

# Oh, No! Not the Religion and Science Debate, Again, and Again...and Again...

The Philosophy Cafe Meet Up,  
Brisbane, Australia

Sunday, 12 July 2020, 1:30 PM GMT+10, Zoom Meeting

The discussion for today is science and religion.

#### 16 DEFINITIONAL FRAMING: *Both* EMPATHETIC & CRITICAL

RELIGION	SCIENCE
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Prehistory: Fight or Flight Response to the Unknown (evolutionary psychology, e.g. Pascal Boyer)</li> <li>2. Mysticism (ancient and modern philosophers, including Plato; sometime called Perennial philosophy)</li> <li>3. Code of the Romanised Church (Latin, Religio, "conscientious scrupulousness", St. Augustine, via Lactantius)</li> <li>4. Reasonable Christianity (epistemic doctrine, Immanuel Kant)</li> <li>5. Historical Pronouncement of Christianity as True Religion (17<sup>th</sup> century political doctrines, e.g. John Hobbes, John Locke)</li> <li>6. Subjectivity in Spirit (Friedrich Schleiermacher)</li> <li>7. Subjectivity resolved in Absolute Idealism (historical doctrine, G.W.F. Hegel)</li> <li>8. Authentic Subjectivity (ethical doctrine, Søren Kierkegaard)</li> <li>9. An Illusion or Comfort of the Superstructure (Karl Marx)</li> <li>10. Idea of the Holy (Rudolf Otto)</li> <li>11. Western Moral Code (from J.S. Mill to William Buckley Jr.)</li> <li>12. Aristocrat Revaluation or the Will to Power (Friedrich Nietzsche)</li> <li>13. Type of Experience (William James via Kant's Noumena)</li> <li>14. Phenomena or the Existential Angst (e.g., Karl Jaspers, Jacques Maritain, Miguel de Unamuno, Rudolf Bultmann, Gabriel Marcel, John Macquarrie, Paul Ricoeur)</li> <li>15. Ultimate Concern (Paul Tillich)</li> <li>16. 'God Language' Game whose problems need untangling (Ludwig Wittgenstein)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Prehistory: Disposition to curiosity or wonderment (evolutionary psychology, e.g. Carl Sagan)</li> <li>2. Mysticism (ancient and modern philosophers, including Plato; sometime called Perennial philosophy)</li> <li>3. Nature (Aristotle)</li> <li>4. Universal Schemas (scholastic theologians, e.g. Thomas Aquinas via Aristotle, Theology as the 'Queen of the Sciences')</li> <li>5. The Method (Francis Bacon)</li> <li>6. Empiricism (e.g. Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, George Berkeley, and David Hume)</li> <li>7. Rationalism (e.g. Baruch Spinoza, René Descartes, Gottfried Leibniz, Immanuel Kant)</li> <li>8. Skepticism (problem of Induction, David Hume)</li> <li>9. Pragmatic Logic, as in Semiotics or Mathematical Models (Charles Sanders Peirce)</li> <li>10. Logical Positivism as Logic or Mathematical Statements of Reality (i.e. Carl Hempel, the best as philosopher of science in this definitional frame)</li> <li>11. Falsification (Karl Popper)</li> <li>12. Logical Coherentism – anti-foundationalism (W.V.O. Quine)</li> <li>13. 'Science Language' Game whose problems need untangling (Ludwig Wittgenstein)</li> <li>14. Revolutionary Models – and contentiously as language solos (Thomas Kuhn)</li> <li>15. Sociological Belief (Strong Programme in the Sociology of Scientific Knowledge, e.g. David Bloor, Barry Barnes)</li> <li>16. Epistemological Anarchism – against method (Paul Feyerabend)</li> </ol>

### Conflation in Religion & Science Thinking

Most fail to understand in debates of belief and doubt because each has a presentation of 'religion' and 'science' in their thinking. In most cases the presentations do not align with the 'reality' or 'usage' of such terms.

I cannot imagine a more conflated and misunderstood topic in public discourse.

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## 16 DEFINITIONAL FRAMING: *Both* EMPATHETIC & CRITICAL

### RELIGION

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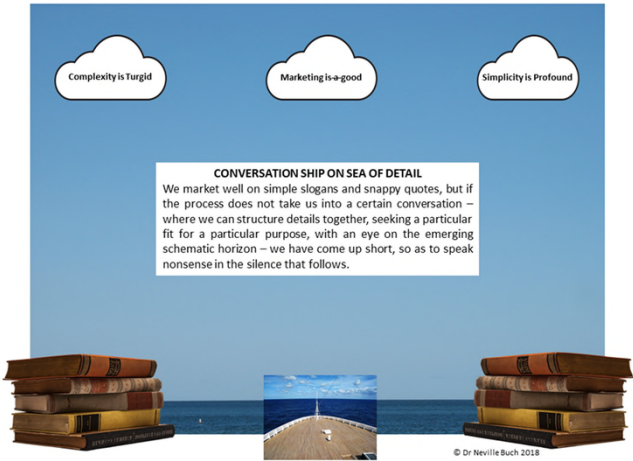
### SCIENCE

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There are, from my research, 16 definitional frames brought to each term.

There is no time to work through each frame. But it is important to say that each framing is both empathic and critical, and all have truth and fallacies.

Any of these frames can be made to work for a definition of religion or science, but only if all parties understand what is being communicated.



Complexity is Turgid

Marketing is a good

Simplicity is Profound

**CONVERSATION SHIP ON SEA OF DETAIL**

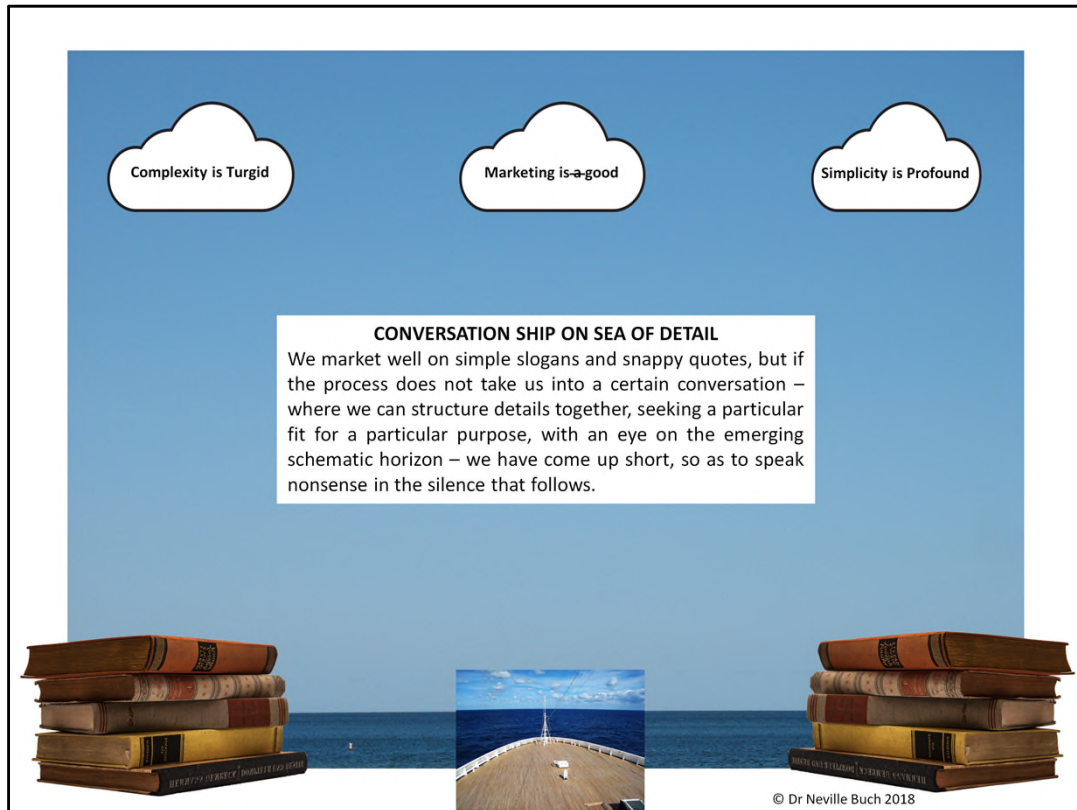
We market well on simple slogans and snappy quotes, but if the process does not take us into a certain conversation – where we can structure details together, seeking a particular fit for a particular purpose, with an eye on the emerging schematic horizon – we have come up short, so as to speak nonsense in the silence that follows.

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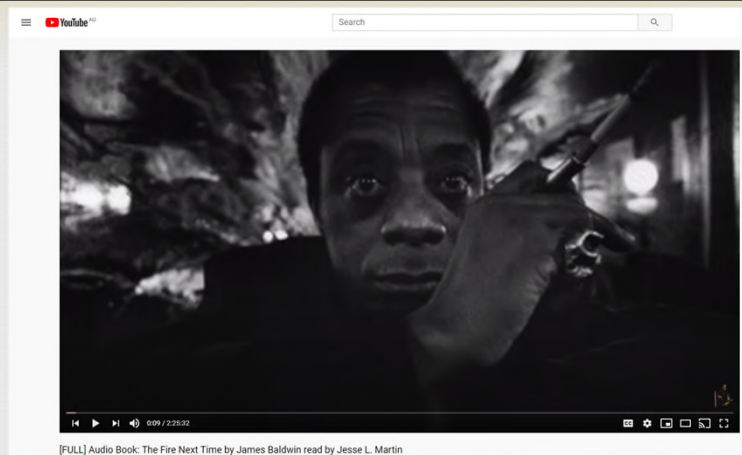
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There is a more basic way of communicating the details, but we need to liberate ourselves from the slavery to memes.



We market well on simple slogans and snappy quotes, but if the process does not take us into a certain conversation – where we can structure details together, seeking a particular fit for a particular purpose, with an eye on the emerging schematic horizon – we have come up short, so as to speak nonsense in the silence that follows.



**"I have a feeling that a great many words have been floating around this table which need to be redefined. And that, by the way, is a problem which faces this entire country."**

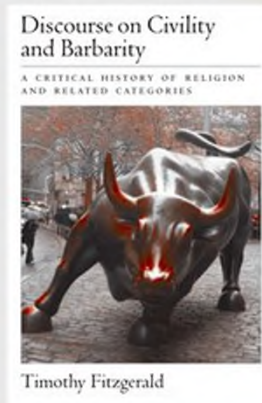
James Baldwin at a radio interview, WBAL, 25 April 1961, Los Angeles: Pacifica Radio Archive ('Black Muslims vs. the sit-ins')

Understanding definitions and the usage of terms is not an academic game. James Baldwin, understood this when he was debating racism in America, and said,

"I have a feeling that a great many words have been floating around this table which need to be redefined. And that, by the way, is a problem which faces this entire country."



“The problem today, as I see it, derives from this radical redescription of the meaning [historical review of the church-state controversy], not only of religion, but of the commonwealth and the civil authority. For now the dominant trope is not Religion as encompassing Christian Truth; it concerns religion as it stands in various binary oppositions: religion and state, religion and politics, religion and economics, religion and civic society, and religion and science.”  
 “The usage of ‘religion’ in the plural as an apparently objective, neutral, descriptive term for other people’s beliefs and practices becomes systematically institutionalised in the nineteenth century with the development of the so-called science of religion and comparative religion.”



Timothy Fitzgerald, *Discourse on Civility and Barbarity: A Critical History of Religion and Related Categories*, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 23.

Timothy Fitzgerald provides a way into the conversation. He stated,

“The problem today, as I see it, derives from this radical redescription of the meaning”, referring to historical review of the church-state controversy, “not only of religion, but of the commonwealth and the civil authority. For now the dominant trope is not Religion as encompassing Christian Truth; it concerns religion as it stands in various binary oppositions: religion and state, religion and politics, religion and economics, religion and civic society, and religion and science.”

“The usage of ‘religion’ in the plural as an apparently objective, neutral, descriptive term for other people’s beliefs and practices becomes systematically institutionalised in the nineteenth century with the development of the so-called science of religion and comparative religion.”

Presentism as Truth and Fallacy



Origins as Truth and Fallacy

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Fitzgerald is referring to how religion and science is understood, both in present and past terms.



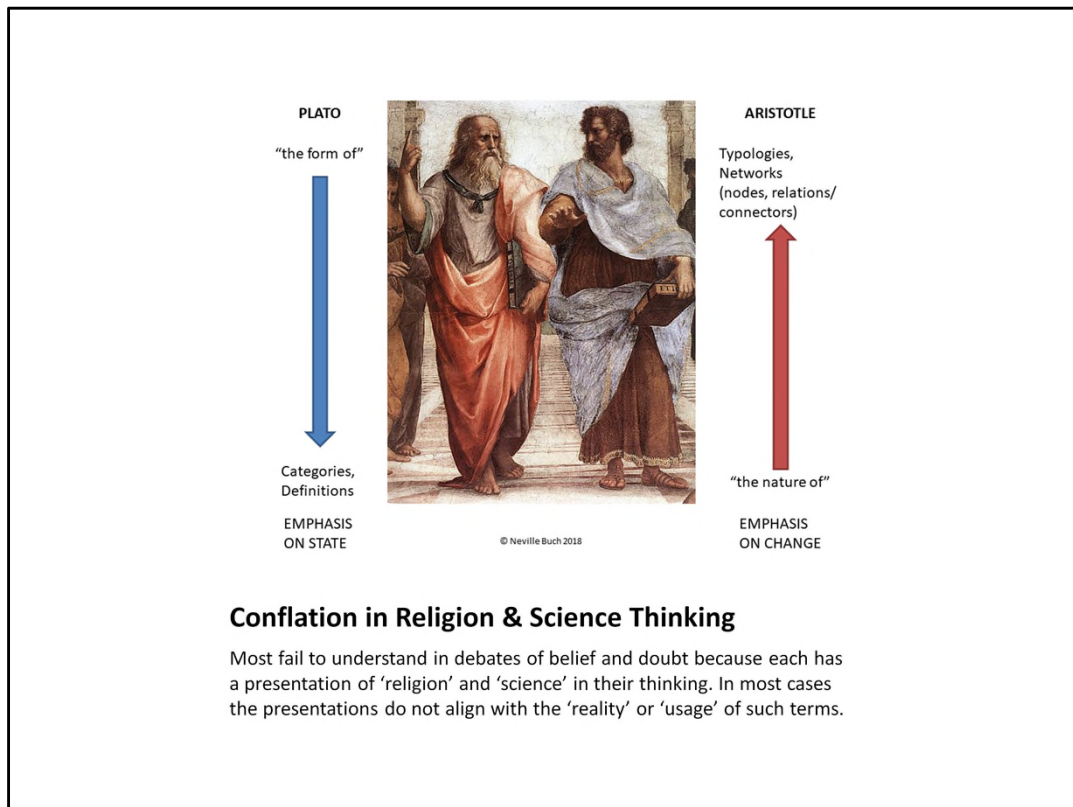
**Presentism as Truth and Fallacy**



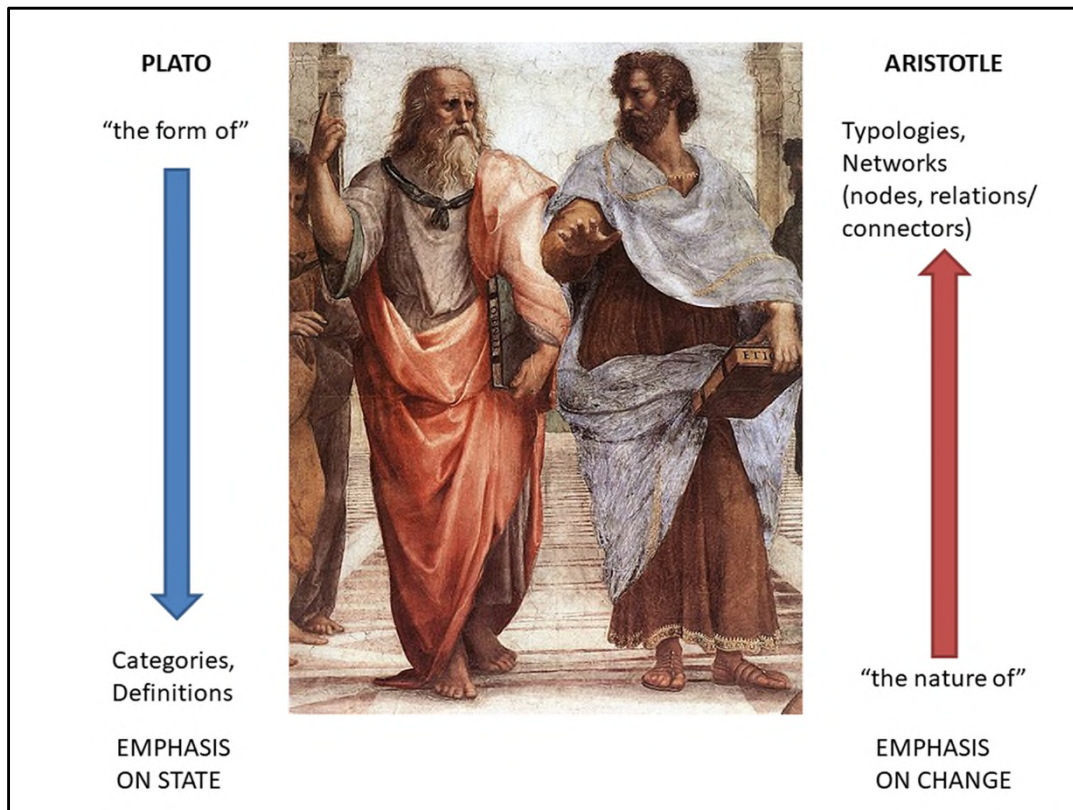
**Origins as Truth and Fallacy**

One needs to understand that both approaches are legitimate, but can lead to error if the relationship is not perceived.

Often the understanding of the past is a projection of our present mindset. That is legitimate when we are asking present questions, such as “How did we get here?” The error is not to perceive the layering of the present upon the past. Equally problematic, is if we assume there is unfiltered access to any origins, or assume that that the origins explains the whole story.



The origin of much in western philosophy goes back to Plato and Aristotle.



Each of the ancient philosophers offers a touchstone in understanding the terms of religion and science. It really depends upon if you work your way up or down the schemas. And it depends whether the focus is on what is constant or what is fluid.

### John Locke and Thomas Hobbes on Civic Religion



### Conflation in Religion & Science Thinking

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There are two qualified terms which will add the understanding. The first is civic religion, and we can also refer to social science.

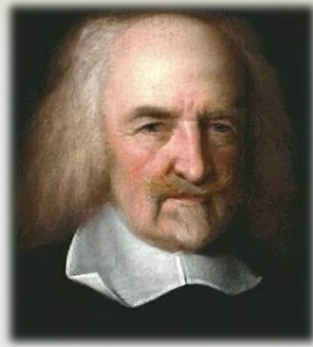
## John Locke and Thomas Hobbes on Civic Religion



The definitional frames go back to when those who defined such terms worked both in religion and science. Here there is not much difference between them.

Indeed, in this era of the 17th century, theology was considered the Queen of the Sciences.

However, like the fundamental differences between Plato and Aristotle, we have to understand the distinct difference between the Hobbesian and the Lockean interpretation of religion and science.



“...it was not unlawfull for Abraham, when any of his Subjects should pretend Private Vision, or Spirit, or other Revelation from God, for the countenancing of any doctrine which Abraham should forbid, or when they followed, or adhered to any such pretender, to punish them; and consequently that it is lawfull now for the Sovereign to punish any man that shall oppose his Private Spirit against the Laws: For hee hath the same place in the Common-wealth, that Abraham had in his own Family.”

Section, “No Pretence Of Private Spirit Against The Religion Of Abraham”, in *Leviathan* by Thomas Hobbes, 1651

Like Plato, Thomas Hobbes had the downward pressure on civic religion and social science:

“It was not unlawful for Abraham, when any of his Subjects should pretend Private Vision, or Spirit, or other Revelation from God, for the countenancing of any doctrine which Abraham should forbid, or when they followed, or adhered to any such pretender, to punish them; and consequently that it is lawful now for the Sovereign to punish any man that shall oppose his Private Spirit against the Laws: For he hath the same place in the Common-wealth, that Abraham had in his own Family.”





“The business of true religion is quite another thing. It is not instituted in order to the erecting of an external pomp, nor to the obtaining of ecclesiastical dominion, nor to the exercising of compulsive force, but to the regulating of men's lives, according to the rules of virtue and piety... I esteem it above all things necessary to distinguish exactly the business of civil government from that of religion and to settle the just bounds that lie between the one and the other.”

A Letter Concerning Toleration by John Locke, translated by William Popple, 1689

Like Aristotle, John Locke had the upward pressure on civic religion and social science:

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### G.W.F. Hegel and Immanuel Kant on Natural Religion



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The second qualified term is natural religion, and we can also refer to natural science.

## G.W.F. Hegel and Immanuel Kant on Natural Religion



Again, there are distinct differences, with two definitional framing between Hegel and Kant. And we still have not yet arrived at the modern divorce between the two terms, if such a divorce ever occurred.

Both Hegel and Kant are a challenge to read, so please be patient, and listen carefully.



“It has been the work of Spirit throughout thousands of years to work out the notion or conception of religion, and to make it the subject of consciousness. In this work the movement begins from immediacy and nature, and these must be overcome. Immediacy is the natural element; consciousness, however, is elevation above nature; natural consciousness is sensuous consciousness, as the natural will is passion; it is the individual which wills itself in accordance with its naturalness, its particularity it is sensuous knowing and sensuous willing. But religion is the relation of Spirit to Spirit, the knowledge by Spirit of Spirit in its truth, and not in its immediacy or naturalness.”

Section, “Definite Religion”, Lectures on the philosophy of religion, together with a work on the proofs of the existence of God by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Translated from the 2d German ed. by E.B. Speirs, and J. Burdon Sanderson, 1832 (revised 1895)

Hegel stated,

“It has been the work of Spirit throughout thousands of years to work out the notion or conception of religion, and to make it the subject of consciousness. In this work the movement begins from immediacy and nature, and these must be overcome. Immediacy is the natural element; consciousness, however, is elevation above nature; natural consciousness is sensuous consciousness, as the natural will is passion; it is the individual which wills itself in accordance with its naturalness, its particularity it is sensuous knowing and sensuous willing. But religion is the relation of Spirit to Spirit, the knowledge by Spirit of Spirit in its truth, and not in its immediacy or naturalness.”



"We very often hear complaints of the shallowness of the present age, and of the decay of profound science. But I do not think that those which rest upon a secure foundation, such as mathematics, physical science, etc., in the least deserve this reproach, but that they rather maintain their ancient fame, and in the latter case, indeed, far surpass it. The same would be the case with the other kinds of cognition, if their principles were but firmly established. In the absence of this security, indifference, doubt, and finally, severe criticism are rather signs of a profound habit of thought. Our age is the age of criticism, to which everything must be subjected. The sacredness of religion, and the authority of legislation, are by many regarded as grounds of exemption from the examination of this tribunal. But, if they are exempted, they become the subjects of just suspicion, and cannot lay claim to sincere respect, which reason accords only to that which has stood the test of a free and public examination."

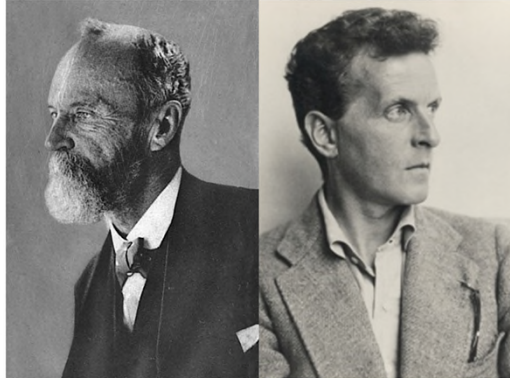


Section, Preface, The Critique of Pure Reason by Immanuel Kant, Translated by J. M. D. Meiklejohn, 1781

Hegel takes the subjectivist and empathetic direction. Famously, Kant comes at it in the objectivist and critical pathway:

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**William James and Ludwig Wittgenstein on  
Religion as Experience and Language**



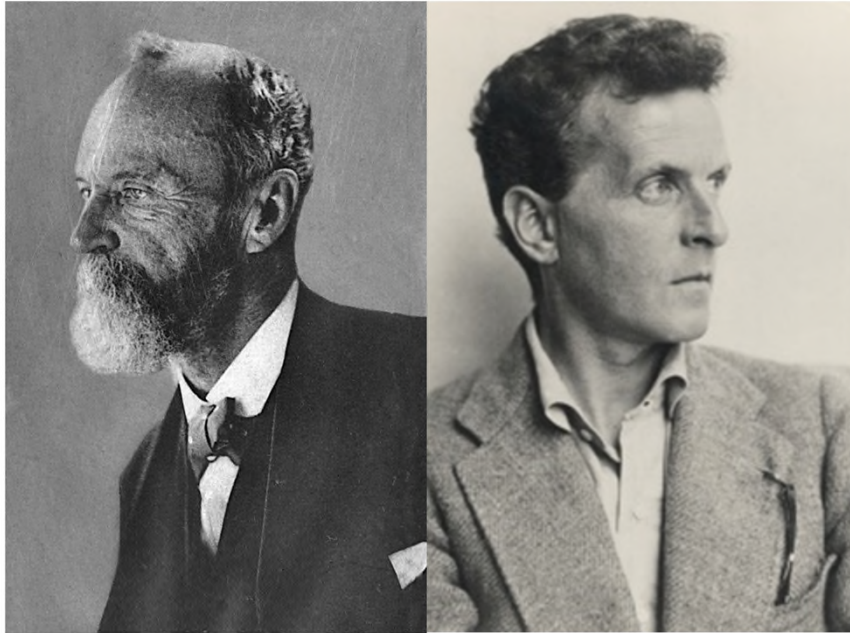
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Plato and Aristotle introduced the conception of religion and science in terms of ideal and nature. John Locke and Thomas Hobbes introduced the conception of religion and science in terms of the individual and the social. Hegel and Kant introduced the conception of religion and science in terms of consciousness and objective reasoning.



## **William James and Ludwig Wittgenstein on Religion as Experience and Language**



All of that comes to either greater clarity or entanglement in what we understand as experience and language. It is then William James and Ludwig Wittgenstein who hopefully provided the clarity.

For William James, it is in the framing of Natural Religion and Social Science. For Ludwig Wittgenstein, it is in the framing of Civic Religion and Social Science.

The arguments of Natural Science continued as definitional framings for itself and religion, but the phenomenology of experience and language becomes so natural that the category becomes meaningless as a definition.

That is the true divorce, neither religion nor science have any a prior claim on each other. For both James and Wittgenstein abandon metaphysics for different descriptions of religious and scientific experience and language.



"In the matter of religions it is particularly easy to distinguish the two orders of question. Every religious phenomenon has its history and its derivation from natural antecedents. What is nowadays called the higher criticism of the Bible is only a study of the Bible from this existential point of view, neglected too much by the earlier church. ...These are manifestly questions of historical fact, and one does not see how the answer to them can decide offhand the still further question: of what use should such a volume, with its manner of coming into existence so defined, be to us as a guide to life and a revelation? ... There can be no doubt that as a matter of fact a religious life, exclusively pursued, does tend to make the person exceptional and eccentric. I speak not now of your ordinary religious believer, who follows the conventional observances of his country, whether it be Buddhist, Christian, or Mohammedan. ...These experiences we can only find in individuals for whom religion exists not as a dull habit, but as an acute fever rather."

Section, "Lecture I. Religion and Neurology", *The Varieties of Religious Experience, A Study in Human Nature*, by William James, 1917

James explains:

"In the matter of religions it is particularly easy to distinguish the two orders of question. Every religious phenomenon has its history and its derivation from natural antecedents. What is nowadays called the higher criticism of the Bible is only a study of the Bible from this existential point of view, neglected too much by the earlier church. Under just what biographic conditions did the sacred writers bring forth their various contributions to the holy volume? And what had they exactly in their several individual minds, when they delivered their utterances? These are manifestly questions of historical fact, and one does not see how the answer to them can decide offhand the still further question: of what use should such a volume, with its manner of coming into existence so defined, be to us as a guide to life and a revelation?"

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"These experiences we can only find in individuals for whom religion exists not as a dull habit, but as an acute fever rather."

“My attitude towards him [a friend who says he isn't an automaton] is an attitude towards a soul. I am not of the opinion that he has a soul.  
 Religion teaches that the soul can exist when the body has disintegrated. Now do I understand this teaching? — Of course I understand it — I can imagine plenty of things in connexion with it. And haven't pictures of these things been painted? And why should such a picture be only an imperfect rendering of the spoken doctrine? Why should it not do the same service as the words? And it is the service which is the point.  
 If the picture of thought in the head can force itself upon us, then why not much more that of thought in the soul?  
 The human body is the best picture of the human soul.  
 And how about such an expression as: "In my heart I understood when you said that", pointing to one's heart? Does one, perhaps, not mean this gesture? Of course one means it. Or is one conscious of using a mere figure? Indeed not. — It is not a figure that we choose, not a simile, yet it is a figurative expression.”



Section, “Part II, iv”, *Philosophical Investigations*, by Ludwig Wittgenstein,  
 Translated by G. E. M. Anscombe, 1958

Wittgenstein takes on a more poetic explanation:

“My attitude towards him,” referring to a friend who says he isn't an automaton, “is an attitude towards a soul. I am not of the opinion that he has a soul.  
 Religion teaches that the soul can exist when the body has disintegrated. Now do I understand this teaching? Of course I understand it. I can imagine plenty of things in connexion with it. And haven't pictures of these things been painted? And why should such a picture be only an imperfect rendering of the spoken doctrine? Why should it not do the same service as the words? And it is the service which is the point.

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### Conclusion: From 16 to Eight DEFINITIONAL FRAMING

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2. Reasonable Christianity (epistemic doctrine, Immanuel Kant)
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By our focus on Plato and Aristotle, Locke and Hobbes, Hegel and Kant, James and Wittgenstein, and focused on what is natural, as well as what is social or civil, we have reduced our definitional list to eight frames on religion, and eight frames on science.

None of these frames will deliver the final word, but by surveying across the territory we can, hopefully, bring greater understanding.

### Images Citations

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Plato:

Aristotle: Scuola di Atene The School of Athens

John Hobbes: Thomas Hobbes (Detail from painting by John Michael Wright, c. 1669)

John Locke: Godfrey Kneller - Portrait of John Locke (Hermitage).jpg

Immanuel Kant: German philosopher Immanuel Kant's "Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science" is the subject of Stanford Professor Michael Friedman's newest book. (Image credit: Wikimedia)

G.W.F. Hegel: By Jakob Schlesinger - <https://thecharnelhouse.org/2013/11/12/rousseau-kant-and-hegel/>, Public Domain,  
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William James: Associated Press

Ludwig Wittgenstein: By Moritz Nähr - Austrian National Library, Public Domain,  
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