definition of a worldview, makes similar distinctions, but based on the work of Mortimer Adler (1993, p. 13-16). In *The Four Dimensions of Philosophy* (1993), Adler cogently writes that knowledge is of the first order "if it is knowledge about reality," and of the second order if it is "knowledge about knowledge itself" (Adler, 1993, p. 13-14).⁴⁶ Vidal proposes that the first five worldview questions in Apostel's definition are *first-order questions* in the sense that they directly question our world, as well as how we should interact with it (Vidal, 2012a, p. 310). As I have pointed out, Apostel's first five worldview questions lead to the philosophical categories of (1) ontology, (2) metaphysics, (3) futurology, (4) axiology, and (5) praxeology. In contrast, the last two questions are *second-order questions*, i.e., they deal with the answers to the first-order questions, and "are about the origin of our answers to those first-order questions" (ibid., p. 310).

In short, the logic or principle behind the two orders seems to be this: first-order questions take their data directly from 'our world' and generate first-order results. These results are then taken up as data for second-order questions or inquiry. However, Vidal adds that second-order questions are not disconnected from first-order ones, since first-order questions — either implicitly or explicitly — determine second-order analysis (Adler, 1965, p. 45; Vidal, 2012a, p. 311). The fact that sec-

⁴³ As we have seen in Apostel's presentation of a worldview, methodology is also built into the worldview. However, this does not take away the fact that methodology takes the answers to the first six questions as its topic. I will come back to this later (see *infra*).

⁴⁴ See also Livingston, 2003, p. 60.

⁴⁵ Reflecting on what is to come, besides being first-order expressions, these also typify first-person subjective expressions and are therefore subject to the validity claim of truthfulness, sincerity, and authenticity. In fact, this is what Hick refers to as "personal faith," following Wilfred Cantwell Smith's use of the term.

⁴⁶ We can see the same logic operating in certain other fields. For instance, in functional analysis, a 'functional' or higher-order function is considered to be a function of a function. In other words, a functional takes functions as its input.

ond-order questions are determined by first-order questions should not surprise us as second-order questions take their data from the first-order ones. I will call this *upward causation*.⁴⁷ Vidal also seems to hint at another process when he write that second-order reflections have implications in our epistemology, and therefore on how to model and predict the world (2012a, p. 311). We could refer to this process as *downward causation*.

Based on the work of Charlie Dunbar Broad (1947; 1958), Vidal also identifies the philosophical activities of (a) analysis, (b) synopsis, and (c) synthesis. The first two are second-order activities, while the third (c) is a *third-order* philosophical activity. While *analysis* is the analysis of concepts and their interrelations, *synopsis* is the deliberate attempt to view together aspects of human experience which are generally viewed apart, and the endeavour to see how they are interconnected (Broad, 1958, p. 116). Synopsis is a second-order activity which "describe different and sometimes contradictory positions on issues" (Vidal, 2012, p. 311). The goal of such philosophising is to remain "point-of-viewless," and consists of stating or reconstructing issues and a variety of positions toward them (Vidal, *ibid.*, p. 311). Vidal refers to these activities as "dialectical" instead of doctrinal. On the same matter, Vidal warns against the temptation to come to the conclusion of *syncretism*, namely, to accept all positions distinguished. He argues that a mere conjunction of contradictory positions is self-contradictory and that it stems from a confusion between first- and second-order philosophising (see also Rescher's view; chapter 7).

Further following Dunbar, Vidal also posits a *third-order* which he calls *synthetical philosophy*. He suggests that synthesis involves "the integration of first- and second-order dimensions of philosophising...to fully exploit this dialectical effort in a doctrinal way" (Vidal, 2010, p. 4). On Vidal's view, *synthesis* is the activity of combining elements into a whole (i.e., integration), namely of the data generated by both (a) the worldview questions, as well as by (b) the analytical and synoptical inquiries. The purpose of synthesis is "to supply a set of concepts and principles which shall cover satisfactorily all the various regions which are being viewed synoptically" (Broad, 1974, p. 126). Note that on Vidal's view, the second-order philosophical activities are not doctrinal activities — since no specific first-order philosophical position is achieved — but that synthesis is again doctrinal. Doctrinal activity is by necessity exclusivist, that is, excludes what is inconsistent with it, and

⁴⁷ I have taken this concept from the philosophical debates on 'emergentism' where emergent properties arise out of lower level entities. The emergent properties are said, by some, to be able to causally interact with the lower levels in a process of downward causation. Conversely, when lower levels causally interact with higher levels this is called 'upward causation.' See, "Emergent Properties," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (O'Connor and Wong, 2012). I use both terms here loosely to express the idea that (1) emergent data are fed back into the system at lower levels (downward causation), or that (2) the data of a lower level are taken up at a higher level (upward causation). I therefore take the term "causation" to mean here: the process of delivering data for processing.

does so on the basis of pre-selected parameters. This has as a consequence that a synthetic position, given its doctrinal nature, will not be able to avoid being just one model of synthesis amongst many (see further chapter 7).⁴⁸

Finally, Vidal argues that we can distinguish six dimensions in philosophy, namely: (1) descriptive, (2) normative, (3) practical, (4) critical, (5) dialectical, and (6) synthetical dimensions. He subsequently relates these six dimensions to Apostel's worldview categories, as well as to Adler's orders and Broad's categories (2010, p. 5). I have summarised the different correspondences in Table 1.

Worldview Categories	Vidal's Dimensions	Adler-Vidal's Orders	Broad's Categories
1. Ontology	Descriptive	First-order	
2. Metaphysics	Descriptive	First-order	
3. Futurology	Descriptive	First-order	
4. Axiology	Normative	First-order	
5. Praxeology	Practical	First-order	
6. Epistemology	Critical	Second-order	Analysis
7. Methodology	Dialectical	Second-order	Synopsis
8. -	Synthetical	Third-order	Synthesis

Table 1: Comparative Chart of Worldview Categories, Orders and Dimensions.

As we can tell, the first three dimensions are first-order activities. On Vidal's view, first-order philosophy is a doctrinal activity, since it provides clear answers to our basic erotetic inquiries about the world. This view is partly similar to Stephen Boulter's, who also argued that philosophy is a world-generating philosophy (Boulter, 2013). However, on Boulter's view, philosophy's main task is the second-order activity of worldview coordination. Further, Vidal points out that on the second-order level we find the critical and dialectical dimensions. This is also congruent with Smart's desiderata for a Philosophy of Worldviews, namely *structural analysis*, which we can equate with

⁴⁸ Thus requiring higher orders of further synthesis in a potentially never-ending process.

the critical dimension, and *comparative analysis*, which is dialectical in nature. From this we can conclude that Smart's vision of the Philosophy of Worldviews is as a second-order philosophy.

Thus, a first-order inquiry provides us with definite answers, and these can be — to use a spatial metaphor— located on a cognitive map. Second-order inquiry, on the other hand, provides us with the map itself onto which we locate our doctrinal answers. Thomas A. Tweed (2006) suggests a similar albeit different spatial metaphor when writing about the externalist and internalist perspectives forwarded by Hilary Putnam (1981, pp. 49–74). In *Reason, Truth and History* (1981), Putnam writes that we can distinguish between two different philosophical perspectives. On the externalist perspective, "[t]here is exactly one true and complete description of 'the way the world is'" (idem, p. 49). On the internalist perspective, one holds that the question "what objects does the world consist of?" only makes sense from within a theory or description. Philosophers who take an internalist perspective often hold that there is more than one 'true' theory or description of the world. Putnam writes:

'Truth', in an internalist view, is some sort of (idealized) rational acceptability — some sort of ideal coherence of our beliefs with each other and with our experiences as those experiences are themselves represented in our belief system — and not correspondence with mind-independent or discourse-independent 'states of affairs' (Putnam, 1981, p. 49-50).⁴⁹

Tweed suggests that we can understand the externalist perspective as "supra-locative," and the internalist perspective as "locative." Given that, on the externalist perspective, one takes "a God's Eye point of view" (Putnam, 1981, p. 49), the supra-locative approach presupposes that the interpreter is everywhere at once and nowhere in particular (Tweed, 2006, p. 16). Thus, the supra-located perspective floats "above" (i.e., *supra*) the map of located positions with an all-seeing eye. In contrast, the internalist perspective (on truth) is a "locative" perspective because here the focus is on actual "points of views" that can be "located" or situated on a map. Putnam writes:

⁴⁹ Victoria Harrison (2006) developed an "internal pluralist" in response to the problem of religious diversity on the basis of this view. My view of religious truth will be somewhere in between these positions: I hold an externalist view to religious truth as objective truth, i.e., our views fit what is out there. However, at the same time I will hold an internalist view when it comes to subjective and intersubjective types of religious truth (see chapter 4).

There is no God's Eye point of view that we can know or usefully imagine; there are only the various points of view of actual persons reflecting various interests and purposes that their descriptions and theories subserve (Putnam, 1981, p. 50).

On the internalist perspective, the focus is on actual "points of views" that can be located, or "situated," as Tweed writes. As a consequence, on the supra-locative approach truth is singular, while on the locative approach truth is multi-perspectival. While Tweed suggests that the external perspective is supra-locative and the internalist perspective is locative, the relationships between the terms do not necessarily run both ways. That is, Putnam's theory is a theory on truth, while Tweed's theory is a theory on perspectives. In other words, one does not necessarily need to ascribe to an externalist theory of truth when taking up a supra-located perspective.

In conclusion, lower-order statements provide us with specific statements or truths about the world. These statements can be mapped out and exhibit a definitive location: something is such and such, and not otherwise. Higher-order statements, as we have seen, are *statements about* lower-order statements. On Smart's view, higher-order statements are "neutral" when it comes to the truth of lower-order positions. They are therefore "unhinged" from any locative mapping, and are supra-locative. On Vidal's view, the goal of second-order philosophising is to remain "point-of-viewless." However, he also identifies a third-order philosophical activity of synthesis, which he sees as the *summum bonum* of philosophy, which is again doctrinal, that is locative. Thus, both Smart and Vidal equate first-order with locative philosophy, and second-order with supra-locative philosophy.

While I will make ample use of both heuristics — i.e., the distinction between orders, and the distinction between locative and supra-locative positions —, I will also keep both separate. While the idea of second-order states that it takes the data from the first-order philosophical activity as its object, this does not need to imply that the results of such activity have no location and remain supra-locative. On my view, the distinction between orders is a *methodological* one rather than a *material* one. We can liken this to a hawk who, like Putnam's God, oversees or *purveys* the landscape. Overseeing and purveying is a methodological act. However, even a hawk has to perch from time to time, and rest in a *given position*. Rescher's orientational pluralism, for instance, as an answer to the second-order problem of epistemic positions, will steer the middle between a locative and supra-locative position. It will be *locative* since Orientational Pluralism promotes taking up a locative stance; however, it will also be a *supra-locative* strategy since it constantly purveys the cognitive landscape. Like the hawk, it both purveys and perches. Furthermore, I will call Rescher's

solution a *third-order solution* since it takes the second-order epistemic positions as its *data* (see chapter 7).

2.3. The First-Order Problem of Religious Diversity

The first-order problem of religious diversity arises from *the fact of religious diversity*, which brings together three separate observations (or assumptions): (1) there is a plurality or diversity of religious traditions, (2) the religious traditions make truth claims, (3) the religious traditions make differing and inconsistent claims. Taken together, these three observations lead us to conclude to the problem of religious diversity, seen as a conflict between specific first-order worldview claims.

2.3.1. Multiple Religious Traditions

The first observation is that there is a diversity of religious traditions. From this follows that we can make a distinction between a *home religion*, to which a particular believer belongs, and all other *foreign religions*, i.e., all the other religions to which the particular believer does not belong to. I use the term *foreign religion* here in opposition to Paul J. Griffiths's preferred use of the term "alien religion" (2001, p. xiv). My argument is that the term alien could easily imply that other religions are so alien to our interpretive schemes that they are *de facto* untranslatable, or worse, unintelligible. The term foreign, on the other hand, often implies a sense of novelty, wonder, etc., as when we, for example, visit a foreign country.

Some religious believers will assert that they belong to two — or more — religions. If this is true, then we should consider both religions to be the believer's *home religion*: the believer is, more or less, at home with both. This phenomenon of having two home religions is variously called double religious belonging, dual belonging, or dual citizenship, as part of a larger phenomenon of Multiple Religious Belonging (MRB).⁵⁰ In other words, what was originally a foreign worldview can become increasingly familiar, so much so that one identifies with two different religions at the same time. However, Griffiths denies that it is possible to belong to more than one religion (2001, p. 34-35). He argues that religious traditions bear a relationship of "non-compossibility" to one another: you cannot simply add up the answers to the different worldview questions to create a composite religion. He writes:

⁵⁰ See for instance Panikkar (1978), Cornille (2002; 2003), Drew (2008), Schmidt-Leukel (2009). Historically, common examples have been, for instance, the Taoist-Confucianist hybrid identities in China, or the Shinto-Buddhist hybrid identities in Japan. A common contemporary Western example is Christian-Buddhist dual belonging. Note that the multiple religious belonged is confronted with the problem of religious diversity by default.

Simultaneous assent to or acceptance of different answers to these questions is both practically and logically impossible, from which it follows that simultaneous habitation of more than one religion is also impossible (Griffiths, 2001, pp. 34-35).

The idea of a home religion fits well with our view that religious traditions provide their adherents with a worldview. As I pointed out, worldviews are comprehensive and integrative frameworks that guide us in life and help us navigate the world. One of its main characteristics is that a worldview constitutes a "web of belief" (Griffiths, 2001; Quine and Ullian, 1978). This implies that some beliefs will be more central to the web of belief than others. For instance, "Jesus is the Son of God" is an essential claim of Christianity: many other beliefs will be dependent on it. If one were to deny it, then the part of the "web of belief" that depends on it would lose its grounding. Following a similar line of thought, Griffiths makes a distinction between *doctrines* and *teachings*. He points out that to belong to a religious tradition requires from the believer that he or she either (a) assents to or (b) accepts its main claims (2001, pp. 27-28). The difference between assenting to and acceptance of a claim, Griffiths writes, is that (a) is largely an *involuntary matter* — as it does not involve choice or deliberation —, while (b) is subject to *voluntary control*: one entertains a claim. From this follows that doctrines are claims which are *required* by the home religion as a social institution, while teachings are claims that are merely *suggested* but not required by it (ibid., p. 24-26).⁵¹ In short, while doctrines are central to the web of belief, teachings are less so and are therefore at the periphery of the worldview. Obviously, given the essential nature of doctrines, they will be held to a higher value and importance than non-essential teachings. This will also have consequences for cognitive conflict between worldviews to the degree that the chances for consensus between dialogue partners will be significantly reduced if the conflict centres on doctrines, since there will be no obvious way out of the conflict outside of one party giving up their essential claims.⁵²

2.3.2. Making Truth Claims

The second observation is that religions make truth claims. A simple example of a religious truth claim would be "God exists." The religious believer affirms the truth-value of this proposition by asserting: "It is true that God exists." Truth claims are statements or propositions that claim truth

⁵¹ One implication of this is that one cannot state that one *belongs to a religion* unless one deliberately assents to its main claims. William A. Christian argues that a doctrine of a religious community is something (a) which is taught, or (b) set forth for acceptance of belief by that community (1972, p. 2).

⁵² Whether one should come to a consensus or not will be a separate issue (see *infra*).

and have truth-value: they are either true or false. A proposition is true if and only if the state of affairs to which it refers is as the proposition asserts it to be. In all other cases, the proposition is considered to be false. We can take the belief that something is the case to be a *propositional attitude* (Russell, 1962, p. 18). On this account, a belief typically presupposes belief in the propositional content of the statement. Michael Peterson adds: "Beliefs, we shall say, are statements (i.e., propositions) that are accepted as true; they are truth-claims" (Peterson et al., 2009, p. 7).

However, Harold Netland, in *Dissonant Voices* (1991), writes that although truth is a quality or property of propositions and only of propositions, this does not need to imply that the terms "true" and "truth" cannot be used in other ways as well (Netland, 1991, p. 114). In other words, not everyone will understand religious belief in terms of propositional truths. However, Netland argues that propositional truth will remain "primary" for understanding religious language, and by extension religious claims. I will return to this issue in chapter 4. However, to preview what is to come, I will argue, *pro* Netland's view, that religious truth can have at least three different meanings dependent on how language is used, and *contra* Netland's view, that we do not need to consider propositional truth to be primary for understanding religious claims.

On a different but related notion, it should be clear that belonging to a religion will also involve more than mere belief. For instance, it will also require performances and actions, such as taking part in its rituals. In my previous chapter, I showed how such claims on performances and actions are part and partial of the worldview, i.e., belong to the *praxeological* or practical aspect of a worldview. However, most scholars of religion seem to be primarily concerned with propositional claims and beliefs, and they have good reasons for it. Firstly, they argue that believing in the home religion's doctrines is a necessary condition for belonging to it, since a religious tradition will require explicit assent to its doctrinal beliefs.⁵³ Secondly, religious traditions will advocate performances and courses of action based on its descriptive belief system. Netland writes that fundamental beliefs about the nature of the religious ultimate, as well as the human predicament, call for certain appropriate "patterns of behaviour" or "courses of action" (1991, p. 111). These fundamental beliefs provide the conceptual framework within which religious and ritual behaviour is to be understood. The way in which religious traditions advocate performances will be through *prescriptive* claims — for instance, claims about the proper conduct of human life (e.g., a Christian ought to give alms to the poor) — , rather than through descriptive claims.

⁵³ Nevertheless, it seems perfectly possible that a person can belong to a religious institution, such as Christianity — because of cultural indoctrination, social pressure, etc. — , but whose inner faith is different. In this case, the person would still belong to the Christian religions, but without necessarily believing in its claims. See Smith (1962) for the distinction of 'inner faith'.

Earlier in this chapter, I already showed how Vidal equates Apostel's first five worldview categories with descriptive, normative, and practical claims. In a similar vein, William A. Christian, in his often quoted *Oppositions of Religious Doctrines* (1972), identifies three types of doctrines. He states that "religion teaches a pattern of life, not just a view of the world" (1972, p. 2). This allows him to infer that doctrines are not just *proposals for belief*, but also *proposals for courses of action* and *valuations*. He argues that some doctrines will have the force of *assertions* when they state what the world is like. Other doctrines will have the force to recommend *courses of action* and will prescribe what one ought to do, inwardly and outwardly. Still other doctrines will have the force of proposing *valuations* and will judge that something or other is good or bad in a certain way (1972, p. 60). Harking back to Vidal's model, we can equate assertions with *descriptives claims* (i.e., ontology, metaphysics, futurology), courses of action with *practical claims* (i.e., praxeology), and valuations with *normative claims* (i.e., axiology).

To be sure, such descriptions are by no means novel, and are also present in for instance Speech Act Theory. Authors such as J. I. Austin (1962) and John Searle (1969) suggest that speech acts can carry different functions and provoke different effects.⁵⁴ For instance, the function of constative (c.f., Austin) or assertive (c.f., Searle) claims will be to state what the world is like: they are statements or descriptions about the objective world (Searle, 1969, p. 495). The function of performative (c.f., Austin) or directive (c.f., Searle) claims is to suggest or require some sort of performance, and aim to cause the hearer to take a particular action, e.g., requests, commands and advice. An implication of these distinctions will be that different types of claims will be held against different criteria, as I show in the next section, and develop further in chapter 3.

2.3.3. The Problem of Religious Diversity

The third and final observation is that the different religions seem to be making conflicting and incompatible claims.⁵⁵ The principle of non-contradiction states that two contradictory statements cannot both be true at the same time.⁵⁶ Take two contradictory claims A and B: for instance, claim A

⁵⁴ I will return to Speech Act Theory in my next chapter on Habermas (chapter 3).

⁵⁵ Incompatibility expresses a relationship between two contradictory propositions. To illustrate incompatibility we can use the simile of a magnet. Two incompatible claims can be likened to two *like* magnetic poles: they will repel each other, making it impossible to be combined.

⁵⁶ *Principium contradictionis*; see Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, 1005b, 15-1009a. The principle is one out of three fundamental principles or laws of thought. In propositional logic this gets expressed as $\neg (P \wedge \neg P)$. The second principle is the principle of identity (*principium indentitatis*) which teaches that an object is identical with itself. The third principle, the law of excluded middle (*tertium non datur*), is that a proposition is either true or false, with no middle position possible.

says 'It is raining'; claim B says 'It is not raining'. If A happens to be the case (i.e., if A is true), then B must by logical necessity not be so (i.e., B is false). In other words, two claims are incompatible if both claims cannot be simultaneously true. This implies that two contradictory claims can each be true, but at different times, as in the case of, for example, the claims "It rains" and "It rains not". However, more absolute claims such as logical and mathematical claims, and one could argue, religious claims, are unaffected by time, and hence would remain contradictory for eternity. John Hick (1983) characterises this issue as the problem of conflicting truth claims (CTC). Joseph Runzo concurs and writes that "the problem of religious pluralism [i.e., religious diversity] is a problem of conflicting truth-claims" (2008, pp. 542; also 2001). On this account, the problem of religious diversity is generated by the question which doctrinal claims are true, and which ones are false. However, William Christian offers a broader interpretation of cognitive conflict. He states:

Two doctrines are opposed [i.e. incompatible] if they cannot be jointly accepted without absurdity (1972, p. 2; also quoted in Netland, 1991, p. 110).

This plays out differently for each one of the different types of doctrines that I discussed. Firstly, to accept a descriptive doctrine is to take what is asserted as true. Christian notes that to accept an assertion, or constative doctrine, one must be willing (a) to assert it oneself in appropriate circumstances, as well as (b) to act on it if an occasion for doing so should arise. Thus, two constative doctrines are in opposition if it would be absurd to take both what is said in one and what is said in the other as true. They are opposed if they are *contrary* to one another, or if they are *contradictory* of one another. If and only if one of the two oppositional claims is true, then logically the other claim must be false. Some examples of descriptive contradictions from the world religions would be:

- (1) God exists — a Christian view.
- (2) God does not exist — an atheist or naturalist view.
- (3) God begets — a Christian view.
- (4) God does not beget — a Muslim view.
- (5) The Soul reincarnates, i.e., atman — a Hindu view.
- (6) The Soul does not reincarnate, i.e., an-atman — a Buddhist view.

Note that such doctrines are foundational to each of the represented belief systems. They create *fault lines* between worldviews, due to the fact that they are (a) foundational for the web of belief,

and (2) form contradictions across worldviews. However, as I will show in chapter four, there is still plenty of room for interpretation that allows us to avert inconsistency.

Secondly, to accept a performative doctrine is to perform what is recommended. From this follows that two performative doctrines are opposed, if it is not possible to undertake both courses of action without absurdity. Following Searle (1969), the criterion for a performative doctrine is whether it is felicitous or not felicitous. Searle writes that the felicitousness of such claims depends on "whether they are performed correctly, completely, and sincerely in accord with some antecedent set of conventions" (Searle, 1969, p. 406). The fact that one cannot undertake two opposing actions without absurdity says nothing about the felicitousness of the two courses of actions. The same is true for the criterion of truth: the fact that two claims contradict does not say anything about the truth of the matter. What it does state, is that, if one is true, the other one must be false.

While we can state for truth, "if one is true, the other one must be false," we are not able to do the same for performative claims. In other words, the fact that one course of action is felicitous does not necessitate that a conflicting course of action is not felicitous. It is clear that many goals will be able to be accomplished by different kinds of courses of action. I can communicate this sentence to you either through speech, or through writing. Or, I can travel to work either by taking the bus, or by walking. Both actions would be felicitous, i.e., take me to work. However, it would be "absurd" to suggest that I can do both at the same time: I have to make a decision between two felicitous choices. Two opposing courses of actions can also have opposing goals. Both courses of action are felicitous if they achieve the set goal. I can either communicate something to you right here and now, or take the bus to work. Hence, the felicitousness is dependent on an antecedent set of goals.

Thirdly, to accept a proposal for a normative doctrine means making a valuation, that is to "regard something as good or bad in a certain way" (Christian, 1972, p. 62). Thus two proposals for valuations are opposed if the valuations are incompatible. For instance, it is not possible to regard something as both good in a certain way, and also bad in that way. However, it would not be absurd to regard something as good in one way, and as bad in another way. For instance, I personally think cars are good because they get me to places fast, but I think they are bad because they run on carbon-based fuels. In fact, I would actually prefer a car that would still take me to places fast, but that was not dependent on carbon-based fuels. Such a car would be better for me. Similarly, in the case of comparative valuations, Christian writes that "it would be absurd to rank x over y in a certain way, and also rank y over x in that way (1972, p. 62). One cannot take something as uniquely good in a certain way, and also take something else as uniquely good in that way. The crux of the matter

here lies in the modifier “in a certain way,” which represents a certain criterion. Thus, in my car example, I used two different criteria: (a) speed, and (b) sustainability of fuel resources. From this follows that criteria will have a crucial role to play in the aporetic management of claims where we also have good reasons for opposing claims (see chapters 5 and 6).

We can further add that it is also always possible that two doctrines come together which belong to different types: for instance, a constative doctrine from one religion meets a performative doctrine from another religion. In such cases, both doctrines are opposed if it is not possible without absurdity to take both what the constative doctrine states as true, and to perform what the other doctrine recommends. Similarly, Christian states that it would be absurd for someone both (a) to say some course is impossible, and (b) to recommend undertaking that course of action. Thus, we can always add a constative to any performative claim, viz. when uttering a recommendation for action one can always formulate a constative claim, which claims it is possible to undertake the course of action. If not, one would not recommend the course of action.

Both William Christian (1972) and Paul Griffiths (2001) point out that not many religious claims will form exact contradictions. Griffiths states that it is more common to find *approximate contradictions* or *contradictories* (2001, p. 33). Approximate contradictions are claims that do not form exact contradictions at first sight, but which can easily be made to result in one. For instance, the (generic) Buddhist claim “Whatever exists is momentary,” and the Christian claim “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8) do not contradict straight away, but nevertheless we could construct an argument whose conclusion does yield an exact contradiction.

Griffiths also makes a distinction between *contradictoriness* and *contrariety*: he calls two religious claims contradictory if both cannot be true and one must be, and contrary if both cannot be true and neither need be (ibidem, p. xiv and pp. 32- 33).⁵⁷ We can exemplify this by taking a look at how beliefs about the identity of Jesus of Nazareth conflict across traditions.⁵⁸ A Muslim will typically claim that Allah (or the Divine as Personal Being) cannot become incarnate. He will regard Jesus of Nazareth to be a prophet of Allah, and as such to be a mere man. According to Christian and Hindu beliefs, however, the Divine can and indeed has become incarnate. The Christian will claim that Jesus is the one and only incarnation of the Divine (or God), whereas the Hindu believer will reject the uniqueness of Jesus. Instead, he will favour multiple instances of divine incarnation. Thus, for a Hindu believer it is acceptable to say that Jesus is a divine being, but not that he is the

⁵⁷ Similarly, some aporias will be merely *a priori* aporias, where philosophical analysis shows that they do not in fact constitute an aporia. Others will be enduring.

⁵⁸ See Lipner (1976, p. 228) and Netland (1991, p. 113).

one and only such being.⁵⁹ If we take the two claims “Jesus is a mere man” and “Jesus is a divine being,” it seems reasonable to say that both cannot be true, but that one must be, since it could be said that he was at least a man. We can thus conclude contradictoriness. If we take the example of the two claims “Jesus is the one and only divine being,” and “Jesus is one of multiple divine beings,” we can safely say that both cannot be true, but that neither need be. We thus conclude contrariety.

Furthermore, not only can we perceive religious claims to be incompatible, we can also say that they — and the belief systems to which they belong — are *incommensurable* or *incomparable*. Incommensurability denotes the lack of a common (Lat.: com-) measure (Lat.: mensura) to decide on the value of two competing claims or theories.⁶⁰ For instance, the Kuhn-Feyerabend thesis on incommensurability states formally:

Two theories are incommensurable, if they contain a basic common term whose meaning or use in one theory is incommensurable with its meaning or use in the other, i.e., if at least one basic term used in both theories has a totally different meaning in each (Wisdom, 1974, p. 299).⁶¹

If we take the Christian concept of “God” as a criterion, then we can say that Buddhism is an atheistic religion, which makes it incommensurable with Christianity.⁶² The meaning of the term incomparability here comes close to the one of incommensurability, and I will regard both terms to be functionally equivalent. The comparison of worldview beliefs can be said to be based on partial order relations. In mathematics, a partial order relation is a relation for which it is possible that two elements x and y are incapable of being compared. In contrast, for a linear order relation, on the other hand, it is always the case that x and y can be compared (i.e., $x \leq y$ or $y \leq x$). Just and Weese write:

⁵⁹ Note that none of this tells us anything about the actual truth-value of any of the contradictory claims.

⁶⁰ See Rorty (1983). The concept of incommensurability was made popular by Thomas Kuhn in his seminal work *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (first edition 1961).

⁶¹ See Oberheim and Hornigen (2009).

⁶² It might be the case that some claims can be made commensurate. Consider, for example, the case of AC/DC, or alternating current and direct current. Both are incompatible but can be made commensurable by means of series of blocks that transform the AC current in to a steady stream of DC current.

Two elements x and y are comparable by a partial order relation \leq if $x \leq y$ or $y \leq x$. A partial order (X, \leq) is called a linear order...if every two elements of X are comparable by \leq (1996, p. 18).

Anticipating what is to come, this is specifically relevant for the process of assessment and justification of claims in aporetic conflict. In such cases, the acceptance of a belief will depend on which beliefs are seen to provide not only good reasons, but also the "best" reasons. To assess whether a claim is good, we hold it against a criterion. To assess whether a claim is better, we hold both claims against the same criterion, as well as against themselves. The idea that justification can settle conflict is therefore premised on the idea that we can hold both claims and their justification against the same criteria, or the same type of criteria. However, some beliefs, each backed with good reasons, will turn out to be incomparable in this regard (i.e., due to differences in how the claims are redeemed).

Lastly, David Basinger (2002) calls cognitive conflict of this type "epistemic peer conflict," viz. knowledge-based conflict about religious claims between peers. Basinger characterises peers as persons who can be considered to be (a) equally knowledgeable, and (b) sincere. Similarly, Robert McKim (2001) writes:

It is not just the fact that there are diverse beliefs that is striking: it is the fact that wise people who think carefully and judiciously, who are intelligent, clever, honest, reflective, and serious, who avoid distortion, exaggeration, and confabulation, who admit ignorance when appropriate, and who have relied on what has seemed to them to be the relevant considerations in the course of acquiring their beliefs, hold these diverse beliefs (McKim, 2001, p. 129).

However, the condition of being "knowledgeable" is vague and in need of further qualification. For instance, we can observe epistemic peer conflict on religious beliefs in three distinct settings. Firstly, *inter-religious conflict* will exist between members of different and distinct religious traditions. Secondly, *intra-religious conflict* will occur between members belonging to the same religion, as in the case of Protestants and Roman Catholics. Thirdly, *inter-system conflict* will take place between a believer of a religious worldview, and a proponent of a non-religious worldview.⁶³ At first blush,

⁶³ The term inter-system conflict is Basinger's.

what it means to be a peer would substantially differ in all three cases. In the case of Christian intra-religious conflict, between Protestants and Catholics, we can consider both to be peers-as-Christians, who share certain paradigmatic knowledge.⁶⁴ However, if a Christian criticises or opposes Buddhist claims in a case of inter-religious conflict, she would not be acting as a peer to the Buddhist. The Christian believer does not have obvious access to the indigenous or emic methods of acquiring knowledge that would allow her to either assent to or criticise those particular claims with reasons good enough to be acceptable to the Buddhist. Of course, the Christian always has recourse to her own resources with which to criticise Buddhist claims. Thus, she can use the Christian framework (i.e., worldview) as a criterion. However, this would not count as an instance of peer criticism in the same way a fellow Buddhist would criticise his or her own tradition. Nevertheless, this is not what both McKim and Basinger have in mind when they define peers as equally knowledgeable and sincere. Rather, appeal is being made to universal conditions that are true for all human beings.

The concept of what it means to be a peer is therefore dependent on the range of application. Furthermore, where inter-religious conflict ends and intra-religious conflict starts is foremost a question of definition. The distinction between the two terms is dependent on how we understand the concept of religion, as well as on how we understand the nature of particular religious traditions. For instance, we can make clear distinctions between the religious traditions of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. This allows us to classify any cognitive peer conflict between them as an instance of inter-religious conflict. However, in a change of perspective, all three religious traditions can be seen to be part of the Abrahamic faiths. In the context of a comparative analysis between the Abrahamic religious family and Buddhism, the differences between, for instance, Christianity and Islam, show up as relatively minor in comparison with the Buddhist belief system. While both cases are cases of inter-religious conflict, the distance between the Christian and the Muslim can be said to be smaller than the distance between the Christian and the Buddhist. However, this says nothing about the importance attached to differences in opinion, as often it is the one closest to us with whom we have the biggest conflicts. Finally, David Basinger argues that the distinction matters little:

⁶⁴ And let's assume, for the sake of argument, that they are both sincere and truthful, which is Basinger's second condition. Compare this condition with Habermas's validity claim of truthfulness (see *infra*). Similarly, I assume that Basinger's first condition, knowledgeable, can be compared with Habermas's validity claim of propositional truth.

As I see it, the same basic perspectives that apply to inter-system diversity (for example, to differing perspectives on the most accurate basic theistic conception of God) apply just as clearly, and in exactly the same sense, to intra-system diversity (for example, to differing perspectives within Christianity over the extent of God's knowledge). Moreover... the appropriate response to these questions — for example, the appropriate response to what we are obligated, or not obligated, to do when confronting diversity — is exactly the same for both types of diversity (Basinger, 2002, pp. 2-3).

2.4. The Second-Order Problem of Epistemic Stances

The problem of religious diversity can also be framed differently, namely in terms of epistemic stances. Alan Race, in his influential work *Christians and Religious Pluralism* (1984), wrote a summary of the different attitudes towards religious diversity that were present in various Christian authors, such as Hendrik Kraemer (1938), John Nicol Farquhar (1913), and William Hocking (1932).⁶⁵ On the basis of this — and inspired by the work of Farquhar — Race developed a so-called *tripartite typology*. This tripartite typology consisted of three different (religious) epistemic stances, to wit, exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. At opposite ends of the typology are exclusivism and pluralism. While exclusivism expresses the idea that only one religious tradition is true — and that all others are false —, pluralism expresses the idea that all the major religious traditions represent true religions, that they are all more or less equally true, and offer equally valid paths to salvations. In the middle of the spectrum is inclusivism, which represents a commitment to claiming that one revelation or religion (sometimes in a special denominational form) is superior to others, even if those can be considered true as well.

Since its publication, Race's typology has been accepted as a useful heuristic by a broad range of scholars. However, it has not been without critics either (Ariarajah, 1994; Blakeslee, 2010, p. 6). Several authors have suggested their own versions of the typology by (a) deleting or subsuming types, (b) adding more types, or (c) rewording types. The upshot is that many different types abound with often different names for the same type of stance. Although I do not pretend to present a comprehensive overview, I will give a brief outline of some of the most referenced versions.

⁶⁵ See Okholm and Phillips, 1996.

In category (a), Gavin D'Costa (1996) argues that pluralism can be reduced to exclusivism, Owen C. Thomas (1994) argues that pluralism reduces to inclusivism, and David Basinger (2002) argues that inclusivism is a soft form of exclusivism.

In category (b), Perry Schmidt-Leukel (2005) proposes a reformed quadripartite typology including the further position of naturalism. David Basinger (2002) also includes naturalism as an epistemic stance. Richard Plantinga mentions a fourth category of universalism, which is a thesis on universal salvation for all (Knitter, 2005). However, in reply, Schmidt-Leukel argues that this type can be best understood as a variant of pluralism (Schmidt-Leukel, 2005, p. 15). Seemingly upping the ante, Joseph Runzo (1988) distinguishes six possible responses, viz. atheism, exclusivism, inclusivism, subjectivism, pluralism, and relativism. However, on his account, atheism equates with naturalism, and the latter three are but versions of pluralism. Hence, his typology comes again down to the same four types.

In category (c), both Paul Knitter (2002) and Paul Hedges (2002, 2008, 2010) support a quadripartite typology, but they prefer to use other terms. Knitter distinguishes four "models," viz. a replacement, fulfilment, mutuality and acceptance model. Hedges uses the terms exclusivisms, inclusivisms, pluralisms, and particularities, but sees them from the perspective of radical discontinuity, radical fulfilment, radical openness, and radical difference.

Of course some authors will classify as multiple types. Both Jacques Dupuis (1997) and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen (2003) argue for an alternative typology that consists of *ecclesiocentrism*, *christocentrism*, *theocentrism*, and *realitycentrism* (Kärkkäinen, 2003, p. 25). The first three categories correspond to exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. The fourth category serves to represent the type of pluralism forwarded by John Hick, who replaces reference to God and gods by reference to an ultimate, transcendent reality.

In my next overview of the typology, I will make use of quadripartite typology presented by Schmidt-Leukel (2005).⁶⁶ Firstly, because Schmidt-Leukel has arguably been the typology's staunchest defender in recent years. Secondly, because it consists of one non-religious option added to the classic three religious options and therefore takes into account the notion of non-religious worldview. Each of these epistemic options will attempt to provide a solution to the first-order problem of conflicting worldview claims. Given that these options are mutually exclusive, the typology as such will present a problem of its own in terms of which one of these option is true, or most acceptable, and so on.

⁶⁶ I will return to Schmidt-Leukel's defence of the typology in my chapter seven.

2.4.1. Naturalism

A proponent of this approach (i.e., a naturalist) maintains that since there exists no divine reality — since the referent in such claims is non-existent — all such claims are false (Basinger, 2002, p. 3). If religious claims, referring to a transcendent reality (i.e., gods or supernatural beings), are false, the fact that they conflict and contradict each other becomes a non-issue, and the problem of cognitive conflict between the claims of the religious traditions disappears.⁶⁷

The naturalist has a few strategies open to her. Firstly, she can take religious claims seriously, and accept them as propositions that refer to states of affairs in reality. For instance, when she is confronted with a statement such as “Jesus Christ is the Son of God” she will attempt to ascertain whether there is indeed a state of affairs to which the proposition refers (i.e., whether there is indeed a referent). If evidence is lacking, or not forth-coming, she will conclude that the claim has no positive warrant, and attribute the value of ‘false’ to the proposition in question. John Hick has pointed out that naturalism can also express a “positive appreciation of religion as a valuable aspect of human life” (Hick, 1993, p. 5). He calls this position “religious naturalism,” in contrast with non-religious naturalism). The religious naturalist accepts that the religious believer is speaking about something, i.e. is referring to aspects of the world, but without targeting the right referents: the religious believer is merely confused. This strategy then is one where meaning is assigned, but where the verdict is that the religious claims are false. Secondly, the naturalist can deny that religious claims have proper cognitive content, or that they have any propositional status. In effect, she states that all such claims are (propositionally) meaningless. Hence, we arrive at a similar result: given a complete lack of truth-value, it does not matter that the different claims contradict each other. Thirdly, an agnostic (i.e., somebody who professes not to know) could also hold that the proposition “God exists” is meaningful, but that we have no way of knowing of whether it is true or false, and that we therefore should refrain from making a judgment. This, then, is a third stance, positioned somewhere between the first two: although we can assign meaning, we cannot assign truth value.

At first blush, the first two strategies seem to be identical. However, saying that the referent does not exist (i.e., falseness or falsity) is not the same as saying that a claim has no propositional status (i.e., meaninglessness). In the first case, a (negative) truth-value is assigned: given that no proof can be provided to show that the referent exists, the claim is taken to be false. This stance is typical of the atheist who takes the lack of evidence for God (i.e., pro God) to be evidence that God does not exist (i.e., contra God). In the second case, because the claim is meaningless (i.e., because

⁶⁷ Note that I use the term naturalism as a catch-all that could also include skepticism. Naturalism, as a theory, rejects references to supernatural entities.

we do not know which proposition the claim implies), we do not assign a truth-value. Nicholas Rescher also points to the difference between *falseness* and *meaninglessness*. While falseness is simple enough as a basis for dismissing claims, meaninglessness is more complicated. Rescher distinguishes between three different forms of meaninglessness, namely (a) hermeneutical, (b) informative, and (c) semantical (2009, p. 97). Hermeneutically meaningless sentences are "literal nonsense" and "unintelligible gibberish." As an example, he gives us the sentence "Yellow weighs wooden tentacles." This sentence is meaningless despite the fact that we can understand the individual words. Taken together, the individual meaningful words create a meaningless sentence: no meaning whatsoever can be derived from the sentence, at least for the listener. Rescher's second category of informative meaninglessness is "absurd and conveys no usable information" (ibid., 97). As an example, Rescher writes: "He drew a square circle." Here, while the separate terms are meaningful, square and circle are opposing terms, and therefore their juxtaposition becomes meaningless. Sentences of this kind are generally caused by "category confusion and presupposition violation" (ibid., p. 98). Semantically meaningless are sentences such as "This sentence is false" (ibid., p. 97). According to Rescher these type of sentences are meaningless since "neither truth nor falsity can be ascribed to it" (ibid., 97). But surely this is a feature shared by all forms of meaninglessness. To describe semantically meaninglessness by referring to this feature is therefore not very informative. "Is false" ascribes truth value to a proposition according to the structure "p is false." Thus we get: "this sentence" is false. "This sentence" is not meaningless as such, since it refers to a particular sentence: "This sentence is false." Hence we can write: "This sentence is false" is false. We then end up in an endless loop of opposing terms since a double negative creates a positive.⁶⁸ Although we do not here have an opposition of terms (like in square and circle) we do end up with an opposition of some sort, namely an oscillation between the desire to ascribe truth and falsity. Many philosophers of religion will in fact stay away from the question of the truth or falsity of beliefs. For instance, David Basinger states that "while the actual existence of any form of divine reality remains a hotly contested issue within philosophical circles, this question [i.e., whether there is indeed a referent] is simply set aside in most current discussions of diversity" (2002, p. 3). In other words, philosophers will not attempt to prove or disprove particular claims; they simply accept, as a cultural fact, that believers take them to be true.

⁶⁸ The next iteration would be: "(This sentence is false) is false" is false.

2.4.2. Exclusivism

A proponent of this approach (i.e., an exclusivist) takes one religious tradition, i.e., their home religion, to be the sole provider of religious truths. An exclusivist holds (1) that the doctrines she believes in are true, and this is the reason why she believes them, and that (2) where the claims of other religions conflict with those of her home religion, the former are to be rejected as false. Kevin Meeker and Phillip L. Quinn write that the religious exclusivist is someone who believes that “one religion is mostly right and all the other religions go seriously wrong” (2000, p. 3). Joseph Runzo states that on this stance “only one world religion is correct, and all others are mistaken” (1988, p. 346). Alvin Plantinga writes that the exclusivist holds that (a) “the tenets or some of the tenets of one religion—Christianity, let's say—are in fact true,” as well as that “any propositions, including other religious beliefs, that are incompatible with those tenets are false” (2008, p. 518). Moreover, Plantinga adds, on an exclusivist position you continue to believe, despite learning about this diversity, what you have all along believed (*ibid.*, p. 518).

On this account, the religious exclusivist strictly applies the principle of non-contradiction, which states that two contradictory statements cannot both be true at the same time (or in the same way). The strategy is therefore as follows: first, she presupposes that one can make accurate judgments about the truth or falsity of the major religions; second, she believes to have sufficient reason to conclude the truth of a specific claim; third, she applies the logical inference that any opposing claims must be false. Bracketing the question how the religious exclusivist decides which one of two conflicting truth-claims is true (i.e., the question of what her reasons are for attributing truth-value), and which is false, the problem of conflicting truth claims seems to have dissolved. Once the truth for or against a religious claim is shown in the court of rational adjudication, the issue is settled. At first blush, then, the exclusivist has an easy task: all she needs to do is “prove” — i.e., show evidence — that her claims are true. She can then claim that all opposing claims are false. If this sounds too good to be true, it probably is. David Basinger agrees that “the exclusivist who faces epistemic peer conflict... should, as a general rule, first attempt to resolve the tension on evidential grounds” (Basinger, 2002, p. 12). However, he adds, “there seldom exists an objective evidential basis for resolving epistemic conflicts in the religious realm” (Basinger, 2002, p. 12). In other words, the religious exclusivist might think she has good reasons for her claims to be true. However, according to Basinger, no real non-question-begging grounds — which do not simply assume what needs to be proven — seem to exist by which she could conclusively convince her religious and non-religious peers. Her grounds then become internal, functional grounds such as coherence

with other beliefs, or a phenomenological experience of the truth of a claim. In the face of religious diversity, this soon becomes problematic, for every religion can claim the same.

Basinger also points out that we can distinguish between two different uses of the term. In the first sense, a religious exclusivist is “anyone who claims that her perspective on a religious issue is true (and, thus, that any incompatible perspective is false)” (2002, p. 4). In other words, anyone who argues for the truth of a particular religious claim (and not for its opposite, for instance) can be considered to be an exclusivist in respect to that claim. In the second sense — the most common one — a religious exclusivist is “someone who believes that one, and only one of the many incompatible basic theistic systems to which people have committed themselves contains the truth” (*ibidem*, p. 5). It is only the latter position that Basinger considers part of the typology, and not the former. However, it is not completely clear how, in practice, we can keep the two positions apart. Often an exclusivist position on a single claim will entail exclusivism of the second type, if that claim is a doctrinal claim and central to a certain belief system. For instance, a Christian will typically believe (a) that God has revealed himself in the Bible, and (b) that Jesus Christ is both the sole incarnation of God, and our Lord and Saviour. From this exclusivist position on two single claims follows that only Christianity will offer saving knowledge of God, i.e. that only Christianity is both true and salvific.

2.4.3. Inclusivism

A proponent of this approach (i.e., an inclusivist) argues that one tradition provides the “full truth,” and that claims made by other traditions are true in so far as they are compatible (i.e., do not contradict) and coherent with the essential truths of the home tradition. The principle of non-contradiction applies here as well, but with more willingness to grant truth to basic claims made by other religious traditions, insofar as they do not conflict with the former. The definition of inclusivism only seems to be reliant on the principle of non-contradiction, and not on the further principle that the claims in question need to cohere with one another.⁶⁹ However, it seems intuitively clear that the inclusivist will more easily accept statements that do cohere with her doctrinal claims. A Christian inclusivist can accept the Muslim claim that Jesus Christ is a prophet of God — it is coherent with a Christian view — as long as he does not explicitly reject the divinity of Jesus (as this contradicts with the Christian’s doctrinal view). She might however have a harder time accepting Hindu claims, even if they do not explicitly contradict.

⁶⁹ Non-contradiction (or consistency) need not imply coherence.

2.4.4. Pluralism

Religious pluralism states that (at least some) religious traditions provide truth, or are on par with respect to truth, even if their claims contradict each other, and that no single religion is superior in this respect.⁷⁰ Meeker and Quinn explicate that pluralism is the view that “all the major religious traditions — the so-called world religions — are in contact with the same ultimate religious reality” (2000, p. 3). A pluralist holds that “ultimately all world religions are correct, each offering a different salvific path and partial perspective vis-à-vis the one Ultimate Reality” (Runzo, 1988, p. 347). They “thus offer different, but equally efficacious access, to the divine” (Basinger, 2002, p. 4). Pluralism differs from exclusivism in that it grants truth-value to different religious traditions, and it differs from inclusivism in that it does not regard one tradition as having superior truth. A pluralist, who grants truth-value to different religious systems, will necessarily be confronted with the problem of conflicting truth claims, and will have to address it in order to have a viable theory. However, not all pluralist theories are created equally, and we can distinguish between different categories of pluralism.

2.4.4.1. Weak vs. Strong Pluralism

Firstly, there is a difference between a weak pluralist theory and a strong pluralist theory. Victoria Harrison writes about the latter:

Theories that fall under this rubric consider all religions to have *prima facie* value in their own right. Each religion is regarded as a viable path to the religious goal. Moreover, each is thought to provide knowledge about the ultimate nature of reality. According to religious pluralists, then, we would never, in principle, be in a position to identify any one religion (Harrison, 2007, p. 198).

Scholars who present a weaker version, and who do not *prima facie* assume that all religions have value in their own right, be it in terms of knowledge or of an adequate salvific path, will have to present a criterion with which to decide between religions that have such value, and religions that do not. In other words, they believe that religions can be graded and compared according to a standard. Whether a pluralist will choose a strong or weak version will therefore depend in part on whether he or she believes that religious traditions can be graded or not. Although grading religions

⁷⁰ Many scholars have suggested (some form of) a pluralist theory such as Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Raimundo Panikkar and, perhaps most notably, John Hick. For a more comprehensive list, see A. Kyongsuk Min, 1997, pp. 587-588.

has the advantage that it avoids relativism, there is also a danger here, as when a pluralist theorist uses a question-begging criterion, i.e., the pluralist selects only those religions that are, by his own definition, all on par while discarding the others. John Hick (2004), as I have shown, argues that we should see the religious traditions as responses to the Divine as a transcendent noumenal reality. If we do so, then we have an obvious problem in the fact that the traditions seem to make conflicting truth-claims, whilst each of them claims total allegiance to its own system (2000, p. 54). Hick tries to steer away from this problem by saying that we should not try to understand religious plurality “through these rival truth claims,” but rather “in terms of the claims of the various traditions to provide, or to be effective contexts of, salvation” (ibid., p. 54). His claim is that each of the different traditions provides a path of salvation and that together they do equally so. Hick then goes on to tell us which religions he has in mind by making a distinction between *pre-axial* religious traditions and *post-axial* traditions.⁷¹ He writes, “whereas pre-axial religion was (and is) centrally concerned to keep life going on an even keel, the post-axial traditions, originating or rooted in the “axial age” of the first millennium B.C.E. — principally Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam — are centrally concerned with a radical transformation of the human situation.” (Hick, 2000, p. 55) Having set apart only those religions that — by his definition — are “centrally concerned” with a radical transformation (i.e., his criterion), it then becomes much easier to show that the religious traditions are indeed all providing a path of salvation (which satisfies his pluralist requirement). In other words, he is already assuming what he is going to prove. Moreover, Hick’s criterion also has the effect of excluding what is arguably the biggest part of humanity’s religious history. His selection of religions can also be said to be biased in favour of the religions of the West (the three so-called Abrahamic faiths), and India (Hinduism, Buddhism). Religious systems that are left out are the contemporary indigenous religious systems of most of the other continents (i.e., tribal religions).

One might argue that a weak pluralist like Hick is, in a certain sense, more of an exclusivist than a pluralist. An exclusivist is only prepared to grant truth and salvific power to a specific set of beliefs, usually from one single tradition, and denies truth and salvific power to sets of belief that do not cohere with it. Similarly, Hick only grants salvific power to post-axial religions, as they are the only ones that fit his criterion.

⁷¹ The Axial Age is a term introduced by Karl Jaspers, who called it ‘Achsenzeit’, to denote the period between 800 and 200 BCE (Before Common Era). See Jaspers’s *The Origin and Goal of History*, 2014 (1953).

2.4.4.2. Identist vs. Differentialist Pluralism

Not all pluralist authors advocate or assume the existence of a single, ultimate reality with which all world religions are in touch. Some authors argue for different ultimates, and for different salvations, rather than for different versions of a single salvific path. Schmidt-Leukel refers to the latter as *polycentric pluralists*, and he mentions such proponents as John Cobb, David Griffin, Stephen Kaplan and Mark Heim (Schmidt-Leukel, 2008, p. 96f). David Griffin has made similar distinctions: he calls the former approach *identist pluralism* (i.e., pluralism in the style of John Hick), and the latter *differentialist* pluralism. Victoria Harrison, advocating an *internal pluralist* view, argues that, on this account, one need not to assume the existence of a single ultimate reality or a single religious goal: what constitutes ultimate reality, as well as religious salvation, is simply “conceptual-scheme dependent” (Harrison, 2006; 2008).

2.5. Conclusion

As I wrote in the Introduction to this chapter, I set out to formulate two different problems of religious diversity. Firstly, I argued that we can identify this problem as epistemic peer conflict on first-order worldview claims. I have shown that not just truth claims need to conflict, but that other types of claims, associated with Apostel’s worldview claims, can also conflict. Crucially, different types of claims will have different conditions for what makes them plausible or acceptable to us. I have also hinted at the role of criteria in deciding what is comparatively more acceptable. I will develop that concern in chapters 5 and 6. From this follows that conditions for acceptability (i.e., plausibility) are an important topic for worldview analysis as *structural analysis*, while the topic of criteria of acceptability will be an important topic for worldview analysis as comparative analysis. Secondly, I have argued that we can also discuss the problem of religious diversity as a choice between epistemic stances where each specific stance aims to offer a second-order solution to the first-order conflict. While this chapter was purely analytical, the remainder of my dissertation will be therapeutic, that is, offer solutions to both problems. Firstly, on the matter of the second-order stances, I will offer a specific solution that consists of what we can call a fifth stance, namely Orientational Pluralism. Secondly, on the matter of first-order conflict, I will not so much offer a solution to the problem as such, but rather strategies with which to solve such problems. This is due to the nature of the first-order problem, where each practical conflict between claims presents its own challenge. Given that my dissertation is meta-philosophical in nature, I will refrain from looking at particular case-studies.

3. Habermas and Validity Claims

3.1. Introduction

In the present chapter I turn to the oeuvre of Jürgen Habermas and his work on validity claims. Particularly in his seminal work *The Theory of Communicative Action* (TOCA; 1984) Habermas aimed to explicate a novel theory of meaning based on a reconstruction of the general structures of speech acts, by showing how speech acts exhibit at least three different formal-pragmatic structures. Employing these structures as a *palimpsest*, Habermas subsequently build up a *cognitive architecture*, which culminated in an exposition of three different types of validity claims, viz., second-order claims that determine what counts as evidence for or against a particular first-order claim.

3.2. Speech Act Theory

Due to the wide range of influences on his work, I consider Jürgen Habermas to be a *philosophical bricoleur par excellence*. Of the many schools of thought that influenced his theory of communicative action, Speech Act Theory deserves specific mention.⁷² From the work of J. L. Austin (1962) and John Searle (1969), Habermas borrowed the idea that the *speech act* (Ger.: Sprechhandlung) constitutes *the elementary unit of linguistic communication*. Searle wrote that a speech act is “not a symbol, word, or sentence,” but rather “the production or issuance of a sentence token under certain conditions (Searle, 1969, p. 16).⁷³ Central to this is the idea that every time we perform a *locutionary act* — i.e. the actual utterance and inherent meaning — we also simultaneously perform an *illocutionary act*.⁷⁴ Speech acts, in their deeps structure, exhibit a “double structure”: they carry both *locutionary meaning* (i.e., propositional content) and *illocutionary force*. Thus, every speech act consists of two sentences, viz., (1) a dominating or performative sentence with illocutionary force,

⁷² Another influence was American Pragmatism. Habermas was introduced to Pragmatism by Karl-Otto Apel (see Cooke, 2011, p. 290), in particular to such authors as John Dewey, Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, and others. For a comprehensive and authoritative survey of the field of Pragmatism, see *A Companion to Pragmatism* (Shook and Margolis, 2006). Note that it is Pragmatism that brought Habermas into the purview of Nicholas Rescher.

⁷³ Owen Eriksson, in his comparative article on speech act theory in Searle and Habermas, unfortunately refers to Austin's second edition of *How to do things with words*, which was only published in 1976. By that time, however, Habermas had already published his theory on formal pragmatics. Moreover, Austin's research dates back to as early as the 1940's (see also Duranti, 1997, p. 219).

⁷⁴ This led Austin to conclude that in saying something we always also do something (Austin, 1962, p. 98).

and (2) a dependent sentence with propositional content.⁷⁵ The performative sentence establishes (a) the *mode of communication* between a speaker and a hearer, as well as (b) the *pragmatic situation* of the dependent sentence. The performative sentence refers to the power to bring about the type of relationship intended by the speaker: this is expressed as an *illocutionary force*. On the other hand, the dependent sentence — generally consisting of an identifying (i.e., referring) phrase and a predicate phrase — establishes the connection of the sentence with *the world*, seen here specifically as *the external world of objects and events*.⁷⁶ This double structure is what determines ordinary communication: both speaker and hearer communicate simultaneously at two different levels, viz., (a) the level of sensory experiences and states-of-affairs, and (b) the level of intersubjectivity. On the level of intersubjectivity, both parties establish a *mutual relationship*, which permits them to come to a *mutual understanding* with one another — *Verständigung*. This relationship is an *intersubjective* relationship precisely because it's a relationship between meaning producing subjects. However, this understanding is but a process on it's way to the real purpose of communicative actions, that is, to reach agreement and consensus. On the level of objective "states of affairs," both parties communicate about content from the objective world (SDUP, p. 157; Fultner, 2014, p. 58).

While the double structure suggests that two types of sentences will always be present in every speech act, these will usually only be present as *deep or implicit structures*. For instance, truth claims, normally associated with constative speech acts (i.e., speech acts which offer propositional content), are presupposed for all types of speech acts. We can however bring those deep structures to the surface by making them explicit. Thus, we can explicate constative speech acts, as well as performative speech acts. Since non-constative speech acts still have propositional content, this content can be made explicit by transforming the propositional content into an assertion. Thus, the dependent sentence of propositional content becomes a proposition on its own, which is capable

⁷⁵ Habermas borrowed the term deep structure from American linguist Noam Chomsky. Chomsky's research (*Aspects of a Theory of Syntax*, 1965) dealt with the deep structures of linguistic competence, that is with those set of rules that agents must use to use language competently. Andrew Edgar, writing on Habermas, states: "The 'deep grammar' to which Chomsky refers may therefore be understood as a set of rules that competent speakers are able to follow, albeit without the capacity to bring to consciousness what those rules are" (2005, p. 140). Habermas is interested in the deep structures not just of linguistic competence, but also of communicative competence, where communication is seen to involve more than the correct use of language. On a biographical note, in 1966 Habermas became co-editor of a series of German translation of English works, which, notably, included Chomsky's *Aspects*, as well as Searle's *Speech Acts* (Specter, 2011, p. 88).

⁷⁶ Habermas differentiates between different types of worlds: an objective world, a subjective world, and finally an intersubjective one. The objective world is object of the dependent locutionary sentence, while the intersubjective world is constituted by the illocutionary force of communication. The butt of some critiques (Steinhoff, 2009; Heath, 2013) will be that the intersubjective world can be referenced in terms of propositional content, thereby rendering it superfluous.

of explicitly claiming truth.⁷⁷ However, in interactive speech (e.g., promises, advise, prohibitions, prescriptions) the speaker implies a different validity claim than truth. In the utterances: “I assert (to you) that *p*,” “I promise (you) that *p*,” “I command (you) that *p*,” the same propositional content *p* appears, but with a varying illocutionary force. In the case of “I promise (you) that *p*,” the speaker establishes a relationship with the hearer that is characteristic of a promise. For the speech act to be successful interactively, it must be in accordance with existing norms, implying at least “factual recognition of the claim that these norms legitimately exist” (SDUP, p. 158). In the same way that emphasis is laid on truth claims in cognitive language use, emphasis is laid here on the validity of the normative background of beliefs. Habermas writes:

The illocutionary force of a speech act, which brings about an interpersonal relationship between consensually interacting participants, arises from the binding force of acknowledged norms of action; to the extent that a speech act is part of consensual interaction it actualises an already established value-pattern. The validity of a normative background of institutions, roles, socioculturally accepted forms of life and so on, is always already presupposed. This is in no way limited only to institutional speech acts which...directly fulfil norms of action (SDUP, p. 158).

The illocutionary force of a speech act establishes *a relationship between subjects* — or between a subject and his community — that actualises existing value patterns and norms of action. Thus, in a similar way that we can explicate the locutionary content of a non-constative speech act, we can also explicate the illocutionary content of constative or declarative speech acts by referring to the normative background, that is, those value statements and norms of action. He adds:

But even assertions, reports, explanations, etc. also give rise to interpersonal relationships which, in order to arise at all, must merge with established value-patterns; this means that they must accord to an existing normative background... So through the illocutionary force of speech acts, the normative validity claim — i.e. rightness or legitimacy — is just as universally built into the structures of speech as is the truth claim (SDUP, p. 158).

⁷⁷ According to Habermas, the claim to truth is but one type of *validity claim* that is built into speech as an inherent structural feature (SDUP, p. 158).

The validity claim associated with normative or interactive speech is therefore not truth but rightness. While a truth claim is judged as *true or false*, a normative claim is judged as *right or wrong*. This differentiation in validity claims reserves the connotation of truth for use in propositional speech only. However, it is indeed possible, in pre-reflective or pre-philosophical language, to say that something is true when it is right: to say that a normative claim is true, is to say it is right.

3.3. Relations to Reality

We could argue that the term double structure is partly misleading. For instance, Austin identified not a double but a triple structure of *locution*, *illocution*, and *perlocution*. Hence what has been left out so far is the third aspect of *perlocution*: the psychological or subjective consequences of a speech act. Consequently, Habermas claims that it is not just illocutionary force and propositional content that are universally present in speech acts: equally present is a claim to subjective sincerity.⁷⁸ In other words, Habermas does not just posit the idea of a "double structure," but also adds a third element. Following the work of Karl Bühler on *Sprachtheorie* (1934) — i.e., Speech Theory —, Habermas (1979, p. 41-44) claims that three different relations to reality accrue to sentences (Ger.: *Realitätsbezüge*).⁷⁹ The act of uttering by the speaker situates the sentence in relation to three types of reality:

- (1) the external reality;
- (2) the normative reality of society;
- (3) the inner reality of the speaker;

Taken together, speech acts can carry *three different types effects* — locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary — which relate the speech act to the external reality, the normative reality of our society or community, and the inner reality of the speaker. I have previously argued that these three relationships are already inherent within our understanding of the worldview concept. In particular, they were already present in Dilthey's search for the *Zusammenhang* or connectedness between objective thought, interpretive understanding of others, and self-reflection. These three relationships are also expressed in John Valk's definition of a worldview who writes that by means of a worldview we come to "understand ourselves, others, and the world in which we live" (see *supra*).

⁷⁸ As well as to the (grammatical) correctness of the linguistic structures so that what has been said can be understood or comprehended by the hearer. This is a fourth validity claim, although Habermas usually keeps to the first three.

⁷⁹ See TOCA, p. 275.

3.4. Habermas's Conceptual Architecture

On the basis of this triple structure of relationships, Habermas sets up an elaborate conceptual architecture. I will understand this architecture as describing at least four different, but interrelated *triadic models*, namely, an (1) ontological, (2) epistemological, (3) functional-linguistic, and (4) formal-pragmatic model.⁸⁰ Since the same structure reoccurs within the different models, the three relationships described *supra* will serve as a *palimpsest* for the whole of the conceptual architecture.

3.4.1. The Ontological Model

Habermas derives what I call an ontological model from the three types of relationships. This model is ontological since it deals with the question "what exists?"⁸¹ Following the palimpsest, Habermas (TOCA, p. 100) distinguishes between:

- (1) an objective world,
- (2) a social world
- (3) a subjective world.⁸²

The objective world (1) denotes the world of objects and events. This is the empirical or "outer" world, and can be simply referred to as "the" world. The social world (2) denotes the social lifeworld of shared values, norms, roles, and rules. This refers to the totality of interpersonal relationships that are currently accepted as legitimate or right, namely, "our" world. Finally, the subjective world (3) denotes the speaker's own of intentional experiences, and refers to the totality of lived experiences to which the speaker S has private or privileged access: "my" world. Thus the speaker S, or subject, communicates in three different ways: she communicates (1) objective data, about states of affairs or events in the world, (2) from within the social norms of the lifeworld she finds herself in, and (3) in respect to her subjective intentions, and so on. The speaker can do so either implicitly, or explicitly. In the same vein as she can explicate propositional content about the objec-

⁸⁰ To be sure, these are my own distinctions, and Habermas never writes about them in this form. For instance, he might well object to my use of the word ontological for his "world model" (see *infra*). I understand a model to be a pattern that demonstrates structure. Thus, an ontological model, for instance, demonstrates the ontological structure of the world.

⁸¹ This question is intimately related to another question "what can I know?" Knowing that something exists is a requirement for stating that something exist. I cannot say: x exists, but I do not know it exists. For a further discussion of ontology, and how it relates to knowledge and truth, see *infra*.

⁸² I will understand the concept of 'world' here as delivering of a set of data (or 'givens'). This avoids using the term object indiscriminately.

tive world, or refer to the normative background, she can also explicate her subjective context.

Habermas's theory of three worlds was inspired by a similar world theory offered by Karl Popper.⁸³

Popper, in his article *Epistemology without a Knowing Subject* (1967), introduces a view of the universe (i.e., the world) that consists of three different, but interacting sub-universes (1967, p. 143).⁸⁴

He writes:

We may distinguish the following three worlds or universes: first the world of physical objects or physical states; secondly, the world of states of consciousness, or of mental states, or perhaps of behavioural dispositions to act; and thirdly, the world of objective contents of thought, especially the scientific and poetic thoughts and of works of art (1972, p. 106).

Popper spends most of his time on defending the third world: World 3 (W3). W3 refers to the products of the human mind "such as languages; tales and stories and religious myths; scientific conjectures or theories, and mathematical constructions; songs and symphonies; paintings and sculptures" (ibid., p. 106). Besides these cognitive products, W3 also includes physical objects such as "aeroplanes and airports and other feats of engineering," which are equally products of the human mind (i.e., aeroplanes are not natural or non-human objects).

Popper agrees that many objects that belong to W3 will also belong to World 1 (W1), the world of physical bodies. While an airplane starts as an idea or concept in World 2 — the real of personal experiences and ideas — it also effectively exists as a physical instance of such an idea. If we were to call W1 objective, and W2 subjective, then W3 (although a separate world for Popper) crosses lines with both. That is, objects from W3 transcend the mere subjective, and become either objective via physical incarnations, or quasi-objective (e.g., mathematical models). Popper gives the example of the Bible: W1 objects are the many different copies and editions of the one book that we call the Bible, which is a W3 object. In other words, the Bible as a W3 object does not exist in a

⁸³ In the 1960's, both Popper and Habermas were involved in the so-called 'Positivismusstreit' (positivist dispute) and were divided on the basis of irreconcilable differences. This turned on different interpretations of sociology, and as we will see, Habermas is mostly concerned with the sociological repercussions of Popper's three world theory. See also *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology* (Adorno, 1976). Jeremy Shearmur, former assistant to Popper, has argued that the differences between Popper and Habermas can be reconciled to some degree if we understand them as "shar[ing] a perspective drawn from the Kantian theme of *objectivity as intersubjectivity*" (1996, p. 165; italics mine).

⁸⁴ See also Popper's *Objective Knowledge* (1972). Arguably, his theory is perhaps best known from his Tanner lectures, delivered at The University of Michigan on April 7, 1978, entitled "*Three Worlds by Karl Popper - The Tanner Lecture on Human Values.*"

physical sense: only W1 bibles do. Thus, Popper concludes that most though not of all W3 objects will be embodied or physically realised via W1 physical objects (1972, p. 145).

Popper's world theory can be seen as an attempt to bring the subjective world into the objective world. This is contrary to the view Habermas develops since he insists that he does not posit the subjective and social world as "partial regions of one objective world" (TOCA, p. 77): both concepts of subjective and social worlds are merely "analogous" to the concept of an objective world. Habermas writes:

The lived experiences that S expresses in expressive speech acts (prototypically avowals and revelations) should no more be understood as a particular class of entities (or inner episodes) than should the norms that, through regulative speech acts (prototypically commands and promises), legitimate an interpersonal relationship established between S and H (TOCA, p. 77).

Habermas's ontological theory is an attempt to salvage both a subjective world and an intersubjective world from the dominating force of objectification via teleological and strategic action. Thus, Habermas can be understood as being primarily concerned with *methodology*, and with the preservation of different types of methodology. As a sociologist, Habermas witnessed the gap between two different types of sociological research. The first type was based on the work of August Comte (1798-1857) and his positivist followers, who argued that social phenomena could be subjected to observable natural laws. This view adopted an *external or objective perspective* on the production of social order, seeing it as a quasi-natural process that could be observed in its empirical regularities, and that could be explained by means of "nomological or nomothetic hypotheses" (Cooke, 2011, p. 289). The second type of sociological methodology was based on the work of Dilthey, who argued for an interpretive and hermeneutic approach to social phenomena. This view adopted an internal or subjective perspective on the production of social order, viewing it as a "meaningfully structured reality for social agents that should be interpreted in terms of intentional actions" (Cooke, 2011, p. 289). Intention for Dilthey, understood as subjective meaning, was a "sociological primitive" and an irreducible element of sociological analysis (ibid., p. 290).

From this follows that, since human action has an intentional or subjective component, it is therefore always possible to ask what the actors (or agents) intended or meant. We do not just have to rely on the *observation of behaviour*. Thus the sociological methodology shifted from being

nomological — or we could even say *monological* — to *dialogical*, that is, to dialogue between a speaker and a hearer whereby the hearer has the ability to listen to and *question* the speaker.

Here then is an important difference between the *data* of the different epistemic or *object domains*. On my view, a *datum* will be anything "given" in each of the different worlds. Thus, I regard the different worlds in Habermas's ontological model as (object) domains, i.e. areas of experience that provide us with data. The crux is that we can distinguish between different data, and we can do so by pointing them to the right domain. For instance, intersubjective data — belonging to an intersubjective object domain — should not be "mined" or accessed by means of objective methodologies, but rather through the intersubjective methodology of dialogue, aimed at mutual understanding. Objective data, on the other hand, can be gathered using scientific methods taken from the natural sciences. To the extent that social phenomena have objective aspects these methods are useful to arrive at quantitative data. However, as Dilthey's hermeneutic approach shows, social actors cannot just be treated as objects: they are also subjects, or *persons*. Meaning as such is not present in the objective world, but only in the subjective world. However, a further feature is that it can be intersubjectively shared, between different subjects, through communicative actions that establish normative frameworks.

Besides being an heir to Dilthey's project, Habermas's ontology must also be seen as a response to Kantian ontology. The latter was itself a product of a "turn to the subject," going beyond Cartesian metaphysics, which provided a basal distinction between two differing realities, namely subject and object (Azeri, 2010, p. 269). This distinction, in essence, was an *epistemological one*: the subject is known from within, by the subject, while the objective world is known externally, through or by way of the subject. Objective knowledge on the Cartesian view was constituted by a correspondence between the objective world and a subjective representation of it. However, Kant admitted that subjective reality requires objective reality for being real, viz., that subjectivity is impossible without objectivity (Azeri, 2010, p. 269). However, he also understood that objectivity is equally constituted by the knowing self. This led Kant to some novel distinctions. Firstly, the distinction between a *phenomenal aspect* of outer reality, that is outer reality as it appears to an epistemological subject, and a *noumenal reality*, to be found outside the boundaries of subjective experience. Secondly, the distinction between an empirical self and transcendental self as "two distinct modes or forms of subject" (Azeri, p. 271). Habermas writes that, here, "the subject relates to itself at the same time as it knows its objects [and thusly] encounters itself in the double position of being both a single empirical entity in the world and as the transcendental subject facing the world as a whole" (Habermas, 1991, p. 218). That is, the transcendental subject relates to itself as the con-

sciousness of the existence of the empirical self. The latter, perceiving the world of objects, becomes object to itself. Rather than merely adopting the two-fold subject-object classification, Habermas argued for a three-fold classification, viz., adding the relationship between subjects, established by illocutionary acts, thereby transcending Kantian ontology. Thus, Habermas critically wrote:

Between these two [sic] positionings of the subject there is no space left for the symbolically prestructured, linguistically constituted domains of culture, society and socialised individuals... What is constitutive [i.e., for reaching understanding about the world] is the relation of an ego to an alter ego, of simultaneous and equal origin. Between the two, the space opens up for an intersubjectively shared life world; communicating parties are situated within the horizons of this lifeworld when they refer to objects or states of affairs in the world (Habermas, 1991, p. 218).

The upshot of this was, according to Barbara Fultern, the English translator of Habermas's *Truth and Justification* (2003), that Kant's necessary subjective conditions of objective experience were transformed and given the "quasi-transcendental" role of intersubjective conditions of linguistic interpretation and communication (Habermas, 2003, p. xii). Thus Habermas's Kantian pragmatism offered an "intersubjectivist theoretical framework that avoid[ed] the pitfalls of both objectivism and subjectivism" (Habermas, *ibid.*, p. viii).

This idea, that the subjective and social world are merely analogous to the objective world, has been criticised by Uwe Steinhoff, author of *The Philosophy of Jürgen Habermas* (2009).⁸⁵ Steinhoff argues that if the three worlds are indeed different worlds we could "assume that the objects of one world could hardly have an impact on objects of the other" (2009, p. 44). This is however counterfactual, and Steinhoff presents us with two such examples.

Firstly, with chemical drugs (i.e., objects) we can influence feelings and subjective states. Hence, the objective world impacts the subjective world. Secondly, the intersubjective world of norms can influence the objective world, as when, for example, the physical movement of cars is regulated by the norms of traffic rules. This leads Steinhoff to conclude that a "legal norm is just as much a part of the objective world as a stone and an emotional impulse" (*ibid.*, p. 44).

⁸⁵ Habermas similarly calls the validity claims of normative rightness and subjective truthfulness truth-analogous. This idea as well has been criticised by Joseph Heath (2001).

Presumably, we can add to Steinhoff's critique some edifying examples of the other relationships. For instance, my subjective feelings set the intention for particular changes to the objective world: e.g. I am angry with my neighbour and set out to kill him. Thus, the subjective world influences the objective world. Similarly, the objective world sets constraints to, for instance, what kind of traffic rules we can normatively decide upon.

Thus the argument runs that, if the objective world can influence the two other worlds, and they in turn can influence the objective world, then surely these three worlds should be seen as different sectors of the same world. Moreover, Steinhoff extends his critique by adding that we can equally state true or false propositions about the existence of personal feelings and social norms, as we can about physical objects. Given that Habermas defines the objective world as "the correlate of the totality of true propositions" (also quoted in Steinhoff, 2009, p. 44), this would imply that personal feelings and social norms equally belong to the objective world.

In response to Steinhoff, we do not need to argue that, because the data from the subjective and social world are *different* from those of the objective world — for instance, feelings are qualitatively different from the neurological processes that support them — they therefore must be solely *non-objective*. By insisting that those two worlds are analogous to the objective world, Habermas neither denies that they aren't part of the objective world, nor affirms that there are indeed three fully independent and differing worlds. As I have made clear, Habermas does not at all deny that we can make *propositional statements* about all three worlds. One way out is that we could grant that, *ontologically*, there is only one world, but that *epistemologically* there are three different worlds. That is, when it comes to investigating that one objective reality there are in fact three distinct ways of doing so. These thruways are provided for by Habermas's epistemological model. On such a view, Habermas's epistemological model would take primacy over the ontological model (see *infra*).

3.4.2. The Epistemological Model

Habermas also derives from his palimpsest an epistemological model ("how can I know it"). According to this model, the subject engages with each of the three different "worlds" by means of three different basic attitudes, i.e., an objectivating attitude, a norm-conformative attitude, and an expressive attitude. I call this model epistemological because it describes how subjects relate to — and come to know — each of the different object domains (i.e., each of the three different types of "world"). For instance, Peter Checkland reminds us of the Kantian idea "that we have no access to what the world is, to ontology, [but] only to descriptions of the world (some of which may survive

severe tests), that is to say, to epistemology" (1983, p. 671; in part also quoted in Mingers, 2006, p. 6). Thus, since epistemology drives ontology — in the sense that *how* we know sets the conditions for *what* we know —, Habermas's ontological model should be understood in light of the epistemological one.⁸⁶

Firstly, the *objectivating attitude* is the attitude taken by a third-person observer. It allows us to speak of an "it" (and "its"). This epistemological attitude takes any datum, from any of the specific domains (i.e., subjective, intersubjective, and objective data), and turns it into an "it." For instance, one can also take an objective attitude towards the social world. Habermas writes:

To be sure, from the objectivating point of view of the sociologist-observer there “really” are normative expectations, practices, habits, institutions, and regulations of all sorts “in the world” in addition to physical things and mental states (McCarthy, Rehg, et al., 2001, p. 31).

That is, seen from the third-person or analytical perspective of the sociologist, these data appear to be objective. He writes:

In normatively regulated actions the actor, entering into an interpersonal [i.e., intersubjective] relation, takes up a relation to something in the social world. An actor's behaviour is subjectively "right" (in the sense of normative rightness) if he sincerely believes himself to be following an existing norm of action; his behaviour is objectively right if the norm in question is in fact regarded as justified among those to whom it applies (TOCA, p. 104).

Secondly, the *norm-conformative attitude* is the attitude taken by a second-person subject, permitting us to speak of a "you" (and a “we”). The illocutionary force behind the communication between subjects creates a normative background of a "culturally ingrained pre-understanding" against which speech acts are to be held (TOCA, p. 100). We should point out here that this shared background will have a certain "range." In other words, there will equally be a pre-understanding *about*

⁸⁶ Peter Checkland reminds us "that we have no access to what the world is, to ontology, [but] only to descriptions of the world (some of which may survive severe tests), that is to say, to epistemology" (1983, p. 671; in part also quoted in Mingers, 2006, p. 6). On the basis of this Kantian idea, Checkland concludes that we should “never say of something in the world that it is x, but rather that it may be described as x,” which he admits would be a tedious undertaking (ibidem, p. 671).

the kind of community to which these rules apply. For instance, a Catholic Christian will understand how Catholic Christian rules apply to him and to his community of peers.

Finally, the *expressive attitude* is the attitude taken by a first-person subject, or simply "I," reporting on "subjective experiences" (TOCA, p. 99). Again, similar to the example of the objective attitude, we can take an expressive attitude towards the three different worlds.

To conclude, if indeed epistemology drives ontology, and if we can distinguish three radically different epistemologies for investigating ourselves, others, and the world, then it would not be farfetched to conclude that, in effect, we also end up with a tripartite ontology. As epistemological beings we have no other way to approach the world than through our inherent capacities: even if, objectively seen, there is only one world, this knowledge itself is only based on one out of three functions of the human being.

3.4.3. The Formal-Pragmatic Model

Applying the three basic attitudes to the three worlds — i.e. combining the epistemological model with the ontological one — Habermas ends up with nine so-called *formal-pragmatic relations* (TOCA, p. 237). I will therefore call this model *formal-pragmatic*.

Worlds	1. <i>Objective</i>	2. <i>Social</i>	3. <i>Subjective</i>
Basic Attitudes			
1. <i>Objectivating</i>	Cognitive-Instrumental Relation	Cognitive-Strategic Relation	Objectivistic Relation to self
2. <i>Norm-Conformative</i>	Moral-aesthetic relation to a non-objectivated environment	Obligatory relation	Censorious relation to self
3. <i>Expressive</i>		Presentation of self	Sensual-spontaneous relation to self

Table 2: The Formal-Pragmatic Model.

To easily represent these nine relationships, I suggest we make use of a *formal shorthand*: a formula S R O, where S represents the subject or speaker, R establishes the relation with reality, and O denotes the object domain or world. Applying the shorthand, we can differentiate between three types of relationship (R), namely a *cognitive* relationship (cog), a *norm-confirmative* relationship (norm),

and an *expressive* relationship (exp). We then derive the following notations: R_{cog} , R_{norm} , and R_{exp} .⁸⁷ Similarly, we can make subdivisions in the object domains, such as O_{sub} , O_{soc} , and O_{obj} , which represent the object domains of, respectively, the subjective world (sub), the social world (soc), and the objective world (obj). Our new notation allows for the following presentation of the formal-pragmatic model:

Basic Attitudes	Objective World	Intersubjective World	Subjective World
Cognitive	$S R_{\text{cog}} O_{\text{obj}}$	$S R_{\text{cog}} O_{\text{soc}}$	$S R_{\text{cog}} O_{\text{subj}}$
Normative	$S R_{\text{norm}} O_{\text{obj}}$	$S R_{\text{norm}} O_{\text{soc}}$	$S R_{\text{norm}} O_{\text{subj}}$
Expressive	$S R_{\text{exp}} O_{\text{obj}}$	$S R_{\text{exp}} O_{\text{soc}}$	$S R_{\text{exp}} O_{\text{subj}}$

Table 3: The Formal-Pragmatic Model in shorthand.

Habermas does not systematically examine each of the different formal-pragmatic relations in TOCA. Instead he writes: “I shall content myself with intuitive indications of characteristic forms of expression, which can serve as illustrations” (TOCA, p. 236).⁸⁸

$S R_{\text{cog}} O_{\text{obj}}$: The cognitive-instrumental relation is characterised by “assertions, instrumental actions, observations, etc” (TCA, p. 236). It is the result of an objective or third-person attitude *towards the outer world*. Hence, this will generate *descriptive* beliefs about the world. Such descriptions are also action-oriented: they allow us to take action in the world, and transform the world (hence instrumental).

$S R_{\text{cog}} O_{\text{soc}}$: The cognitive-strategic relation is exemplified by “social actions” of the purposive-rational type. In other words, S treats the actors within the social system as other objects, in analogy to the objects of the objective world. From this follows that beliefs generated by this relationship will reflect this attitude. Although the cognitive-strategic relation is provided for by the epistemological model, and can be empirically verified, it is clear that this type of relationship denies the essence of the intersubjective domain. While the objective world is best engaged through nomological

⁸⁷ Alternatively, we could also use the shorthand 1-p for first-person claims, 2-p for second-person claims, and 3-p for third-person claims.

⁸⁸ I have listed these illustrations in Addendum A to my dissertation, and I shall not further discuss them here.

or monological methods, the intersubjective world is best engaged through dialogical methods (see *supra*).

S R_{cog} O_{subj}: An objectivistic relationship to one's self is "illustrated by certain theories; for instance, of empiricist psychology or utilitarian ethics" (ibid., p. 236). I would suggest — and I will not thoroughly belabour the point — that certain religious practices will foster an objective attitude towards one self in order to separate one's identity from self-absorbed egoic structures of consciousness.

S R_{norm} O_{obj}: Habermas writes: "The phenomena that exemplify a moral-practical, a 'fraternal' relationship with nature are the least clear, if one does not wish to have recourse to mystically inspired traditions or to taboos (such as vegetarian aversions), to the anthropomorphising treatment of animals, and so on" (ibid., p. 236).

S R_{norm} O_{soc}: The obligatory relation is illustrated by normatively regulated actions.

S R_{norm} O_{subj}: A censorious relationship to one's self can be illustrated by superego phenomena such as guilt feelings, as well as by defense reactions.

S R_{exp} O_{obj}: An aesthetic relation to a non-objectivated environment is exemplified by works of art, phenomena of style in general, but also by theories, for example, in which a morphological way of looking at nature finds expression.

S R_{exp} O_{soc}: The relationship to the self is exemplified by social actions of the dramaturgical or self-presenting type.

S R_{exp} O_{subj}: A sensuous-spontaneous relationship to one's self can be found in "affective expressions, libidinal stirrings, creative performances, etc."

3.4.4. The Communicative Model

Habermas also argues that speech itself, i.e., language as a communicative medium, serves three different functions: i.e., a *representative*, *expressive*, and *interactive* function. He states that these tie in with "three principal lines of research," which he considers crucial to his conception of universal

pragmatics.⁸⁹ The representative function of language (1) serves to represent states of affairs (or something the speaker encounters in 'the' world). This type of research (i.e., objective research) attempts “an analysis of the universal and necessary (that is, not context-specific and variable) conditions for making statements about “the” world” (McCarthy, 1985, p. 281). The ability or competence to use language *representatively* is seen as a precondition for the developmental ability to distinguish between a public world (Ger.: *Sein*; being, that which really is), and a private world (Ger.: *Schein*; illusion, that which merely seems to be). The latter ability — and the distinction therein — is therefore fundamental to the definition of any speech situation (McCarthy, *ibid.*, p. 281). From this we can infer that a close relationship exists between the developmental capacities of the human being, and the functions of speech: linguistic competence is a prerequisite for cognitive capacity.

The expressive function (2) serves to express the intentions (or subjective experiences) of the speaker and subject. This type of research involves “an analysis of the universal and necessary conditions for expressing the intentional experiences of one’s “own” world, of transparently representing one’s on subjectivity”. Here, (what I call) *expressive competence*, or the competence to use language expressively, is seen as “a precondition of the ability to make a second distinction that is fundamental to the definition of any speech situation: the distinction between the individuated self (Ger.: *Wesen*; essence) and the various utterances, expressions and actions in which it appears (Ger.: *Erscheinung*; appearance)” (McCarthy, *ibid.*, p. 281).⁹⁰

The interactive function (3) serves to establish relations (of mutual understanding) with an addressee. Lastly, this type of research involves “an analysis of the universal and necessary condition for linguistically establishing the interpersonal relations that constitute “our” world, a shared life-world based on the reciprocity of expectations” (McCarthy, *ibid.*, p. 281). Similarly, (what I call) *interactive competence*, or the competence to use language interactively, is seen as “a precondition of the ability to mark a third distinction fundamental to the definition of any speech situation: the distinction between what is (*Sein*) and what ought to be (*Sollen*)” (McCarthy, *ibid.*).

It is clear that these pragmatic functions of speech reflect the different relations to reality, and, by extension, the formal-pragmatic relations discussed earlier. According to Habermas, these

⁸⁹ Note that the three functions correspond to our by now familiar categories of subjective, objective, and intersubjective functions.

⁹⁰ Arguably, the capacity to make this distinction, and then express it through speech, is also a cognitive function, suggesting that also the second function of speech is premised on cognitive capacities. We can infer from this that communicative action, in general, is *cognitively involved*. This warrants a distinction between *experience* proper, and the *expression of an experience*. We can however go both ways: we can either give primacy to non-reflected experience, or argue that all experience *that makes a difference* is also always reflected experience. A linguistically oriented theory would undoubtedly favour the latter interpretation.

three functions intersect and are focused in linguistic expressions. Hence the idea that the three functions are simultaneously present in speech acts. He writes:

Three rays of meaning intersect and are focused in linguistic expressions. What the speaker wants to say with the expression is connected with what is literally said in it, as well as with the action that what is said should be understood as. There arises a threefold relationship between the meaning of a linguistic expression and what is intended or meant (*Gemeinten*) by it, what is said in it, and the way it is used in the speech act. Normally, the linguistic meaning is not exhausted by any one of these three relations (Habermas, 1992, p. 58).

Habermas further notes that each of the pragmatic functions of speech have been intuited by three different theories that have dominated the discourse on meaning in the past: namely, (a) intentional-istic semantics, (b) formal semantics, and the (c) use-theory of meaning. However, he credits Bühler for bringing these three intuitions together in a threefold functional scheme (*ibid.*, p. 57). Thus, Habermas writes:

Each of the three competing theories of meaning takes up exactly one aspect of the process of achieving mutual understanding of an utterance. They seek to explicate the meaning of a linguistic expression either from the perspective of what is meant (as intended meaning), or from the perspective of what is said (literal meaning), or from the perspective of use (as utterance meaning) (Habermas, 1992, p. 64).

Each theory claimed that it could explain the *comprehensibility* of linguistic expressions through just one of these relations, which is why, in Habermas view, they were inherently flawed. In other words, the problem was not so much with what each theory presented, as each contained a kernel of truth, but rather with their separate insistences that their truth was the whole truth. For this reason, Habermas designed his theory of meaning to take into account a more complete or *integral* picture.

3.5. Validity Claims

Habermas's cognitive architecture finds its culmination in his concept of *validity claims*. He states that in uttering a sentence we necessarily issue certain claims concerning the validity of what we are saying. These validity claims can be explicated in terms of the previous models:

- (1) we make claims about the truth of what we say in relation to the objective world (i.e., objective truth);
- (2) we make claims about the legitimacy of our speech acts in relation to the shared values and norms of our social life world (i.e., normative or intersubjective rightness);
- (3) we make claims about our sincerity concerning our own intentions and feelings (i.e., subjective truthfulness).
- (4) in addition — *but not exhaustively so* — we make claims that what we say is comprehensible (i.e., that we are uttering a grammatically well-formed sentence).

Thus in uttering a sentence, the speaker claims that what he states is *true* (or, if no statement is made, that the existential presuppositions of his utterance's propositional content are fulfilled); that his manifest expression of intentions is *truthful* (or veracious; Ger.: *wahrhaftig*); and that his utterance (or speech act) itself is *right* or appropriate (Ger.: *richtig/angemessen*) in relation to a recognised normative context (or that the normative context it satisfies is itself legitimate). Thus, every speech act, at least implicitly, claims validity of four different types: (1) truth, (2) truthfulness, (3) rightness, and (4) comprehensibility. Of these four, the claim to comprehensibility is the only one that is “language-immanent,” as the other claims place the speaker's utterance in relation to “extra-linguistic orders of reality,” i.e. different worlds or object domains (McCarthy, 1984, pp. 280-282).⁹¹

Making validity claims “amounts to incurring a commitment to provide reasons for the acceptability of the utterance” (Heath, 1998, p. 23). For Habermas, it is the giving of reasons — i.e., reasons-for and reasons-against — that ultimately characterises the rationality of our speech acts: it is the central condition for reaching (mutual) understanding that is free of coercion. McCarthy also explains that the key the notion of mutual understanding is this possibility of “using reasons or grounds to gain intersubjective recognition for criticisable validity claims” (McCarthy, 1984, p. xx; *italics his*). In short, we understand a speech act *if we know what makes it acceptable* (Honneth, 1992). This demand for reasons — or the normative or intersubjective claim of rationality — is at the core of Habermas's so-called “post-metaphysical project.” This project aims to replace the centrality of ontological claims with the demand for reasons.

⁹¹ McCarthy reminds us that propositional content need not actually be asserted in every speech act. In non-constative speech acts, propositional content is merely “mentioned”. With this unasserted proposition, the speaker still claims that existential presuppositions are fulfilled. If need be, we can subsequently transform an unasserted or mentioned proposition into an asserted proposition by making it the propositional content of a (follow-up) constative speech act.

Communicative rationality is only possible if the communicating actors are able to make distinctions between those three validity claims.⁹² Understanding of the speech act requires from the hearer that he or she has knowledge of “the type of reasons that could be offered in support of it” (Heath, *ibid.*, p. 23). Each of the different validity claims can be contested (i.e., in epistemic peer conflict), and subsequently defended, by giving good reasons in argumentation. Each dimension comes with its own modes of investigation, which present “possibilities of hypothetically examining the truth of statements, the rightness of actions and norms, or the authenticity of expressions” (McCarthy, 1984, xiii). Thus the hearer-as-critic can reject a claim (or speech act) from the speaker by taking issue with at least one of these validity claims, and issuing a ‘no’. This ‘no’ from the critic expresses the claim that the original utterance is not in agreement with either “*our* world of legitimately ordered interpersonal relations, or with *the* world of existing states of affairs, or with *the speaker’s own* world of subjective” (Habermas, TOCA, p. 308; italics his). The critic can then qualify his or her ‘no’ by saying that the utterance is, respectively, wrong (i.e., normatively wrong), untrue, or insincere. Similarly, the speaker can try to defend his speech act by giving reasons that confirm his ‘yes’, and confirm that the claim is either right, true, or sincere. Thus Habermas writes:

With their illocutionary acts, speaker and hearer raise validity claims and solicit their recognition. But this recognition need not follow irrationally, because the validity claims have a cognitive character and can be tested.... In the final analysis, the speaker can have an illocutionary effect on the hearer (and vice versa) because the speech-act-typical obligations are tied to cognitively testable validity claims that is, because the reciprocal bonds have a rational basis. The engaged speaker normally connects the specific sense in which he wants to take up an interpersonal relation with a thematically stresses validity claim (Habermas, 1979, p. 63).

Habermas mentions that the validity claims have a “cognitive character,” and that they can therefore be tested. From this follows, that not just the propositional content of an utterance can be tested, but that we can also test whether the speaker is speaking truthfully, or whether what he or she says fits the

⁹² Habermas distinguishes between more than these three validity claims; however, he consistently singles out these three validity claims as the necessary conditions for communicatively achieved agreement, i.e. for communicative action. Habermas states: “Communicatively achieved agreement is measured against exactly three criticisable validity claims” (TOCA, p. 308). Thus, in strategic action, we do not find communicative rationality, but rather “instrumental rationality” (*ibid.*, p. 14).

normative context. That is, we can test both since both exhibit a cognitive character. If this is correct, then each of the different claims can be redeemed using our cognitive and objectifying capacity (or third person perspective), and we can make secondary propositions that claim truth. This would allow me to state: “It is true that I speak truthfully when I state *p*.” In this case, the truth claim is not attached to the proposition *that p*, but to the claim that I speak truthfully.

However, crucially, the sincerity of my claims can only be measured against *conditions of subjective truthfulness*, and not against the *conditions of objective truth*. Otherwise we are incurring a performative contradiction. In other words, whether or not an utterance fulfils its representational function will be measured against truth conditions; whether or not a speech act fulfils its expressive function will be measured against conditions of subjective truthfulness; whether or not a speech act fulfils its interactive function will be measured against normative rightness. If indeed those conditions are fulfilled, then the inherent validity claims of the speech act will be redeemed. If the conditions for all three validity claims are fulfilled we end up with what I will call a *trifecta*. The concept of a trifecta implies trivially a triadic structure, but more importantly the idea that all three elements are *necessarily present*.⁹³ Thus, for Habermas, the ideal speech act is a trifecta. He adds that mutual understanding — the prerequisite for mutual agreement and consensus — is impossible if the participants to the debate continuously confuse the three validity claims. In his view, the world religions typically fall prey to this trap, and blend together these three aspects in their metaphysical worldviews (TOCA, p. 202f). With Habermas we can conclude that the coordination of worldview claims will therefore depend on understanding this tripartite nature of speech acts.

3.6. Conclusion

For my conclusion to this chapter, I will reflect on the previous chapters from the point of view of the above analysis of Habermas’s models. Thus I stated previously that religious traditions offer worldviews, and that such worldviews consist of answers to seven types of philosophical questions (Chapter 1). These answers form different types of claims — i.e., descriptive, normative, and practical claims — , which can be understood as different types of speech acts. Each type of speech act will (a) have conditions for acceptability, as well as (b) form incompatibles when mutual acceptance of claims within that type leads to absurdity. Habermas showed that inherent within speech acts are in fact three different types of relationships to three different worlds. These relationships are expressed in speech through three different functions which express nine formal-pragmatic relations.

⁹³ Or multiples of three, when combined with two or three other models.

Finally, we understand a speech act — or a worldview claim in the context I have presented — *if we know what makes it acceptable*. Each of the different types of relationships will raise a particular validity claim: truth, truthfulness, and rightness. From this follows that worldview claims, insofar as they can be categorised as *descriptive*, *normative* and *practical* claims, will raise different validity claims. While descriptive claims claim truth, and are objective, normative claims claim rightness and are intersubjective.

If this view is correct so far, then we have two issues left: (1) how do we understand practical claims (i.e., courses of action) on this account, and (2) how do we understand subjective claims. In order to be able to answer these questions we need to have another look at Habermas's formal-pragmatic model.

Worlds	1. <i>Objective</i>	2. <i>Social</i>	3. <i>Subjective</i>
Basic Attitudes			
1. <i>Objectivating</i>	Cognitive-Instrumental Relation	Cognitive-Strategic Relation	Objectivistic Relation to self
2. <i>Norm-Conformative</i>	Moral-aesthetic relation to a non-objectivated environment	Obligatory relation	Censorious relation to self
3. <i>Expressive</i>		Presentation of self	Sensual-spontaneous relation to self

Table 4: The Formal-Pragmatic Model (Revisited).

Concerning practical claims, or courses of action in the objective realm, Habermas writes that an objective attitude to the objective world generates descriptions that are also action-oriented: they allow us to take action in the world, and transform the world (hence instrumental). However, courses of action are not *descriptive* but *prescriptive*, i.e., pertain to the prescriptive relationship of the subject to the world. From this we can conclude two things. Firstly, what redeems such claims is whether they effect the objective world as stated. The validity claim here is not the same as objective truth, but is rather something like felicitousness. Secondly, courses of action can also raise a normative validity claim. If a course of action suggests that we should drive on the left then this prescriptive course of action would only be right, i.e., fulfil its claim of rightness, within the context of for instance British accepted traffic rules, but not within the context of European accepted rules.

In the latter context such course of action would be wrong. This is therefore an expression of the *norm-confirmative attitude* to the objective world.

Subjective claims, reporting on the subjective world, are beholden to the validity claim of truthfulness, and are expressed through the *expressive attitude*. The expressive attitude can be found within our various definitions of worldview. Firstly, Apostel expresses the idea that the “world” of a worldview is the broadest environment that is “cognitively, practically and emotionally relevant” (Apostel, 1994, p. 8; see *supra*). While emotional relevance is an expression of sincerity and authenticity, i.e., understood as resonance with the self, it is not immediate clear how this is expressed in a worldview. Cognitive and practical relevance are easily understood in terms of descriptive and practical claims. The expressive attitude suggests that I express the subjective contents of my mind: such expressive claims are *acceptable* if they do indeed express my subjective content. Secondly, Smart argues that a worldview has seven dimensions, one of which is the experiential and emotional dimension. He writes:

And it is obvious that the emotions and experiences of men and women are the food on which the other dimensions of religion feed: ritual without feeling is cold, doctrines without awe or compassion are dry, and myths which do not move hearers are feeble (Smart, 1998, p. 14)

Thus, the assumption here is that the emotional or experiential dimension feeds all other dimensions — and Smart mentions here the ritual (i.e., pragmatic), doctrinal, and mythical dimension. The experiential dimension determines how a subject interprets all other dimensions, and appropriates them. In other words, it is the subject who experiences each and every object domain.

For instance, take the proposition “The rose is red.” As a proposition it makes a reference to something out there in the objective world: there is a rose, and its colour is red.⁹⁴ The propositional content is justified by methods that check whether there is indeed a rose, and that the rose is red. These methods involve *interacting* with the objective world, and serve to fulfil the validity claim of truth. Particularly, these methodologies do not require communication as such, that is, dialogue with other people. However, the giving of reasons for this claim will be an *intersubjective act* as this will require an addressee or listener, and therefore another subject. Similarly, the terms rose and red are intersubjectively agreed upon conventions, and such conventions are not of the objective world per se. That *there is a rose* is a feature of the objective world, but that *the rose is a rose* is a feature of

⁹⁴ I.e., in the sense that the rose reflects a certain light spectrum.

the intersubjective world, and of communicative understanding inherent in all language: we come to understand that *the rose is a rose* by communicating and interacting with others. The interpretation of a rose as a rose, and red as red, depends on a meaning-giving subject. The convention, on the other hand, depends on mutual understanding within a community of subjects. Therefore, to come to “know” that there is a red rose requires an *objective methodology as well as an intersubjective methodology*. We need to be educated — through conventions and linguistic norms — of what it means to see a red rose. This understanding then retreats to the background and becomes a *background understanding*: we do not have to bring this up again, unless communication *misfires*, when for example different worldviews meet each other.⁹⁵

Still, nothing here, however, expresses *how I feel* about the rose, or what type of images, symbols, and so on, the rose will evoke within my subjective consciousness. Such feelings and images might be completely idiosyncratic, and evoke feelings of fear, hatred, sense of loss, and so on. Therefore, how descriptive claims are interpreted by the individual depends on her own subjective experiences. This is different from a norm-conformative attitude where normative claims describe what kind of subjective experiences should be evoked in the individual. Such normative claims are independent of what the individual in fact experiences. The crucial aspect of subjective experience is, however, that it can only be accessed through *self-analysis*, *self-reporting*, and so on. Similarly, we can only access the intersubjective world through *dialogue*, and we can only access the objective world through *observation*. I will call these means *epistemic methodologies* or *competences*. They allow us to “mine” or examine the different worlds for *data*: we mine for subjective data through self-analysis, we mine for intersubjective data through dialogue with others, and we mine the objective world through observation. On this view, the subject can entertain three epistemic relationships to herself, that is, a subjective, intersubjective, and objective relationship. In other words, she can look at the content of her heart and mind, she can communicate with others, and she can observe the objective world. The subject can also maintain two epistemic relationships to others, through dialogue and observation, but she loses self-analysis as a tool for mining data. Finally, she can entertain an objective relationship with the objective world through observation, but she loses access to self-analysis and dialogue as tools for mining data. Thus, the subject wields epistemic powers, but such powers diminish in the direction from self, to others, to the environment. Therefore, on this basis we can create a further model, which I will call the *Natural Model of Epistemic Methodologies* (see Table 5). Although this model is different from Habermas’s model of formal-pragmatic relationship, presented in Table 3, it does not however diminish it. In Habermas’s

⁹⁵ Private languages are no exception: they are built upon conventions with oneself.

model there is no forced link between a certain relationship to reality, and its respective world domain: epistemology is separate from ontology. Although it does not make sense to mine the objective domain through self-analysis, we can however report on how we feel about the objective environment, i.e., our idiosyncratic being-in-the-world, or about the intersubjective world.

Basic Attitudes	Objective World	Intersubjective World	Subjective World
Cognitive	$S R_{\text{cog}} O_{\text{obj}}$	$S R_{\text{cog}} O_{\text{soc}}$	$S R_{\text{cog}} O_{\text{subj}}$
Normative	—	$S R_{\text{norm}} O_{\text{soc}}$	$S R_{\text{norm}} O_{\text{subj}}$
Expressive	—	—	$S R_{\text{exp}} O_{\text{subj}}$

Table 5: The Natural Model of Epistemic Methodologies.

The term *Natural Model* expresses the idea that the epistemic relationships represented here are *natural relationships*. Thus, there is a natural relationship between the expressive attitude and the subjective object domain. On this view, the objective and subjective world are in fact contained within the subjective world of the subject (i.e., are internal to), and it is this fact that allows the subject to have an expressive relationship with the objective and social world. However, it is also formally possible to have *supernatural relationships*, which will fill in the blanks in the above model. The natural epistemic powers are a consequence of how the self is positioned in relationship to the three different worlds. The subject does not have *direct access* to other minds or to the world, what we could call the *noumenal aspect* of both others and the world. However, particularly in religious language, it has been reported that the self can merge with others, or with the environment. In such cases, the subject would acquire *subjective access* to the noumenal reality of the social and objective environment.⁹⁶ Similarly, the subject with supernatural epistemic powers would be able to establish communion, understood in terms of a dialogical relationship, with objective reality. I call these powers *supernatural* since they do not follow naturally from our epistemic capacities. However, I do not interpret these powers as ontological powers: rather my use of the term supernatural should be seen as a dialectic to the term natural.

⁹⁶ In such cases the relationship R transforms into a relationship of equality, expressed by =, so that we get $S = O$.

4. George Lindbeck and The Nature of Doctrine

4.1. Introduction

In the current chapter, I will argue that the tripartite typology of validity claims is *isomorphic* to a theory of religious meaning developed by George Lindbeck. In *The Nature of Doctrine* (TND, 1984), published in the same year as Habermas's *Theory of Communicative Action*, Lindbeck developed a tripartite typology of different ways of understanding religious doctrines. While Habermas integrated different approaches within social theory, Lindbeck formulated his typology on the basis of how religious doctrines were historically understood by a diversity of religious scholars and schools of thought. By arguing that Lindbeck's typology is analogous, i.e., shares characteristics with Habermas's cognitive architecture, in particular his communicative model and his concept of criticisable validity claims, I provide the means for applying the insights of the previous chapter to religious doctrines.

In particular, I will argue how the different validity claims relate to three different types of “religious claims,” that is, propositional, expressive, and normative claims. As Habermas has shown, these need not be distinct entities as such, since the triffecta of validity claims represents the deep structure of ordinary language, i.e., they are always already present in every speech act. Thus, while in my first few chapters I showed how religious worldviews consist of a variety of different types of doctrines — interrelated in a more or less coherent web of meaning — here I argue that “religious speech” always already exhibits three different functions. To do so, I will not only rely on Lindbeck's understanding, but also show how representations of these three functions can be found within the literature on religious diversity, such as in the work of Julius Lipner, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, John Hick, and Harold Netland.

4.2. Lindbeck's Tripartite Typology

With *The Nature of Doctrine* (1984, 2009; TND), George Lindbeck set out to create a theory that could explain the possibility of doctrinal reconciliation between different partners in Christian ecumenical or intra-faith dialogue, without them having to change their doctrines in order to do so.⁹⁷ Since its publication, TND has been hailed as “one of the most influential works of academic theory to appear in English in the last fifty years” (Marshall in TND, p. vii). As a testimony to this, Lindbeck has since been credited with introducing a new form of theology (i.e., post-liberal theology), as well as with establishing, together with Hans Frei and David Kelsey, a new theological move-

⁹⁷ Lindbeck specifically refers here to Christian dialogues between Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant theologians.

ment known as the Yale school. In fact, Bruce Marshall reflects that Lindbeck's work seemed to promise a way forward for the whole of Christian theology, namely Catholic and Protestant alike (Marshall, *ibid.*, p. viii). However, this is not to say that it did not also meet with ample criticism and conceptual resistance. But perhaps this equally testifies to its theological, and undoubtedly broader academic importance.

In TND, Lindbeck starts out by observing that participants to ecumenical dialogues have reported to be in "basic agreement" on a variety of topics, while at the same time continuing to hold to their historic and (once-divisive) convictions (TND, p. 1).⁹⁸ He writes that, seemingly, they felt "compelled by the evidence, sometimes against their earlier inclinations, to conclude that positions that were once really opposed [were] now in fact reconcilable, even though these positions [remained] in a significant sense identical to what they were before" (TND, p. 1).⁹⁹

At first sight, this renewed position seems self-contradictory. However, Lindbeck objects and suggests that a proper response is not to deny the reality on the grounds that it seems impossible, but rather to seek to explain its possibility (TND, p. 1). The latter is precisely what he attempts to accomplish, namely to provide a convincing conceptual model that accounts for the possibility and purported fact of "doctrinal reconciliation without change." Lindbeck goes about this by first examining how theologians and philosophers of religions, following the theological precept of *fides quaerens intellectum*, or faith seeking understanding, have hitherto understood both religion as well as religious doctrine. Classifying these into types, he distinguishes between:

- (1) a propositional-cognitive type,
- (2) an experiential-expressive type, and
- (3) a cultural-linguistic type.

4.2.1. The Propositional-Cognitive Type

Firstly, the *propositional-cognitive type* of theological theory "emphasizes the cognitive aspects of religion and stresses the ways in which church doctrines function as informative propositions or truth claims about objective realities" (TND, p. 2). On this view, religion is a matter of knowing

⁹⁸ He references numerous sources that catalogued such dialogue proceedings (see Lindbeck, 2009, p. 12, note 1). He also refers to an independent evaluation of some of these dialogues contained in "The Bilateral Consultations Between the Roman Catholic Church in the United States and Other Christian Communion: A Theological Review and Critique by the Study Committee Commissioned by the Board of Directors of the Catholic Theological Society of America" (1972), *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Association of America* (1972), pp. 179-232.

⁹⁹ It should be clear that "remaining in a significant sense identical" is not saying the same as "without change."

truths about religious content — what Lindbeck calls the Divine — that can be expressed through clear and comprehensible statements (i.e., truth claims). The presupposition underlying this perspective is that there is a neat and correct fit between the concepts in our heads and the things out there. Lindbeck describes this as holding onto an "adequation" theory of truth, where truth amounts to adequation of an object with cognition (Knitter, 2005). He suggests that, historically, this approach has been taken on board by modern Anglo-American analytic philosophers who are occupied with the "cognitive or informational meaningfulness of religious utterances" (TND, p. 2). On this outlook, religion has been conceived as similar to philosophy or even science. If this is correct, then it would follow that analytic philosophers of religion are most interested in applying the propositional-cognitive approach to address the problem of religious diversity. The propositional-cognitive type of religion is isomorphic with the representative function of language, and with first-order worldview claims of the type of constatives and declaratives. This type of doctrine delivers clear ontological answers to worldview questions that can be expressed through truth claims. As Habermas has shown, constative or representative speech is part and parcel of the deep structure of every speech act. This deep structure is embodied via the validity claim of propositional truth.

4.2.2. The Experiential-Expressive Type

Secondly, on an experiential-expressive view of doctrine and religion, a religious believer knows "the Divine" mainly through what she experiences, feels, or senses inside herself. Adherents to this view can still hold to the adequation theory of truth, Lindbeck believes, but when they do, they do so only for material objects, and not for matters of the Divine. He writes:

[This view] interprets doctrines as non-informative and non-discursive symbols of inner feelings, attitudes, or existential orientations, [and] highlights the resemblances of religions to aesthetic enterprises (TND, p. 2).

We can assume that, when Lindbeck writes that doctrines are "non-informative," he means that they are non-propositional, and that when he writes that they are "non-discursive," he means that they are "non-norm-conformative" (i.e., before they are intersubjectively shared). Lindbeck adds that historically this perspective has been adopted by liberal theologies which were influenced by continental developments that originated with Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834). This second view on religious doctrine equates with claims that fulfil the expressive function of language. Jeffrey Alexander (1991) summarises:

The third distinct mode of action is expressive, referring both to emotional and aesthetic statements. The claim put forward here is not truth, but ‘truthfulness’, sincerity and authenticity in a subjective sense. The discourse that thematises this claim Habermas sometimes calls therapeutic and at other times aesthetics (Alexander, 1991, p. 54).¹⁰⁰

Such claims are measured against conditions of subjective truthfulness and authenticity. If these conditions of truthfulness and authenticity are met, the claim will have successfully fulfilled its function to express religious truth.¹⁰¹

4.2.3. The Cultural-Linguistic Type

Thirdly, on the cultural-linguistic view, religious claims and beliefs are conceived as "different idioms for construing reality, expressing experience, and ordering life" (TND, pp. 33-34). Lindbeck writes:

[This type] emphasise[s] neither the cognitive nor the experiential-expressive aspects of religion; rather, emphasis is placed on those aspects in which religions resemble languages together with their correlative forms of life, and are thus similar to cultures (insofar as these are understood semiotically as reality and value systems — that is, as idioms for the constructing of reality and the living of life (TND, p. 4).

In other words, religious doctrines are neither interpreted as expressive symbols, nor as truth claims, but rather as “communally authoritative rules of discourse, attitude, and action” (TND, p. 4). The cultural-linguistic type of religious doctrine expresses the interactive function of speech acts.¹⁰² This means that claims will be measured against normative rightness, i.e., what the partners in dialogue consider to be normatively right. For a religious believer, the primary community of peers will be the home religion to which he or she belongs, both as an institution and as a religious faith.

¹⁰⁰ For Habermas, the three validity claims are analogous to Plato’s the Good, True and Beautiful. Hence the expressive function of language represents the Beautiful (i.e., aesthetics). Similarly, Habermas associates the expressive function with the work of Freud (i.e., therapeutic).

¹⁰¹ The reasons and evidence given for such claims will, by necessity, be self-referential, that is, refer back to the subject.

¹⁰² See Habermas’s communicative model, *supra*.

If the conditions for normative rightness are met, then the inherent validity claim of religious doctrines of this type will be fulfilled.

Besides three pure types, Lindbeck also recognises the existence of *hybrid theories*. He mentions only one such hybrid, namely theories that regard both the propositional and the expressive dimensions as religiously significant. Lindbeck mentions the work of Karl Rahner and Bernard Lonergan as examples. Lindbeck never names the hybrid himself. However, it seems intuitively proper to call it something like *cognitive-experiential*, or *propositional-expressive*. Although Lindbeck mentions only one hybrid, logically four are possible, i.e., three hybrid pairs, with one hybrid triple consisting of the *trifecta* or *integral* of all three types taken together.

The existence of hybrids is analogous to the fact that speech acts raise several validity claims simultaneously, either implicitly, as is usually the case, or explicitly. As Habermas has pointed out, the *de facto* state of speech acts is that they can be situated simultaneously towards three different worlds, namely *the* world of objective states of affairs, *our* world of interpersonal relationships, and *my* world of uniquely individual experiences. Thus, religious claims can be interpreted according to different types of religious language. This implies that the doctrines in question raise validity claims inherent within those types.

To do away with cumbersome language I suggest the use of a shorthand similar to the one used in chapter 3 when I discussed Habermas's formal-pragmatic relationships. For instance, I suggest the codes *cog*, *exp*, and *norm* to represent cognitive, expressive and normative language. With this code, we can categorise the hybrid pairs as *cog-exp*, *cog-norm*, and *norm-exp*, and the hybrid triple as *cog-exp-norm* — or simply *int* to denote the integral of the three. This allows us to rewrite the relationship S R O in terms of S R_{cog} O, S R_{exp} O, S R_{norm} O, and so on for each of the different types. Given that in normal speech, the validity claims are only present as deep structures, we can bring explicitly bring them to the surface. One way of doing so, particularly useful for written language, is to tag claims to signify the kind of validity claim we are making. For instance, we could take the shortcodes and add them to opening tags <> and closing tags </> to denote the beginning and end of a specific epistemic element. Take the generic religious claim "Spirit is Real." When we are stating "Spirit is real," we could either be saying:

<cog>Spirit is real.</cog>

<norm>Spirit is real.</norm>

<exp>Spirit is real.</exp>

Similarly, we can tag the same sentence also in accordance with the different hybrids, and we can express the trifecta or *integral* as <int>Spirit is real.</int>. If we were to replace this example “Spirit is real” by “Spirit exists”, then the term “exists” would acquire a different meaning according to the experiential domain that generates the datum. In the objective object domain, Spirit would “exist” as an objective datum. Similarly, in the normative domain, Spirit “exists” as a normative *datum* or given.

4.3. Doctrinal Reconciliation Without Capitulation

Lindbeck admits that the multi-dimensional strategy of understanding religious doctrines, consisting of hybrids, has certain advantages. However, he proffers that the first two types of theological theories, and by extension its cognitive-experiential hybrid child, were designed when the “contemporary ecumenical problematic was not a relevant concern” (TND, p. 2). Hence, they all suffer from a significant impairment, that is to say, “[i]n all of these perspectives it is difficult to envision the possibility of doctrinal reconciliation without capitulation” (TND, p. 2). The way out, he argues, is to adopt the cultural-linguistic approach. In other words, Lindbeck finds all types of religious understanding, including the hybrid types, insufficient for his purposes of achieving doctrinal reconciliation without change, that is, with exception of his preferential selection of the cultural-linguistic type. On the other hand, Habermas’ ideal speech act is one that fulfils the conditions for all three validity claims, simultaneously, rather than just the one validity claim of normative rightness. However, even for Habermas, it is the normative function of speech that allows for both mutual understanding, and mutual agreement.

4.3.1. The Propositionalist

Lindbeck writes that on the propositionalist approach if a doctrine is once true, it is always true. Hence, its denial, as in the case of contradictories, will therefore by necessity be false at all times. Mutual agreement (i.e., consensus) can only be reached if one of the parties abandons their claims, and relinquishes their position. Either they remove claims outright, or modify them by giving up part of the original meaning expressed by those claims in question. Lindbeck concludes that DC/C, on this account, is impossible, “because there is no significant sense in which the meaning of a doctrine can change while remaining the same” (TND, p. 2-3). However, Lindbeck underestimates how on a propositionalist approach truth is not given as such, but must be earned, and must be redeemed. Our attempts to derive knowledge, that is true and justified claims, are far from perfect. Therefore,

the current state of our knowledge only represents our best attempts to arrive at truth. Dialogue between epistemic peers is a way to coordinate our propositions about the world, and look for inconsistencies that will show us possible errors. A consensus based on one party changing their claims because new evidence has come to light is therefore neither unusual, nor undesirable.

4.3.2. The Expressivist

Experiential expressivists, for whom truth is a function of symbolic efficacy, compare religions and their doctrines in terms of how effectively they communicate and express their religious experiences. As Lindbeck states, all religions are “by definition capable of functioning truly, [however] they can vary in their potential or actual degree of truth (i.e., efficacy)” (TND, p. 33). Distinguishing doctrines from the meaning they carry, Lindbeck argues that on the experiential-expressivist account the meaning of a doctrine can vary while the doctrine itself stays the same. Conversely, doctrines can be modified without any alteration in meaning. He throws further light on this by referring to the case of transubstantiation.¹⁰³ Both transubstantiationist and non-transubstantiationist doctrines, Lindbeck argues, can express either (a) similar experiences of divine reality, (b) dissimilar experiences, or (c) no experience at all.

The general principle is that insofar as doctrines function as non-discursive symbols, they are polyvalent in import and therefore subject to changes of meaning or even to a total loss of meaningfulness, to what Tillich calls their death. They are not crucial for religious agreement or disagreement, because they are constituted by harmony or conflict in underlying feelings, attitudes, existential orientations or practices, rather than by what happens on the level of symbolic (including doctrinal) objectifications (TND, p. 3).

In other words, subjective experiences show a wide variety in personal meaning, including no meaning at all, if the subject does not resonate with the doctrine in question, i.e., when a doctrine does not evoke an experience. Lindbeck will reject the expressive approach in favour of an intersubjective coordination of meaning. That is, only when we come together as a group can we stabilise meaning into a communally accepted worldview. However, coordination in meaning still implies that the subjects in question, i.e., the members of the social group, are willing to adjust their responses to discursive doctrines. The social world, as one of the three worlds in Habermas’s world

¹⁰³ Transubstantiation in Roman Catholic theology denotes the spiritual process of changing bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ during the Eucharist.

theory, is inter-subjective, that is, subjective: meaning is not out there in the objective world, but is to be found in individual consciousness.

4.3.3. The Cognitive-Expressivist

If indeed the two previous ways of understanding religious doctrines have their weaknesses, as Lindbeck believes, could these be overcome by combining both theories? In this case, we understand doctrines through both aspects, namely, referring to propositional content and expressing religious sentiments. Lindbeck is not convinced, and he dismisses the hybrid theory with just a few lines:

[A]lthough two-dimensional views are superior for ecumenical purposes in that they do not a priori exclude doctrinal reconciliation without capitulation as do simple propositionalism and simple symbolism, yet their explanations of how this is possible tend to be too awkward and complex to be easily intelligible or convincing (TND, p. 3).

Lindbeck's dismissal, due to its brevity, is hardly convincing, as he does not further explicate in what way the authors he has in mind propose solutions that are "too awkward to convince." However, in this hybrid model, doctrines are interpreted according to both the representative function of communication, claiming truth, and the expressive function, claiming sincerity and authenticity. Such an approach takes into account that the objective world is never just "given," but is in fact interpreted by conscious subjects who inject meaning into objectivity.

4.3.4. The Normativist

Lindbeck claims that a cultural-linguistic approach, which he also refers to as *the regulative approach*, has no difficulty explaining the possibility of DC/C: rules, unlike propositions or expressive symbols, retain an invariant meaning under changing conditions of compatibility and conflict. That is, they allow us to reconcile our beliefs with others while keeping the meaning of our claims constant. Lindbeck gives the following example: the rules "Drive on the Left" and "Drive on the right" are unequivocal in meaning and unequivocally opposed, yet both may be binding: one in Britain and the other in the United States, or one when traffic is normal, and the other when a collision must be avoided. Thus oppositions between rules can in some instances be resolved, not by altering one or both of them, but by specifying when or where they apply, or by stipulating which of the

competing directives takes precedence. Similarly, both transubstantiation and at least some of the doctrines that appear to contradict it can be interpreted as embodying rules of sacramental thought and practice that may have been in unavoidable and perhaps irresolvable collision in certain historical contexts, but that can in other circumstances be harmonised by appropriate specifications of their respective domains, uses, and priorities. Lindbeck explains that we can understand the different ideas on transubstantiation to apply to different domains, much like in the case of the traffic rules: one set of rules on transubstantiation will be binding within the Roman Catholic Church, while another set of rules will be binding for the Lutheran or Protestant.

Seemingly, on Lindbeck's proposal, no real agreement or consensus takes place. Rather, both parties leave with their own interpretations intact, and agree not to disagree. Thus doctrinal reconciliation seems to be based on a *differentiation of context*. The propositionalist also has access to this strategy, when he or she argues that two differing descriptions apply to different contexts within the objective and non-discursive world. Neither would this solution be impossible to achieve on a subjectivist approach. Two different subjects could simply agree to interpret the sacrament in two different ways. Therefore, it seems we would not require Lindbeck's linguistic type in order to justify this type of reconciliation. We can however ask whether Lindbeck himself does not expect his formula of DC/C to do more in the context of ecumenical dialogue. Bruce D. Marshall, in his *Introduction* to TND, seems to do so. He recounts:

These dialogues [between Lutherans and Roman Catholics] consistently reported unexpected and often deep convergences on long-divisive matters... Yet these agreements have produced — with the exception of the 1999 Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification — few ecclesial results. Full communion still seems a long way off, in some ways farther than it did forty-five years ago, before the dialogues began. The bright hopes shared by Lindbeck and many others at the conclusion of Vatican II have so far gone mostly unrealised (Marshall, TND, p. xxii).

While Marshall doesn't explain in what way Lindbeck's bright hopes for DC/C have gone unrealised, it should not come as a surprise. If Lindbeck's work is indeed an attempt to aid the process of doctrinal reconciliation without change, then it would seem that his proposed strategy turns out to be too weak. Lindbeck also admits that his approach proposes no common framework (TND, p. 40), that is, leads to incommensurability between positions. He writes:

[T]he experiences that religions evoke or mould are as varied as the interpretive schemes they embody. Adherents of different religions do not diversely thematize the same experience, rather they have different experiences. Buddhist compassion, Christian love, and...French Revolutionary fraternité are not diverse modifications of a single fundamental human awareness, but are radically (i.e., from the root) distinct ways of experiencing and being oriented toward self, neighbour, and cosmos (Lindbeck, TND, p. 40; also quoted in Knitter, 2002, p. 181).

Since the diversity of experiences creates an unbridgeable gap between religions, it also makes them untranslatable. The upshot is that religious claims and experiences can be understood — and are “true” — only within “the given texts or language systems of the particular religions” (Knitter, 2002, p. 182). If Knitter is correct, it seems that on a regulative approach the hurdle to overcome is not so much the incompatibility of religious beliefs — due to the contradicting nature of their propositional content — but rather their incommensurability. Two conflicting claims can both be “true,” but each claim will only be seen as true from within its own interpretive framework (i.e., worldview).

If indeed the cultural-linguistic approach is prone to incommensurability, might this also not be the case on the expressivist approach? Both approaches are subjective, where meaning depends not necessarily on what is “given” within the objective world as such, but on how subjects interpret their reality. While the expressivist approach acknowledges that meaning is generated subjectively, the normative approach acknowledges that subjective meaning can also be intersubjectively shared and experienced. For instance, my interpretation and experience of an artwork — let’s say *Christ of St. John of the Cross* by Spanish surrealist painter Salvador Dali — can be completely idiosyncratic. You, as a second person, have no way of knowing how I understand and see this artwork, unless I can somehow convey my understanding, and give you an experience of what it is like to see it through my eyes. The criticism of incommensurability is valid insofar as you and I do not share a mutual understanding of each other’s categories. Similarly, the Buddhist concept of ‘nirvana’ (i.e., the ‘blowing out’ of the fires of greed, hatred, and delusion accomplished in meditative states) is incommensurable with Christian concepts, as it does not represent a Christian experience: it is not constitutive of ‘reality’ in Christianity, whether understood in an internal subjective sense, or an external objective sense. As long as there is no corresponding experience in Christianity of what nirvana means, the Christian is unable to translate it into a Christian concept.

This issue is particularly brought home by religious believers who have two home religions, so-called multiple religious believers (MRB), who have to deal with it on a practical level. Each one of their religious paths will encourage to experience the truth (i.e., personal, lived truth) of their religious beliefs. For instance, the Buddhist path will encourage the believer to experience *nirvana*, and have a lived and existential understanding of it, whilst the Christian path will encourage the same believer to experience God's love through Jesus Christ, Our Lord. Whilst this constitutes two separate experiences, and therefore does not warrant equating the two concepts, at least a bridge seems possible between the shores of meaning, as the *dual believer* has experience of both. Thus, within the community of dual believers new communally shared frameworks can develop, which can both communicate *nirvana* and God's love, and where both concepts represent a true experience. For as long as the Christian has not entered the Buddhist path (or vice-versa) *nirvana* will never constitute a true experience, even if we grant that *nirvana* represents a true experience for the Buddhist. If this is true, then it follows that the linguistic approach cannot be divorced from the other approaches, in this case, a subjective understanding of doctrine.

In promoting his linguistic approach, Lindbeck also seems to be putting the cart before the horse. While Lindbeck wants to explain the possibility of DC/C, he does so by preferentially selecting how we should interpret religious language. The claim is that if one wants reconciliation one must interpret religious language according to the socially regulative function of language. This therefore excludes all religious language that functions propositionally or expressively. If two propositions that claim truth conflict, agreement is not to be achieved within this particular epistemic domain. Rather, one is forced to give up one's propositional aims, and translate the claims in question to the intersubjective domain. It is clear that this will be unacceptable to all who do not follow Lindbeck's proposal. However, as we have seen, to the objection that DC/C seemed implausible, Lindbeck suggested that a proper response would be not to deny the reality on the grounds that it seems impossible, but rather to seek to explain its possibility. Thus, while Lindbeck correctly assesses that religious language can perform three different functions, rather than selecting one and dismissing all others including *the integral*, he should in fact follow his own advice and seek to explain how religious believers can maintain their preferred interpretation, and still achieve DC/C.

4.4. The Expressivist Position Revisited

Having given an overview of Lindbeck's tripartite typology, I will now revisit both the experiential-expressive and cultural-linguistic stances by referring to a few authors working on religious diversity.

4.4.1. Julius Lipner

Julius Lipner, in his article *Truth-Claims and Inter-religious Dialogue* (1976), points out that the term "religious belief" is not an unequivocal concept. He argues that it often hides a misleading ambiguity. This ambiguity is based on the fact that we can distinguish between two different meanings or usages of the term. Moreover, he argues that some authors as John Hick and D. Z. Phillips have failed to make these distinctions with "unfortunate consequences" to their respective theories. Firstly, Lipner writes that religious belief "very often means a certain propositional content asserted as being the case, that is, as factually true, not only for myself but for the other as well — and then it becomes a truth-claim" (Lipner, 1976, p. 217).¹⁰⁴ He writes:

From an epistemological point of view, "religious belief" can stand for the propositional content, i.e. the meaning in G.E. Moore's sense of the term" (Lipner, 1976, p. 217).

On this account, religious belief can be understood as a *proposition referring to a state of affairs*. Such claims typically demand universal consent, and ought to be recognised by everybody.¹⁰⁵ Due to this demand for universal consent, propositional truth forms the traditional battlefield on which dissolution of conflicting claims is or ought to be settled.

Secondly, Lipner argues that when a Christian believer states "It is my belief that we shall all rise again on the Last Day," she states an express content of her mind, but without affirming that she asserts this belief to be a true one (i.e., one that is the case for everybody). Lipner adds that the believer, on this account, is merely concerned to state what she believes, without emphasising the interpersonal potential of the assertion, that is, without being concerned with the truth value of the propositional content. Lipner refers to this type of religious belief as the *personalist dimension*, i.e.,

¹⁰⁴ He writes: "Strictly speaking, I do not claim things to myself. I make claims in the face of exacted opposition. Thus we say: 'It is the religious belief of many Hindus that Krishna is the human avatara of the Deity' which can be another way of saying 'Many Hindus assert it to be the case that Krishna is God descended in human form' with the implication that this is a state of affairs that ought to be recognized by everybody" (Lipner, 1976, pp 217-218).

¹⁰⁵ In other words, by third-persons (or, first-persons using a third-person perspective).

being centred on the person. He also calls it *reflexive*, i.e., personalist claims reflect back to the believer, rather than the objective world. He sums up:

The emphasis here, it seems clear, is on religious beliefs not acting so much as truth-claims, viz. as assertions of fact valid for all, but as having meaning for me in my particular situation (Lipner, 1976, p. 218).

On Lipner's account of religious belief as personalist and reflexive, religious beliefs refer back to "my world" and offer first-person interior-individual content. Such subjective content does not need to explicitly assert third-person objective truth. When I express the content of my mind, I am stating what it is that I believe. In so doing, I do not expressly assert this belief to be a true one, i.e., affirm the correspondence of my concepts with objective reality, nor do I emphasise the interpersonal potential of my assertion. However, William Christian reminds us that we normally take *first-person statements of belief* to convey implicit *assertions* of what is said to be believed (1972, p. 19). He writes:

[W]hen a speaker says something of the form 'I believe that p' we do not normally suppose that he is merely reporting some inner experience or state in an informative way, as he might report a nightmare (Christian, 1972, p. 19).

Nevertheless, Christian (1964) adds that "it is possible to adhere wholeheartedly to a suggestion without being absolutely certain about the truth of some proposition one derives from this suggestion" (p. 246). In Lipner's "Last Day" example, we expect the believer to state (1) that there is, or will be, a Last Day, and (2) that it will be the case that, when this Last Day comes to pass, we shall all rise (i.e., presumably, from death). In fact, it was the same G. E. Moore referenced by Lipner who was the first to point out that accepting the following statements generates a paradox (Hintikka, 1962, 19):

- (1) I believe that p.
- (2) It is not the case that p.

If believing "that p" implies stating "that p," then together with (2), we end up with a simple contradiction. Of course, Lipner's example does not necessarily generate a Moorean contradiction as such. That is, for such a paradox to occur, the speaker needs to assign both a positive (1) and a neg-

ative truth value (2) to the propositional content mentioned in the belief. Lipner's believer, however, is "unconcerned," that is, does not ascribe any truth value to the propositional content, whether positive or negative. The question is then whether we can legitimately ignore the validity claim of propositional truth.

To hark back to Habermas's views, we can make the presence of two different validity claims clear by appealing to both of them exclusively through separate sentences. Thus, in Moore's Paradox, claim (1) appeals to *truthfulness*: it is true, in the sense that I am being sincere, that I believe that p. Claim (2), however, appeals to *truth*: it is true that p is not the case. Therefore, while claim (1) succeeds on the subjective validity claim, it fails on the objective validity claim. The fact that (1) makes good on its own claim has no impact on whether it makes good on the validity claim of statement (2): if it did, wishful thinking would lead to true propositions about the objective world. Given that believing "that p" implies stating "that p," this means that when it comes to belief, it would seem that the validity claim of propositionally truth is always already raised, and if raised, it should make good on it.

However, it does not need to follow from this that, if a claim cannot be shown to be propositionally true, it should by necessity bring into doubt its validity claim of subjective authenticity. As I have argued in my previous chapter, the differences between validity claims is ultimately one of methodology. Assessing the contents of my mind, even if those contents refer back to the objective world, requires a *first-person introspective methodology*. Affirming the correspondence of my concepts with objective reality, i.e., affirming the propositional content of my claims, requires a third-person or objective methodology, the results of which are true for everyone. Similarly, acquiring interpersonal understanding, and interpersonal agreement, will require a second-person methodology of dialogue between communicating partners: neither first-person nor third-person methodologies will be required, nor appropriate. I will discuss this issue more thoroughly in the next section on W. C. Smith's view on personal faith.

4.4.2. Wilfred Cantwell Smith

Another account of the personalist type of religious belief can be found in Wilfred Cantwell Smith's work. In *The Meaning and End of Religion* (1962), W. C. Smith suggests that we can make a distinction between religion as the historical "cumulative tradition," and the personal or "inner faith" of the religious believer. The cumulative tradition is built up over time and consists of the external aspects of a particular religion (such as rites, practices, beliefs, institutions, scriptures, etc.). The cumulative tradition is what lends religion "its peculiar identity" (Netland, 1991, p. 117). However,

what really matters, according to Smith, is not the religious tradition as such, but the personal and inner faith of the believer; this is where “the locus of truth” is to be found. In religion, Smith says, “one has not to do with religions [i.e. cumulative traditions], but with religious persons” (Smith, 1962, p. 153). Donald Wiebe writes that such a “non-propositional position” comes very close to an “existentialist conception of religious truth, somewhat after the fashion of Kierkegaard” (Wiebe, 1981, p. 212).

In *Questions of Religious Truth* (1967), Smith further writes that “religions are not in themselves true or false but that a religion may become true in the life of a man of faith who is related to God” (quoted in Hick, p. 143). Religious truth is not an absolute or static property, as in the case of propositions, but is a changing and “dynamic product of involvement” by the believer with what is said, and therefore requires “existential appropriation” (Netland, 1991, p. 119). For instance, Smith says of Christianity that it is “not true absolutely, impersonally, statically [i.e., as in the case of objective propositions]; rather it can become true, if and as you or I appropriate it to ourselves and interiorise it, insofar as we live it out from day to day” (Smith, 1967, p. 68). Elsewhere he says: “No statement might be accepted as true that has not been inwardly appropriated by its author” (Smith, *ibid.*, p. 35). Religious doctrines, on this account, are not true or false by themselves (i.e., objectively so). Rather, they are “true” for individual persons, and only to the extent in which they existentially appropriated the claims.

In *Faith and Belief* (1979), Smith draws our attention to the etymology of the word “to believe,” which can be traced back to Latin and Old English origins. To believe, throughout the Middle Ages, meant “to hold dear” or “to love.”¹⁰⁶ He writes:

The object of the verb [to believe] begins by being almost almost always a person; it ends by being almost always a proposition. That is, a shift has taken place from the verb’s designating an interpersonal relation to its naming a theoretical judgment: from an action of the self, in relation to others, to a condition of the mind, in relation to an abstraction (Smith, 1979, p. 118; also quoted in Webb, 2009, p. 221).¹⁰⁷

Webb points out that, although the meaning of the word believe might indeed have changed, for religious believers it still carries the double meaning of truth and love (2009, p. 221). He concludes

¹⁰⁶ In fact, this is also present in Dutch, my own mother tongue, where “liefde” is the word for love.

¹⁰⁷ I will come back to Smith, and these two notions of belief, in chapter 4.

that *the mode* in which belief takes place can vary according to the emphasis it puts on one or the other of those two aspects of believing. From this brief outline follows that the validity claim associated with Smith's version of personal truth is *truthfulness*, *sincerity* and *authenticity*, which corresponds to the expressive function. To be authentic implies that one has experienced what one says one has: I am authentically claiming that I have existentially appropriated the beliefs that I ascribe to. In other words, this type of religious claims expresses authentic first-person experience; it is the language of poetry where the world is experienced as personal, evocative, and mysterious.

John Hick paraphrases Smith, when he says that truth is not only “the correspondence of propositions with reality, but also, and even more importantly so far as religious truth is concerned, *integrity* and faithfulness in a person” (Hick, 1974, p. 143; italics mine). Hick further writes that he himself (i.e., Hick) is inclined to prefer a descriptive and metaphorical phrase for Smith’s concept of personal truth, such as “the moral truthfulness of a person’s life” (Hick, 1974, p. 144). Netland adds to this that religious truth, for Smith, “does not reflect correspondence with reality so much as it signifies *integrity*, *sincerity*, *faithfulness*, *authenticity* of life, and existentially appropriating certain beliefs in one’s life and conduct” (Netland, *ibidem*, p. 118; italics mine).

Thus we can infer from the previous observations that Smith attempts to establish a conceptual shift for religious language, away from the object domain of propositional truth, and towards the object domain of personal experience. And if so, then this will have consequences for Smith’s understanding of the problem of conflicting claims, something which also Harold Netland points out (1991, p. 120). Netland summarises that on this approach it becomes possible that all religions are true for those believers who happen to appropriate the beliefs and practices of the respective traditions (*ibid.*, p. 120). As a pluralist, Smith holds the attitude that the different world religions have equal access to religious truth. We can see how the shift to personal truth allows him to suggest that religious truth claims are only apparently conflicting. No real conflict needs to exist between claims, as each of the different religious traditions has equal potential capability to “become true” in the lives of their believers. Smith’s concept of personal truth therefore opens up the possibility for a pluralist theory of religious truth, one that avoids the principle of contradiction, and that is based on “truth” as representative of an authentic life. However, this is only possible because the validity claim of objective truth has not been explicitly raised.

4.4.3. John Hicks's Response

John Hick is not convinced by Smith's conclusions. He argues that Smith's shift to personal truth does not get us off the hook when it comes to the problem of conflicting truth claims. Hick believes that religious claims can only become true in the lives of believers because they are already true in a more universal and objective sense. Hick writes:

[A] religion, as a historical context consisting of religious beliefs and practices, can only become personalistically true in a man's life because those beliefs were already true beliefs, pointing towards and not away from the divine reality, and because those practices were already appropriate rather than inappropriate as ways in which to worship and serve the divine reality (Hick, 1974 p. 146).

Hick argues that even if claims can be said to be personally true, this is only because they have already been found true in the objective realm of so-called real referents. On this propositional view, claims to personal and lived truths, although fulfilling the conditions for sincerity, would have to be rejected unless they could be shown to be propositionally true. In Hicks's own theory, Hick is committed to (a) seeing religious claims as propositions, and to (b) the pluralist idea of assigning truth-value across different religious systems. In order to do so, Hick needs to overcome the hurdle of conflicting truth claims (while preserving the logical principle of non-contradiction).

Instead of addressing the problem head on, that is, finding evidence and good reasons for or against religious propositions, Hick claims that the problem "may more profitably be approached from a different direction, in terms of the claims of the various traditions to provide, or to be effective contexts of, salvation" (Hick, 2000, pp. 54-55). On Hick's view, each one of the religions claims (1) to have knowledge of a transcendent reality (i.e., propositional knowledge), which (2) provides an effective context of salvation. Since (1) has consistently shown to be problematic, Hick decides to address (2) first, and doing so arrive at (1). If they can indeed be shown to be effective contexts of salvation, then presumably this is only the case because (1) contains ontological truth. If this argument succeeds, then Hick would have affirmed his initial commitments to propositional truths (a), as well as to a pluralistic view (b).

Thus, in his attempt to demonstrate (2), Hick argues that each of the different religions is centrally concerned with a transformation of human existence from self-centredness to being centred in divine Reality (what he calls 'Real Reality'). If we look at what the fruits are of the different religions "we arrive at the modest and largely negative conclusion that, so far as we can tell, no one

of the great world religions is salvifically superior to the rest” (Hick, 2000, pp. 58). While this argument might satisfy Hick’s second concern of pluralism, it still does not address his first concern of the propositional content of claims. Hick cannot do much more than put forward the possibility (i.e., through a hypothesis) that each of the different claims truly corresponds to reality. In his own words:

If salvation is taking place, and taking place to about the same extent, within the religious systems presided over by these various deities and absolutes, this suggests that they are different manifestations to humanity of a yet more ultimate ground of salvific transformation. Let us then consider the possibility that an infinite transcendent reality is being differently conceived, and therefore differently experienced, and therefore differently responded to from within our different religio-cultural ways of being human. This hypothesis makes sense of the fact that the salvific transformation seems to have been occurring in all the great traditions (Hick, 2000, pp. 58-59).

However, in showing that the different religions all bear fruit, i.e., seem to be effective in establishing transformation in equal measure, Hick has merely shown that the different religious belief systems can be *pragmatically true* for their believers. In other words, the different belief systems only bear fruits to the extent that the individual believers have *existentially appropriated* those beliefs within their own lives, so that they could become authentic experiences and be personally true. Hick’s conclusion that all religions bear fruit in equal measure, and represent contexts of salvation in equal measure forces him to restate his earlier assumption that a belief cannot be personally true and personally effective (what Lindbeck calls symbolic efficacy), if it was not first true in a more universal and objective sense. But that is exactly what he sets out to prove in the first place. I therefore suggest that Hick is left without any non-question-begging grounds for the idea that the different religious claims are propositionally true responses to reality, and that his arguments on the fruits of religion merely serve to confirm Smith’s intuitions. His attempt to use the fruits of religious practice to redeem validity in the realm of propositional truth therefore fails.

4.4.4. Harold Netland’s Response

Harold Netland (1991) is, similarly to Hick, unconvinced by Smith’s appeal to lived experience. He summarises Smith’s view as follows:

Smith is not saying that that we cannot speak of truth in religion, that the term “truth” is inapplicable in religion. But he is asserting that religious truth is different from concepts of truth found in ordinary life or in the sciences. And emphatically rejects the idea that religious truth is propositional truth (Netland, 1991, p. 118).

However, Donald Wiebe offers perhaps a more moderate interpretation of Smith’s position by pointing to a persistent ambiguity in Smith’s work. He demonstrates that while Smith attempts to give primacy to personal truth, he does not want to get rid of propositional truth altogether. He quotes Smith:

The criteria by which this propositional truth is to be judged, the meaning it shall have are questions that we need not settle; we simply agree that this area of truth is at stake. My suggestion is that there are other additional areas, involving additional criteria and meanings of a quite different sort that might profitably be brought into play (Smith, 1974, p. 34; also quoted in Wiebe, 1981, 212).

From this follows that for Smith two sets of criteria apply to religious doctrines: criteria related to propositional truth, and to personal truth. Wiebe writes:

At one point Smith seems to suggest that, in fact, ‘religious truth’ does not ultimately differ from truth as ‘rational correctness’ [i.e., as propositional truth] — that it does not have totally different criteria of assessment but claims rather that religious truth concerns both ‘rational correctness’ and ‘personal response’ (in the existentialist sense of ‘authenticity’) as a joint criterion (Wiebe, 1981, p. 213).

These brief comments show that, although Smith aims to shift the primacy of understanding doctrine to personal truth, he is unable to distance himself from understanding doctrine also propositionally. While he values authenticity perhaps more than truth, Smith has to admit that both validity claims pertain to religious truth claims. Within Lindbeck’s typology, Smith would in fact occupy a hybrid position, namely a cognitive-expressive position. However, given that Smith is reluctant to permit propositional truth, typifying him as an expressionist would still be appropriate.

However, Netland further argues that Smith fails to recognise that there is an important sense in which “propositional truth is logically basic and is presupposed by all other uses of

truth” (Netland, *ibidem*, p. 129). Thus for Netland, propositional truth is more important than personal truth, even if we accept that there is such a thing as personal truth. While for Smith personal truth is primary, for Netland propositional truth is primary. Commenting on Smith’s concept of personal truth, Netland argues that at least three different interpretations are possible:

- (1) Personal truth can legitimately be applied to religion whereas propositional truth cannot.
- (2) Both personal truth and propositional truth can be applied to religion, but personal truth is somehow more basic and fundamental than propositional truth.
- (3) Both personal truth and propositional truth can be applied to religion, but propositional truth is more basic than personal truth.

Since Netland believes that, epistemologically, the most basic notion of truth is propositional truth, he will reject (1) and (2). His argument runs as follows: if a proposition *p* is offered as something we should accept as true — and we assume that Smith has this intention —, then it is itself dependent upon the notion of propositional truth. The reason for this is that *p* expresses a proposition that makes a claim about reality: that reality actually is as the proposition expressed by *p* asserts it to be. The sense in which *p* is presumed to be true is therefore not that of personal truth.

However, Smith’s claim, that religious truth should be understood as personal truth (“Religious truth is personal truth”), can easily be understood as a claim that is itself propositional. Thus, the validity claim attached to Smith’s own statement is different than the validity claim implied by the content of his statement. This difference does not generate a paradox, since two sentences can raise two different validity claims. As we have seen, the reverse is also true: one sentence can raise two validity claims. This is best shown by explicating the validity claims in question through secondary sentences. But how do we know which of those two validity claims is primary? Rather than aiming to deny that propositional truth is primary, I suggest arguing for a fourth option, one that Netland himself does not consider:

- (4) Both personal truth and propositional truth can be applied to religion, and neither is more basic than the other.

The reason why neither personal truth or propositional truth is primary is due to the fact that different validity claims can be attached to sentences. On this account, propositional truth is not and cannot be foundational for the validity claim of either subjective truthfulness or intersubjective right-

ness, due to the fact that the conditions that redeem truth are radically different from the conditions that redeem truthfulness or rightness. Propositional truth is therefore never a necessary condition for the authenticity or intersubjective appropriateness of claims.

4.5. The Normativist Position Revisited

We can understand religious belief on the expressivist approach to pertain to first-person subjective meaning. Extending this to include others, when two first-persons share the same religious belief, this belief is now not just my first-person belief, but one that we — as a first-person plural quasi-entity — share interpersonally. Thus my original claim acquires *an illocutionary force* which was not present when it was only me who held the belief. Given our shared cultural space, the question asked here is whether it is appropriate or right for me to hold this particular belief. I can be authentic and truthful about my own interior belief, but unless my belief is also intersubjectively or culturally appropriate, you and I will not come to understand one another or be able to coordinate our actions, *if need be*. Thus a social or cultural worldview prescribes, through illocutionary force, what is considered to be appropriate belief and behaviour. Neither I, nor the others, are necessarily raising a claim to propositional truth when we affirm or deny intersubjectively held beliefs. Although a propositional claim is always still available within the same speech act, the particular validity claim raised here is (cultural) appropriateness or justness. This allows me to rephrase option (4) as follows:

(4.1) Both personal truth, propositional truth, and normative truth can be applied to religion, and neither is more basic than the other.

Of course, Netland could still argue that what the culture describes or prescribes, is dependent on propositional truth. This would then simply be an extension of the argument levelled against the expressivist. Again, it remains to be shown that our concepts are always dependent on objective reality. Rather, our cultural framework will offer *a perspective on reality*, which consists of shared meaning, and does not always necessitate a neat cognitive correspondence with the objective domain. At least, it is not self-evident that all religious assumptions have, or need to have, an objective referent, that is, be ontologically real.

For instance, the claim “Santa Claus exists” is a typical cultural belief held by children of a certain age. It has objective referents in the little Santa Claus dolls in the shops, or in the bearded gentlemen on whose laps the children sit. However, this does not mean that it is ontologically the

case that Santa Claus exists. The fact that, ontologically, Santa Claus does not seem to exist is the reason why children sooner or later grow up to deny Santa Claus all together.

A propositionalist will argue that a proposition is not dependent on it being true. Rather, a proposition is defined by its capacity to hold a truth value of either true or false. Thus, the propositionalist could argue that those children are merely holding false beliefs, and that they will come to understand this fact after a certain age. At that moment they will drop their false beliefs. Thus, the fact that the propositional claims fails, shows that a truth-value has been assigned.

However, a normativist could argue that, although ontologically Santa Claus does not exist, he does "exist" culturally, that is, within the cultural worldview. For something to be meaningful it does not need to exist in the objective world, as long as it "exists" either subjectively, or intersubjectively.¹⁰⁸ If propositional truth is foundational, when a propositional claim collapses, the dependent claims should collapse with it. However, the fact that Santa Claus does not ontologically exist does not necessarily prevent us from holding onto the claim.

The propositionalist could counter that, if cultural beliefs (e.g., religious beliefs) are proven to be propositionally false, it could be said to be *insincere* to keep believing in them, even if the false beliefs still continue to produce cultural (e.g., religious) results. However, this argument only has bite if one agrees on the primacy and selection of truth as a validity claim in the first place. If the discourse is truth-oriented, to keep affirming what has been shown as false, is indeed *fallacious*, irrational and to be rejected. However, as we have shown, discourses on normative rightness and subjective truthfulness, are not centred around the *truth-falsity dyad*, and cannot be based on the same concerns that govern propositional truth. Indeed, the crux of the matter is that we have different measures of justification for each of the different types of claims. To return to my previous example, I can believe that <subj>Spirit is real</>, but be not quite sure whether also <obj>Spirit is real</>. Although for me Spirit is a first-person experiential reality, I can grant that I have very little evidence to suggest that Spirit is also a third-person objective reality. Since the different domains are quasi-independent, it does not follow that, because I cannot claim <obj>Spirit is real</>, I should also forego the claim <subj>Spirit is real</>. An objective referent does not necessarily need to exist for me to be justified in claiming that "Spirit is Real," since I have *basic subjective evidence* that <subj>Spirit is real</>. The authenticity of my experience cannot be accessed by any objective methodologies, but only through interior insight, and a truthful reporting of that experience. If, however, I am going to claim that <obj>Spirit is real</>, then I am indeed rationally beholden to the

¹⁰⁸ In the first case, it is meaningful to me, in the second case it is meaningful to us.

demands of objective inquiry in order to offer convincing third-person proof that this is indeed the case. However, even if I do not have this kind of justification, it does not seem to be required that I should completely get rid of the claim *<obj>Spirit is real</>*. Since I already have subjective experience of Spirit, it might well turn out to be an objective reality as well. For now, however, I have no way to evidentialize this claim (i.e., provide evidence). Hence, instead of abandoning the claim, I bracket it, and file it away as being an unresolved claim. Of course, if convincing evidence would show up that in fact *<obj>Spirit is not real</>*, I might have to revisit my original claim, and assign it the value of “false.” Bracketing the claim, we quarantine the claim within a particular domain for the time being. For instance the claim [*<obj>Spirit is Real</obj>*] is quarantined in the objective domain. Hence, for the foreseeable future, it can no longer be selected as a representational speech act, and is therefore no longer vulnerable to objective criticism, until it is either decommissioned from quarantine, or removed altogether.

4.6. Conclusion

In conclusion, in this chapter I made a rather simple but necessary point, namely that the functions of language identified by Habermas are equally present when it comes to religious language. Firstly, I presented and discussed Lindbeck’s tripartite typology. Secondly, I investigated how Lindbeck’s categories are also present in the writings of several authors who write on the topic of religious diversity. I also specifically argued that none of the three functions of religious language is necessarily primary. That is, although I accept Lindbeck’s tripartite classification of religious language, I do not follow his advice that we should take the cultural-linguistic function to be primary. Neither do I follow Netland’s recommendation that propositional language is primary. Instead I argue that all three functions can be present in religious speech but that none is primary to the others.

5. Nicholas Rescher and Aporetics

5.1. Introduction

In my Introduction I stated that one of the aims of my dissertation is to show how Aporetics can be aptly applied to the issue of religious diversity. In this chapter, I will introduce Rescher's work on Aporetics.¹⁰⁹ I will start by defining the concept of an aporia and analyse its structure as consisting of three necessary elements. Following Rescher, I will define the field of Aporetics as the rational deliberation of aporias by means of a plausibility analysis. In particular, I will show how an aporetic plausibility analysis requires criteria and standards of acceptability. Such criteria are necessary in order to judge claims and prepare the aporetic set for dissolution. However, the crux of the matter of such criteria will be that they themselves are rooted in epistemic values. Although those values are still thoroughly rational — we have good reasons for them —, they will also be preferential, and thus give rise to differences in *orientation*.

5.2. The Structure of Aporias

Taken from Ancient Greek, the term *aporia* (Greek: ἀπορία; plural: aporias, aporiai) literally means “no way out,” and denotes an *impasse* or *blockage*. However, in Plato's *Republic* it also acquired the meaning of a *logical puzzle*, or a (cognitive) *perplexity*. As with many ideas mentioned by Plato, the term *aporia* has since then had a long history in Western philosophy.

To begin with, Aristotle — in his *Book Beta* of the *Metaphysics* — presented a list of fifteen fundamental puzzles that needed to be resolved in metaphysics. He likened aporiai to intellectual knots: “You cannot...untie a knot unless you know how it was tied, and perplexity reveals an intellectual knot” (Aristotle, *Book Beta*, Ch. 1). The dissolution of aporiai was to be achieved by means of an “aporetic method” (Karuzis, 2010, p. 233).

In modern times, Emmanuel Kant — in his *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1781)— discussed a number of aporiai as “coordinated pairs of arguments” or antinomies that lead to mutually contradictory conclusions (Siitonen and Airaksinen, 1988). Nicolai Hartmann (1882-1950) made extensive use of aporiai in his *Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis* (1921). Hartmann viewed

¹⁰⁹ Rescher has written on aporias for over four decades. As a very prolific writer — a characteristic he shares with Jürgen Habermas — Rescher has written numerous articles and monographs on the topic, a fair bit of which has been repetition. I refer the reader to my Bibliography. Here, I will only mention his first main work on aporias, *The Strife of Systems* (1985), his monograph on *Pluralism* (1993), and his summative work on *Aporetics* (2006). A short summary of *The Strife of Systems* can be found in his article *Aporetic Method in Philosophy* (1987). *Pluralism* deals with the topic of dissensus, and the possible attitudes to diversity (or pluralism) within philosophy. For a book review of *Aporetics*, see Vickers (2010). For secondary literature on Rescher and Aporetics, see Saarinen (2003), Almeder (2008), and Jacquette (2009).

them as difficult foundational questions. The terms *aporia* and *aporetic figure* also featured heavily in the work of Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) to which testifies his *Aporias: Mourir —s’attendre aux “limites de la vérité”* (1996). Derrida understood *aporiai* as the “blind spots” of a metaphysical argument (Allen, 2005; Anker, 2006).¹¹⁰

Arguably, Nicholas Rescher has made the most extensive use of the concept of *aporia*, at least in recent years. Rescher describes an *aporia* as “any cognitive situation in which the threat of inconsistency confronts us” (Rescher, 2009, p. 1).¹¹¹ More technically, he defines it as “a group of contentions that are individually plausible but collectively inconsistent” (ibidem, 2001, p. 93).¹¹² Nevertheless, Rescher is not the only one who has recently revised the concept of *aporia*. Vlk and Ossimitz (2010) suggest that the “modern definition of the ancient philosophical term *aporia* has been coined by Gerhard Schwarz” (p. 647). According to Schwarz, an *aporetic conflict* is a situation that fulfils three criteria (Schwarz, 2010, p. 301):

- (1) two opposing claims or assertions (which is trivially true for every conflict);¹¹³
- (2) both sides are right;
- (3) both claims depend on each other,

Rescher’s definition of an *aporia* seems only slightly different from Schwarz’s version. Similarly, we can identify three salient points in Rescher’s definition; an *aporia* represents:

- [1] a group of claims (which are)
- [2] individually plausible (but)
- [3] collectively inconsistent.

¹¹⁰ The term “aporetics” also shows up in Paul Ricoeur’s *Time and Narrative* (2012). For an extensive overview of the history of the term *aporiai*, see Arto Siitonen’s *Problems of Aporetics* (1989), as well as W. D. Ross’ *Metaphysical Aporia and Philosophical Heresy* (1989).

¹¹¹ I will call anyone who is confronted with an *aporia* — and therefore has to find a way out of the inconsistency — an *aporetic decider*. This implies that he or she has to make a decision of some sort: they cannot idly sit by in the face of an *aporia*. I will also use the term *aporetician* for someone who studies the field of aporetics, and has interests in the mechanics of conflict dissolution. The *aporetic decider* merely wants a solution for the problem at hand, and does not necessarily have broader interests.

¹¹² Rescher’s definition seems to have become the standard in the field, even to describe the original term *aporia*. See the entry ‘*aporia*’ in Honderich, *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (2005).

¹¹³ Vlk and Ossimitz use the term “positions” when they translate from the German. The actual text says “Behauptungen oder Interessen” (Schwarz, 2010, p. 301). For Rescher, a “position” involves the selection of certain claims as a dissolution of the *aporia*.

5.2.1. Aporetic Clusters

Rescher suggests that individually plausible claims will not present an aporetic problem unless they come together in an *aporetic group* or cluster. The claims must somehow join — and be in a relationship with one another — in order for us to be able to talk of an aporia. On Schwarz's account, claims also come together to form clusters but they do so minimally, i.e., an aporetic cluster contains just two claims, constituting a simple contradiction or antinomy.¹¹⁴ Rescher, on the other hand, is more forthcoming in suggesting how claims join together, that is, by proviso of a *thematic context*. The claims of an aporetic clusters are gathered around a theme; they constitute a thematic family. In short, not just any claims join into a cluster, but rather thematically related claims.¹¹⁵ So how do themes arise?

Rescher responds that aporias surface in many different contexts of cognitive endeavour, but that they are “particularly prominent in philosophy” (1987, p. 283). Rescher understands philosophy as *worldview-generating philosophy* (see also chapter 1). He argues that human beings are rational inquirers who inquire into their environment by interacting with it and formulating questions. The products of such rational inquiry are “data” that can be categorised into (a) beliefs, (b) practical expectations, and (c) evaluations (1993, p. 65-67). The differential background of experiences will lead different inquirers to cognitive disagreement, or cognitive pluralism. Worldviews will exhibit a tendency to “hypertrophy.” In constructing a worldview we interpret what is distinct — the natural environment, the human environment (other human beings), and the internal environment within ourselves — , and the matter of fact is that there are always different ways of doing so. Thus, the total set of beliefs on the world plunges the community of all inquirers into inconsistency. The thematic dependency of aporetic claims is therefore to be expected on the basis of similar *erotetic inquiries* across worldviews. Since the same questions generate differing answers, these answers will be thematically linked.

William Christian, however, has pointed out — see *supra* — that even when we have thematically related claims, such claims might still not explicitly contradict each other. We can expect the likelihood of explicit contradiction to increase with greater geographical and cultural contact between different worldviews, as has been the case in the last few centuries. Moreover, there are often implicit contradictions between worldview claims that can be made explicit by, for instance, the comparative philosopher, or the philosopher of religion. Finally, the fact that religious aporias

¹¹⁴ Paradoxes are examples of aporias. See Rescher's *Paradoxes* (2001a), and Chapter 6 in his *Aporetics* (2009).

¹¹⁵ E.g., claims on the status of Jesus Christ, the nature of the Soul, the existence of an Ultimate Reality, etc.

— i.e., coordination problems between specifically religious world views —, will be pervasive is evidenced by the history of religious doctrinal conflicts, both internal and external, and to a lesser degree perhaps by the considerable contemporary philosophical literature on the problem of conflicting religious claims.

5.2.2. Backed by Good Reasons

Both Rescher [2] and Schwarz (2) agree that in an aporetic situation we have some good (i.e., *prima facie* at least) reasons to accept each one of the individual contentions. In other words, the different claims seem individually plausible (or acceptable and appealing). We could say that the available evidence speaks well for them. Yet, Schwarz (2) posits that we are not just in possession of good reasons for our claims, but that these claims are also right. Herein lays the problem as the principle of contradiction — one of the cornerstones of rational thought — states that two claims cannot be both true at the same time when they contradict each other. Vlk and Ossimitz take this to suggest that aporias are “outside of Western binary logic” (2010, p. 643). They write:

[C]riterion (2) implies that they cannot be resolved either by logical reasoning (since they are impossible and not allowed in the world of logic) nor by judges or hierarchical organizations (ibid., p. 647).

This purported fact that aporias fall outside of “Western logic” seems a tall price to pay for what is arguably only little benefit. Prudence suggests that we should only consider boat-rocking strategies after we have exhausted all other and less costly venues for resolution first. Rescher, on the other hand, manages to avoid such far-going statements. He suggests that we — i.e., the belief holders who are forced to make aporetic decisions — treat the different positions and contentions not as true claims, but rather as *plausible data* (i.e., as proposals). These plausibilities are propositions that, while claiming truth, have not yet been fully established as true, and are therefore only *truth candidates*. For the moment, these putative truths are backed only by a rationally warranted expectation that they may turn out to be true, if all goes well, and no countervailing considerations are operative. However, in the final analysis, these candidates may not be able to make good on their epistemic claims. Furthermore, while the approach that Vlk and Ossimitz suggest is “paraconsistent” — where the rules of logic are changed to avoid inconsistent results (Vickers, 2010, p. 105) — Rescher firmly rejects “logic-driven” approaches in favour of a “content-driven” or “supra-logical”

approach (2009, p. 88; see *infra*). Vickers summarises that on such an approach one decides how best to proceed "by considering the material content of the assumptions in question" (2010, p.106).

5.2.3. An Inconsistent Set

Rescher's definition of an aporia stipulates that, taken together, the individual contentions and assertions are mutually incompatible: the cluster is inconsistent. Schwarz makes the same point in (1), where he says that the positions oppose each other. The fact that certain claims conflict with others might give us reasons for caution, for, as we noted, considerations from logic (i.e., the principle of non-contradiction) suggest that at least some — if not all — of the claims involved will have to be false. That is, although we had good reasons to believe a claim to be true, the fact that others disagree with us might mean that we were wrong. In this case we are exercising the epistemic value of *prudence or caution*. Thus, David Basinger (2000, 2002) argues that we should take a step back and reconsider our positions when differing claims come into purview.

However, this argument might not be universally convincing, as it is not self-evident — at least not to all — that the existence of differing claims should make us waiver, or move us to reconsider the claims that we ourselves have brought to the table: that is, either reconsider the available evidence for our beliefs, or reconsider their truth value (i.e., true or false) altogether. The reason why we rationally believe our claims is, presumably, that we have some experiential evidence for the fact of the matter of our beliefs. Moreover, it might also be the case that this experience — or its logical consequences — have been confirmed or validated by a community of equally experienced peers. Thus, for all we know, our claims are warranted. Admittedly, the experience of other people might have led them to other claims. Nevertheless, we ourselves might have nothing in our experience that could corroborate theirs, and neither might our own community of peers. Since we had good reasons for our beliefs in the first place, we could therefore just sit on our own claims, and posit them as true (as far as we know), even in light of epistemic peer conflict.

However, we can also bring other epistemic values to bear. For instance, Rescher argues that if we want to engross truth (i.e., enlarge our total knowledge), we must be willing to expand our horizons, and reconsider our claims. That is, even if we remain convinced of the truth of our claims, we should be willing to take the claims of our interlocutor on his or her own terms, and examine them on their truth values. After all, doing so we might learn something. Of course, considering novel claims does not need to imply that we abandon our own claims. One part of our mind can take our own claims to be true — as no definite proof has yet been delivered that they would be false —, while another part of our mind is willing to reconsider by investigating novel or even op-

posing claims. In fact, this strategy is the only way we could ever readjust our conventional beliefs in favour of new beliefs.

5.3. Aporetic Procedures

As we have stated *supra*, the inconsistency of claims suggests that the different contentions cannot all be right, or true: at least some of them will have to be wrong, or false. Thus, if we accept some of the claims, logic will dictate that we deny those claims that are inconsistent with what we accept.¹¹⁶ However, logic does not dictate which claims we should deny, or what strategy we should use to deny them. To do so, we need an "extra-logical" or "supra-logical" approach to aporias. For this purpose, Rescher suggests we turn to aporetics as a theory of rational deliberation in the face of inconsistencies. In his recent monograph on aporetic theory — aptly named *Aporetics* (2009) - Rescher not only offers a descriptive explanation of what constitutes an aporia, but also how they can be rationally dissolved by means of an aporetic method or procedure. Rescher argues for a general and uniform approach to the management of aporias, which he calls coherence tropism via plausibility analysis. This aporetic procedure consists of a rational appraisal of the *comparative plausibility* of claims, followed by a breaking of the aporetic chain at its weakest link (Rescher, 2009, p. 3). Rescher makes three fundamental points in this regard, which we can sum up as follows:

- (1) the prime directive of cognitive rationality is to maintain and restore consistency;
- (2) the only rationally viable option for doing so is by rejecting (or modifying) claims and taking up a specific philosophical position;
- (3) weeding out claims is most successfully done via a plausibility analysis, where the least plausible claims are rejected.

5.3.1. Consistency Restoration

Principle (1) states that the definitive task (or goal) of aporetics is consistency restoration: we aim at restoring consistency by bringing back systemic order and coherence into the claims of the aporetic cluster (2009, p. 133). Rescher calls this the "prime directive" (2009, p. 3) or the "prime desideratum" (ibid., p. 9). Given that the principle of consistency is one of the cornerstones — and a princi-

¹¹⁶ One of the enduring problems of aporetics will be that we have good reasons to accept all of the individual claims, and that denying some claims will therefore come at a cost. As we will see, an exclusivist approach to aporetics will be willing to pay that cost, unlike a pluralist approach.

pal epistemic value — of rational philosophy, it makes sense that consistency restoration should be one of the primary task of aporetics. Nevertheless, Rescher suggests that consistency restoration is not the only operative principle. To secure truths, we must accept something and we should not do so indiscriminately. We therefore require certain epistemic principles and criteria that can act as guidelines in our decision making. Such criteria allow us to sift out what is acceptable — or plausible in the sense of tenable — and what is not. Consistency and coherence, two prime concerns in worldview construction, are examples of such rules. Both often also come in tandem and we could argue that consistency is but a stricter and more formal form of coherence. Since to achieve coherence the different components need to fit well within the system we could argue that inconsistency is but one type of example of how a component does not fit the larger whole.

Many other criteria will be at play (see also chapter 6). Rescher reasons that we do not just aim at accepting *only truths*, but also at accepting *all truths* — i.e., we want to engross or enlarge truth. The endeavour towards *more truth* is hindered if all we want to do is *secure truths*, and avoid errors. Hence we require a spirit or *epistemic value* of pushing beyond what we already know, boldly looking for further truths. Crucially, Rescher argues that in such a case there is “nothing regrettable, and nothing irrational, about adopting epistemic policies that allow occasional errors — and even inconsistencies — to slip through the net, provided that the general quality of the catch is high enough” (2009, p. 10). He quips that error avoidance “can prove part of that best which is the enemy of the good” (ibid., p. 11). Rescher further writes:

The point is that one can reasonably be in a position of deeming inconsistencies plausible when driven to it by the operation of (otherwise defensible) acceptance principles. The very drive towards completeness — itself a key parameter of systematic adequacy — can and does so operate as to enjoin at least temporary and provisional inconsistency toleration upon us (ibid., p. 12).

However, pushing to catch *bigger fish* — to stick with the fishing analogy — can come at the cost of catching less smaller fish, namely those that are more secure. Hence, the epistemic value of trying to catch bigger fish, namely a bigger catch of claims, competes with the epistemic value of securing truths.¹¹⁷ In short, although we need epistemic principles for the purpose of deciding on claims, sometimes such epistemic principles can interfere with the operation of others (see also

¹¹⁷ This is however not an either-or situation, but a dialectical one.

chapter 6). One implication of this will be that *aporiai* can become pervasive beyond the mere difference in first-order claims. As I will show later on, even complete “superclasses” of epistemic criteria — that is, large clusters of similar criteria — can cause such interference. A classic example is the insistence of science on mere objective principles, for instance in dialogue with religious world-views.

5.3.2. Philosophical Positioning

Principle (2) states that, in order to escape an *aporia*, we have to choose between claims, and take up a specific philosophical position. Rescher notes that there are always several ways out of an *aporia*, which can be accomplished by three different techniques: (1) suspension of judgment, (2) thesis rejection, and (3) thesis modification.

5.3.2.1. Suspension of Judgment

The first way out is not to choose: we simply walk away from the *aporia*. It must be said that, technically, this is not a way out of the inconsistency, but merely *avoidance* of the problem. We abandon the particular project or issue, and walk away from the entire aporetic cluster. We opt for a *suspension of judgment*, as we choose not to choose between claims. Rescher points out that suspension of judgment has lesser intellectual appeal than trying to problem-solve the cluster, and finding out exactly where the difficulty lies. Not choosing, he adds, would “curtail our information” (2009, p. 8) — if indeed we value the engrossing of truth — and “plunge us into vacuity” (2007, p. 23). However, lesser intellectual appeal, we might add, does not need to imply that there is never any intellectual satisfaction to be had from suspending judgment.¹¹⁸ We might under certain conditions value suspension of judgment more than impromptu adjudication, for instance in the case of futurological beliefs (i.e., beliefs about the future). Consider the belief: “It will rain in Glasgow on April 15th, 2015”. This statement — trivially perhaps — leads to a contradiction if conjoined with a statement of the sort: “It will be sunny in Glasgow on April 15th, 2015.” In an attempt to force a resolution, and choose a particular stance, we could argue that on that day it will rain in Glasgow, perhaps based on an analysis of weather patterns for all April 15th's of the past hundred years, and plausibly expect it to do so. The voice of caution, however — and someone can always be found to voice it

¹¹⁸ One could argue that, because we do not choose or decide, that no intellectual satisfaction is in fact possible here, since not choosing does not add to our knowledge. However, not choosing leaves intact the possibility that we might be able to decide one day, and expectation itself can carry a certain satisfaction. Similarly, postponement of satisfying a desire can sometimes bring a perhaps counter-intuitive kind of satisfaction.

— might suggest that we postpone judgement on cases that deal with (distant) future events. We could reason that the variables involved in calculating the probability are too numerous to make an informed decision; until we know more, we should postpone judgement. If we do so, we prefer the epistemic value of *security* over and above the value of *informativeness*. To exercise caution is, in this case, prudent, and therein lays its rational appeal. Our epistemic value of prudence avoids more decisive aporetic techniques in favour of a suspension of judgment.

Quine and Ullian (1978) call such a suspension of judgment “non-belief,” in contrast to disbelief (i.e., the belief in the falsity of a claim). They argue that our adjustment of inconsistent sets may be either *decisive* or *indecisive*: “If it is decisive, each belief of the set is either kept or switched to disbelief. If it is indecisive some of the beliefs simply give way to non-belief; judgment on them is suspended” (1978, p. 19). Crucially, they add: “On the meager data before us, the most reasonable course would seem to be to rest with this indecisive outcome pending further findings” (ibid., p. 19). In other words, in cases of insufficient data, arguably more benefit can be had from taking the middle position between belief and disbelief than to squarely stand behind the option of disbelief. Instead of abandoning the claim, we “bracket” it, and file it away as being an unresolved claim. This is not dissimilar to a detective having separate file folders: one file folder for “closed” cases, which have been resolved, and where we had enough evidence to come to a *decisive* solution; another folder for “cold” cases, where we did not have enough evidence. As anyone watching detective shows knows, it is the nature of cold cases that they can always be reopened. If more evidence shows up, we can revisit our original claim, and assign it a truth value. The bracketing of claims is specifically relevant for claims that have more than one function in the communicative process. For instance, we can bracket a claim representing a certain communicative function (e.g., to express propositional truth), and we take it off the aporetic table. However, we then resubmit it to the aporetic table as representing another function (e.g., to express subjective or experiential-expressive truth), which can be achieved by thesis modification (see *infra*).

5.3.2.2. Thesis Abandonment

The most obvious strategy of restoring consistency, Rescher suggests, is by weeding out claims: we remove certain claims to make room on the aporetic table for the ones that we want to keep. Thus, Rescher notes that any aporia can be resolved by simply abandoning some (or all) of the commitments whose conjoining creates a contradiction (2009, p. 3). He calls this process *thesis rejection* or *thesis abandonment*. Given that this strategy excludes claims from the global set, we could also call

this *thesis exclusion*. As I will point out in the next chapter, the exclusivist epistemic stance to religious diversity will depend on thesis exclusion for its aporetic concerns.

Rescher argues that there is “no rationally viable alternative” (ibid., p. 4) to rejecting one or more of the theses involved since accepting all of them results in inconsistency. Because our cognitive sympathies are overextended we must make curtailments. Something has to give; some of those incompatible contentions at issue must be abandoned. Aporias therefore constitute situations of a “forced choice” among alternative contentions (ibid., p. 4-6). For instance, the most simple example of an aporia is a *contradiction*, that is, an aporia with just two claims A and B. In order to get rid of the inconsistency we choose one claim A, and we reject the other claim B. Only two options are available here: either we choose A over B, or we choose B over A. However, an aporia with multiple claims is not any different. We select our basic set of claims, and reject all others that are inconsistent with it. The only difference is that the amount of possible exits out of the aporia increases. Rescher illustrates this by means of an example that lists a group of contentions formulated by pre-Socratic philosophers (2009, p. 94):

- (1) Reality is one: Real existence is homogenous.
- (2) Matter is real (self-subsistent).
- (3) Form is real (self-subsistent).
- (4) Matter and form are distinct (heterogenous).

Propositions (2) to (4) entail that reality is heterogeneous. This entailment contradicts (1) and makes the cluster of claims aporetic — given that we have some substantiation for each claim. We now have a limited number of exits (i.e., four) out of the aporia, what I will call an *aporetic quad*:

- (a) denial of (1): we can reason from (2) to (4) to the denial of (1)
- (b) denial of (2): we can reason from (1), (3), and (4) to the denial of (2)
- (c) denial of (3): we can reason from (1), (2), and (4) to the denial of (3)
- (d) denial of (4): we can reason from (1) to (3) to the denial of (4)

We can choose between four possible exits, and all are reasonable to take. If a position is reasonable to take, it is likely that someone will actually do so. Hence, the occurrence of different schools of

thought that historically took up each one of those exits.¹¹⁹ If these schools are divided on some specific topics, it might be the case that they are united on other topics. Thus we could envision a position where, in our search for consensus, only those claims are retained that are agreed upon by all parties at the table, and where all issues that are divisive are rejected. However, even in this case we are still using the strategy of thesis rejection, viz., we abandon those claims that are inconsistent. Doing so, we are not taking up a philosophical position on the divisive issues. For this reason, this strategy would still remain dissatisfactory for all parties involved. We can expect the degree of dissatisfaction to be proportionate to the perceived importance of the issues involved. A variation on this scenario would be an *identist pluralist theory* that aims to dig out the commonalities between worldviews by looking for the deep structures behind claims. Such a theory argues that what is of real importance is in fact those deep structures, rather than the surface structure of claims on which worldviews differ.

Finally, it is not the case that thesis rejection *ipso facto* leads to a dissensus between parties at the table. As an aporetic strategy it is neutral in this regard. For instance, we can have a change of heart and reject our claims in favour of alternative claims. Here, we are still using the same method of thesis rejection, but we have turned the tables. We now accept what we hitherto rejected, and this has now become our own doctrinal position. This type of consensus, however, is based on a capitulation of one's own position, what George Lindbeck (1984) calls “doctrinal capitulation” (see *infra*).

5.3.2.3. Thesis Modification

Although Rescher states that we have no choice but to abandon certain propositions in order to restore inconsistency, he also adds that it is often possible to “embody a distinction that makes it possible to retain something of what is being abandoned” (Rescher, 2009, p. 121). He explains:

To restore consistency among incompatible beliefs calls for abandoning some of them as they stand. In general, however, philosophers do not provide for consistency restoration wholly by way of rejection. Rather, they have recourse to modification, replacing the abandoned belief with a duly qualified revision thereof. Since (by hypothesis) each thesis belonging to an aporetic cluster is individually attractive, simple rejection lets the case for the rejected thesis go unacknowledged. Only by modifying the thesis through a resort to dis-

¹¹⁹ Historical examples of (a) are the pluralism of Anaxagoras, and the form/matter dualism of Aristotle; of (b), the idealism of the Eleatics (the school of thought founded by Parmenides), and Platonic idealism; of (c), materialism in the form of atomism; of (d), the dual-aspect theory of Pythagoreanism. See Rescher, 2009, p. 94.

inctions can one manage to give proper recognition to the full range of considerations that initially led into aporetic difficulty (ibidem, p. 121).

Rescher does make it clear that thesis modification is still a form of abandonment since we abandon the original formulation of the claim. Here, however, the original claim is not just abandoned wholesale but is replaced by a new and qualified version. To illustrate thesis modification, Rescher gives an example taken from the well-known Christian theological problem of evil:

- (1) The world was created by God
- (2) The world contains evil
- (3) A creator is responsible for all defects of his creation
- (4) God is not responsible for the evils of this world

Since (1) God created the world, he is (3) responsible for all aspects of nature, which therefore includes (2) the occurrence of evil in the world. However, this is in contradiction with (4). Rescher suggests that we can introduce a distinction between (a) causal responsibility and (b) moral responsibility. On this view, the causal responsibility of an agent does not by necessity entail a moral responsibility for the consequences of his acts. For causal responsibility, (3) is true but (4) false; for moral responsibility, (4) is true but (3) is false. Thus, we can retain theses (1) and (2), and modify (3) and (4) on the basis of each side of the distinction:

- (1) The world was created by God
- (2) The world contains evil
- (3.1) A creator is causally responsible for all defects of his creation.
- (4.1) God is not morally responsible for the evils of this world.

The end result is that we have successfully restored consistency on the basis of a distinction. Once the distinction is introduced, no matter which way we turn in construing responsibility, the inconsistency operative in the aporia is averted. However, this solution also comes at a cost since the original formulation has been abandoned.

Rescher further suggests that the making of distinctions is a dialectical process: “a Hegelian ascent rising above the level of antagonistic positions to that of a ‘higher’ conception, in which the opposites are reconciled” (1985, p. 294). In this Hegelian process we abandon the initial thesis and

move toward its counter-thesis by way of a “duly hedged synthesis” (ibid.). Rescher compares this higher-order ascent to a principle forwarded by Frank Plumpton Ramsey, which Rescher refers to as Ramsey's Maxim:

In such cases it is a heuristic maxim that the truth lies not in one of the two disputed views but in some third possibility which has not yet been thought of, which we can only discover by rejecting something assumed as obvious by both disputants (Ramsey, 1931, p. 115-116; quoted in Rescher, 1985, p. 294).

On Ramsey's view, distinctions provide for a higher synthesis of opposing views. However, even a synthesis rejects something previously assumed. Since synthesis is based on a strategy of thesis rejection, and thesis modification is but a soft form of thesis rejection — splitting certain theses into acceptable and unacceptable parts —, any synthesis can be seen as taking up one philosophical (or worldview) position amongst others. That is, *synthetic worldviews* are equally vying for aporetic supremacy. On Vidal's account, as we have seen, synthesis is a third-order activity and the culmination of the philosophy of worldviews. Moreover, it consists of a "dialectical investigation" that is exploited "in a doctrinal way" (2012, p. 312). From this follows that synthesis produces a specific philosophical stance. Rescher argues that the synthesis thesis (i.e., contradictions must result in a higher synthesis of opposing views) seems plausible, but that it also has shortcomings. He writes:

For in most realistic cases the two disputed views — alongside with the "third possibility" itself — are simply part of an inconsistent n-ad of alternatives which cannot be gotten rid of, but simply breaks out again in a more sophisticated form even after the "third possibility" is introduced (1978, p. 222).

In other words, synthesis does not necessarily get rid of aporetic clusters. Thus, Rescher concludes that although such distinctions avert immediate cognitive conflict, they seldom settle controverted issues in a definitive way since they “always leave a crucial evaluative issue hanging in the air: the issue of priority” (1985, p. 295). The issue of priority, then, is at the core of Rescher's aporetic method.

5.3.3. Plausibility Analysis

To recapitulate, so far I have discussed that Rescher's aporetic procedure consists of restoring consistency to aporetic sets, either by weeding out claims or by modifying them. However, we still have to review how the aporetic decider is supposed to accomplish this. Although it is possible to take any way out of an aporia by removing what is inconsistent and taking up a certain (philosophical) position, we still need some sort of rational account to justify this process. Thus, principle (3) suggests that we require a "plausibility analysis." This strategy allows us to break the inconsistent chain of claims by removing the *comparatively least plausible* data, i.e., the "weakest link." Rescher (2009, p. 20) argues that *thesis plausibility* is grounded in (a) a thesis-warranting source (i.e., evidentiality), and/or (b) a thesis-warranting principle. The first horn states that we require some evidence in order for a claim to be plausible. The second horn, Rescher suggests, is composed of such "inductive desiderata" as simplicity, uniformity (i.e., treating like cases alike), consistency, specificity, definiteness, determinativeness, naturalness, etc. These include not only formal, but also various material criteria, like closeness to common sense, explanatory adequacy, inherent plausibility, allocations of presumption, and burden of proof. The central idea behind the thesis-warranting principle is that the more simple, uniform, specific, and definite a thesis appears to be, the more we can count it as plausible.

From this list of criteria, Rescher considers *simplicity* to act as a "crucial entry point for plausibility considerations" (2009, p. 20). However, it does not necessarily follow that (1) simplicity is the only entry point, or that (2) simplicity is of prime importance. Firstly, Rescher understands the different principles as *injunctions*, i.e., procedural and regulative principles of presumption. In the case of simplicity, the injunction becomes: "Other things being anything like equal, give precedence to simpler hypotheses vis-à-vis more complex ones" (2009, p. 20). In the same way, uniformity, specificity, etc., can all serve as "plausibilistic guides" to reasoning (Jaquette, 2009, p. 34). Secondly, if simplicity is of prime importance then we need some sort of justification for why it is to be set apart from all others (i.e., uniformity, specificity, etc). This does not seem to be a straightforward undertaking, if only because the effects of such principles are hard to differentiate. For instance, a uniform set of theses would be considered more simple than one that isn't. But is the set more plausible on the basis of its uniformity or on the basis of its simplicity? Therefore, Rescher's thesis-warranting principles seem to be all functionally equal in providing us with entry points into which claims are most plausible. However, this does in turn need not imply that they also all have the same valuational weight.

As stated, Rescher suggests that, in order to dissolve the aporia, we conduct a comparative analysis of the relative strengths of the various courses of positive argumentation, on the basis of the assumption is that this will lead us to “the weakest link” in the chain. This strategy of removing the weakest link, however, is not a novel suggestion. For instance, Quine and Ullian write:

Now when a set of beliefs is inconsistent, at least one of the beliefs must be rejected as false; but a question may remain open as to which to reject. Evidence must then be assessed, with a view to rejecting the least firmly supported of the conflicting beliefs (Quine & Ullian, 1978, p. 16).

The least firmly supported of the conflicting beliefs, on their account, is the one "which has the weakest evidence" (Quine, 1978, p. 17). However, the assessment of evidence is not as such a self-evident procedure. As Rescher points out, the “acceptability of the overall argumentation turns pivotally upon the conclusions to which it leads” (1978, p. 224; 1985, p. 93). In other words, how we evaluate the strength of the philosophical argument is at least in part dependent on the outcome of our aporetic efforts. What makes plausible data acceptable is whether a specific aporetic outcome is *acceptable to us*.

Both concepts of *plausibility* and *acceptability* feature heavily in Rescher's works, and often interchangeably so. If we follow the textbook definition of plausibility, a claim is *plausible* if it has a reasonable basis for belief and *acceptance*.¹²⁰ When we ask how *plausible* a claim is, we are asking how *acceptable* it is to us. From this follows that plausibility and acceptance are semantically related concepts.

However, both concepts also seem to fulfil separate functions in Rescher's work. For instance, Rescher distinguishes between the plausibility or acceptability of the antecedents (i.e., the *terminus a quo*), and the plausibility or acceptability of the consequences (i.e., the *terminus ad quem*) (1985, p. 93; 2006, p. 128). Elsewhere, he distinguishes between the "acceptability of some of its [i.e, the aporia] particular theses" and "its overall acceptability" (1985, p. 98; between square brackets mine). This functional differentiation also reflects the fact that Rescher distinguishes between two different phases of justification: (1) a first phase of supportive or positive argumentation, and (2) a second phase of eliminative or negative argumentation. Both phases aim to answer two

¹²⁰ *The Blackwell Dictionary of Western Philosophy* states: "A claim is plausible if it subjectively seems worthy of belief even if we have not necessarily studied its objective ground. Plausibility is thus acceptable credibility, and its degree of credibility can depend in part on the authority that advocates it. A plausible claim can turn out to be false, and an implausible claim can turn out to be true. People can disagree on what they find plausible" (Bunnin and Yu, 2004, p. 533).

separate questions on the issue of plausibility: (1) what procedure is to be used in qualifying a proposition for data-hood, and (2) how do we eliminate overcommitment when too many truth candidates are on the table.

5.3.3.1. Positive Argumentation

The first phase of positive argumentation is designed to settle the *plausibility* of the aporetic components and their qualification for data-hood. It asks the question which claims we should allow on the aporetic table. As stated earlier, Rescher understands the claims of aporetic sets as "plausible data," implying that the acceptance of a proposition as a truth candidate is not outright acceptance at all, but a "provisional and conditional epistemic inclination towards it" (2009, p. 13). Nevertheless, Rescher writes that plausible data exert "some degree of cognitive pressure" (1985, p. 19): they have some epistemic merit, and some claim upon us. Classing a claim as a plausible *datum* still implies a "committal position" with respect to it (2009, p. 14). Hence, it is this cognitive pressure — the fact that we have some good reasons — that brings claims together into aporetic clusters.

One might object that worldview claims, which come together at the boundaries of worldviews, do not normally have such a status of *truth candidacy*, particularly when those claims are central doctrines of the worldviews in question. Therefore, in order for Rescher's account to still apply the parties involved would have to revert the status of their claims from outright acceptance to provisional candidacy. This begs the question why and how the different parties would do so. In response, we could argue that aporias, in such cases, are *artificial edifices* that are temporarily constructed for the sake of dialogue, that is, for the sake of the possibility of furthering our knowledge. Thus, the notion of candidacy is introduced on *neutral grounds*, and the aporetic principles would apply within this construct.

Furthermore, since plausible data are not truths as such, Rescher grants that the use of his aporetic method will not in the end provide a guarantee of truth. What aporetics aims to accomplish is to optimise beliefs and "to maximise plausibility via considerations of systemic coherence in matters of question-resolution" (2009, p. 3). This aim is subject to the idea that the "most plausible prospect has a favourable assumption on its side" (ibid., p. 19). Thus we need a further account of which claims are "most" plausible — stated differently, which of our "good reasons" for the theses on the table turn out to be *the best*.

5.3.3.2. Negative Argumentation

The second phase of negative argumentation aims to settle the *acceptability* or comparative plausibility of claims: which of the plausible claims on the table should we keep and which should we remove? Paradoxically, this allows us to state that thesis plausibility as an eliminative practice does not involve arguing for the *plausibility* of claims, but rather for the *acceptability* of what are plausible data. Here, the defining question is whether the claims in question are acceptable, and not whether they are plausible, as this was *prima facie* established when the aporia as such emerged. On this account, acceptability equals plausibility of the consequences, since this determines "the relative acceptability of the various theses that are party to the conflict" (Rescher, 1985 , p. 96).

Rescher's *modus operandi* of aporetic decision-making consists of the evaluation and appraisal of the costs-and-benefits of the several alternatives on the table. This analysis is to be effected by means of "a weighing of the standing of the alternatives vis-à-vis various parameters of merit and demerit" (1978, p. 97). We use various epistemic criteria (i.e., parameters; see chapter 6) to decide which theses have more or less merit. Although we have forwarded presumptive data that are individually plausible, we need some epistemic criteria for finding the *most plausible* data in order to eliminate claims. Rescher calls such criteria "situationally appropriate right-of-way considerations" (2009, p. 133). These considerations assist us with aporetic management by means of a cost-benefit analysis of removing inconsistency. Since different cognitive enterprises have different aims and objectives, different rules of prioritising will be in effect.

Crucially, the "right-of-way rules" that we apply have to fit the teleology of the epistemic domain, which Rescher describes as "the functionality of purpose that defines the goal structure of the particular cognitive realm at issue" (2009, p. 137). The criteria (and standards) are articulated in terms of an optimal cognitive harmonisation with our experience: a "conformity to the fundamental commitments at which one arrives on the basis of the general course of one's experience" (2009, p. 137). Thus, while the same fundamental aporetic goal prevails throughout all the variant situations, the proper ways and means by which this is to be accomplished will be detailed by the "epistemic objectives that characterise the particular situation at hand" (2009, p. 139). From this follows that the "probative orientation" taken up towards the appraisal of theses and arguments is thoroughly *axiological* in nature (2006, p.130). Each probative orientation expresses certain *value predispositions* that operate to mark solutions to aporias as acceptable to us from our given position. However, this "given position" comes at the outset of our aporetic deliberations, i.e. *a priori*, and before philosophical reflection and systematisation. As Rescher writes:

[They come] from our culture, the "spirit of the times," the heritage of our teachers and their enemies, the course of our experiences, our own personality, even the stage of development of inclination of a single individual. They are not stable or intersubjective but variable and even to some extent person-relative (2006, p. 229).

Rescher insists that such probative orientational disagreement (i.e., disagreement about epistemic values), as distinct from the doctrinal disagreement of our aporias, is not itself *doctrinal* (i.e., about material theses or contentions). He writes:

It is regulative rather than constitutive; methodological rather than substantive. It relates to the procedural frame of reference, rather than to material that is emplaced within such a frame. It is a matter of the standards and criteria through which a solution to a question can be validated as acceptable (2006, p. 130).

However, we can argue that the epistemic criteria are still part and parcel of our worldview, even if they are not expressed through specific theses. They still form the "framework" (i.e., the probative orientation) for our aporetic concerns, or, more generally, for our concerns vis-à-vis the acceptance of worldview beliefs. They frame what kind of claims we can accept in the first place, and are therefore present in the background.

Although Rescher seems to use the terms criteria and standards interchangeably, I posit that our understanding of Aporetics would benefit from a further clarification and differentiation. For instance, Stanley Louis Cavell considers criteria to be "specifications a given person or group sets up on the basis of which (by means of, in terms of which) to judge (assess, settle) whether something has a particular status or value" (1979, p. 9; between brackets his). Criteria are means by which "a given group judges or selects or assesses value or membership in some special status" (ibidem, p. 11). Similarly, the goal of aporetic settlement is to confer the status of the acceptance of candidates, and the status of having reached a satisfactory conclusion. However, while criteria determine whether a datum is generally "of the right kind" (i.e., a relevant candidate), standards determine the "degree" (or grade) to which a candidate satisfies those criteria: they determine "the fit of the announced criteria in the individual case" (ibid., p. 11). Standards therefore function as practical tests as to whether a given datum fits the general criteria or not. While criteria set the general framework, standards are needed to subject each claim to an assessment. This interplay between criteria and standards, Cavell argues, may either be taken for granted, or highly articulated. In

some cases, he explains, criteria are explicitly granted and the emphasis falls wholly upon standards. As an example Cavell mentions diving competitions:

The judge has a more or less clear area of discretion in the application of standards, but none whatever over the set of criteria he is obliged to apply. It is expected that judges will differ over how well the diver entered the water (such is the point of having judges), but not over whether excellence of entry into the water is a criterion of the excellence of a dive (Cavell, 1979, p. 12).

In the above example, all of the judges (i.e., our aporetic decision makers) have agreed to follow the same criteria, to such a degree that the criteria are taken for granted. What different judges will disagree about, when judging competitions, is not the set of criteria, but the application of standards, that is, to which degree the criteria are deemed to be fulfilled by the divers. Thus, aporetic decision makers can agree upon criteria of acceptability for aporetic claims, but differ on the standards, that is, the degree to which different claims are in fact acceptable on the basis of those criteria. Making the difference between criteria and standards explicit gives us further insight in how different aporetic deciders come to different positions. Not only the application of different epistemic criteria will lead one to take different outcomes out of an aporia, even when the same axiological framework is used differences might still occur in the final assessment of claims.

However, while this makes clear that we can have consensus in criteria and dissensus on standards, Cavell points out further differences between the two concepts. For instance, he adds that judges of law seem to differ from judges in competitive games such as diving competitions. Like judges in competitive games, judges of law are "incompetent to alter the criteria by which it decides the individual case" (1979, p. 12). However, a given case in law may raise controversy over just which established criteria it satisfies or escapes. In such cases, the judge must decide "the identity of the case in question, i.e., which established criteria, if any, apply to it" (ibid., p. 12). Although the criteria are decided by law, the judge still has a level of flexibility in that he or she must identify what kind of criteria apply in this case. Of course, if one does not agree with the judgement of the court judge, one can always make an appeal, and ask for a reassessment of the case by another court or another judge. Although this seems rather irrelevant when the aporetic decider is an individual, in the case of religious worldviews, the criteria for worldview assessment will often be provided by the group. Thus, differences can occur between or within communities where one differs not on the set of epistemic criteria, but on which criteria apply in which aporetic context.

Finally, Cavell adds that the divers, in the competitive game example, are not primarily competing against one another, but rather, each is competing against the perfect dive. Similarly, the adversaries in court cases are not primarily in competition with one another; rather, they are in competition for, what Cavell calls, *the favour of the law*. We could call this the *ideal principle* behind the relevant set of criteria.

5.4. Critique/Response

Stephen Boulter has forwarded a critique of Rescher's method stating that the present method is insufficient for aporia resolution. The crux of Rescher's method is that (a) aporias are solved by means of a prioritisation of epistemic principles, and that (b) the choice of epistemic principles depends on the domain of deliberation:

All in all... the rationale for a particular mode of prioritisation lies in the specific goal and purpose of the domain of deliberation at hand. Just this essentially pragmatic consideration must be allowed to determine the correlative principle of prioritisation (Rescher, 2009, p. 199; also quoted in Boulter, 2013b, p. 39).

The butt of Boulter's criticism is (b), which he finds lacking for two reasons: (1) frequently there is no single domain involved in the case of an aporia; (2) even if there was a single domain involved, merely identifying the goal or purpose of a domain does not allow one to adjudicate which claims are more plausible. On the basis of this, Boulter concludes:

So, while Rescher has a very clear view of the nature of the philosophical dilemma, he has yet to provide a principled way of making the less plausible give way to greater plausibility because the pragmatic method never really addresses the issue of relative plausibility at all. (Boulter, 2013, p. 39).

Boulter's critique therefore implies that Rescher does not actually offer a pragmatic method for establishing *relative plausibility*, that is, *comparative plausibility*. In order to deal with this criticism, I will first analyse whether stating one's epistemic goals is an insufficient strategy for determining the plausibility of theses in general, and then examine whether the same strategy will also be insufficient for determining comparative plausibility. If the outcome of my first analysis is positive — i.e., the strategy is insufficient for determining plausibility — this will also knock down the second

leg. To defend Rescher's approach I will present an example that involves different domains of deliberation, which is Boulter's strongest case (see 1).

As Rescher has pointed out, our criteria need to fit the goals of the domain. Take the above example of a swimming competition. Let us assume there are three judges that operate within three different domains: (1) the first judge wants to know who swims fastest, (2) the second judge wants to know who swims most beautifully, and (3) the third judge wants to know who swims most synchronously. The three judges represent three "domains of deliberation," taken in fact from three existing types of swimming competitions: competitive swimming, diving competitions, and synchronous swimming competitions. Each domain presents the judge with probative criteria and standards. The first judge will apply the criterion of speed. Not only can he or she determine visually who swims fastest, but the actual speed of the contestants can be determined by the use of chronometers (i.e., measuring time and therefore overall speed) and speedometers. The second judge, who wants to know who swims more beautifully, will rely perhaps on a variety of criteria, such as elegance, fluidity of motion, and so on. The third judge wants to know whom of the different swimmers (or teams of swimmers) is most capable of swimming synchronously. He or she might use a variety of criteria such as timing, correctness of movement, etc, across the different swimmers. In each of those cases, *knowing the goals of the domain in question* (i.e., speed, beauty of execution, and synchronicity) determines the type of criteria that would allow us to judge. Therefore, the judge who judges speed would be able to assess speed, and pick a winner. Similarly, we can assume that the judge who judges beauty of execution would be able to come to a decision as well, based on parameters and criteria relevant to that type of sport. Finally the judge who judges synchronicity would use criteria specific to the goal of the domain in question.

Therefore, it should be clear from this that, if a judge who judges speed were to judge any of the other competitions, he or she would be operating from a probative orientation that does not fit the context. This does not mean that his set of criteria, having to do with speed, would be necessarily completely irrelevant to all other domains. It might be the case that speed also plays a role in judging beauty of execution, or synchronicity. But even if it were, it seems *prima facie* unlikely that it would be the primary criterion. Similarly, some of the criteria used to judge beauty of execution might also play a role in judging synchronous swimming competition: but here as well, on their own, these criteria seem insufficient for us to arrive at an assessment, since the criteria used would not completely fit the goal of the domain (i.e., the sport) in question. Knowing the goal of the domain therefore is crucial in helping us to decide which criteria are to be taken into account in making assessments. Moreover, this is also an eliminative process: we choose some criteria over and

against others. Therefore, comparative plausibility is already built into — or suggested by — the domain in question. Knowing the epistemic domain allows us to establish the comparative plausibility of criteria, which allows us to establish the comparative plausibility of claims.

In conclusion, it seems Boulter's criticism lacks some bite. Of course, it might always be possible that — in some cases — stating one's epistemic goals is an insufficient strategy. However, all I needed to do was to deny Boulter's absolute claim that merely identifying the goal or purpose of a domain does not allow one to adjudicate which claims are more plausible.

5.5. Conclusion

To conclude this chapter I will point out how the above discussion satisfies three different goals for this chapter, namely, (1) to show how the problem of religious diversity constitutes an *aporia*, (2) to show how Aporetics satisfies the primary concerns of a Philosophy of Religions, and (3) to show how Aporetics presents us with a therapeutic tool for addressing such problems.

Having argued in chapter 2 how the problem of religious diversity represents a first-order problem of conflicting worldview claims, I am now able to state that such a problem is aporetic, i.e., constitutes an *aporia*, given that (a) worldview claims come together in both formal and informal settings of worldview comparison and dialogue, (b) such claims represent plausible data, but are (c) mutually inconsistent.

In this chapter, I have also showed how aporetics leads us to two separate issues: (a) the issue of the plausibility of claims, and (b) the issue of the acceptability of claims. Both issues are in fact on the agenda of a Philosophy of Worldviews as set out by Ninian Smart (chapter 1). Firstly, Smart argues that one of the first desiderata of worldview theory is the *analysis of worldviews*. Smart sees it as one of the tasks of such an analysis to deliberate on the reasons for or against worldview claims. If so, then one of its tasks would in fact be to address the plausibility of worldview claims. Secondly, in order to settle aporetic conflict, we also need a further analysis, viz., an investigation of what kind of criteria are being applied to our plausible data. In other words, how do we decide which claims are better, if they are equally justified? Such a concern is dependent on the analysis of criteria within the context of worldview analysis as *comparative analysis*. However, the question of what kind of criteria we have available is itself a *desideratum* for the Philosophy of Worldviews, namely, a higher-order one that requires a meta-analysis (see chapter 6).

Finally, on the basis of this chapter we can arrive at a tentative model for aporetic resolution consisting of four distinct steps::

1. we can weed out inconsistent claims by the aporetic strategies of thesis rejection (i.e., thesis exclusion) and thesis modification (i.e., thesis inclusion) — we make a surgical incision into the aporetic set, and restore consistency;
2. finding out where and how to incise the aporetic set is achieved by means of a comparative plausibility analysis, focused on determining “the weakest link;”
3. to find the weakest link, we apply a “probative orientation,” which consists of a number of epistemic right-of-way criteria;
4. our choice of criteria is dependent on the goal(s) of the particular probative domain.

In my next chapter, I will address Smart’s final and *primary* desideratum, namely an analysis of our right-of-way criteria. In particular, I will demonstrate how the three worlds defined by Habermas constitute three different “probative domains,” which will determine what kind of criteria we will have available for the resolution of our aporetic conflicts.

6. Worldview Criteria

6.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I will present an analysis and clarification of the criteria for determining the “truth” of claims, where truth is to be understood as the acceptability of claims. This concern is congruent with Rescher’s analysis of the primary factor in aporetic deliberations, viz., the need for right-of-way criteria (see chapter 5). Thus, I will expand upon Rescher’s notion of *criteria of acceptability* by specifying three “super-classes” of criteria — namely objective, subjective and intersubjective criteria. Following Heylighen (1993, 1997, 2000) and Vidal (2008, 2012), I will show how these super-classes of criteria act as *parameters* for the validity claims inherent in speech acts. Doing so, I will tie together three previous strands, namely Habermas’s notion of validity claims (chapter 3), Lindbeck’s analysis of religious language (chapter 4), and Rescher’s theory of Aporetics (chapter 5). Firstly, I will introduce the work of Francis Heylighen (6.2.1), who argued for the notion of “selection criteria” for worldviews, as well as further developments by Clément Vidal (6.2.2). Secondly, I will discuss the different classes of criteria in depth with a reference to Smart’s observations on similar issues (6.3-5).

6.2. Criteria for Worldview Acquisition

6.2.1. Francis Heylighen

The Belgian cyberneticist and systems theorist Francis Heylighen has written several papers on "selector mechanisms" that can be found behind the acquisition of worldviews (Heylighen, 1993, 1997, 2000). Heylighen argues that the acceptance of "knowledge" by a given worldview community depends on several independent "selection criteria" (1997, p. 63).¹²¹ On his view, only certain beliefs constitute knowledge for a worldview community. The process of selection of acceptable beliefs is done via the implicit or explicit application of a number of criteria, which can be divided into three different classes: objective, subjective, and intersubjective (see Table 6). As an heir to Apostel’s worldview project, Heylighen writes within the fields of evolutionary epistemology and selection theory. The former — its name coined by Donald T. Campbell (1974) — represents a naturalistic and scientific approach to epistemology. As the name already suggests, this discipline at-

¹²¹ The term ‘acceptance of knowledge’ is slightly ambiguous in Heylighen’s phrasing. Surely, what Heylighen means to say is the acceptance *of* propositions *as* knowledge by a community. I consider the community to play an essential part and an active role in the process of justifying claims (see *supra*). Heylighen’s wording ‘acceptance of knowledge’ would suggest or denote a more *passive* role. Since this would not be consistent with his work, I suspect this is merely an oversight.

tempts to address questions in the theory of knowledge from an evolutionary point of view (Bradie and Harms, 2012).

Objective Criteria:	Subjective Criteria:	Intersubjective Criteria:
1. Invariance;	1. Individual Utility;	1. Publicity;
2. Distinctiveness;	2. Simplicity;	2. Expressivity;
3. Controllability;	3. Coherence;	3. Formality;
	4. Novelty;	4. Collective Utility;
		5. Conformity;
		6. Authority;

Table 6: Heylighen's Criteria.

Evolutionary epistemology — which I will shorten to Evo-Epi¹²² — emphasises the importance of natural selection in two primary roles. In the first role, selection is the generator and maintainer of the reliability of our senses and cognitive mechanisms, as well as the “fit” between those mechanisms and the world. In the second role, trial-and-error learning and the evolution of scientific theories are construed as selection processes (Bradie and Harms, 2012).

However, Heylighen opts for what he calls a more functional methodology. Combining Evo-Epi with insights from cybernetics, he characterises this particular approach as evolutionary-cybernetic epistemology (ECE), which "puts more emphasis on the structure of cognitive systems, on the processes by which they are constructed, on the control they provide over the environment, and on the communication of knowledge" (Heylighen, 1997, p. 63).

Thus, within the context of ECE, Heylighen argues that we can identify three classes of selector criteria implicit in the work of Campbell (1990, 1997).¹²³ Heylighen identifies these as objective, subjective, and intersubjective, which he considers to denote “superclasses,” since they are open to further refinement into subclasses. In line with his ECE approach, Heylighen describes the selector criteria according to the role they play in the evolution of knowledge. Thus, objective crite-

¹²² I was inspired by the example of Evo-Devo, short for evolutionary developmental biology. See Sean B. Carroll, *Endless Forms Most Beautiful*, 2005. On a side note, the curious title of Carroll's book references a Charles Darwin quote.

¹²³ Campbell's 1990 article was also published as a book section in Nicholas Rescher's *Evolution, Cognition, and Realism* (1990).

ria aim for selection for fit to the outside object; subjective criteria deal with selection for acceptance by the individual subject; finally, intersubjective criteria aim for selection for sharing between subjects. From this we can glean three principal concepts, namely, (a) subjective acceptance, (b) intersubjective sharing, and (c) objective fitness. If Heylighen is right, then this allows us to conclude that a system of beliefs (i.e., a worldview) will be successful — that is, survive within cognitive systems that are human beings— if it can be (a) subjectively accepted, (b) shared with peers, and (c) fits the objective world. On this account, the acceptability of claims will depend on three types of *coherence*, or what we can call “fitness” in terms of Heylighen’s evolutionary approach. In other words, a single logic operates behind all three concepts, namely, they all express “selection by fitness.” In other words, beliefs will be selected on the basis of (a) objective fitness (it needs to fit the objective world), (b) subjective fitness (it needs to fit the individual), and (c) intersubjective fitness (it needs to fit the community). In Darwinian evolutionary theory, fitness only pertains to the objective world, since the objective world is where living beings “exist.” Ideas and beliefs, however, even if their referents exist in the objective world (Popper’s World 1), “exist” in the minds of cognitive systems, that is human beings.

We can also express the same idea in reference to coherence theories and Habermas’s epistemological world theory. Within this framework we could state that our worldview beliefs *ideally* cohere with (a) the external world, (b) the internal world, and (c) the social world. Importantly, Heylighen and Campbell both agree that it is impossible to separate the different selectors fully since they all impinge on the evolution of knowledge. In other words, the overall probability that a belief will be selected (i.e., accepted by the individual or community) will be a “weighted sum” of the degrees to which each of the individual criteria are fulfilled. An idea or belief that scores high on one superclass, but low on another, will be less likely to survive selection (i.e., in our aporetic deliberations) than beliefs that score high on both counts. From this follows that ideas will be in competition with one another in order to survive, and make the selection. Certain ideas will win the competition in certain contexts but will lose in other contexts. Thus, each set of ideas is adapted to its particular niche, and is “fittest” only within that context. Similarly, within a single niche, some ideas will be fitter than others. No single criterion will be able to guarantee selection or provide justification for a belief’s validity. This leads Heylighen to conclude that the more criteria a belief satisfies, and the higher the degree of satisfaction, the “fitter” the belief will be (1997, p. 64).¹²⁴

¹²⁴ And the more likely it will win the competition with rival beliefs, as for instance when beliefs compete for survival in an aporetic context.

It should be clear from this that worldviews, and in particular institutionalised worldviews, are the result of previous “competitions.” That is, the claims within our worldview are already proven to be fittest. When worldviews come into contact with each other they enter a new competition: they are again under cognitive pressure for survival. If we were able to “score” every idea (i.e., to record how well they do), then it would seem logically possible that one idea, or group of ideas, is markedly “better” than any other idea. If we do so for religious worldviews, it would be possible that one religion scores better on all criteria, or better on more criteria than any other religion. Thus, given that there are a limited number of religions in the actual world, it seems reasonable to suggest that we could in fact find out whether one religion scores best, given that we can score them in the first place. We could then be led to believe that the rational choice is to accept the “best” performing religion, and get rid of the “lesser” performing religions. Such a strategy would be congruent with the epistemic positions of both the exclusivist and the inclusivist (see chapter 2). However, this strategy is also common amongst pluralists. If this strategy seems intuitively right, then this is due to the fact that acceptability of claims is based on our own preferential selection of epistemic criteria.

Heylighen further suggests two general principles: (a) all the criteria will play a role in the selection of ideas; (b) the sum total of criteria will be unevenly distributed. If we compare Heylighen's selection criteria to the trifecta or integral of validity claims, and assume their equivalence, then (a) follows from the integrated nature of each of the different validity claims within general speech acts. That is, since speech acts usually exhibit objective, subjective and intersubjective aspects, it will follow that all of the criteria will apply. Of course, this needs to be qualified. As we have seen, the worldview holder, who selects belief for worldview construction, takes a stance by preferentially selecting certain criteria above others. Hence, the sum total of criteria will be “unevenly distributed.” This will include the deliberate de-selection of certain criteria: that is, certain criteria will be ignored to make room for others. For one, this will be due to the fact that some criteria will be mutually exclusive. If this is correct, then we can modify Heylighen's claim and stating that all criteria will *potentially* play a role. Whether they do so, in the end, depends on the *valuational orientation* of the worldview holder.

Heylighen further adds that we can encounter cases where the principles mentioned above are deliberately thwarted. For instance, science as a social institution and as a method explicitly promotes objective criteria. At the same time, it aims to neutralise those criteria that are likely to detract from the objectivity of its enterprise (e.g., authority not backed by expertise, conformity for conformity's sake, and utility for the pure sciences). What is more, Heylighen argues that the objec-

tive criteria have come to be built into the scientific method itself — a phenomenon known as “vicarious selectors” — rather than as an outside force to which knowledge is subjected.¹²⁵ Heylighen concludes that, since other forms of knowledge are not selected at this level, “they will evolve in a less efficient way and are therefore likely to be of lower quality” (Heylighen, 1997, p. 65-57).

Returning to Habermas, speech acts typically raise three different validity claims, and they usually do so implicitly or unconsciously. Once one becomes aware of the different validity claims — that is, the objective, subjective and intersubjective parameters that permit or limit what one can say through language — one can explicitly raise certain validity claims. Since science is oriented towards the objective world, its further progress is premised on *becoming aware of its own methods*, and thereby internalising objective criteria. Religious belief systems, although concerned with objective truth as well, have not (yet) followed science down this road. If religious worldviews come out of the assessment (i.e., science versus religion) as of inferior quality, then this assessment is based on the preferential primacy of objective criteria. However, as I have made clear in my discussion on Lindbeck and the nature of religious language, religious worldviews have used the full triad of validity claims to argue for religious claims. They, at times, have argued for propositional truth, as well as for subjective truthfulness and normative rightness. Religious worldviews, therefore, are not necessarily bound to objective parameters. However, if a religious worldview specifically aims to make claims that pertain to the objective world, it should be subject to the same objective criteria as “objective” worldviews. However, most religious traditions have held back from entering such formal discourse — what Habermas would call *empirical* or *theoretical discourse* (Habermas, 1984). Religious believers have used several strategies for doing so. For instance, some religious believers have argued that religious claims are only seemingly about the objective, or natural world; instead, religious claims are about an altogether different world, namely a supernatural or transcendent reality (see Hick's definition of what constitutes a religion). However, we could argue that even if a supernatural world exists it still needs to impinge on our world in order for epistemic cognition to occur amongst human beings. Furthermore, presumably our epistemic abilities are a product of, and adapted to, what we have come to call the natural world. One therefore needs an answer on how our object-oriented cognitive capacities acquire knowledge of a super-objective realm. One way out for the religious believer would be to state that a different set of epistemic abilities is involved when it comes to the cognition and apprehension of transcendent realities. Nevertheless, even if a different kind of epistemic cognition occurs, how are we to know that our cogni-

¹²⁵ A vicarious selector is “an interiorization of external selectors” (Heylighen, 1997, p. 67), or an “anticipatory selector” that will anticipate what the system needs.

tion is appropriate, and that it leads to justified knowledge about the supernatural world? The religious believer, who claims to have a different set of epistemic abilities, will still have to convince his peers in this regard. However, not all religious believers will agree with a supernatural account of religion. Some religious believers will claim that both worlds (i.e., the natural and the Divine) are the same (i.e., on a monist interpretation of the absolute). In that case, we could reasonably expect the objective criteria to apply since any religious claim would directly apply to the objective world.

6.2.2. Clément Vidal

Clément Vidal, who I introduced in chapter 2, expands on Heylighen's work on worldview criteria. He argues that a worldview can have at least three different "flavours," or nuances (Vidal, 2012, p. 314-315). The first flavour consists of a "world conception," which he considers to be both systemic and objective. Vidal writes that this concept is similar to Dilthey's "world picture" (i.e., *Weltbild*), which "insists on remaining consistent with soft and hard scientific results" (Vidal, ibidem, p. 314). The second flavour consists of a "life world" (Ger.: *Lebenswelt*), which is experienced, subjective, and stresses the personal aspect of the worldview. The third flavour consists of a "worldview," which is here seen in its social or intersubjective aspect. Vidal points out that for Dilthey, a worldview (i.e., *Weltanschauung*) was based on a *Weltbild*, "to form values, ideals and norms for actions for individuals and society" (Vidal, ibidem, p. 314). Vidal also distinguishes the same main superclasses of selection criteria for worldview knowledge as Heylighen does (2012, p. 315). He points out that objective criteria deal with "the object that knowledge refers to," subjective criteria deal with "the subject who assimilates and remembers" worldview beliefs, and intersubjective criteria deals with "the communication process used to transmit the knowledge between subjects." From this follows that the objective superclass applies to the world conception, subjective criteria apply to the life world, and intersubjective criteria apply to the worldview. Although Vidal briefly mentions Habermas in support of his three flavour theory, he does not reflect on the latter's work beyond merely stating that, for Habermas, actors evaluate their speech acts against three worlds, namely the objective world, the social world, and the subjective world.

Vidal's notion of flavours clearly makes sense if we interpret it as a *modifier*. For instance, we could replace it with the term "orientation," and Vidal's argument would still work: worldviews exhibit three orientations, namely an orientation to the world, to the subject, and to others. If I understand Vidal correctly, his goal is to identify specific aspects of a worldview in terms of the above three orientations. What constitutes "knowledge" for a subject (as a worldview holder) is a combination of (a) his or her own idiosyncratic beliefs, feelings, attitudes, (a) socially accepted conven-

tions, and (3) objective knowledge (i.e., true and justified beliefs). Thus, on this line of thought, a worldview would be a combination of a subjective life world (i.e., *Lebenswelt*), an intersubjective worldview (i.e., *Weltanschauung*), and a world picture (i.e., *Weltbild*).

However, the fact that one of the aspects of a worldview is itself a worldview creates an unnecessary ambiguity. Secondly, while the terms *Weltbild* and *Weltanschauung* both denote a view or picture, the term *Lebenswelt* denotes the world as it is experienced. I suggest that it would make more sense to replace it with the term *life view* (i.e., *Lebensanschauung*), where life represents the life world.

Further, Vidal argues that there will be no “true” worldview. For Vidal, worldviews are entities that evolve and are in constant flux. Moreover, he claims that it is “fundamental to constantly criticise and improve our worldviews” (2012, p. 317). He concludes: “There is therefore a fundamental relativity in our approach, in the sense that we can only compare [i.e. assess the individual strengths and weaknesses of] one worldview with one other” (2012, p. 317; between square brackets mine). By this he means that there are “no absolute criteria [for truth], nor any intrinsic ‘goodness’ or ‘truthfulness’ of a worldview” (ibid., p. 317). Here then is an important point, namely to what degree the process of worldview construction is relativistic. As Rescher has shown, a certain relativity exists in how we come to accept claims. However, this is a rational relativism, that is, it is justified with good reasons, where rationality equates to the giving of reasons (which of course does not prevent justification from going wrong). The provision of reasons is an *intersubjective* demand: they serve our community of peers, who can then apply the same injunctions or paradigms that we went through in order to come to our beliefs, and thereby corroborate or contradict our findings. Stated differently, “good reasons” aim to convince our peers, and preferably all of them (i.e., everyone). In this regard, subjective and objective beliefs are at opposite ends of a spectrum. In the case of objective beliefs we appeal to the global community of peers, which allows us to make universal statements. However, when it comes to the subject, we have no such peers — this being the reason why for Habermas there is no formal discourse for subjective claims. Our justifications are therefore *basic*, having to do with direct awareness of the self, to which our peers have none: they can only observe our behaviour (i.e, using a third-person methodology) and check whether it corresponds to what we say in dialogue (i.e., using a second-person methodology). In other words, when it comes to the contents of my mind, I do not have to convince myself through the giving of reasons. If indeed the giving of reasons is an intersubjective demand, then it follows that knowledge as justified true belief is itself *the integral* of three types of validity claims: truth depends on correspondence with the objective world, justification depends on an intersubjective community, and be-

lief (i.e., whether we personally believe something) depends on our own subjective attitude. Finally, intersubjective claims lie somewhere in the middle of the spectrum. Here we also appeal to a community of epistemic peers in the giving of reasons, but not necessarily, although not excluded, to the global community.

To continue, Vidal's concern is to construct or improve worldviews. As I have pointed out earlier (chapter 2), Vidal sees synthesis as the culmination of philosophy (i.e., a philosophy of worldviews), that is, to construct overarching worldviews. For this purpose he offers two guiding principles: (1) to maximise simultaneously all of the different criteria, and (2) to balance contrasting and conflicting criteria. Vidal proposes that this can be most easily done by assessing worldviews and using the list of criteria as a checklist for comparison (2012, p. 319). He warns, however, that we should not see this type of assessment as "an issue-resolving algorithm" (ibid., p. 329). Rather, the criteria are cognitive values, which influence the preference of one worldview over another. In other words, instead of worldview assessment being an objective and analytical affair, Vidal sees it as being left over to *preference* — i.e., to a subjective or intersubjective process. Thus, he writes:

[T]wo thinkers adhering to the same criteria list might still reach different conclusions. Indeed, depending on the weight given to each of these criteria, one might value one worldview more than another (ibid., p. 317).

However, as I have pointed out, we cannot simply assume that such preference is similar across the board as we have to take into account the epistemic range of our claims: objective claims will need to convince everyone, intersubjective claims will need to convince our community of peers. Of course, nothing prevents us from holding a completely idiosyncratic worldview. However, when such a worldview comes into touch with objective reality, reality will "resist." If I believe that there is no wall in front of me, and I keep walking, then reality will resist not only my physical body, but also my beliefs. Similarly, our community of peers will "resist" both our objective beliefs as well as our intersubjective beliefs, if they do not cohere well. Concerning principle (2) — to balance contrasting and conflicting criteria — Vidal writes that the criteria for assessing worldviews can also generate tensions themselves and raise issues of compatibility. He mentions the contrast between subjective and objective criteria (see Table 7), and argues that preference for either of them generates two conflicting cultures. He concludes that dialogue between those two cultures "is often difficult, if not impossible" (ibid., p. 329). Vidal characterises the subjective culture as focused on *narrativity*, while the objective one is focused on *scientificity*. He explains: "The one is seeking univer-

sal principles applicable to everything and everyone while the other tries to understand and describe a particular inner experience” (ibid., p. 329).

Objective Criteria:	Subjective Criteria:	Intersubjective Criteria:
a. Objective consistency;	d. Subjective consistency;	g. Intersubjective consistency;
b. Scientificity;	e. Personal utility;	h. Collective utility;
c. Scope;	f. Emotionality;	i. Narrativity;

Table 7: Vidal’s Criteria.

6.3. Objective Criteria

6.3.1. Heylighen’s Criteria

Concerning the objective criteria, Heylighen points out that we can only use indirect means to determine whether a belief corresponds to an objective reality” (Heylighen, 1997, p. 65; cf. Campbell, 1997). In terms of neural activation “there is no fundamental distinction between a perception and a hallucination” (Heylighen, 1997, p. 65; cf. von Foerster, 1981, and Maturana and Varela, 1987). However, according to attribution theory (cf. Kelley, 1967), people attribute causes of perceived effects to those phenomena that *covary* with the effects, that is to say, that are present when the effect is present. In other words, *external effects will covary with external causes*, but not with changes that only affect internal variables. From this idea, Heylighen derives a number of criteria for judging objective reality, namely (1) invariance, (2) distinctiveness, and (3) controllability.

(1) Invariance is the idea that if the same external phenomenon is perceived in different ways, it should maintain a constant identity. From this follows, the larger the domain over which it remains invariant, the more “real” it will be (Heylighen; cf. Bonsack, 1977). Heylighen distinguishes between three types of invariance (ibid., p. 66; cf. Kelley, 1967):

- a. **Invariance over modalities:** if the same phenomenon is perceived through different senses (e.g. sight and touch), points of view, or means of observation, it is more likely to objectively exist.
- b. **Invariance over time:** a perception that appears or disappears suddenly is unlikely to be caused by a stable referent.

c. **Invariance over persons:** a perception on which different observers agree is more likely to be real than one that is only perceived by just one person.

(2) Distinctiveness is the idea that *different referents produce different perceptions* (cf. Kelley, 1967). A perception that remains the same when the attention is directed elsewhere is likely to be produced by the perceptual system itself (e.g., a particle of dust in the eye). Heylighen points out that those perceptions which are “real” tend to be characterised by richness in contrast and detail (in contrast, imagined or dream perceptions typically are coarse-grained and fuzzy) and to exhibit “Gestalt qualities, such as regularity, closure and simplicity, producing a distinct, coherent pattern, rather than an unstructured collection of impressions” (ibidem, p. 66; cf. Stadler and Kruse, 1990).

(3) Controllability is the idea that a phenomenon that reacts differentially to the different actions performed on it is more likely to be real. Heylighen admits that this criterion is to some degree dependent on the observing subject.

6.3.2. Vidal’s Criteria

To these criteria, Vidal also adds three of his own, namely (a) objective consistency, (b) scientificity and (c) scope.

(a) Objective consistency requires one to hold a consistent worldview with the use of logic and rationality as a general way to (a) understand, (b) value and (c) act in the world; this includes theorising, a problem-solving attitude and arguments devoid of anomalies and contradictions. Vidal concludes that the answers to the different worldview questions are interdependent, and therefore should not contradict each other. In other words, Vidal sees objective consistency as a *transversal criterion* (i.e., applies everywhere) for each of the different worldview questions.

As we have seen, the main feature of aporetic conflict is inconsistency: in other words, aporetic clusters violate the criterion of objective consistency. Vidal writes that the result of such violations is an invalid or self-contradicting worldview, *and that such a worldview is unacceptable* (Vidal, 2012, p. 319). Thus, one of the prime directives of worldview construction is to defend its consistency at all times. However, it is not self-evident that an inconsistent worldview is unacceptable. For instance, should we do away with a complex worldview system if somewhere down the line a single inconsistency appears? The answer should be: of course not. Although consistency is a prime value, as Rescher also points out, it is not the only epistemic value in use. Furthermore, Vi-

dal's comments do not take into account where in the web of belief the inconsistency is located. The first question to ask ourselves is how important the inconsistency is within the whole of our worldview. In other words: how detrimental is it, and what would it cost us to either keep it or remove it? It might be that the cost of keeping the inconsistency is much easier to bear than the cost of doing away with it. Furthermore, keeping our worldview at all times completely consistent might require considerable cognitive energy. Typically, we are not always aware of all parts of our worldview: many assumptions and beliefs that we accept remain unconscious and implicit. Here as well, it would cost us significant cognitive energy to bring these parts to the surface, check them repeatedly for inconsistencies, and make our beliefs coherent. In other words, the epistemic objective of objective coherence comes into conflict with other values, such as cognitive energy conservation. However, both concerns are also related: too many inconsistencies in our worldview will drain our cognitive energies as well. This does not mean that Vidal finds no value in inconsistencies. He writes: "On the other hand, contradiction, precisely because it allows anything to happen next, can be seen as a great opportunity to question deeply rooted assumptions, and to try out radically new hypotheses as theories" (ibidem, p. 319).

Ninian Smart also mentions consistency as a first criterion (1995, p. 24), and writes that, other things being equal, the less tension there is the better. A rich system, covering different facets of human experience, will be liable to strong tension (ibid., p. 24). He adds: "Internal tension itself [i.e., inconsistency] may encourage formulae to stabilise it, but the stability of the formulae themselves may be in question" (p. 24). Mentioning the Christian example of the Triune God — an idea in tension with the belief that God is One —, he writes: "Fix up the tension in the god-man idea in one direction, and some such divergence as Nestorianism may emerge" (p. 24).

In other words, differing answers to fundamental questions will, sometimes at least, have the power to establish completely new and divergent worldviews. As Nicholas Rescher has pointed out, this is typical of aporetic decision making, where deliberative decisions will have reverberations throughout the worldview, especially when doctrines or high-level claims are involved. Solve an aporia and its solutions will create other aporiai further down the line.

(b) Scientificity refers to the degree of compatibility of a worldview with the results of all of the natural sciences. I will characterise scientificity as an external consistency criterion — i.e., this criterion aims at the accuracy of our concepts to represent the external world. Objective consistency is then an internal consistency criterion, i.e., representing logical and systemic consistency. Vidal argues that although philosophy is non-scientific, as it does not question the world with observational

and experimental methods, it should nevertheless adhere to the scientificity criterion in order to avoid “the unscientific pitfall” (2012, p. 320).¹²⁶ He adds that it is also possible for a worldview to fall into the trap of *scientism*, when both unscientific and non-scientific knowledge are dismissed, and when excessive trust is placed in the power of scientific knowledge and techniques. Vidal points out that the modelling of our world, in terms of providing declarative statements about the world, is mostly a scientific matter and that worldviews should therefore “be updated according to scientific progress” (Vidal, *ibid.*, p. 320).

Following Vidal's injunction, however, might not be as straightforward as it seems. Do we merely add a new set of scientific beliefs to the sets of propositions that we already have, or do we replace our existing propositions that are in conflict with the new set of scientific propositions? The first strategy is bound to lead to many inconsistencies, which is in conflict with the criterion of objective consistency. On the other hand, the second strategy is all but self-evident, and will be dependent on the type of claim in question. For instance, consider the metaphysical claim: “Eros is the driving force of the Universe,” where *eros* denotes love. Updating our worldview with the scientific propositions of contemporary evolutionary theory, we conclude that there is a tendency to increased complexity in the universe, but no teleological force that drives it. Modifying this claim will however only be justified if we correctly estimated this claim to be an objective statement, for we are bound to the epistemic domain to which it belongs. Ninian Smart writes on the same issue:

[I]t may turn out that a traditional religion is right about some matters of science. For instance, traditional Buddhism believed in many world systems, or as we might now say, galaxies. This is a point in favour of that tradition, when one comes to see it over against the tiny little cosmological cage in which the Jewish and Christian imaginations were long confined (p. 24).

In order to test this, we could replace the Buddhist term of many world systems with the more modern term of galaxies, check all connected claims to their scientific truth value, and compare them with the modern scientific claims. However, it seems unlikely that Buddhist claims would fair well in this regard.

¹²⁶ Cf. Broad 1958, p. 103, for the distinction between *non-scientific* and *unscientific*.

(c) Scope is divided into three sections:

i. **Scope in agenda:** a worldview is “better” when it has a large scope in its agenda, thus tackling a wider array of issues. According to Vidal, when scope in agenda is violated, “specific and narrow issues are considered, failing to see more urgent and fundamental issues” (Vidal, 2012, p. 321). This then leads to sectarianism and overspecialisation (cf. Bahm, 1953, p. 423).

However, we may add that in many cases doing more (i.e., having a large scope) would not be necessarily better than doing less (i.e., having a narrow scope). Focussing on a narrow task, with intent and depth, often leads to more and better results, as cognitive resources are always limited. Focusing on a “specific and narrow” issue should therefore not be seen as a *negative* (i.e. being worse). Moreover, neither should it be seen as antithetical (somehow) to “urgent and fundamental.” Focussing on “urgent and fundamental” issues *would in fact benefit* from narrowing the scope in order to be able to hone in on those aspects that are most urgent and most fundamental, to the exclusion of anything else. For instance, a physicist will narrow her field of research to and within the domain of physics, with exclusion of the biological, the social, the psychological, the technological, and the philosophical domains, amongst others. Although none of these other domains are totally removed from her own domain of research, she will nevertheless gain more if she can focus her limited resources (e.g., time, money, methodological resources) on a specific problem within her own domain. Therefore, I propose that scope in agenda represents a continuum between, on the one hand, *narrow scope*, which is more suited for deep analysis, and *broad scope*, which is more suited for synthetic philosophy.

The argument also runs in the other direction: given that cognitive resources are limited, synthetic philosophy (i.e., broad scope) will necessarily have to work with broad strokes rather than with in-depth analysis. If synthetic philosophy had to do all of the deep structural analysis itself (i.e., second-order activities), rather than taking the results of deep analysis as its *data*, it would never get around doing any of the synthetical work (i.e., third-order activities). Given the existence of a continuum, what is needed for creating a balanced worldview is a back-and-forth reciprocating movement between analysis and synthesis. From this follows that a worldview will be *comparatively better* if it includes *both narrow and broad scope*.¹²⁷ Vidal also admits to some problems with the idea of a wide scope: the wider the agenda, the more difficult the systematic integration, and the

¹²⁷ Possibly, Vidal’s bias towards wide or broad scope and synthetical philosophy follows from the fact that for him synthesis is a third-order activity while analysis is second-order. Synthesis therefore stands at the apogee of his three-levelled model.

more difficult the division of labour. Of course, this follows from the idea of wide or broad scope itself: the more ground to cover, the more resources will be required (ibid., p. 321).

ii. **scope in levels' breath:** this refers to how many "aspects or levels" are being considered. Ideally, a worldview with a wide scope reaches over many if not all domains of human experience. When scope in levels' breath is violated, philosophy is restricted to just one aspect, as when for instance a materialist assumes that everything can be reduced to the interplay of atoms. Hence, this criterion aims at avoiding reductionism of any kind. This criterion can also be abused, according to Vidal, when a worldview becomes too holistic and makes vague claims such as "everything is one field" (2012, p. 322). Seemingly, Vidal's first type of error consists of identifying and distinguishing an aspect (or part) and confusing it for the whole of reality. For instance, a materialist rightly concludes that atoms (or quanta, or strings) are fundamental building blocks of the universe (i.e., parts), but then concludes that everything (i.e., the whole) can be reduced to exactly those building blocks. The second type of error consists of not making part distinctions at all, and only seeing wholes. Thus, what at first sight seem to constitute two different errors can be seen to be two aspects of the same kind of mistake: namely, both views fail to accurately distinguish between parts and wholes. Or stated differently, they lack a hierarchical perspective. We can refer to these errors as, respectively, a *pars pro toto* and a *totum pro parte* error.

iii. **scope in levels' depth:** a worldview with a wide scope extends across not only to a wide diversity of levels, it also extends across the extreme possibilities of each level. According to Vidal (2012, p. 323), if the space level is violated in its depth, the worldview applies only to a very limited geographical area. Similarly, when the time scope is violated in its depth, the worldview applies only to a very particular era.

6.4. Subjective Criteria

6.4.1. Heylighen's Criteria

For beliefs to be accepted and retained, it will not be sufficient that they respond to distinct, invariant and controllable phenomena; rather, subjective factors will be in play as well. Heylighen distinguishes between (4) individual utility, (5) simplicity, (6) coherence, and (7) novelty.

(4) Individual utility is the idea that people will only do the effort to learn or retain an idea, or accept a belief, that can help them to reach their goals. Thus, ideas that lack such subjective or individual utility, even if they are true, might be less likely absorbed within the worldview.

(5) Simplicity implies that the more complex an idea is, the higher the burden will be on the cognitive system. Hence, Heylighen concludes, “knowledge should be easy to learn” (1997, p. 67). He adds that simplicity is a subjective criterion because “it depends on the concepts and associations that are already known” (ibid., p. 67). As we have seen, simplicity was also a prime desideratum for Rescher.

(6) Coherence: whether a cognitive system will assimilate a particular idea will depend on the concepts and associations that are already known. Ideas and beliefs will only be subjectively appropriated if they fit in with the background beliefs that the individual already holds. Heylighen defines coherence as “mutual connection, support and consistency” (1997, p. 67). He does not regard consistency as a separate (subjective) criterion, but he does state that our “preference for consistency follows from the theory of cognitive dissonance, which states that people tend to reject the ideas that contradict what they already believe” (ibidem, p. 67). Heylighen sees this in an evolutionary context where “a fit individual must be able to make clear-cut decisions” (ibid., p. 67).

An important corollary of the coherence criterion seems to be that it will promote *conservatism* (i.e., a conservative attitude). We can expect that an exclusivist epistemic approach to religious diversity will be accompanied (see chapter 2), or even motivated, by such a conservative attitude. The exclusivist believer is *subjectively justified* to hold on to his or her own beliefs based on this criterion. He is thus likely to select this criterion as a primary way-of-right consideration when addressing aporetic conflict. It is clear that Heylighen’s subjective coherence criterion will also have an equivalent in terms of intersubjective criteria. Thus, he mentions conformity as one of the intersubjective criteria, where conformity is the desire to accept what the group already believes (see *infra*).

(7) Novelty: new, unusual or unexpected ideas tend to attract the attention, and thus arouse the cognitive energy, which will facilitate their assimilation. According to Heylighen, this shows itself in the human emotion of curiosity — an evolutionary adaptation that helps the individual cope with unusual situations (1997, p. 67).

Given that we associate coherence with a conservative attitude, we can associate novelty with a progressive attitude. An inclusivist attitude towards religious diversity would be congruent with both coherence and novelty. The inclusivist is still conservative enough to prefer his own set of beliefs, but is also open to novel ideas that have a certain degree of coherence with what is already believed by the individual. However, we can expect some of these criteria to run interference for each other. For instance, confronted with a spider-like doctrinal claim, which spurns webs of belief, a worldview holder, despite valuing novelty, might instead prefer to use simplicity as a criterion. In such a case, the costs associated with complex solutions is weighed against the novelty factor.

The distinction between coherence (with tradition) and novelty is also a prime criterion for Ninian Smart. Smart writes that tension might exist at the interface "between the received beliefs and values of a traditional worldview and the discovered truths and emerging values of contemporary society" (p. 24). As an example, he mentions the tension between contemporary evolutionary theory and conservative interpretations of the Bible. While this advice is useful, it also unnecessarily inserts a time frame, which is surprising given that Smart is a historian of religion. However, we can also interpret contemporary as simply meaning the time frame in question. In other words, at any given moment, traditional values can clash with emerging or novel beliefs and values, and when this happens, more often than not, the emerging beliefs and values are framed within the context of the previous worldview. For example, Joanna Jurewicz's now classic article *Playing With Fire* (2000) demonstrates how the Buddha's exposition of the law of dependent origination (*pratīyasamutpāda*) should be understood in the context of Vedic thought. With his formulation of the law of independent origination, the Buddha explicitly rejected the doctrine of *ātman*, and doing so undermined the whole of Vedic cosmogony.¹²⁸ The emergence of Buddhism did not happen *in vacuo*, and the same can be demonstrated for the other world religions. It is also clear that the advent of Buddhism did not replace Vedic thought. In other words, not everybody will have been convinced by this novel direction. What we understand as traditionalism is thus the tendency to stay with the previous beliefs in light of alternatives.

Smart further adds that, because our knowledge of the natural world changes, "the adaptability of a worldview becomes a sign of truth or acceptability" (p. 25). In other words, for Smart, adaptability of the worldview is a feature (i.e., a vicarious selector) of the scientific worldview. In contrast to scientific worldviews, religious worldviews will often stress the unchangeable nature of their core doctrines. From this follows that the primary distinction between religious traditions and

¹²⁸ In other words, the *pratīyasamutpāda* was a deliberate polemic argument designed against Vedic thought. It was designed to clash with the contemporarily accepted view.

science is not necessarily the fact that science is devoted to making truth claims about the objective world, but rather that its operating principle is that every claim can be called into doubt in light of new discoveries.

6.4.2. Vidal's Criteria

Vidal adds three criteria to the list of subjective criteria, namely, (d) subjective consistency, (e) personal utility, and (f) emotionality.

(d) Subjective consistency requires the worldview to fit the broader knowledge, or common experience individuals already have. If an idea does not connect to existing knowledge, it simply cannot be learnt. Consistency requires that none of the claims is inconsistent. In other words, consistency requires the absence of inconsistency. However, this does not tell us much in terms of whether the claims fit the broader worldview very well. For instance, they could only fit minimally. Coherence, as a criterion, on the other hand more clearly expresses the idea of fit. Heylighen, for instance, does not mention consistency as a subjective criterion, but mentions coherence instead. For Heylighen, coherence is the idea that ideas will only be subjectively appropriated if they fit in with the background beliefs that the individual already holds (see *supra*).

(e) Personal utility: A worldview satisfying this criterion provides goals, values or at least some preference heuristic. It requires having a well functioning implicit or explicit theory of values. Abusing this criterion, Vidal writes, leads to individualism: everything becomes centred on the individual's gain in pleasures and decrease in pains. We want the pleasures to be not only personal, but also sharable with individuals and larger systems. That is why we also need to take into account a larger scope. Vidal also refers to this criterion as "personal satisfaction" or "happiness" (2012, p. 324). Presumably, the difference in language can be attributed to a difference in perspective, where 'personal utility' is a structuralist concept based on an objectifying stance, whilst 'happiness' is a more hermeneutical concept, based on a subjective stance. In other words, given that we are using an objective stance to catalogue subjective criteria, it makes sense to inquire into subjective equivalents as well.

(f) Emotionality: Vidal does not give a straightforward definition of this criterion. However, there are a few hints as to how we should interpret this criterion. Vidal says that when this criterion is violated: "[F]ew emotions are involved (or only negative and low-energy emotions such as depres-

sion). No motivation is found to accept or act according to" (2012 p. 325). Vidal also adds that we can abuse emotionality in expressing a worldview, when our worldview starts suffering from a lack of an argumentative and logical approach, and violates objective consistency. He admits that emotions, and hence their functional role for worldviews "still remain poorly recognised and discussed in many human interactions," and that we are therefore "missing a major aspect of our cognition" (ibid., p. 325). In conclusion, he argues that we need a framework and tools to deal with them.

6.5. Intersubjective Criteria

6.5.1. Heylighen's Criteria

Lastly, Heylighen points out that the process of transmission and diffusion of ideas (or memes; cf. Heylighen, 1992) from others plays an essential part in their selection. The following intersubjective criteria play a role: (8) publicity, (9) expressivity, (10) formality, (11) collective utility, (12) conformity, and, finally, (13) authority.

(8) Publicity is the effort the subject carrying the idea invests in making it known to others (Heylighen, 1997, p. 67). In other words, a worldview holder might have idiosyncratic ideas which she prefers to keep for herself. These ideas are then purely subjective as they do not exceed the realm of the individual. On the other hand, she might prefer for her ideas to be known to others, for instance, her parochial group (e.g., parish), the further tradition or society (i.e., church), or simply everyone. If one's goal is a public one, then ideas which are easier to be made public will be preferred to ones that are harder. The criterion of publicity will therefore go hand in hand with a criterion of *intersubjective coherence* (i.e., subjective ideas cohering with intersubjective or communal ideas).

(9) Expressivity is the idea that all memes need a communication medium in order to be transmitted; ideas that are easy to express will be communicated more easily. Thus, the medium will co-select ideas, as each medium will be more suited than others will. Heylighen writes that, for instance, the development of physical theories is dependent on mathematics as a medium (1997, p. 67). Although nothing prevents religions to use formal language, religious memes are often communicated through the medium of myths or stories (Smart, 1969; Rennie, 1999). Ninian Smart calls this dimension of religious thought the narrative or mythological dimension (Smart, 1989, p. 12). As we will see, Vidal specifically adds narrativity as a criterion (see *infra*).

(10) Formality is the degree that ideas are context-independent, and are more likely to be interpreted uniformly. An idea is expressed formally if it lacks equivocation. The more formal the idea, the more likely it is to be communicated accurately (Heylighen, 1997, p. 68).

(11) Collective utility differs from individual utility in the sense that some forms of collective utility will be useless to the individual (e.g. traffic fines). From an evolutionary perspective, collective ideas will be selected on the group level, as groups having those ideas will be more fit than groups lacking them. Thus, Heylighen argues that supernatural cosmologies, characteristic of archaic civilisations, have been selected on the basis of such collective utility (*ibid.*, p. 68; Campbell, 1997). Of course, we should add that such an account is functionalist: most people will be unaware of its role.

(12) Conformity is the selective pressure that suppresses individually selfish deviations from collective beliefs. All other things being equal, it is evolutionary optimal for subjects to adopt the majority belief of those people that try to convert them (*cf.* Boyd and Richerson, 1985).

(13) Authority is the idea that the backing of a recognised expert will contribute to the acceptance of a particular idea. Individuals within a complex society will tend to specialise in a particular domain. As they are successful doing so, through a positive feed-back mechanism, they will see more such work delegated to them, thus developing even greater expertise and authority (*cf.* Gaines, 1994). It should be clear that the power of authority has always played a role in the dissemination of religious worldviews.

6.5.2. Vidal's Criteria

Finally, Vidal also adds the criteria of (g) intersubjective consistency, (h) collective utility, and (i) narrativity.

(g) Intersubjective consistency: This criterion calls for the minimisation of conflicts between individuals. According to Vidal, moral philosophy, economics, ethics, politics and jurisprudence are mainly concerned with this criterion. When intersubjective consistency is violated, conflicts occur and communication is difficult. When the criterion is abused by avoiding conflict, on the other hand, it will promote traditional ways of thinking and acting.

(h) Collective utility: This criterion is the collective extension of the individual utility criterion (see *supra*).

(i) Narrativity calls for presenting the worldview through the medium of stories. Vidal defines a story as “a connected series of actions that follow from one to the next” (2012, p. 328).¹²⁹ Vidal adds that *narrativity* and *emotionality* go hand in hand, “because both have a double subjective and intersubjective aspect” (ibid., p. 328). Subjectively, narrativity makes a worldview more emotional, motivating and easy to assimilate; intersubjectively, it makes that messages are easier to convey. When narrativity is violated, we face theoretical material that is emotionally insipid, hard to learn and to remember.¹³⁰ Science and philosophy will explicitly avoid narrativity as they focus on seeking generalities: “Science aims at finding universal laws, supposed to be certain, independent of time, contexts or individual subjects; whereas stories narrate a sequence of actions at a particular time, in a particular context and with an uncertain outcome” (Vidal, ibid., p. 328).¹³¹

6.6. Conclusion

To conclude, I understand the different superclasses of criteria as *parameters* for the fulfilment of the validity claims of specific beliefs, where a parameter constitutes (a) a measurable factor that defines a system, or (b) sets the conditions of its operation. From this follows that such parameters can play both a role in establishing the initial plausibility of worldview claims, as well as in establishing their final acceptability. Parameters will set constraints as to what we are “allowed” to accept or believe. As I have shown, in the Aporetics of worldview claims (chapter 5), only *specific claims* will come together to form aporetic sets. From this we could reasonably conclude that to solve such specific aporetic conflicts we can suffice by giving reasons for or against those claims and thus settle the conflict. However, as I have argued, this is rarely a sufficient strategy. One reason for this is that the final acceptability of claims does not merely rest on justification for our claims — which is a necessary but insufficient condition — but also on relationships of implication with other beliefs within the web of belief, where one cannot give up one claim without giving up others. Another reason is that we still need right-of-way criteria to establish exits out of our first-order aporias based

¹²⁹ This would be one instance of Heylighen’s criterion of expressivity.

¹³⁰ Vidal mentions the example of mathematics which is often painful to learn for children because it violates the criterion of narrativity.

¹³¹ A similar project took place in the context of Bible exegesis and the hermeneutics of Scripture where myths were analysed with the purpose of deriving formal content. Rudolf Bultmann (1958) even suggested that the tasks of the contemporary theologian should be to “demythologise Scripture” (Sherratt, 2005).

on a *rational but preferential* orientation. This is in line with Heylighen's argument that such criteria will be "unevenly distributed" for different worldviews. Thus, I will summarise:

A. Whether any given claim fulfils its *representational function* will be measured on the basis of objective parameters, such as distinctiveness, controllability, objective coherence, etc. The more of these parameters are fulfilled, *the more likely* it is that the particular claim will be able to redeem its associate validity claim of objective truth.¹³² In other words, redemption of the validity claim will determine the *acceptability* of the claim, understood here in terms of *truth*. Once redeemed, the claim will become or remain part of the worldview as an objective claim *per se*, or as an *objectively charged claim*, leaving room for other validity claims.

B. Whether any given claim fulfils its expressive function (i.e., its subjectivity) will be measured on the basis of subjective parameters, such as utility, novelty, consistency, emotionality, etc. The more of these parameters are fulfilled, *the more likely* it is that the particular claim will be able to redeem its associate validity claim of subjective authenticity. In other words, redemption of the validity claim will determine the *acceptability* of the claim, understood here in terms of *authenticity*. Once redeemed, the claim will become or remain part of the worldview as a subjective claim *per se*, or as a *subjectively charged claim*, leaving room for other validity claims.¹³³

C. Whether any given claim fulfils its interactive function will be measured on the basis of intersubjective parameters, such as publicity, expressivity, formality, collective utility, conformity, and so on. The more of these parameters are fulfilled, *the more likely* it is that the particular claim will be able to redeem its associate validity claim of intersubjective justness. In other words, redemption of the validity claim will determine the *acceptability* of the claim, understood here in terms of *normative rightness*. Once redeemed, the claim will become or remain part of the worldview as an intersubjective claim *per se*, or as an *intersubjectively charged claim*, leaving room for other validity claims.

¹³² Note that such a process is not an absolute guarantor of truth.

¹³³ Thus, to be an authentic and expressive person is to accept claims that fit one's own subjective life world. As Heylighen's evolutionary-cybernetic approach shows, what will be important to individuals are such principles as personal utility, novelty, consistency, emotional resonance, etc.

7. Orientational Pluralism

7.1. Introduction

In chapter 2, I presented a brief analysis of the problem of religious diversity, constituted by two different problems, namely a *first-order* problem of conflicting claims, and a *second-order* problem of different stances towards religious diversity. Subsequently, I argued that the *first-order problem* was constituted by different answers to leading worldview questions, such as: what exists, what should we do, what should we value, and so on. In chapter five, I argued that such a problem was aporetic, i.e., constituted an aporia based on a definition provided by Nicholas Rescher (2009).

In this chapter, I will analyse the *second-order problem of epistemic stances* and similarly define it as an aporia. Given that this problem is limited in scope, i.e., there are only four answers to one leading question, I will also propose a solution to this aporetic puzzle.¹³⁴ In particular, I will analyse Perry Schmidt-Leukel's presentation of the quadripartite typology in terms of Aporetics (Schmidt-Leukel, 2005). In response to Schmidt-Leukel's preferred position of pluralism, I will present a fifth possibility, suggested by Nicholas Rescher, namely Orientational Pluralism. I will define this epistemic stance as a *third-order stance* consisting of a combination of *locative exclusivism* and *supra-locative pluralism*. Such an Orientational Pluralism is grounded in the idea that pluralist theories, rather than being *supra-locative second-order theories*, are in fact locative solutions similar to exclusivism. Therefore, a solution out of this problem is to insist on a *locative* theory as exclusivism does — which relies on the aporetic procedures I have outlined previously —, but mitigated by a *supra-locative* pluralism. From this follows that Orientational Pluralism will have access to three different locative stances: exclusivism, inclusivism, and (locative) pluralism. Finally, I will demonstrate how Mark Heim, a self-professed Orientational Pluralist, chooses to be a Christian inclusivist in developing a Christian Trinitarian solution to the problem of religious diversity. However, such an orientation results from Heim's own rational preferentialism, and should not be seen as a forced consequence of his Orientational Pluralism.

7.2. The Second-Order Aporia

Nicholas Rescher, in his *Pluralism* (1993), argues that when it comes to assessing *the truth of substantively informative claims*, inquirers must proceed on the basis of a “perspective.” That is, they must take up a cognitive stance, or a point of view, from which the issues at hand can be judged. However, he adds, the empirical basis of our factual knowledge leads us to a variety of alternative

¹³⁴ As I have stated earlier, concerning the first-order aporia, I sufficed by merely addressing the strategies for aporetic dissolution.

cognitive positions in answering “the Big Questions about the world” (1993, p. 76). Thus, from this follows that it is “to be expected that people equipped with different courses of experience should judge differently with respect to issues that are not in themselves totally cut and dried” (ibid, p. 77). Faced with such cognitive pluralism, we can then ask the question as to what our knowledge-generating attitude should be to such pluralism. Rescher lists four reactions, to wit: (1) scepticism, (2) syncretism, (3) indifferentist relativism, and (4) perspectival rationalism or contextualism (1993, p. 80).¹³⁵ Firstly, Rescher formulates a so-called “leading question,” viz., how should we approach such diversity? He then lists four possible responses to this question:

- (1) accept none: reject all, ours included;
- (2) accept one: retain ours;
- (3) accept several: conjoin others with ours;
- (4) 'rise above the conflict': say 'a plague on all your houses' to the available alternatives and look elsewhere-to the 'ideal observer', to the 'wise man' of the Stoics, to the 'ideally rational agent' of the economists, or some such (in these circumstances unavailable) idealisation (Rescher, 1993, p. 101)

We can now state that these four answers constitute an aporia by comparing it with Rescher’s definition presented earlier (chapter 5). Firstly, the different answers are thematically related. This is due to the fact that they are answers to the same leading question for this set. Secondly, we have good reasons for each of these positions. That is, arguments can be given for each position that would make them seem individually attractive. Thirdly, the total set of theses is inconsistent; the individual theses are mutually exclusive. On the basis of this we conclude that the set is aporetic. We can also conclude that it constitutes a *second-order aporia*, given that the epistemic positions are in fact exits out of an aporia constituted by the different answers to the first-order worldview questions.

The next step in the aporetic process is to look for possible exits out of this aporia by removing the weakest link. Rescher suggests that four possible reactions exist to cognitive pluralism, namely (1) scepticism, (2) syncretism, (3) indifferentist relativism, and (4) perspectival rationalism or contextualism. If this indeed the case, then these reactions be seen as exits to the aporia.

¹³⁵ Interestingly, Rescher’s presentation is very similar to our presentation of the second-order problem of epistemic stances. However, nowhere does Rescher refer to Alan Race’s tripartite typology, or mentions any of the other authors working in the field of religious diversity. However, the obvious similarities between the two typologies will allow me to analyse Schmidt-Leukel’s presentation of the standard typology in terms of Aporetics.

(i) Scepticism: accept (1), reject (2) — (4). The sceptic accepts none of the first-order positions on the basis that no single position is justified, since the alternatives "simply cancel one another out" (1993, p. 80). Rescher considers this not to be a viable strategy as it does not provide us with a positive or informative answer to the leading question. He argues that we do not gain anything informative from not choosing.

(ii) Syncretism: accept (3), deny (1) to (2) as well as (4). Syncretism stands in stark contrast with the skeptic's position. While the skeptic argues that we should accept *none of the alternatives*, the syncretist argues that we should *accept all alternatives*. On this view, all of the seemingly discordant positions are justified, and we must, for this reason, conjoin or juxtapose them.¹³⁶

(iii) Indifferentist Relativism: accept (2), deny (1), (3), (4). The *indifferentist relativist* takes up the position that *only one alternative should be accepted* out of the many. However, the relativist argues that we cannot do so on the basis of rationally cogent grounds. The acceptance of a single alternative emerges from considerations that themselves lack any rational basis: they are a matter of taste, of personal inclination, or social tradition, etc.

(iv) Perspectival Rationalism: on the basis of (2), the perspectival rationalist, or contextualist, accepts only one alternative, similar to the relativist. Unlike the latter, his acceptance does have a basis of rational cogency, albeit this basis "may differ perspectively from group to group, era to era, and school to school" (ibid., p. 80).¹³⁷

Firstly, using the basic aporetic strategy of thesis rejection, four positions are possible out of the aporia, one of which is based on accepting (4). However, Rescher drops this exit on the argument that it is "utopian and unrealistic," since we have "no way to get there from here" (1993, p. 102). However, he does not further elaborate on this position beyond this single sentence. With the same strategy of thesis rejection, only one option based on (2) is possible. Given that he presents us with two variations, Rescher must make use of the alternative strategy of *thesis modification*. He does so

¹³⁶ The issue of syncretism has garnered quite a bit of attention in recent years in Religious Studies, specifically amongst Christian scholars. One such issue involves how to define syncretism (Droogers, 1987; Gort, Vroom et al., 1987). Ferdinando defines syncretism as "substitution or modification of central elements of Christianity [i.e., a given religion] by beliefs or practices introduced from elsewhere" (1995, p. 272; between square brackets mine).

¹³⁷ In *The Strife of Systems* (1985), Rescher calls this stance orientational pluralism. See also Rescher, 1978.

by modifying claim (2) by way of reference to a rationality cogent justification. Thus, he begets a (iii) *non-rational relativism* and a (iv) *rational relativism*, which he names *perspectival rationalism* or *contextualism*. Non-rational relativism is the butt of an extended critique by Rescher leading him to reject it in favour of rational relativism. He points out, *inter alia*, that non-rational relativism is self-inconsistent: since it claims that we have no good reasons for arriving at a specific position over and against others, it will equally have no good reasons for defending its own position.

Secondly, in terms of the quadripartite typology of epistemic stances towards religious diversity, skepticism falls under the rubric of naturalism, which, as I have argued, was a catch-all concept for any stance that reject all religious claims (for whatever reason). A syncretist position falls under the rubric of pluralism, however, it is most easily associated with *polycentric pluralism*, where religious traditions are understood as separate strategies to achieve separate goals. Both Indifferentist Relativism and Perspectival Rationalism — also called Rational Preferentialism — are exclusivist in nature, but with the former being relativistic.

In *Chapter Six of Pluralism* (1993), Rescher presents us with another double aporia in answer to two distinct leading questions (1993, p. 100):

Q1: How should we evaluate each of the alternative positions on our cognitive, evaluative and practical questions? This divides into two separate issues: should we (a) dismiss those that differ from the one we ourselves favour, or (b) see all the alternatives as deserving of consideration and some positive response?

Q2: How are we to evaluate the posture of those who adopt these differing positions (or world-views)? This divides into two issues: should we (a) acknowledge that they are, or may be, proceeding in a way that is appropriate and legitimate given their situation and circumstances, or (b) not?

Although he does not explain, the reason for these distinctions can be found in Rescher's aporetic procedure, particularly in the dual structure of justification. As we have seen, Rescher distinguishes between the *initial plausibility* of claims and the *eventual acceptability* of claims. Thus, making the above two questions more explicit, Rescher derives the following leading questions which can be used for an aporetic set-up (1993, p. 98):

Q1: In general, how many of the alternatives with respect to a controverted matter are *plausible* in the sense of deserving sympathetic consideration and deliberation?

Q2: Within the range of such viable alternatives, how many are *acceptable* in the sense of deserving endorsement and adoption?

From these two questions we can derive two subsequent aporia, hinging on the distinction between *initial plausibility* and *eventual acceptability*. Taking the first leading question, we can state:

- (1) No alternatives are plausible, including ours.
- (2) Only one alternative is plausible, that is, ours.
- (3) Two or more alternatives are plausible.

It is clear that the individual theses are mutually exclusive and logically exhaustive: no more options can be found. This leads us to three possible exits on the basis of basic thesis exclusion.¹³⁸

- (i) nihilism: accept (1), and deny (2) and (3);
- (ii) monism: accept (2), and deny (1) and (3);
- (iii) pluralism: accept (3), and deny (1) and (2);

The aporia also repeats itself when we attempt to answer the second question, this time on the issue of acceptability:

- (1') No alternatives are acceptable, including ours.
- (2') Only one alternative is acceptable, that is, ours.
- (3') Two or more alternatives are acceptable.

Again, we have three exits out on the basis of thesis rejection.

- (i) scepticism: accept (1), and deny (2) and (3);
- (ii) monism: accept (2), and deny (1) and (3);
- (iii) pluralism: accept (3), and deny (1) and (2);

¹³⁸ I have taken the headings from a table found in the same chapter (1993, p. 99, table 6.2).

Rescher summarises the different theses and epistemic positions by means of the following chart (1993, p. 99, table 6.2).¹³⁹

Range of answers Question 1	Question 2	Resultant Doctrinal Position
0	0	Nihilism
1	1	Monism (absolutism)
2 or more		Pluralism
	0	Scepticism
	1	Preferentialism
		Doctrinalism (rationalistic)
		Relativism (irrationalistic)
	2 or more	Syncretism

Table 9: Range Resultant Doctrinal Positions.

The left and middle column represent the two aporias with their various theses (i.e., theses 1-3). The column on the right represents the possible exits out of the aporias in the form of what I have called "epistemic stances." Due to the interaction between Rescher's two leading questions, both aporias are tied in with one another. Thus, the second aporia, based on the acceptability of claims, is stacked on top of the first one. As a consequence, we have a doubling up of positions: nihilism-scepticism, monism-preferentialism, pluralism-syncretism. Each pair follows the same logic.

From this chart we can now derive Rescher's preferred stance. In relation to the first column, on the *initial plausibility* of claims, Rescher prefers pluralism. In relation to the second column, on *final acceptability*, Rescher chooses rationalistic preferentialism (i.e., exclusivism). Thus, Rescher's answer to the above questions will generate what he calls an Orientational Pluralism.

As such, Orientational Pluralism, is a combination of two different positions, namely: (a) being fully committed to the correctness of one's own position (i.e., exclusivism), while (b) acknowledging that others are fully entitled and rationally justified (given their "situation") in holding the views that they do (i.e., pluralism). While (b) is in response to the question which alternatives we find plausible — and the answer is all of them —, (a) is in response to the question which ones

¹³⁹ The chart represented here is my own reproduction of Rescher's chart, rather than an exact copy.

of those we find acceptable, i.e., just one. Thus, the original aporia is dissolved on the basis of a distinction or modification hinging on the difference between plausibility (i.e, worthy of consideration) and acceptability (i.e., worthy of adoption). We take up a specific position despite the fact that multiple positions are plausible.

7.3. Orientational Pluralism

7.3.1. Varieties of Pluralism

To repeat, Orientational Pluralism is a pluralist theory which combines *preferentialism* (i.e., monism or exclusivism) with *pluralism*. It is therefore an alternative to other pluralist stances. Rescher writes that pluralism, as "the doctrine that any substantial question admits of a variety of plausible but mutually conflicting responses, is (itself) susceptible to a plurality of versions and constructions" (1993, p. 79). This implies that the epistemic doctrine of pluralism engenders an aporia of its own. We can call this aporia a *third-order aporia* since it takes as its *datum* one exit to the second-order aporia. In other words, once we take up the position of pluralism, we are confronted with a new aporia, namely one that consists of conflicting doctrines on the epistemic position of pluralism. Rescher identifies three such stances, namely (1) syncretism, (2) eclecticism and (3) synthesism, and analyses them as insufficient strategies, to be rejected in favour of an Orientational Pluralism.

Firstly, *the syncretist option* is to view all the alternatives positively, and to conjoin them in "an attempt to 'rise above the quarrel' of conflicting doctrines, refusing to 'take sides' by taking all the sides at once" (Rescher, 1993, p. 90). Confronted with contradictory beliefs, the syncretist does not take the usual exit out of the aporetic inconsistency by duly choosing between alternatives, but instead embraces all alternatives. The syncretist's view is not that of a pluralism of alternative positions, but rather of a "grand superposition" that conjoins all positions (1993, p. 91). A syncretist position is akin to a pluralist stance of wanting to include all religious traditions within the category of acceptable worldviews. However, Rescher argues that syncretism is in the end self-defeating, for it cannot avoid seeing the alternatives to itself (scepticism, absolutism, etc.) as equally valid. The syncretist finds himself in the same Procrustean bed as the relativist: by seeing all options as equally valid, the syncretist cuts off his or her own chance of having a superior intellectual position. Stated differently, while the syncretist aims for a pluralist position towards the first-order aporia, she cannot do so for the second-order aporia: he or she is forced to take an exclusivist or preferential stance.

Secondly, eclecticism is the "internally diversified stance that each lower-level doctrine is right in some very partial, merely aspectival respect though wrong in others" (1993, p. 92). While syncretism can be classified as a "position-conjoining" approach, eclecticism is rather a "position-combining" approach.

Thirdly, synthesis — or its concomitant position of synthesisism — is "the construction of a combining standpoint that mixes a piece of one position with some different piece of another," or "that grants one the right in *this* respect and another the right in *that* one" (1993, p. 94; italics his).

Rescher does not reflect on the relationship between eclecticism and synthesisism. However, turning to standard definitions, we can derive that eclecticism amounts to (a) the selection of what appears to be best in various doctrines, positions, etc., or (b) a selection from a variety of sources. In this regard, synthesis would appear to be doing the same thing, that is collect different elements. However, the focus in synthesis does not lie with *the method* of gathering elements, but rather with *the goal* of constructing a whole. Hence, *synthesis is opposed to analysis*, or the deconstruction of a whole into its constituent parts. Conversely, however, we would not state that the opposite of analysis is eclecticism.

Since all three theses are forms of pluralism this allows us to identify a *syncretic pluralism*, an *eclectic pluralism*, and a *synthetic pluralism*. While syncretic pluralism accepts all claims indiscriminately, both eclectic and synthetic pluralism discriminate. Eclectic pluralism discriminates on the basis of the *acceptability of parts*, while synthetic pluralism discriminates on the basis of the *acceptability of the whole*. The crucial point of difference between *syncretic* and *synthetic pluralism* is that synthetic pluralism provides one standpoint amongst many. Rather than conjoining dissonant positions, as the syncretist philosopher does, the synthesist aims to co-ordinate dissonant positions in order to arrive at a positioned albeit all-embracing stance. However, due to the overdetermination of beliefs, incompatible standpoints can always be combined in various ways. We thus end up with different syntheses, each vying exclusively for our acceptance.

7.3.2. Orientational Pluralism

Rescher understands the doctrine of pluralism as the idea that it is "rationally intelligible and acceptable that others can hold positions at variance with one's own" (1993, p. 88). However, it does not follow from this statement that (a) one needs to endorse a plurality of positions, or (b) that the fact that others hold a certain position would constitute sufficient reason for us to do the same (1993, p. 89). Concerning (a), Rescher concludes that, unless we opt for a syncretist position that is self-refuting, we are forced to make a preferential choice. He writes:

We can only resolve our cognitive or practical problems if we conduct our inquiries in the doctrinalist manner--only if we are willing to 'stick our necks out' and take a position that endorses some answers and rejects others. And we can only do this in a reasonable way if we are willing to deploy the resources of reason in this process (Rescher, 1993, p. 89).

The only way out, therefore, is a *pluralism that is co-ordinated with a rational preference* based on context-relevant considerations. This kind of pluralism has a first advantage that it is self-consistent: it takes its own advice and positions itself as the preferred stance, as superiorly meritorious.

Concerning (b), this repeats an issue that I have touched on beforehand (in chapter 5), and which is equally a point of interest in the discussions on religious diversity, namely: should the existence of a variety of alternative positions diminish the epistemic confidence we have in our own doctrinal position? Rescher is adamant in stating that it does not. However, neither does he argue that we should be merely sitting on one our own claims. If we want to engross truth, we have an epistemic duty to investigate whether we could not be wrong about our current claims, and others right. However, *mere plurality by itself* is not necessarily reason enough to doubt our own position (see chapter 5). Thus Rescher writes that, while the fact that others agree with us is no proof for the correctness of our claims, neither is the fact that they disagree a sign of error (1993, p. 89).

Seemingly then, we have two conflicting strategies, a phenomenon we are by now familiar with. In other words, we are faced with an aporia between two different mutually conflicting options: exclusivism, and pluralism. If we apply thesis rejection, then we can come down to either exclusivism, as many authors have done (e.g., D'Costa, Netland), or to pluralism (e.g., Hick, Schmidt-Leukel). However, we can also apply the strategy of thesis modification and argue for two different contexts to which these stances apply. Rescher can be seen to take the latter option when he argues that both exclusivism and pluralism are two features belonging to different domains, namely "the standpoint of the individual and the standpoint of the group" (1993, p. 89). He writes:

Pluralism is a feature of the collective group: it turns on the fact that different experiences engender different views. But from the standpoint of the individual this cuts no ice. We have no alternative to proceeding as best we can on the basis of what is available to us (1993, p. 89).

While from the perspective of the group we can allow for various positions — and hence for a dissensus — from the perspective of the individual we are forced to take up a specific position, delivering specific answers to our probative questions. He argues (Rescher, 1993, p. 101):

- (1) That pluralism is compatible with preferentialism: seeing a range of alternative positions as deserving of our respect, consideration, and the like, is perfectly consistent with seeing only one of them as having a valid claim to our acceptance.
- (2) That a rationalistic preferentialism (i.e. doctrinalism) which insists on the correctness of one particular alternative is perfectly compatible with a pluralism that acknowledges that others, situated differently from ourselves in the experiential scheme of things, may be fully rationally warranted and entitled to hold the variant position they in fact adopt.

Both points state that a *first-order exclusivism* is consistent with a *second-order pluralism*. On the first-order level, we choose one set of theses above other sets. At the same time we acknowledge that there are other cognitive positions possible, which differ from ours, and which we do not take. Our own position is arrived through the rational application of evaluative criteria and standards. But so are other positions. Be this as it may, they are not the evaluative standards that we prefer to apply. Importantly, this evaluative choice is not an irrational one. Both partners to the dialogue have perfectly good reasons for their position. In the end, these reasons are "evaluative in nature, and thus potentially variable" (Rescher, 1993, p. 103). As Rescher writes, "the rational configuration of one's standards and criteria exactly consists in this systematically congruent attunement to the realities of one's experience" (ibid., p. 103) And since experiences and contexts will differ, so will our epistemic framework.

Returning to my chapter two, we require a locative solution where we position ourselves in the world. In first-order philosophy of worldviews, the task is to come to a distinct set of answers, and in order to do so we have to make curtailments, for having too many answers is the equivalent of having no answers. Taking a step up, and surveying the field of distinct positions, we can however also allow for plurality. Rescher's pluralist position, however, is *supra-locative* and *free-floating* at the second-order level. This is congruent with both Smart's and Vidal's understanding of a *neutral second-order philosophical activity*. Hence, pluralism and exclusivism are two necessary positions, but distributed over two philosophical activities: *first-order* and *second-order philosophy*.

However, we are not forced to merely see pluralism as a neutral second-order approach. At times, Rescher diminishes the role of what we could call the collective subjective or intersubjective

realm. It comes as no surprise that this has seen him at odds with Jürgen Habermas, for whom the prerequisite of social interaction is that we come to a consensus. However, Rescher continuously points out that diversity and dissensus is an essential feature of who we are as epistemic beings situated in the world. Rather than striving for consensus, Rescher defends a position of “accommodation through general acquiescence” (Marsonet, 2009, p. 7). Rescher writes:

Accommodation through general acquiescence is a perfectly practicable mode for making decisions in the public order and resolving its conflicts. And, given the realities of the situation in a complex and diversified society, it has significant theoretical and practical advantages over its more radical alternatives (Rescher, 1993, p. 166).

Such an “accommodation through general acquiescence” amounts to what has been called a tolerant position towards religious traditions (Schmidt-Leukel, 2002). Thus, to be tolerant implies that we accept that some of our peers, who are differently positioned than us, hold different beliefs that are equally plausible from their point of view. It also includes the idea that we can *appreciate* this diversity. However, this appreciation still allows us to be critical of those other positions, namely, from the point of view of our own orientation. However, none of this implies that the collective group cannot also come to a consensus, if need be, and thus arrive at a *positioned agreement*. If this is the case, then pluralism as an epistemic position that arrives at a positioned consensus between parties is always an availability, and in fact needs to be. However, whether we do so will depend on the goals of our epistemic deliberations, and whether they allow for dissensus, or strive towards consensus.

7.4. Schmidt-Leukel’s Revised Typology

7.4.1. An Aporetic Set-Up

Perry Schmidt-Leukel in his defining article *Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism: The Tripolar Typology Clarified and Reaffirmed*, published in Paul Knitter's *The Myth of Religious Superiority* (2005), offers a defence of the classic typology by “transforming it from a descriptive and phenomenological typology into a classification that is logically precise and comprehensive” (2005, p. 18). This reinterpretation is based on, what Merritt R. Blakeslee (2010) throughout his thesis calls “critical presuppositions.”

Firstly, Schmidt-Leukel writes that the religious traditions all affirm certain beliefs, namely the categories of claims identified in my chapter 2: (a) assertions about what exists or does not exist, (b) value judgments, (c) practical instructions (ibid., p. 18). In my same chapter 2, I further argued that we can see such claims as answers to important worldview questions, which fit the categories of, respectively, (a) ontology, (b) axiology (ethics), and (c) praxeology (i.e., the study of human action).

Secondly, Schmidt-Leukel argues that the most central religious conviction, which all traditional religions confirm, is "that there is something more important than anything else in the universe" (ibid., p. 18). He agrees that this might also be true for so-called "secular religions," however, in the case of the traditional world religions, this something more important is affirmed to be a "transcendent reality, that is, not one of the finite realities of this world" (ibid., p. 18).¹⁴⁰ Each of the religious traditions, then, (a) claims some form of knowledge or revelation of this transcendent reality, (b) makes value judgments of the transcendent reality being of the utmost importance and the highest good, as well as (c) instructs their adherents in how to "live their lives in such a way that they truly reflect this utmost importance of ultimate reality" (ibid., p. 18). Schmidt-Leukel refers to the latter by the term salvation, here understood as a *tradition-neutral term*.¹⁴¹ Salvation, in his words, is the "proper orientation of life and the hopes connected with it," that is, within the context of a transcendent reality.

On the basis of these presuppositions, Schmidt-Leukel concludes that "the religions, at least the traditional ones, claim—each in its own way—to mediate a salvific knowledge or revelation of a transcendent reality" (ibid, p. 18). His next step is then to assign a variable P to this assertion, and make the following statements:

- (1) P equals mediation of a salvific knowledge of ultimate/transcendent reality;
- (2) P is a property of a religious tradition, (a) if the tradition claims to be in possession of P, and (b) if this possession is deemed veridical, i.e. true.

¹⁴⁰ This presupposition, that religious belief systems hinge on belief in a transcendent reality, can be contested. The author states that he only considers the traditional world religions. In other words, he only counts those religions which fit his definition of what constitutes a religion. But even if we only consider the so-called world religions, this characterisation is perhaps most appropriate for the Abrahamic faiths (Christianity, Judaism, Islam), and arguably less so for such Asian traditions as Daoism, Confucianism, or even Buddhism.

¹⁴¹ The term salvation is taken from a Christian context. Somebody with a Christian background will find it hard to see the term as "tradition-neutral," as the term conjures images of a Christian salvation. A Buddhist, not having been raised in a Christian context, will escape this fate (or faith), but might be likely to think of a Buddhist salvation instead, based on ideas of personal enlightenment.

Thus, P being a property of a religious tradition means that the religious tradition in question has knowledge of the proper conduct for (a) right relation to, or (b) right reflection of a transcendent reality. On the basis of this, we have now recourse to four assertions (Schmidt-Leukel, 2005, p. 19):

1. P is not given among the religions.
2. P is given among the religions, but only once.
3. P is given among the religions more than once, but with only one singular maximum.
4. P is given among the religions more than once and without a singular maximum.

These four assertions together constitutes an aporia, since:

- (a) The four claims are grouped together as answers to a leading question, namely whether we can find salvific knowledge, centred on an ultimate and/or transcendent reality, in any of the religions.
- (b) We have good reasons to accept each of these claims. This is shown by the fact that each one of the four options has previously and continuously been defended in public debates and discourses. Each proponent believes she has good reasons for her own position, as well as that she is choosing the right option, since, if she did not believe this, she would choose another one.
- (c) Taken together, the four assertions form an inconsistent set. All the theses are mutually inconsistent.

Given that there are four theses, each of which is incompatible with the others, the total amount of possible exits out of inconsistency will therefore also be four. This means that we are confronted with an *aporetic quad*, that is, an aporia with four possible exits out of the ensuing inconsistency. Affirming any of the answers, and hence denying others that are inconsistent with it, forces us to take up a specific philosophical stance, expressed by the four options of the quadripartite typology (see chapter 2), namely:

[0] Atheism/Naturalism: Salvific knowledge of a transcendent reality is mediated by none of the religions (because a transcendent reality does not exist).

[1] Exclusivism: Salvific knowledge of a transcendent reality is mediated by only one religion (which naturally will be one's own).

[2] Inclusivism: Salvific knowledge of a transcendent reality is mediated by more than one religion (not necessarily by all of them), but only one of these mediates it in a uniquely superior way (which again will naturally be one's own).

[3] Pluralism: Salvific knowledge of a transcendent reality is mediated by more than one religion (not necessarily by all of them), and there is none among them whose mediation of that knowledge is superior to all the rest.

Schmidt-Leukel emphasises that this classification is fully comprehensive, due to it being fully disjunctive. Thus he concludes:

Either P is given or not. If P is given, it is given only once or more than once. And if P is given more than once, it is either with or without a singular maximum form (Schmidt-Leukel, 2005, p. 19).

7.4.2. Applying Thesis Exclusion

Schmidt-Leukel argues that the typology entails that there are only four options available (i.e., to exit the aporetic cluster), and that it would therefore be a waste to look for any other options (ibid., p. 21). Choosing some claims and rejecting others is a standard aporetic procedure, as well as the hallmark of the exclusivist.¹⁴² If we adopt thesis rejection, then Schmidt-Leukel is right: logically, only four exits are available. Each option rejects or abandons three items. Not choosing, as Rescher points out, is certainly another option, but it is also the least informative, and the least desirable. Hence, all we really need to dissolve the secondary aporia is apply thesis rejection. However, if we apply the aporetic strategy of *thesis modification*, alternative exits become possible, which include claims which we would otherwise have to reject. Salvaging inconsistent claims opens up further possibilities, expanding the typology beyond just four options.

Let me recapitulate. Firstly, *thesis rejection* is the simple aporetic strategy of accepting some claims and abandoning the ones that are compatible with it. Since abandonment is achieved through exclusion we can call this strategy *thesis exclusion*. Similarly, we can rename thesis modification as *thesis inclusion*: here, we do not abandon a claim, but we include it into our set of acceptable claims through *modification* or qualification. While the term thesis modification stresses *method*, the term thesis inclusion stresses the *goal* to include otherwise objectionable theses. If we call thesis “logical

¹⁴² Schmidt-Leukel would not agree with this statement. However, I merely claim that the exclusivist only needs to apply thesis rejection to arrive at his position.

exclusivism,” then we can distinguish it from an “epistemic exclusivism” as a second-order theory (e.g., D’Costa, 1990, 2009). However, both are related since epistemic pluralism is arrived at by adopting a logical exclusivism.¹⁴³ In other words, there seems to be no obvious difference between logical exclusivism and epistemic exclusivism. For instance, we can redefine epistemic exclusivism by reference to an injunction: when confronted with a religious aporia, take the set of theses that you find acceptable, i.e., consider salvific knowledge, and reject the others (i.e., apply thesis rejection). It should therefore be clear that Schmidt-Leukel’s presentation forces us to equally apply thesis rejection (i.e., exclusivism) to the second-order aporia. Following the injunction of thesis rejection, we thus easily arrive at the different epistemic stances. Naturalism rejects all claims, because it denies truth value — in one way or another — to all religious claims. Exclusivism rejects a specific set of religious claims (which constitute salvific knowledge), and rejects all others. The inclusivist can accept that other religious traditions have some salvific knowledge, as long as they are not in contradiction with the set of religious beliefs from the home religion. The inclusivist states that one religion can claim a maximum of salvific knowledge, while admitting that salvific knowledge is also given in other religions. For the pluralist stance — again, as an epistemic stance towards the first-order aporia — things appear to be more complicated. In general, pluralists take offence at the idea that exclusivists take their own religious position to be solely true, and the religious position of others to be false. In reply, pluralists argue that all the religions (or at least a preferential selection of those religions they deem appropriate) are positioned equally in relation to the truth. The pluralist, unlike the exclusivist, is now confronted with a problem: if we affirm the truth of all (or most) religious claims present in those religious traditions, then we end up with multiple inconsistencies. The pluralist therefore makes a trade-off. She states that no religion is superior regarding truth, and confronts the resulting inconsistency; an inconsistency which will somehow have to go. The pluralist is therefore faced with the following antinomy:

- (1) All religions have P — i.e. are true belief systems.
- (2) The total set of all religious truth claims is inconsistent.

The exclusivist takes the easy way out by denying (1). Since the pluralist refuses to take this road, her only recourse is to somehow deny (2). But since the outright denial of (2) would be suspect, the

¹⁴³ I can see no reason why Schmidt-Leukel would not agree to at least this.

only way out is to somehow modify the claim.¹⁴⁴ The pluralist can modify (2) by stating that the “[different] religions testify to the same ultimate transcendent reality despite the different forms this testimony takes, and they do so with the same genuine authenticity and an equal salvific potential” (Schmidt-Leukel, 2005, p. 21). Thus both John Hick and Schmidt-Leukel dissolve the issue of inconsistency by taking recourse to thesis modification. That is, they postulate an Ultimate Reality, a transcendent or noumenal reality, to which all religions refer. Doing so, they are committed to taking the different religious theses from the different traditions seriously, and state (by way of making a novel distinction) that they all refer to this Ultimate Reality. Thus, we arrive at their preferred choice of *identist pluralism*. However, thesis modification always also implies *the giving up of an original thesis*. Therefore, this strategy leads to the well-known criticism that the identist pluralist does not take the different religions really on face value, but rather reinterprets their beliefs to fit the idea of a single transcendent reality. For instance, Victoria Harrison (2006) writes:

One problem with Hickean transcendental pluralism is that, in separating religious phenomena from their supposedly noumenal source, Hick is compelled to describe religions as other than their adherents take them to be. In particular, he insists that the “gods” which religious believers worship are not the real thing. While this does not place one religion above any other, it nevertheless appears to imply that all believers are to some extent mistaken in their beliefs (Harrison, 2006, p. 295).

7.4.3. Applying Thesis Inclusion

The Orientational Pluralist agrees with Schmidt-Leukel that one should choose one of the exits available — and deny the others —, but adds that this ignores the alternative strategy of thesis modification (or thesis inclusion). Through thesis modification, the aporetic decider is able to add further distinctions to the aporetic set. The Orientational Pluralist does so by making a distinction between the *plausibility* and *acceptability* of claims. This implies that now a fifth position or option becomes possible, despite Schmidt-Leukel’s insistence that “no other options exist” (see *supra*).

Firstly, the Orientational Pluralist is committed to taking up a *specific or locative* philosophical position (i.e., in first-order philosophy) as to which claims she endorses and which claims she rejects. She might agree that none of the religious claims are acceptable (“P cannot be found in the religions”), on the basis of perhaps scientific standards of acceptance, and therefore take the exit of

¹⁴⁴ As we have seen, mere thesis rejection ignores the crucial alternative strategy of making distinctions, of salvaging parts from those claims we are rejecting, by means of thesis modification (chapter 5).

the naturalist. Or, she might endorse a singular religious tradition, and reject the claims from other religions when they are inconsistent with her religious position. In such case, she would either be an exclusivist or an inclusivist in Schmidt-Leukel's typology. The fact that the Orientational Pluralist takes up a specific position towards the first-order worldview questions allows him or her to have access to both exclusivism and inclusivism. Moreover, he or she has equal access to pluralism as well, if we understand pluralism here as a positioned epistemic stance.¹⁴⁵ Moreover, the Orientational Pluralist is also committed to a *meta-philosophical*, or supra-located second-order position, where she grants that multiple solutions are always attainable on the basis of differing probative orientations. Bracketing her own preferred position — whether this be a religious or a non-religious position — she grants that P is given among the religions more than once and without a singular maximum. From a certain perspective of probative orientations, only one plausible position (i.e. one set of claims) can be taken; however, different perspectives can certainly allow for different positions without a “singular maximum,” as each position represents its own maximum under its own constraints.

7.4.4. A Superior Position

Schmidt-Leukel's concept of a “singular maximum” amounts to a position where one regards one's own position as superior. Schmidt-Leukel, as a religious pluralist, explicitly rejects the idea that religious traditions can “mutually claim their superiority” (2005, p. 25). He is thus opposed to a mutual epistemic exclusivism, where each religious tradition considers their own position as epistemically superior. However, true to his own position, Schmidt-Leukel forwards pluralism as superiorly meritorious, thereby taking an epistemically exclusivist (i.e., not just a logically exclusivist) position towards the different stances.

In contrast, Orientational Pluralism represents a *self-consistent position*. The Orientational Pluralist professes the superiority of her own worldview stance (i.e., the first-order aporia), and also affirms the superiority of her epistemic stance of orientational pluralism (i.e., the second-order aporia). Moreover, she acknowledges that other positions are always possible: dependent on one's evaluative framework one can always come to a different position. One could always argue that a certain set of epistemic values will be superior to the other, to which all must agree. This position, however, must therefore be itself justified by some standard. This of course, amounts to a regress, and as Rescher has pointed out, “we had best deny that it is infinite” (1985, p. 142). Orientational

¹⁴⁵ I will return to this issue shortly when I discuss Heim's inclusivism.

Pluralism takes the position that the regress terminates in a “self-supportive set of cognitive values” (1985, p. 142). Although cognitive or epistemic values allow for alternatives, these are unavailable to our position since we are already pre-committed in that regards. The regress therefore terminates locally, rather than globally, in a way that is convincing to those who hold a particular set of cognitive values — and only to those. Orientational Pluralism denies that there is a “neutral, evaluatively presuppositionless standard” (ibid., p. 142) that would somehow resolve the issues by some common measure.¹⁴⁶

7.4.5. The Giving of Reasons

Once the aporia has been established, Schmidt-Leukel suggests that we attempt to dissolve it by giving our reasons for or against each of these positions:

[Since we settled on only four options] the theological/philosophical debate can [now] concentrate on the reasons that speak for or against each of the four options and its possible sub-forms and should try to refine them. But in the end one has to choose one of them (ibidem, p. 21; between square brackets mine).

Once we know what the options are, Schmidt-Leukel argues, it is merely a matter of assessing the reasons for each option and adjudicating which (religious) option would be best. Presumably, the assessment of reasons will lead us to achieve a consensus — i.e., will convince all rational people — as to what option is best to take: we, the community of thinkers, would come to agree, after assessment of the available evidence, on a single option. The available evidence, however, suggest that this has not happened (yet).

In contrast, the Orientational Pluralist explicitly denies that we can solve or dissolve aporias by merely “concentrating on the reasons that speak for or against each of the four options.” Aporetics states that an appeal to evidence will usually not settle the matter as to which exit to take out of an aporia. Of course, to justify holding our beliefs we need to show that we have good reasons for holding them. A key feature of aporetic clusters is that they are made up of *rationaly defensible propositions*. However, since we have good reasons to believe each of the different claims, all of the evidence that we can gather is already brought to the table. It is here that we will have to make our

¹⁴⁶ The ensuing incommensurability only obtains to epistemic values, and not to truth claims within a single perspective. As to the criticism of relativism, see *supra*, or consult Rescher, 1985, p. 191.

eliminative choices.¹⁴⁷ Presumably, we will want to choose those claims with the strongest appeal. But this assessment, as to which claims are the *most plausible* to accept, typically generates disagreement as well, and not the mutual agreement that one might expect or hope for. The choice between different positions cannot, therefore, be made purely on the basis of evidence and reason alone: it requires recourse to evaluative judgments and previous commitments. Rescher summarises:

Discussion [i.e. understood as reason-giving or probative discussion] across the divide of conflicting positions, however useful it may be in highlighting the issues, will not settle philosophical disputes. Different values [i.e. epistemic values] express themselves in different cognitive priorities and thus in variant resolutions to philosophical problems (Rescher, 1985, p. 115, between square brackets mine).

7.5. Mark Heim's Orientational Pluralism

The best known case of an application of Orientational Pluralism to the question of religious diversity is the work of Mark Heim, for instance, *Salvations* (1995) and *The Depth of the Riches* (2001).¹⁴⁸ In these monographs, Heim defends the view that a person can rationally hold that his or her own religious beliefs are superior to those of others, and that others are justified in holding different beliefs. He therefore deliberately positions himself as an Orientational Pluralist:

“[O]rientational pluralism insists there is only one reality and we are trying to know it. It is not committed to regarding other substantive views as equally valid, only as tenable from different perspectives. What is fragmented is not truth but justification or warranted assertability. The justification offered by a philosophy may be orientationally limited in appeal, but the claims themselves can be universal and unrestricted (Rescher, 1985, 190). People who rationally hold contradictory views from different orientations are each justified in thinking the other wrong. ‘We can only pursue the truth by cultivating our truth’ (Rescher 1985, 199). Philosophical positions are not opinions but judgments” (Heim, 1995, p. 137).

¹⁴⁷ In Schmidt-Leukel's typology, the reasons for each of the different positions are not explicitly laid out on the table. However, Schmidt-Leukel assumes that once they are laid out, those reasons will guide our hands (and heads) towards an aporetic solution.

¹⁴⁸ Other authors include James, 2003; Kiplinger, 2005; Saarinen, 2003; Thomas, 1994.

However, at the same time, Heim also positions himself as a Christian inclusivist, and rightly so (i.e., based on his own epistemic values). On my view, then, Heim can be seen to be making three separate decisions: (1) a first-order decision, (2) a second-order decision, and (3) a third-order decision:

- (4) At the level of the first-order problem of conflicting claims, Heim chooses to be a *Christian* — and nothing but his own set of criteria forces him to do so.
- (5) At the level of the second-order problem of epistemic stances, he chooses to be an *inclusivist* — and nothing but his own set of criteria forces him to do so.
- (6) At the same time, Heim chooses to be an *Orientalist Pluralist* as a third-order solution to the second-order problem.

While giving an in-depth discussion of Heim's theology would take me too far, I will give here a brief overview of his propositions. Firstly, Heim argues for the thesis that the different religious traditions represent not just multiple ways of salvation, but rather multiple salvations. This position is congruent with a *differentialist pluralist position* (see chapter 2). On this account, each religious tradition authentically offers its own unique and ultimate aim that differs from other traditions. However, if Heim was an epistemic (differentialist) pluralist, he would have to state that none of these traditions are superior, and that there is no single salvation that is superior to the other. Seemingly this would prevent him from being an Orientalist Pluralist, since it is in contradiction with its first principle, namely to hold one position as superior. However, Heim could still argue that we should indeed accept multiple traditions, and take up a *pluralist Orientalist Pluralism* (see *infra*). Nevertheless, he does not choose this road, as we will see next.

Secondly, Heim argues for the thesis that the fact of multiple religious ends is rooted in the differences within God. The goal of his second book, *The Depth of Riches* (2001), in fact amounts to an attempt to “map a Christian theology that has distinct religious ends” (Heim, 2001, p. 12; also quoted in Adiprasetya, 2013, p. 51). It is here that Heim in fact shows himself to be in fact a Christian inclusivist. Other religious traditions are not just given a place of their own — a stance reflecting his Orientalist Pluralism —, but are incorporated within his Christian view of the world. Adiprasetya similarly adds that Heim's theology is “an inclusivist theology in the sense that it argues for a particularly Christian ultimate end that includes all other religious ends as penultimate (Adiprasetya, 2013, p. 51). In particular, Heim's theology is based on the Trinity, where religious multiplicity is generated from God's reality as Trinity.

The question we can ask here is whether Heim's Orientational Pluralist stance forces him to be a (Christian) inclusivist? By no means. Heim could have still been an Orientational Pluralist, even if he was a *Christian exclusivist*, or an identist or differentialist pluralist. However, in order to do so he would need a different valuational orientation than the one he presented in *The Depth of Riches*. Given that Heim opts for a Christian inclusivism of multiple religious ends, such a path is no longer available to him. Although an Orientational Pluralist takes up a specific stance towards worldviews, it does not follow from this that he or she is therefore an *exclusivist*, or that it equates to an *inclusivism*. Rather than *being* an exclusivist, the Orientational Pluralist *has access* to the exclusivist stance, just as he or she has access, in principle, to inclusivism, and pluralism. Similarly, being orientated towards multiple worldviews does not imply that the Orientational Pluralist is a second-order pluralist. Heim could simply have been an Orientational Pluralist and have argued that other religious traditions are plausible from different epistemic orientations (of whatever nature). However, none of these other religions have turned out to be acceptable to the Christian inclusivist. Moreover, tolerance for other traditions is already guaranteed by the Orientational Pluralist stance, and does not need to depend on an inclusivist stance.

In short, rather than *being* a second-order pluralist, the Orientational Pluralist *has access* to epistemic pluralism. The difference between *being* and *having* is what distinguishes Orientational Pluralism, and what makes it into a *higher-order position*. Stated differently, the defining aspect is that at any given order — or level, if one prefers — one can only look (a) down or (b) across, but not (c) up. Thus, the exclusivist can look down at religious worldviews, and across to other epistemic stances. The Orientational Pluralist can look down to all of the epistemic stances. We can summarise this as follows: the Orientational Pluralist (third-order) has access to the diversity of epistemic stances (second-order), which have access to the diversity of religious and non-religious worldviews (first-order).

At first sight, it seems paradoxical or counter-intuitive to state that the Orientational Pluralist has access to the different epistemic stances such as exclusivism and inclusivism: after all, isn't the Orientational Pluralist a pluralist? However, this is no different from stating that the exclusivist (i.e., second-order) has access to all of the worldviews (i.e., first-order). Of course, this access is merely *potential*, and not necessarily *actual*. This principle of *potential access* allows us to explain why we find exclusivists in the different traditions in the first place. Similarly, the Orientational Pluralist has *potential access* to the different epistemic stances, and how these get *actualised* depends on the Orientational Pluralist's choices, as in the case for instance of Heim.

If indeed the Orientational Pluralist has *equal potential access* to the different epistemic positions, then the Orientational Pluralist can choose whether or not to be also a *second-order exclusivist, inclusivist, or pluralist*. This choice will be dependent on what worldviews — or sets of beliefs — the Orientational Pluralist finds acceptable. For instance, an exclusivist Orientational Pluralist will find only one worldview acceptable. The pluralist Orientational Pluralist will find several worldviews acceptable: amongst the multiple plausible worldviews he or she will claim that at least two are superior worldviews. A good example of this is the phenomenon of Multiple Religious Belonging (MRB). A person committed to MRB will typically find him or herself caught between the Scylla and Charybdis of forming a closed, positioned stance that makes clear-cut claims, or an open stance that allows for a diversity of views simultaneously. The first strategy holds the danger of creating a positioned stance that does not properly belong to any worldview tradition (e.g., neither Christian, nor Buddhist; see chapter 2), while the second holds the danger of continued *cognitive dissonance* due to inconsistencies between two different frameworks of looking at the world.

Even within a single epistemic stance such as the exclusivist stance, different types of exclusivism might occur, due to the preferential selection of types of validity claims. Within the trilemma we can differentiate between three value pairs, viz., *subjective versus objective*, *subjective versus intersubjective*, and *intersubjective versus objective*. Since these are *value pairs*, aporetic differences will occur between claims at each end of those dyads. Thus a *subjective exclusivist* might be preferentially inclined to choose subjective claims over and against other types of claims.

For instance, a *naturalist Orientational Pluralist* has equal access to exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism on the basis of a first-order philosophical stance. A naturalist can be an *exclusivist* Orientational Pluralist, or an *inclusivist* Orientational Pluralist.¹⁴⁹ The same naturalist Orientational Pluralist can accept both (1) and (4) on the basis of a modification of the variable P (*see supra*). She could confirm (1) by means of objective criteria, where P represents a validity claim of objective truth. However, she could also readily confirm (4), namely that P is present amongst the religious traditions, to which she herself does not adhere, on the basis of subjective and intersubjective (i.e. normative criteria) criteria, given that P represents either a validity claim of truthfulness or normative rightness. For instance, she could propose a slightly altered (4), which adds the tail “on the basis of differing epistemic values,” that is subjective and intersubjective criteria. She would then affirm: (4.1) P is given among the religions more than once and without a singular maximum, on the basis of differing epistemic values.

¹⁴⁹ Or be a pluralist, but then she would most likely have to qualify her naturalism to a certain degree.

From this follows that Orientational Pluralism is not exactly a pluralist theory, if by pluralism we understand epistemic pluralism as it features in the tripartite typology. Pluralist theories are (second-order) *meta-theories* that take the different worldview claims as their *data*. Orientational Pluralism, however, is a (third-order) *meta-theory* that takes epistemic stances as its *data*, including pluralist theories: it takes a stance towards epistemic stances, so to speak. We could therefore argue that Orientational Pluralism is *polyphonic* in nature (i.e., multiple voices), rather than pluralist. Pluralist theories tend to imply the creation of *synthetic worldviews* based on certain features that the worldview holder deems significant (i.e., identist pluralism), or *syncretic worldviews* based on the acceptance of distinct worldview systems thereby creating. In each case, a new worldview is being forwarded.

7.6. Conclusion

In this chapter, again following Nicholas Rescher, I argued for a distinct epistemic position towards religious diversity. This position claims that we should come down to a specific set of answers to our worldview questions: that is, we should formulate concrete answers to our cognitive, evaluative and practical concerns. Each religious tradition will be confronted with a similar task since the worldview questions are universal concerns: what should we believe, what should we do, how should we act, what is right and what is wrong, etc. In order to derive answers, the Orientational Pluralist takes up a specific point of view, based on a preferential selection of cognitive values and priorities. These values are not mere preferences or tastes, but rationally grounded, albeit this grounding itself will again be axiological (i.e., in terms of epistemic values).

The Orientational Pluralist acknowledges that different positions can always be taken toward similar issues. The outcome of such positions will be — at least for some — plausible and acceptable from the point of view of a different epistemic framework. However, these are positions that the Orientational Pluralist herself does not take. Confronted with sets of inconsistent claims, the pluralist can avail herself of two strategies to accomplish her position. Applying an explicit or implicit set of cognitive criteria, she weeds out claims either by means of thesis rejection, or by means of thesis modification. Thus, she can only accept a certain set of claims and reject others, or she can modify claims to make the set more consistent. In terms of the traditional typology, all of the options are open to the Orientational Pluralist. She can be a naturalist, and reject all religious claims — for instance, based on a epistemic orientation of purely objective criteria. She can be an exclusivist, taking up a specific religious tradition. She can be an inclusivist, accepting claims of other traditions that are consistent with hers. She can be a pluralist on the basis of a procedure of thesis

modification, and thus again come to a specific doctrinal stance. All of these options are consistent with the two prime directives of the Orientational Pluralist: (1) come down to a position based on an orientational epistemic axiological framework (i.e., first-order), (2) while acknowledging that things could always be otherwise (i.e., second-order). As Rescher puts it succinctly: “The situational differences of our contexts simply lead to different rational resolutions. *And that's just the end of the matter*” (1993, p. 117).

Conclusion

The problem of religious diversity, the central issue at the heart of my dissertation, can be understood as the incompatibility of claims. Such incompatibilities between religious traditions usually lie dormant until the coming together of such claims, either in formal discourse settings, or in informal dialogues and encounters between faith adherents. We can trace back such incompatibilities to the web of belief that is our worldview: i.e., the various answers that we give to our probative inquiries into ourselves as subjects, our peers with whom we constitute an interpretive and meaning-generating community, as well as the objective world of objects and events. These three object domains, of the self, others, and world, will generate different epistemological relationships, different ontologies, and different methodologies for “mining for data.” From this follows that the incompatibility of claims will similarly be diverse: that is, different types of claims will require different conditions to be fulfilled in order for the validity of the claim to be fulfilled. For claims about the subjective object domain, we will require authenticity. Claims will form incompatibles when the subject cannot hold both claims without cognitive absurdity or dissonance, thereby draining cognitive energy if the incompatibility continues to exist within the subject. For claims about the intersubjective object domain, we will require rightness. This implies that our claims must fit the normative background of our own community, if not of the *global community* of all epistemic peers. If they do not fit a certain community, whether our own community or another, incompatibles will form. Finally, for claims about the objective object domain, we will require truth. Similarly, we can define truth in terms of fit or coherence, where our claims fit with the object domain. We can establish such fit by the applications of parameters or criteria that help us measure such coherence. Conflict will form when our claims about the objective world are equally justified but nevertheless constitute a contradiction. Due to the fact that, as epistemic beings, we simultaneously orient ourselves to ourselves, others, and the world, claims will tend to imply all three validity claims at once. However, we can also raise a single validity claim, or multiple validity claims at once, when we put up claims to our community of peers.

Incompatibles of this kind will form aporias, where an aporia is constituted by claims coming together in a specific set, usually as answers to a leading question, where each of the specific claims is justified and backed by good reasons to an equal degree, but taken together the claims form inconsistencies. Thus we are in need of an aporetic procedure understood as aporia management. The resultant Aporetics is therefore a specific task for a philosopher interested in answering the Big Questions as well as in the coordination of our answers to such Big Questions. Such a philosophy can be understood as a Philosophy of Worldviews as it takes the concept of worldview

as its intentional object. Three main tasks of such a Philosophy of Worldviews are (1) worldview analysis, where we analyse the nature of worldview claims, (2) comparative analysis, where we investigate how incompatibles are formed between the various worldviews, including religious and non-religious worldviews, and (3) the investigation of right-of-way criteria that help us decide which claims are most acceptable. All three tasks form an inherent component of the aporetic method. However, of particular interest to the Aporetician — anyone either formally or informally involved in the dissolution of such cognitive conflicts — is the application of right-of-way criteria to determine the acceptability of claims premised on a rational preferentialism. Such a rational preferentialism will engender a cognitive pluralism towards solutions of aporias thereby generating a second-order conflict. Not only do the answers to our worldview questions conflict, also our proposed solutions out of such conflicts will conflict. To address this issue we therefore need recourse to a third-order solution that combines a rational preferential position, with a pluralistic supra-locative stance of what we could call tolerance towards other epistemic orientations. Such an Orientational Pluralism does not need to imply that *consensus*, or the coordination of our belief systems to reach agreement on issues, cannot be built into our aporetic deliberations.

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