Thought, Belief, and Instinct

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Conflicts about religious beliefs often end in a deadlock, with both sides agreeing to disagree. A prima facie account of this would relegate it to opinions or the subjective nature of beliefs, but such an account is unable to give a clear picture of what happens when someone believes something religiously. What is often contested in these arguments is the truth of the beliefs held by those who are religious. It is necessary, then, to give a neutral account of truth that will suspend *judgments* of truth and allow for a proper account of faith and belief-statements. One such account considers the social, political, and historical effects of truth rather than its truth or falsehood. Such a consideration defines truth according to its active role and function, but it is limited by its inability to account for the causes of truth. Its neutrality, however, clears the way for another account of truth offered by the nineteenth-century Christian existentialist, Søren Kierkegaard, in which the subject considering truth focuses on his or her *relation* to truth. His definition of truth is able to account for the subject's role and its involvement in the formation of truth. Kierkegaard's account is informative in regarding an analysis of religion made by the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein's analysis is more extensive and begins with an examination of the language used in belief-statements and then proceeds to how belief-statements function in the life of the believer. His analysis, involving both accounts of truth, is comprehensive enough to arrive at a general philosophical theory of religion. His method is useful for pointing out the limitations involved in strictly adhering to either of the two accounts (particularly the over-reductive aspect of the first account), and his theory is informative for both religious and nonreligious considerations.

First to be considered, then, are the accounts of truth. One account of truth is given by Paul Rabinow in "Representations are Social Facts: Modernity and Post-Modernity in Anthropology," in which he considers the nature of truth in his analysis of representationalism in epistemology. Rabinow criticizes Richard Rorty for his inability to see truth in the contexts of power and

society. By using Michel Foucault's consideration of these contexts, Rabinow is able to disarm the oppositional nature of truth in thought in order to research its active role in historical, social, and political institutions. Rabinow does, however, agree with Rorty's criticism of epistemology and its quest for certainty, and he offers Foucault's method as a solution. Rabinow describes Foucault's theory "not as deciding the truth or falsity of claims in history 'but in seeing historically how effects of truth are produced within discourses which in themselves are neither true nor false,'" and, he adds, "Foucault proposes to study what he calls the regime of truth as an effective component in the constitution of social practices" (240). Rabinow uses Foucault's theory to address what Rorty fails to consider: the contexts of power and social function. The values of truth and falsehood are cashed out in terms of their political power and social role. The phrase "regime of truth" implies truth's role as an active constituent within power. What becomes important are the "effects of truth." That is, truth is embedded in a network of relationships, and it can be defined by defining the nature of those relationships. Truth, defined this way, is given a broad range, but it is also limited in certain respects. The strict sense of objectivity employed in this method may be useful for detecting and emphasizing truth as an effective component of social, historical, and political practices, and may, thereby, allow for a grounded study in factual claims by avoiding abstract and esoteric epistemological claims; but failing to acknowledge the substantive importance of subjective experience tends to obscure the importance of objectivity. In order to understand the limitations involved in his method we must begin by raising the implicit theory or theories of truth that Rabinow supports.

Rabinow, in offering Foucault's method for research, does not give any explicit philosophical account of truth. There are, however, possible theories that he implies by the methodology he proposes. One such possibility is the coherence theory of truth offered by postmodernist philosophers as described in "Postmodernism: The Most Recent Coherence Theory" in an entry entitled "Truth" in the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Rehearsing the details of the theory is not necessary for this paper, but it is important to note the theory's emphasis on the social and political aspect of truth. The entry describes the theory as having

"received a more sympathetic reception among social scientists than among physical scientists." The entry refers to the different ends that physical and social scientists have in mind. Physical scientists are more concerned with the certainty of their theoretical claims and hard facts whereas social scientists are more likely to be concerned with the effective value of their theoretical claims in explaining and treating social phenomena without vying for the objective reality of their theories. The entry offers an example:

> Social scientists will more easily agree, for example, that the proposition that human beings have a superego is a "construction" of (certain) politically influential psychologists, and that as a result, it is (to be regarded as) true. In contrast, physical scientists are—for the most part—rather unwilling to regard propositions in their own field as somehow merely the product of consensus among eminent physical scientists. They are inclined to believe that the proposition that protons are composed of three quarks is true (or false) depending on whether (or not) it accurately describes an objective reality. They are disinclined to believe that the truth of such a proposition arises out of the pronouncements of eminent physical scientists. In short, physical scientists do not believe that prestige and social influence trump reality.

The passage above reflects the differences in methodologies that come about as a result of the different ends that are sought by social and physical scientists. The former are interested in the "construction" of truth, while the latter are more interested in "objective reality" and assume the construction of truth as a natural fact. What is important about this passage is its portrayal of the different roles and aspects of truth that are emphasized by the differing interests of each group. Rabinow seems to accept the construction of truth only insofar as its social, historical, and political effects are concerned. He attempts to maintain objectivity through the analysis of these effects. Rabinow's analysis seems to be built upon his specific interest or project, but in the process of laying out his methodology he seems to deemphasize the importance of the unified and universal notions that are involved

in philosophy and religion. What is necessary, then, is to show how he does this.

Rabinow's analysis is problematic because of its connections to postmodernism's project of decentralization and its involvement with Foucault's poststructuralism. Although the methodology he proposes is useful because it does not rely on a centralized doctrine that excludes possibilities outside the doctrine's range, it is also limited by not acknowledging what must be assumed—the role of the nonobjective and intentional subject as an agent. Within the domain of philosophy this would be considered a kind of phenomenological approach, and this approach, though not necessary within the domain of study that Rabinow is interested in, is important within the broader context of the meaningful world and its human inhabitants. The limitation can be seen specifically by analyzing a passage in which Rabinow quotes Rorty describing the project of epistemology: "The desire for a theory of knowledge is a desire for constraint—a desire to find 'foundations' to which one might cling, frameworks beyond which one must not stray, objects which impose themselves, representations which cannot be gainsaid" (234). Rorty traces "epistemology as the study of mental representations" back to a "desire" for constraint within foundations or frameworks (234). Rabinow analyzes Rorty's claim in terms of the constraints within foundations or frameworks, but he does not analyze "desire," which might provide some insights. The analysis of the desire points the way towards understanding the role of the subject in and the values or meanings, created by the subject, necessary for truth formation.

In order to understand this desire, the causes of truth mentioned earlier need to be given consideration for a full account of truth. Here, concepts from the second account of truth may be of assistance. This second account is given by James Giles in "From Inwardness to Emptiness: Kierkegaard and Yogacara Buddhism," in which he tries to make sense of Kierkegaard's philosophical account of faith by using what is called "the three-natures theory of teaching" from the Yogacara school of Buddhism (323). For the purposes of this paper I will focus only on Giles' description of Kierkegaard's view. He gives this interpretation of Kierkegaard's concept "inwardness": "Since inwardness is focusing on the process of one's own existence, then inwardness is

concerned with the nature of one's relations to objects rather than with the objects themselves" (312). Kierkegaard is interested in this fundamental property of our experiencing, in which we cannot avoid our particular existences and relations to objects. For Kierkegaard, then, pure objectivity is an illusion because even objectivity requires some reference to subjectivity (it is important to note here that subjectivity is a different notion than the isolated subject in the subject/object distinction). Accordingly, it is important in any analysis to remain aware of subjectivity. This notion of inwardness, then, means that there is something to be gleaned from what the nature of the desire consists in. Inwardness is a concern for "one's relations to objects," and the desire is the relation that connects the epistemologists to the foundations. The desire is, in fact, of more primacy than the foundations or frameworks because the motivations for the foundations or frameworks lie in the desire. The desire has a causal and creative role in the search and discovery of the foundations and frameworks themselves. I will return to this causal role later, and also show that these desires prove to be problematic in the analysis of Wittgenstein's views. For now, we must return to the details of the two accounts of truth.

In contrast to this view, Kierkegaard's view is "that truth is subjectivity" (313). Giles describes Kierkegaard's view in this way:

> [T]he question of the truth of one's beliefs will not be
> determined by the existence of the object of one's belief,
> but rather by the way in which one believes it, that is, by
> the relation one bears to the object of one's belief.
> Consequently, "as long as this relationship is in truth,
> the individual is in truth even if he should be thus
> related to what is not true."   (312)

Here, Kierkegaard is focusing on the origin of the value of truth; that is, the value of the object of truth as defined by the meaning it is given from the "way" in which one is related to the object of truth. The believer of the truth has a role in the formation of the truth, and the object is deemphasized, given a secondary role. For Kierkegaard, these concepts are employed in an analysis of Christianity and faith, but they are informative in a general way as well. By saying that the "relationship is in truth" Kierkegaard is able to account for the desire. That is, the subject is related to

truth by way of desire. Kierkegaard emphasizes precisely what Rabinow avoids. The values involved in the formation of truth and the experiencing of truth are at the highest point of contention in both religious arguments and epistemological arguments. The "way" in which each of the opponents of the argument is related to the objects of truth argued about defines the meanings and subsequent values of the objects of truth. Rabinow avoids this contentious issue in order to proceed to the objective value of function in social, political, and historical contexts, but the objective value can have little meaning without the value-givers, and this same problem of the formation and values of truth occurs in these contexts. After analyzing the effects of truth, the causes still remain, and this returns us to the causal problem mentioned earlier. The subject's role as a causal agent in the formation of truth is important in defining the very scope of the effects of truth. Because Kierkegaard does not describe how or why the subject as a causal agent is involved in the formation of truth, what are needed here are some insights offered by Wittgenstein's views on religion.

In order to fully address the limitations of the two accounts of truth described above, we must first turn to the causal problem. To address the causal problem of desire we must turn to Wittgenstein's philosophical views on religion as interpreted by Brian Clack in *An Introduction to Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Religion*. Clack describes Wittgenstein's analysis of belief in this way: "The language of religion causes much perplexity because its belief-statements do not function as 'normal' beliefs, but are instead the linguistic component of a particular mode of living and cannot meaningfully be divorced from its context of conduct" (71). In his analysis, Wittgenstein is focusing on the linguistic function of statements about religious beliefs. The phrase "normal beliefs" refers to beliefs about the existence or nonexistence of objects. A statement like "I believe in God" is not a statement about whether some object (God) exists or not. It functions as an expression about the way the believer sees the world ("mode of living") and consequently acts ("context of conduct"). We would say that there is a huge difference between the speaker of the first statement and one who says, "I'm not sure, maybe"; whereas, we would say that there is little difference between one who says, "There's a rabbit in the distance," and one who says, "I'm not sure, maybe." In the

first two statements, the second speaker vacillates on the issue of an entire way of life, while the latter two statements are evidence of only a slight disagreement about the accuracy of a person's judgment regarding a simple fact.

At first glance, then, Wittgenstein seems to be using a similar methodology as that proposed by Rabinow in the quote above. The truth of belief-statements is cashed out in terms of their social and political values. Here, "conduct" refers to the social value, and "mode of living" has a political value in determining the conduct. Rabinow also describes truth as being "linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it" (240). Here, the phrase "regime of truth" mentioned above is appropriate. The relationship is between truth and the "systems of power" which extend their power through the use of truth. The believers described above extend the power of their ways of seeing the world or modes of living through their conduct. Furthermore, and more importantly, both Wittgenstein and Rabinow are interested in the active role of truth. That is, they are interested in giving an account truth that captures truth as a functioning component in the believers' lives and society.

However, unlike Rabinow, Wittgenstein does not stop there. He is able to offer an explanation for the causes of truth. Yet there are objections to his views regarding belief-statements; in particular, to his analysis of belief-statements through their expressive function as irreducibly meaningful to believers. The contentions of one of Wittgenstein's objectors, for instance, "centres on what he sees as the 'compartmentalisation' of social life entailed by talking of institutions and practices as distinctive language-games" (Clack 85). In this objection religion is designated as a "language-game." The objection is that this view gives religion, among other "institutions and practices" that fall under language-games, the right to be isolated from criticism by anyone who is not a believer. Within this understanding of Wittgenstein, only those involved in a mode of living could rightfully understand and criticize that mode of living. The answer to this objection lies in a further specification of language-games that Clack describes: "Language-games seem, rather, to be quite small-scale units of language-usage which occur in various human

contexts" (87). This means that the term language-games refers to the methodology that Wittgenstein uses to analyze religious belief-statements. It does not, however, refer to the whole category of religion. Religion, or any large-scale language system built around irreducible expressions involved with ways of living, therefore, is not an isolated or compartmentalized institution. Categories such as religion do not have to be seen as generating statements that cannot have meaning outside their respective categories. Wittgenstein implies that belief-statements made by believers can have meaning to those that do not believe so that the believers, and the respective categories they work within, are not isolated from each other. This question of isolation or compartmentalization seems to be problematic for Rabinow's methodology.

We now turn to the problem of compartmentalization in Rabinow's analysis, in which there is no explanation of how or why the subjects of "thought and social practices interconnect," only that they do (239). He says that "thought is nothing more and nothing less than a historically locatable set of practices" (239). Here, he is criticizing Rorty for not acknowledging the implications of his own insight. Rabinow, however, does not acknowledge the intentionality involved in historical practices and seems to imply that thought can be reduced in this way to be studied as a historical object without any negative consequences. The study, in its presentation, becomes static and confusing to the observers of the presentation; that is, though subtle, the observers of the view presented by Rabinow are left with the illusory sense of the objectified "thought as social practice," which is impossible in any strict sense. Any phenomena that lie outside or are not directly tied to the categories of history, society, and power are isolated. The problem here is that Rabinow's methodology is effective within the domain of study that he proposes, but it is not given a meaningful context outside that domain. The categories are too objective to be able to deal with subjectivity, and subjectivity is necessary for intersubjectivity. That is, communication between believers and nonbelievers (the problem of compartmentalization) can only be accounted for by delving into subjectivity. Rabinow's methodology becomes too isolated to examine the causes of truth mentioned above. What is necessary, then, is a return to the earlier problem of desire. Clack quotes Wittgenstein as saying:

"But what is the word 'primitive' meant to say here? Presumably that this sort of behaviour is *pre-linguistic*: that a language-game is based *on it*, that it is the prototype of a way of thinking and not the result of thought" (117). Wittgenstein is saying here that religion has a "primitive" source. Religion, or, more generally, thought, is based on human instincts. Truth, as a function of thought, finds its formation and original values in instinct. Rabinow's view of thought as historical, social, and political practice is important, but to deemphasize instinct as cause is to offer a distorted approach. It is a reduction that does not acknowledge the fact that it has been reduced from something else. Kierkegaard's view, by contrast, suffers from the opposite reduction: it seems at times to reduce the objective truth into something with no importance at all instead of simply acknowledging its limitations. Both reductions have problematic implications for ethics and education, and both must be neutralized with a steady awareness of the extended contexts of their views.

Wittgenstein, by acknowledging instinct, or the prelinguistic, preanalytic aspects of religion, gives us an important way to view different religions as well as different ways of thinking. An awareness of this pre-intentional instinct gives us a reason to be compassionate. Conflict arises from the way we characterize instinct, and an awareness of this tendency makes it much easier to neutralize conflict by allowing for an open interaction between compassionate individuals. It is in this way that religion is important as a universal viewpoint. The tendency in ethics and education to overemphasize one truth or the opposing truth must be recognized. Educational and ethical systems often overemphasize objectivity, as Rabinow does, and in doing so give the illusory impression that a strict objectivity is possible. Religion, on the other hand, overemphasizes subjectivity, as Kierkegaard does, and gives an illusory impression of what is meant by absolute. Both objectivity and religion are exclusionary approaches that avoid the problem of criticizing the other, but in doing so they also avoid the necessary acknowledgement of and possible solutions to the problem of their coexistence. It is this tentative dialogue between regimes of truth with exclusionary practices that Rorty was perhaps interested in opening with his doctrine of intersubjective conversation. It seems that he was interested in

more than thoughts as objects of study, as Rabinow presents them. It seems that he was interested in thoughts as effective components in our present and ongoing conversations. If that was his intention then I would say that I am in agreement.

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