religions

MDPI

Article

Invoking Wittgenstein in Defence of Religious Belief

Stephen William Law

Oxford Lifelong Learning, University of Oxford, Oxford OX1 2JA, UK; stephen.law@conted.ox.ac.uk

Abstract

This paper provides an overview of five defences of religious belief against criticisms offered by 'modern atheists' such as Richard Dawkins. All five defences maintain that the atheist's criticisms are off target as a result of the atheist having failed properly to grasp how religious language is used. All five defences are linked with Wittgenstein. My interest here is not in whether any of the defences outlined are Wittgenstein's (I take no position on that), but rather on whether any plausibly deliver the conclusion that the atheist's criticisms are off target. The paper concludes that, as they stand, all five defences face significant objections. First, while some would deliver the conclusion that the 'modern atheist's' criticisms are off target, their accounts of how religious language is used appear implausible. Second, the remaining defences, while offering more plausible accounts of how religious language is used, appear not to deliver the conclusion that the 'modern atheist's' criticisms are off target. The paper also notes that those who claim atheist criticisms of religious belief are off target aren't always clear about which defence (or defences) they are offering, be it one of the five defences outlined here or some other defence. By providing this map or overview, I aim to offer such defenders an opportunity to identify more clearly which defence they have in mind and why they believe it succeeds.

Keywords: Wittgenstein; language; Dawkins; non-cognitivist; philosophy; religion

1. Introduction

Wittgenstein's later views regarding religious belief are elusive. There is relatively little writing upon which to draw and what we do possess was not intended for publication. The texts are also quite cryptic, with the result that there are various different interpretations of Wittgenstein on offer.

I don't defend any interpretation of Wittgenstein here. Nor do I intend to target Wittgenstein's own views, in part because I am unclear about what they are. Rather, I outline how a number of different views linked with Wittgenstein's work might be employed in defence of religious belief. I then evaluate those defences, finding all face significant difficulties.

2. On-Target and Off-Target Criticisms of Religious Belief

Religion's defenders respond to critics in different ways. My interest here is defences that involve at least some appeal to Wittgenstein's later philosophy. All the defences examined here aim to show that the criticisms are off-target because they misunderstand how religious language is used.

What I shall term *on-target criticisms* are those that correctly identify and target that to which the religious person is committed. Defences against criticisms acknowledged to be

Academic Editors: Sebastian Sunday Grève and Philip Goodchild

Received: 25 August 2025
Revised: 20 May 2026
Accepted: 22 May 2026
Published: 26 May 2026

on-target aim to show that, while the critic might properly have grasped what the religious believe, their criticism fails. I provide an example of such a defence below.

2.1. The Evidential Problem of Evil and On-Target Defences

One popular criticism of theism is the Evidential Problem of evil. If God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent, how are we to square his existence with observed evils? 'Evils', in this context include *moral evils*—morally bad actions (e.g., murder, theft)—and *natural evils*, including immense suffering caused by natural diseases and natural disasters. Given that God possesses those three omni-attributes, he will not want there to be evil, will know about any evil, and will have the power to prevent any evil. While God might allow some evils as the price God pays for allowing greater goods, he presumably won't allow *gratuitous* evil—e.g., pain and suffering for which there is no adequate justification. Yet, we observe huge quantities of evil, much of which does appear to be gratuitous (many millions of years of horrendous animal suffering, for example). The argument can be summarised like so:

> If God exists, gratuitous evil does not exist.
>
> Gratuitous evil exists.
>
> Therefore, God does not exist.

Theists respond to the Evidential Problem in a variety of ways, typically by challenging that second premise. They concede that evil exists, but deny any is gratuitous. Some theists attempt to deal with the problem by offering *theodicies*. These are attempts to identify reasons God might have for allowing such evils. Some theists appeal to sceptical theism, insisting that, even if we are unable to identify the reasons God might have for permitting observed evil, we can't justifiably conclude that there are probably no such reasons. There might easily be reasons 'beyond our ken'.

Let's call such responses to the Evidential Problem of evil and other criticisms of religious belief *on-target defences*: they attempt to show that, while the criticism is on-target, it fails to land a decisive blow.

2.2. Armstrong's Off-Target Defence Against the Evidential Problem of Evil

An alternative way of defending religious belief—the kind of defence on which I focus here—is to suggest that the criticisms are *off-target*. The belief the critic attacks is not one to which the religious person is committed.

An illustration of this sort of defence can be found in Karen Armstrong's bestseller *The Case for God* (Armstrong 2009). Armstrong considers the question 'How do we account for the great evil we see in the world supposedly created and governed by a benevolent deity?' (Armstrong 2009, p. 266). She suggests the question is rooted in failure to understand what 'God' means. 'God', says Armstrong, is 'merely a symbol of indescribable transcendence' (Armstrong 2009, p. 266) 'pointing beyond itself to an ineffable reality' (Armstrong 2009, p. 307). By drawing a veil of ineffability around her God, Armstrong seems to leave the critic with little if anything at which they might even take aim. That religious language is used with the aim of symbolising such an ineffable reality is a view Armstrong also attributes to Wittgenstein (Armstrong 2009, pp. 267–68).

Regarding the problem of evil, Armstrong says about the Jews in Auschwitz who famously put God on trial:

> If God was omnipotent, he could have prevented the Shoah, if he could not stop it, he was impotent; and if he could have stopped it but chose not to, he was a monster. They condemned God to death. The presiding rabbi pronounced the verdict, then went on calmly to announce that it was time for the evening prayer.

> Ideas about God come and go, but prayer. . . must continue. (Armstrong 2009, p. 266)

Armstrong's thought here seems to be that, in so far as a critic is targeting ideas about God that can be clearly stated—for example, that there exists an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent deity—they are targeting something other than that to which sophisticated theists like herself are committed.

It is versions of this alternative approach of insisting that criticisms of theistic and religious belief are *off-target* that I examine here. I call them *off-target defences*.

Incidentally, Armstrong also says that 'God', used correctly, points to '*absolute* goodness, beauty, order, peace, truthfulness, justice.' (Armstrong 2009, p. 246) It's unclear to me how we are to reconcile these claims about God with his also being an 'ineffable reality'. Moreover, the claim that God is absolute goodness and absolute justice would seem, on the face of it, to be incompatible with his allowing gratuitous suffering. An atheist wielding the evidential problem of evil might suspect that Armstrong is here unwittingly engaged, not in sophisticated theology, but in a merry-go-round of evasion. When the atheist takes aim at religious belief, it vanishes; when the threat recedes, it reappears.

To be clear, Armstrong does not deny that *some* religious people do use 'God' in the way atheist critics suppose. According to Armstrong, 'atheism is always a rejection of and parasitically dependent on a particular form of theism' (Armstrong 2009, p. 290): a form of theism that she labels 'fundamentalism' (Armstrong 2009, p. 290). A fundamentalist and an atheist critic like Dawkins may share the same fundamental misunderstanding about, for example, how 'God' is used. Those who appeal to Wittgensteinian ideas in trying to immunise religious belief against atheist criticism may and often do acknowledge that the atheist's criticisms may be on-target so far as the beliefs of *some* believers are concerned, just not the beliefs of more sophisticated adherents.

3. Invoking Wittgenstein in Off-Target Defences of Religious Belief

As we will see, Wittgenstein is widely supposed to offer one or more off-target defences of religious belief, or at least the resources to mount such a defence. In *Lectures and Conversations*, Wittgenstein says that, lacking belief himself, he is unable to contradict what the religious person believes:

> If you ask me whether or not I believe in a Judgement Day, in the sense in which religious people have belief in it, I wouldn't say: 'No. I don't believe there will be such a thing'. It would seem to me utterly crazy to say this.
>
> And then I give the explanation: 'I don't believe in. . .'. but the religious person never believes what I describe.
>
> I can't say. I can't contradict that person. (Wittgenstein 1970, p. 55)

Note that if we cannot contradict a belief then, in so far as a refutation of that belief will take the form of an argument, the conclusion of which contradicts that belief, neither will we be able to refute it. No such conclusion can be stated.

Drawing on the above passage, Simon Glendinning extracts a moral about what he calls the 'modern atheist', citing Richard Dawkins, author of *The God Delusion*, as an example. Glendinning says that, unlike Dawkins, he and Wittgenstein simply *fail to believe* rather than try to espouse the modern atheist stance of 'believing the contrary'. Glendinning explains as follows:

> The religious believer's beliefs are of a very distinctive sort, quite different to typical scientific beliefs, but the modern atheist's assertion of double belief—that 'there won't be a Judgment Day, but another person says there will'—supposes

> that there are two beliefs in view here that can be traded in the marketplace of reason; just as if one were to assert that 'there won't be an eclipse tomorrow, but another person says there will'. In the latter case the two market sellers may well contradict each other, 'they mean the same'. (Glendinning 2013, p. 50)

Note that Glendinning appears here to be talking about *religious beliefs quite generally*, including all at which 'modern atheists' like Dawkins take aim (which include the beliefs that God exists and created the World, and that Jesus rose from the dead). If it is true that non-believers cannot so much as contradict such beliefs, why can't they do this?

Wittgenstein elsewhere suggests that philosophical problems are generated by linguistic confusion and, in particular, a failure to attend to differences in how superficially similar expressions are *used*:

> In the use of words one might distinguish 'surface grammar' from 'depth grammar'. What immediately impresses itself upon us about the use of a word is the way it is used in the construction of the sentence, the part of its use—one might say—that can be taken in by the ear—And now compare the depth grammar, say of the word 'to mean', with what its surface grammar would lead us to suspect. No wonder we find it difficult to know our way about. (Wittgenstein 2009, (I) §664)

There's a broad consensus that Wittgenstein thinks that, despite their superficial similarities, the religious use of sentences such as:

(a) God exists.
(b) God created the World.
(c) Jesus rose from the dead.
(d) There will be a Judgement Day.

is very different to the typical use of sentences like:

> Electrons exist.
>
> Nye Bevin created the NHS.
>
> Ted rose from his bed.
>
> There will be an election day.

Glendinning's 'modern atheist' fails to spot this difference in use. Seduced by the superficial similarities, they suppose the religious person uses 'God exists' to make a claim analogous to that made by 'Electrons exist', a claim they then confusedly suppose they might contradict and perhaps even scientifically refute.

But how exactly do the religious use the target sentences (a) through (d)? And why should that use have the result that the atheist cannot contradict what the religious believe?

My plan here is to explore five different views of why the modern atheist's criticism is supposedly off-target. All have at least been linked with Wittgenstein in some way (I don't mean all are explicitly attributed to Wittgenstein; they may be 'linked with' Wittgenstein only in the sense that they are presented as, e.g., drawing on, or best understood and/or articulated using, Wittgensteinian ideas):

1. *The Non-Cognitivist View*: The religious use sentences such as (a) to (d) to do *something other than make a claim*. If no claim is made, then the atheist critic has nothing to contradict or refute.
2. *The Juicer View:* The religious use such sentences to commit to claims, but the religious use, and thus meaning, of such sentences as 'God exists' and 'There will be a Judgement Day' extends *well beyond* what the atheist critic is capable of grasping, leaving the atheist unable to contradict or refute what the religious believe.

3. *The No-Overlap View:* Sentences (a) through (d) are used by the religious to make claims, but *quite different* claims to those the atheist critic understands them to make. Consequently, the atheist's criticisms are entirely off-target.
4. *The Atheist-Minus View:* The religious use sentences (a) through (d) to make claims, but they claim rather *less* than the atheist supposes. Thus, the atheist's criticisms are off-target.
5. *The Riddle View:* The religious use at least some of the target sentences to articulate a certain sort of riddle. This leaves the atheist unable to contradict what the religious use them to express.

I will now unpack these views and flag some of the difficulties they face.

4. The Non-Cognitivist View

In this view, the religious use 'God exists' and 'Jesus rose from the dead' not to make claims, but in some other way. Obviously, if no claim is made by the religious using such sentences, then the atheist is left with nothing to contradict or refute. But how are such sentences used, if not to assert?

4.1. Emotivism

One suggestion is that when the religious say 'God exists', they are, in effect, merely emoting. Just as emotivists, regarding moral talk, suppose 'murder is wrong' is used not to make a claim but to express an attitude (see Ayer 2001, chap. 6), so our expressivist, regarding sentences (a) through (d), says they are used not to make claims but to express attitudes. For example, perhaps 'God exists' is used to do nothing more than express feelings of awe, wonder, and gratitude that the universe exists, and/or a feeling that ultimately all will be well. Perhaps the religious person who say, 'God exists' is doing little more, linguistically speaking, than someone who exclaims 'Oh Wow!' in astonishment that there exists anything at all.

4.2. Commitment to a 'System of Reference'

An alternative non-cognitivist account suggests that 'God exists' and 'Jesus rose from the dead', are used in a meaning- or reference-fixing way. Wittgenstein at one point suggests religious belief involves something like a 'passionate commitment to a system of reference' (Wittgenstein 1998, p. 73).

What would this meaning- or reference-fixing use involve? In the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein presents remarks about the standard metre bar (used at one time as the standard by which all other metre rules were calibrated):

> [t]here is one thing of which we can say neither that it is one metre long, nor that it is not one metre long, and that is the standard metre bar in Paris. But this is, of course, not to ascribe any extraordinary property to it but only to mark its peculiar role in the language-game of measuring with a metre-rule. (Wittgenstein 2009, (I) §50)

The 'peculiar role' of:

> The standard metre is one metre long

is to fix what is meant by 'one metre'. Superficially similar sentences, such as:

> The kitchen table is one metre long

are used differently, to make claims that might then be doubted, challenged, and even refuted. It makes no sense to challenge what's expressed by the former sentence, on the

other hand, because it does not 'say' or assert anything; rather it is (or at least was) used to determine what it is we say when we say something is 'one metre long'.

If 'God exists and 'Jesus rose from the dead' are employed similarly in a meaning or reference-fixing way, then it would follow that they too are not used to make claims, and so the critic will again be left with nothing to contradict or refute.

4.3. Lash's Promissory Account

We use language not just to assert, but also to command, question, promise, and so on. A third non-cognitivist interpretation suggests that sentences such as 'God exists' are used, not to make claims, but in a *promissory* way. The theologian Nicholas Lash appears to offer an account along these lines:

> If someone is asked: 'Do you believe in God?' and replies, 'I do', they may be saying one of two quite different things, because the English expression 'I believe in God' is systematically ambiguous. (Lash 2008, p. 34)

On the one hand, says Lash, the person who says 'I do' may be offering an opinion—that God exists. However, 'I do' can be used very differently, as it is in a wedding ceremony. When the groom replies 'I do' to the question 'Do you take this woman. . .?', he is making a promise—entering into a commitment. Lash suggests that when theists like himself are asked if they believe in God, and they reply, 'I do', they're not offering an opinion that might then be contradicted; rather they are entering into a profound commitment. But then, suggests Lash, the atheist who attacks the opinion that 'God exists' attacks a crude and uninteresting variety of theism that Lash himself rejects:

> the atheism which is the contradictory of the opinion that God exists is both widespread and intellectually uninteresting. (Lash 2008, p. 34.)

4.4. The Non-Ccognitivist View: Two Objections

The three accounts outlined above are all non-cognitivist in that they insist that 'God exists', 'Jesus rose from the dead', etc., aren't used by religious people to make claims but in some other way. All three have been linked to Wittgenstein. However, in terms of dealing with attempts by an atheist like Dawkins to contradict and refute what the religious believe, all face a number of challenges. I will outline two.

Perhaps the most obvious challenge is that the Non-Cognitivist View appears to inaccurately reflect how most believers use, and indeed understand themselves to be using, religious language.

Wittgenstein insists that rather than make assumptions about how language is used we should *look and see*: (Wittgenstein 2009, (I) §66) 'Don't think, but look!' He urges us to pay close attention to ordinary linguistic practice. Yet ordinary linguistic practice involving 'God exists' and 'Jesus rose from the dead' includes a great deal of activity seemingly at odds with non-cognitivist accounts. In particular, a great deal of that linguistic practice involves believers arguing both for, and in defence of, for example, the existence of God and the truth of the Resurrection. This practice reflects the fact most religious folk do at least understand themselves to be using sentences such as 'God exists' and 'Jesus rose from the dead' to commit to metaphysical and historical truth claims.

Indeed, it seems to matter to most Christians that Jesus did literally rise from the dead, as Corinthians 15: 14 notes:

> And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith also vain.

Yet Wittgenstein maintains that:

> The historical accounts in the Gospels might, historically speaking, be demonstrably false and yet belief would lose nothing by this. (Wittgenstein 1998, p. 32)

This comment seems obviously untrue so far as many Christians are concerned, including some of its seemingly most sophisticated adherents. That Christ rose from the dead as a matter of historical fact is widely argued for by Christians, including some leading Christian philosophers and apologists, who, for example, maintain that the best available explanation for the post-mortem reports of Jesus is that the Resurrection really happened (Frank Morison's *Who Moved The Stone* (Morison 1930) is a classic example; for a more contemporary example see (McGrew and McGrew 2009)). Similarly, if 'God exists' makes no claim, then why, when critics argue the claim is false, using, for example, the evidential problem of evil, do so many Christians—again including many leading Christian philosophers and apologists—respond by constructing theodicies or invoking sceptical theism? Why expend so much energy defending a claim to which they're not even wedded? In addition, how, if the non-cognitivist is correct, can the religious entertain the kind of doubts to which many religious admit? If no claim is made, there's nothing to doubt.

In short, it appears that, if any of these non-cognitivist accounts of how these sentences are used are correct, it can only be for a small minority of Christians.

It's possible, of course, that rather than describing how most mainstream religious people use religious language, Wittgenstein is merely talking about, say, the kind of religious faith that he considers respectable. However, it remains the case that adopting the Non-Cognitivist View would seem not to be an option for most believers given their own understanding of how they use religious language.

A second challenge faced by some (if not all) versions of the Non-Cognitivist View is that, even if their account of how 'God exists' is correct and no assertion is made, it appears that the truth of an assertion is at least *presupposed*.

Take Lash's promissory account. Let's suppose Lash is right: when Lash is asked 'Do you take this woman. . .?' and he says, 'I do', he makes a promise rather than offers an opinion. Still, his promise does obviously take something for granted, namely that there actually *is* a woman present whom he might take as his wife. Lash's promissory account appears to involve a similar presupposition. Lash says about his 'I do' response that

> . . . it promises that life, and love, and all one's actions are henceforth set steadfastly on the mystery of God, and hence that we are thereby pledged to work towards that comprehensive healing of the world by which all things are brought into their peace and harmony in God. (Lash 2008, p. 34).

But (even setting aside the question of to whom this promise is made—is it a promise to God, oneself, or someone else?) this is a promise requiring there is a 'mystery of God' into which everything can be brought into their peace and harmony. This certainly sounds like the existence of some sort of divine reality, even if of a mysterious kind. In which case, while, by saying 'I do', Lash might not be offering the *opinion* that such a reality exists, he is nevertheless presupposing its existence. But then what Lash presupposes might yet be contradicted, and perhaps even refuted, by an atheist like Dawkins.

The 'system of reference' version of non-cognitivism suffers a similar problem. Again, it appears that the truth of what atheist critics deny is, if not asserted, then at least presupposed. If the sentence:

> The standard metre bar is one metre long

is employed, not to 'say' or assert something about the length of the bar, but to fix what 'one metre' means, that use does at least *presuppose* that there exists such a bar. Similarly, if what 'God exists' and 'Jesus rose form the dead' are used to express a 'passionate commitment to

system of reference', then, even if they do not use such sentences to assert that there exists some sort of divine reality, they do at least to *presuppose* such a reality. John Cottingham raises exactly this objection:

> the adoption of such a system does nevertheless presuppose certain truths—for example, the actual reality of the standard posited by the system (the paradigm 'metre bar' [. . .]). In the same way, a religious 'system of reference' can be said to have cognitive implications (by presupposing that supreme creative reality without which the system would make no sense). (Cottingham 2009, p. 221)

How plausible is the suggestion that Wittgenstein is a non-cognitivist about how religious language is used? Some believe Wittgenstein is a non-cognitivist. For example, Hans-Johann Glock supposes Wittgenstein's view is that 'religious statements do not describe any kind of reality, empirical or transcendent, and do not make any knowledge claims' (Glock 1996, entry on 'religion'). Others disagree. Severin Schoeder, for example, argues that Wittgenstein rejects non-cognitivism. Schroeder maintains that

> [c]ontrary to [a] widespread view, Wittgenstein did not propound a purely expressivist construal of credal statements. Wittgenstein stresses the importance of commitment, the practical dimension of religious faith, without denying that it is, or involves, also believing certain things to be true. (Schroeder 2007, p. 445)

Genia Schönbaumsfeld also denies that Wittgenstein is a non-cognitivist about religious utterances. According to Schönbaumsfeld, to embrace Christianity is to do more than just assent to the truth of certain claims. However, that is not to say that therefore the 'doctrine'—Christian claims—is irrelevant, as this would be as absurd as thinking that because a song can be sung both with and without expression, you could have the expression without the song (Schonbaumsfeld 2007, p. 186).

According to Schönbaumsfeld, stripping Christianity of its truth claims, leaving only the passion, would make Christianity 'either unintelligible or some bizarre sort of rapture' (Schonbaumsfeld 2007, p. 188).

4.5. In Defence of the Non-Cognitivist View

Regarding the first objections to non-cognitivism outlined above—that it fails accurately to reflect how religious language is actualy used—we should acknowledge that a *limited* version of the Non-Cognitivist View might fare better. Our non-cognitivist could adopt a hybrid position in which some religious sentences are used to make claims while others are not. For example, they might maintain that 'Jesus rose from the dead' is used make a claim while 'God exists' is not. This would allow them to side-step some of the more obvious apparent counter-examples, such as that many Christians appear deeply committed to the Resurrection as a matter of historical fact.

Defenders of the Non-Cognitivist View might also respond to critics like Schönbaumsfield by biting the bullet and insisting that, actually, Christianity *really is* nothing more than 'some bizarre sort of rapture'. When Christians make doctrinal utterances, they really don't make any claim at all. True, they might *think* they're using 'God exists and 'Jesus rose from the dead' to make factual claims, but closer observation of their actual useage reveals it's quite different to what they suppose. In short, our non-cognitivist might insist that *many religious are simply confused about their own linguistic practice* and it's this confusion that leads them to, e.g., offer theodicies in response to the problem of evil.

I consider the above suggestion implausible. The fact that Christians clearly intend and take themselves to use 'Jesus rose from the dead' and 'God exists' to make claims is at least *prima facie* evidence that they do use them that way (in much the same way as the fact that some religious people might take themselves to be using such sentences in a

non-cognitivist way would provide at least be *prima facie* evidence that that is what they are doing). In this case, the onus is on our non-cognitivist to show that, appearances to the contrary, the religious use of the target sentences is non-assertoric. But then what is it about the use of 'God exists'and 'Jesus rose from the dead' that reveals that they're not being used to make claims, but in some other way?

Perhaps our non-cognitivist will answer that it's the fact that a religious person *won't let anything count against* what they use the sentence to express shows that they're not using the sentence to make a factual claim. However, it's not immediately obvious why it follows from the fact that we won't allow anything to count against what we use a sentence to express that we're not using that sentence to assert what we believe to be a fact. Many Young-Earth Creationists won't allow anything to count against their belief that the universe is only around 6k years old. All evidence to the contrary is ignored, explained away, etc. Does it follow that Young-Earth Creationists do not use 'The universe is around 6000 years old' to make a factual assertion? That's certainly not obvious (it strikes me as highly counterintuitive). Certainly, further argument would be required before we would be justified in drawing the conclusion that such Creationists aren't making claims.

Similarly, then, it doesn't obviously follow from the fact that the religious won't let anything count against what they express using 'God exists' and 'Jesus rose from the dead' that they're not using these sentences to make claims. Our non-cognitivist would owe us an explanation of why it follows that our believer fails to make a claim. Further, our non-cognitivist would owe us an explanation of why, when it comes to determing how, e.g., 'Jesus rose from the dead' is being used,

(i) not allowing anything to count against what's expressed

is a relevant aspect of how the sentence is used—an aspect that demonstrates the sentence is not being used assertorically—while

(ii) offering up empirical evidence in support of what's expressed (the empty tomb, the eyewitnesses, etc.)

is not an aspect of use that demonstrates the sentence is being used assertorically. Otherwise, it looks as if our non-cognitivist is cherry-picking: focusing on those aspects of use they think support their non-cognitivism while ignoring those aspects that don't.

In short, as it stands, I find the suggestion that the religious just don't realise they're using the target sentences non-assertorically unconvincing.

4.6. The Juicer View

The Non-Cognitivist View of how religious language is used maintains that the use is not assertoric. The target sentences are used, not to make claims, but in some other way. However, while the Non-Cognitivist View would deliver the conclusion that the atheist cannot contradict what the religious use such sentences to express, it seems implausible as an account of typical religious use.

Let's now turn to what I consider to be a more plausible account of how such sentences are used. In what I call *the Juicer View*, the religious do use such sentences to make claims, but their use of such sentences involves further dimensions of meaning and significance beyond that typically grasped by 'modern atheist' critics like Dawkins. Consequently, such critics fail properly to comprehend what the religious use such sentences to express.

John Cottingham thinks that there are propositions involved in religious belief. However, he believes that there is much more involved in religious belief than intellectual assent to those propositions. He offers a juicer analogy to explain the error he supposes many atheist analytic philosophers make regarding such beliefs. Such philosophers, he suggests,

require that the clear fluid of a few propositions be pressed from the pulp of religious context, so that they can then be analysed and their truth assessed. But

> [a] juice extractor does not, as might first be supposed, give us the true essence of a fruit; what it often delivers is a not very palatable drink plus a pulpy mess. Someone who has only tasted strawberries via the output of the juicer, and has firmly decided 'this is not for me', may turn out to have a radically impoverished grasp of what it is about the fruit that makes the strawberry lover so enthusiastic. (Cottingham 2009, p. 209.)

Similarly, then, the atheist analytic philosopher, in squeezing out a few propositions—that God exists, Jesus rose from the dead, or there will be a Judgement Day—from the context that gives them life, is likely to have a deeply impoverished understanding of that to which the religious person is committed.

Genia Schönbaumsfield concurs that there exist dimensions of significance and meaning involved in the use of religious language missed by atheist naysayers. She offers a musical analogy. Someone who lacks a 'musical ear' might repeat the utterances of a music connoisseur, but their understanding can amount to no more than an intellectual grasp 'comparable to having learnt a code.' Schönbaumsfeld suggests that *contradicting* the music connoisseur or religious believer's judgement, requires 'the kind of understanding that makes the musical work or the prayer (the religious words) *live* for me, not the kind that allows me to parrot a form of words.' This, explains Schönbaumsfeld, is why Wittgenstein says he is incapable of contradicting what the religious believe:

> For exactly analogous reasons Wittgenstein feels that he cannot contradict what the religious person is saying, since he, as yet, lacks a real grasp of the concepts involved. (Schonbaumsfeld 2007, p. 187.)

4.7. Objection to the Juicer View

That there exist aspects to the use of religious language missed by at least some atheist critics is not, I think, implausible. I suspect a reasonable case can be made for concluding that there is more to the meaning of such utterances than some atheists are capable of grasping.

However, does the fact that there are rich dimensions of significance lost on religion-blind atheists entail that they cannot then contradict that to which the religious are committed? I don't believe so (and to be clear, unlike Schönbaumsfeld, Cottingham does not himself draw that conclusion).

Consider the following analogy. Mary hears Tom say, 'Otto is a Kraut'. By saying this, Otto clearly intends to communicate that Otto is German. Yet there is obviously more to the use of 'Kraut' than that. 'Kraut' is a term of insult. Someone who refers to Otto as a 'Kraut' is doing rather more, linguistically, than just asserting that Otto a German. Suppose Mary has an unusual psychological condition rendering her, as it were, insult-blind. So far as Mary is concerned, 'Kraut' just means German. The further dimensions to the use of 'Kraut' are entirely lost on Mary. Does the fact that these additional dimensions to the meaning of 'Kraut' are lost on her mean that Mary cannot contradict, or indeed refute, what Tom says? Clearly not. If, knowing Otto is not German, Mary responds '*You are wrong, Otto is not a Kraut—he's not German*.' it's clear that she has successfully contradicted Tom, despite her impoverished understanding of what Tom meant by his remark. Mary may have only a thin, 'juicer' grasp of what Tom means by 'Otto is a Kraut', but that's no obstacle to her contradicting and even refuting what Tom says.

The same applies to the atheist critic. Perhaps they possess only a thin, 'juicer' grasp of what the religious mean by 'God exists'. That doesn't entail that they cannot contradict or refute the belief expressed.

To be clear, my objection here is to the suggestion that the fact that 'God exists' or 'Jesus rose from the dead' are used to do rather *more* than assert something entails that the atheist cannot than contradict (or refute) what's asserted. That conclusion does not follow, as the 'Otto is a Kraut' example illustrates.

In response, a defender of the Juicer View might argue that 'Otto is a Kraut' provides a poor analogy: there is something particular about the way in which 'God exists' and 'Jesus rose from the dead' are used that entails that, even if the atheist is capable of grasping some or all of what's asserted, they're unable to contradict what the religious use such sentences to assert. However, the onus would then be on a proponent of the Juicer View to explain what it is about the religious use of such sentences that has the consequence that, while the atheist and religious person's understanding of what these sentences are used to assert at least overlaps, the atheist is in no position to contradict what the religious use them to assert. Merely pointing out, as Schönbaumsfeld does, that the atheist fails to grasp what makes the religious person's judgement 'live' for that person does not, so far as I can see, supply that explanation.

4.8. The No-Overlap View

However, perhaps what Wittgenstein intends to suggest is that there is no overlap *at all* between what the religious says using 'God exists' and what the atheist understands that sentence to assert. What if, for example, the religious use 'God exists' *metaphorically*?

Imagine Mary overhears John say, 'Tom is the moth to Jane's flame.' Let's suppose Mary is not only insult-blind but also metaphor-blind. She just doesn't 'get' metaphors. Mary supposes that what John says is to be understood literally. Consequently, Mary responds, 'But Jane clearly isn't the visible, gaseous part of a fire, and Tom has no antennae or wings.' In this case, there's no overlap *at all* between what Mary thought Tom meant, and what he actually meant. Consequently, she has failed to contradict him.

Similarly then, what the religious person means by 'God exists' and 'Jesus rose from the dead' is perhaps wholly metaphorical. In which case, might an atheist entirely fail to grasp what's meant, and so fail to contradict them?

In her *A Confusion of the Spheres*, Schönbaumsfeld says something at least suggestive of this view. She thinks Wittgenstein, who understands the individual words that make up a sentence used to express a religious belief but, because he fails to grasp the sentence's religious use, fails to understand the religious belief expressed, is like

> someone who knows that the sun is a star located at the centre of our Solar System, but who fails to see the aptness of the phrase 'Juliet is the sun'. (Schonbaumsfeld 2007, p. 184)

'Juliet is the sun' (as uttered by Romeo) is a metaphor. Understood literally, it is false—Juliet is not a star around which the Earth rotates. However, what Romeo intends to convey by using the sentence is something *entirely* different. Sallie McFague, also drawing on Wittgenstein's later philosophy, goes so far as to suggest that all statements about God are metaphorical (McFague 1982).

Note that the No-Overlap View is distinct from the Non-Cognitivist View, in which no truth claim is asserted. When John says 'Tom is the moth to Jane's flame' he thereby commits himself to the truth of *something* (that Tom is infatuated with Jane), only it's something very different to what a literal reading would give. Similarly, the No-Overlap View of how 'God exists' is used allows for the religious to commit to the truth of *something*, it's just *something entirely other* than what the atheist critic supposes.

Unlike the Juicer View, the No-Overlap View does indeed deliver the result that our atheist fails to contradict the religious person. However, the No-Overlap View now runs into another difficulty. When the atheist responds to the religious assertion that 'God exists' by invoking, say, the evidential problem of evil, the standard religious response is to offer theodicies—explanations for the evil—and/or appeal to sceptical theism: insisting that there might, for all we know, easily be good reasons for God to allow these evils. These responses make no sense if what the atheist is attacking is something entirely other than what the religious believe. Such replies would be as appropriate as John responding to Mary by pointing out that the evidence, that Tom lacks wings and antennae and that Jane is not the visible, gaseous part of a fire, is less than decisive.

Of course, it's open to a defender of the No-Overlap View to insist that most religious people don't understand their own linguistic practice, and that their attempts to deal with, e.g., the problem of evil by constructing theodicies are misplaced and symptomatic of their own linguistic confusion. However, as already noted, the fact that the religious understand themselves to be making the claims that atheists like Dawkins aim to refute is *prima facie* evidence that they are using them that way, and the onus is therefore on the proponent of the No-Overlap View to show that most religious are in fact mistaken about the nature of their own linguistic practice.

4.9. Variant No-Overlap View: 'Forms of Life'

A variant of the No-Overlap View begins with the Wittgensteinian thought that our linguistic utterances are embedded within wider practices and/or 'forms of life'. This, arguably, has the consequence that, stripped of the context in which they have their natural home, such sentences as (a) through (d) are stripped of meaning.

Consider an analogy. If I yell 'Snap!' during a game of poker with my friends, they are likely to be confused. 'Snap!' has its home within another card game bound by different rules. Consequently, it's unclear what, if indeed anything, I mean.

Or consider the expression 'It's five o'clock in. . .'. We understand what this sentence says with reference to different Earthly time zones, 'It's five o'clock in London' may be true while, simultaneously, 'It's five o'clock in Sydney' is false. But what if someone were to say, 'It's five o'clock on the sun'? As Wittgenstein points out [PI (I) §350], this would produce bafflement. The expression has been removed from its usual home and it's no longer clear what's said, if anything.

The 'forms of life' variant, in a similar vein, suggests that utterances like 'Jesus rose from the dead' and 'God exists' have their home within certain religious practices and/or forms of life. If uttered outside of such practices—in a science laboratory or a history class, say—then, similarly, they are stripped of meaning. The religious use of 'Jesus rose from the dead', transposed to Dawkin's context, results in a meaningless utterance. Similarly, 'Jesus rose from the dead' as Dawkins uses it, when transposed to the religious context, results in a meaningless utterance. But then there is no context within which Dawkins and the religious believer might have share an understanding—even a partial understanding—of what's meant by 'Jesus rose from the dead'. So this is a version of the No-Overlap View insofar as it makes any such shared understanding impossible.

It could also be suggested that the use of 'God exists' and 'Jesus rose from the dead' is embedded within a religious form of life *within which the use of scientific evidence and rational argument to assess belief have no place*. Weiberg summarises this suggestion like so:

> the aim is to separate religious speech and action from that of science, for example, by referring to a 'difference in grammar' between a 'language about God' and a 'physical object language'. This distinction serves not least to reject the application

> of scientific criteria of rationality and objectivity to the realm of religion. (Weiberg 2025, p. 5)

Consequently, insofar as atheists like Dawkins attempt scientifically or otherwise rationally to refute that to which the religious are committed, they are again taking aim at *entirely the wrong sort of belief*. They miss the target.

Armstrong appears to attribute at least something like the 'forms of life' variant of the No-Overlap View to Wittgenstein. She says:

> Wittgenstein now maintained that there were an infinite number of social discourses. Each one was meaningful—but only in its own context. So it was a grave mistake 'to make religious belief a matter of evidence in the way that science is a matter of evidence', because theological language worked 'on an entirely different plane'. (2007, p. 207)

However, the 'forms of life' variant also looks implausible as an account of the use of religious language. Religious people often use 'God exists' and 'Jesus rose from the dead' not just in religious contexts, but also in scientific and historical ones. For example, they use scientifically-based fine-tuning arguments for the existence of God, and (as we saw above) produce historical evidence in support of the Resurrection.

Moreover, as Nielsen (1967) points out, even if such utterances as 'God exists, etc., do have their natural home within a religious context, it does not obviously follow that atheists cannot reasonably contradict or refute what the religious use such sentences to assert. Accusations of witchcraft made during the 17th century witch trials were made within a religious form of life alien to most modern atheists, yet that is no obstacle to such atheists contradicting and indeed rationally refuting such religious claims.

4.10. The Atheist-Minus View

The Juicer View and No-Overlap Views suppose that what the religious commit to using sentences such as 'God exists' and 'There will be a Judgement Day' is something that extends beyond what the atheist critic supposes or is even something entirely other than what that critic supposes. A different view of how religious language is used says that theists commit, not to *more* than what the critic might suppose, but to *less*. I call this the Atheist-Minus View.

Suppose our atheist, Dick, takes God to be an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent deity. However, he's been given the analogy of God being a physical, bearded father-figure who looks down on us from a cloud (as God is portrayed in, for example, *God the Father* by Giovanni Battista Cima) and he has taken it literally. Dick understands God to be a person that sits on a cloud. Having inspected every cloud and finding no such person, Dick concludes there is no God. Clearly, Dick's attempted refutation of theism has missed its target. Indeed, if Dick were to assert 'God does not exist', using 'God' as the name of some cloud-borne being, he would fail even to contradict what theists believe (someone who points out that P and Q is false has not thereby contradicted someone who asserts only that P is true).

Dick's misunderstanding is obviously ridiculous. However, I think it's not implausible that at least some critics of theistic belief are similarly guilty of tacking on to theism beliefs to which sophisticated theists are not actually committed. Take, for example, the suggestion that God is a *thing*. Many theists insist that this thought involves a misunderstanding. For example, the theologian Denys Turner maintains that God is not another thing that exists alongside mountains, rocks, plants and the universe:

> It is no use supposing that you disagree with me if you say, 'There is no such thing as God'. For I got there well before you. (Turner 2002, p. 19)

In so far as an atheist assumes that 'God' is the name of a thing, then the atheist who says 'There is no God' fails to contradict Turner's theism. Wittgenstein also says that when we consider God's existence, the issue is 'not the existence of something' [daß es sich hier um eine Existenz nicht handelt] (Wittgenstein 1998, p. 82). So it's possible Wittgenstein would concur with Turner: the atheist's insistence that there's no such 'thing' as God denies what no sophisticated religious person actually believes.

The Atheist-Minus View successfully delivers the result that what the atheist denies when they deny God exists is, in at least some cases, something other than what the religious believe. It also has the consequence that, in so far as the atheist targets something beyond that to which the religious are committed, they fail to refute what the religious believe. However, note the following.

First, to acknowledge that the Atheist-Minus View may have the consequence that some atheist critics fail to contradict or refute what religious people believe is not to say atheists *can't* contradict or refute what the religious believe. Given that the religious are committed to less than what our atheist critic supposes, our atheist, on discovering this, can amend their understanding accordingly. This is, presumably, something the atheist could do quite easily. Once Dick has figured out that the theist is committed to the existence of a God that is omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent, but *not* to a person that literally sits on a cloud, he can just cross out that further commitment. There's now no obstacle to Dick contradicting the theist.

Moreover, while Dick will no doubt abandon his cloud-based attempted refutation of theism, he might still refute the now slimmed-down version of theism in some other way, say, through the evidential problem of evil. In fact, had Dick's initial objection to theism been the evidential problem of evil, pointing out that Dick was under the misapprehension that God is a person that lives on a cloud would do nothing to defuse that objection. Similarly, pointing out that 'God' does not name a 'thing' does not, as it stands, do anything to defuse the evidential problem of evil.

4.11. The Riddle View

Here, finally, is a fifth view linked with Wittgenstein that might be used to try to justify the conclusion that atheist critics are unable to contradict what the religious express. It has been suggested that at least some religious utterances ought to be understood as involving *riddles*. Diamond (1995), for example, suggests that Anselm's ontological argument is best understood as a working out of a riddle-phrase: 'that than which greater cannot be conceived' (hereafter TTWGCBC) In this section, I explore the suggestion that the fact that 'God exists' is used to articulate a riddle successfully explains why the atheist's attempt to contradict or even refute what the religious use the sentence to express is doomed to fail.

Mulhall (2011, 2012) points out that when we try to solve, for example, the riddle of the Sphinx—'What walks on legs in the morning, two legs at noon, and three in the evening?'—we need to understand how this phrase can be understood as a description of a human being (as a baby walking on all fours, then an adult on two legs, and finally an elderly person with a stick). Mulhall also argues that:

> until we have a solution to the riddle, together with an understanding of how it counts as a solution to it, to that extent we lack an understanding of the riddle phrase that the question employs, and so lack an understanding of the question.

Following Diamond, Mulhall suggests that Anselm understands TTWGCBC as a riddle phrase—a phrase that we cannot understand until we have worked out its solution. However, in this case the solution is *necessarily* unavailable to us. That is because, for any being we can conceive, we can always conceive of there being something greater, namely,

'something whose nature exceeds the grasp of any concepts of which we can conceive.' (Mulhall 2011, p. 771.) Thus, says Mulhall, according to Diamond,

> Anselm has established that every statement we can make about TTWGCBC has, and can only have, a promissory meaning; the full transparency of that language is ruled out.' (Mulhall 2011, p. 771.)

Both Mulhall and Diamond link this view to Wittgenstein, suggesting that 'TTWGCBC' is an expression that, 'in the sense in which Wittgenstein normally claims that words have grammar, these words do not.' (Mulhall 2011, p. 772.)

That a significant number of religious who say 'God exists' use the expression as Diamond and Mulhall suggest is not implausible. In fact some of the philosophers discussed in preceding sections might be understood as using the expression that way. Nicholas Lash explicitly talks of 'the mystery of God' (Lash 2008, p. 32), while Karen Armstrong understands 'God' as a symbol for something ineffable and beyond our comprehension (Armstrong 2009, p. 307).

Suppose 'God' is used to mean TTWGCBC. Then sentences employing 'God', such as 'God exists', will be sentences that we cannot properly understand. How might this view relate to the suggestion that atheistic critics of religious belief cannot *contradict* that to which the religious are committed?

I suggest there are at least two options here. The first takes as its starting point Diamond and Mulhall's thought that 'TTWGCBC' is a riddle phrase that cannot be understood until we have its solution, a solution that is necessarily unavailable to us. If neither the theist nor atheist fully understands 'TTWGCBC', then (assuming 'God' is being used interchangeably with 'TTWGCBC') *neither is in a position properly to understand what's expressed by either 'God exists' or 'God does not exist'*. Someone might then conclude that atheistic attempts to deny God exists involve a muddle—the atheist cannot contradict what 'God exists' is used to say, because what it is used to say is something that neither the atheist nor the theist is capable of grasping (to be clear: I am not attributing this further line of argument to either Mulhall or Diamond).

I don't see that this version of the Riddle View succeeds in delivering the conclusion that the atheist is incapable of contradicting what the believer expresses using 'God exists' and that their criticism and rejection is therefore off-target. Consider an analogy: suppose I overhear Fred say to Sally 'The Quarmsquoggle exists'. Knowing Fred is in the habit of making up fantastical places, beasts, objects, etc., and giving them similarly quirky names, I can quite reasonably advise Sally, 'The Quarmsquoggle does not exist'. It seems I can straightforwardly and reasonably contradict Fred despite the fact that I lack any conception of what he's talking about. But then why can't an atheist straightforwardly and reasonably contradict the believer who says 'TTWGCBC exists' even while failing fully to grasp what that sentence means?

Perhaps a defender of the Riddle View will double down and insist that I do not strictly speaking *contradict* Fred when I say 'The Quarmsquoggle does not exist'—I do something else. Even if that's true, my saying 'The Quarmsquoggle does not exist' remains entirely appropriate and reasonable under the circumstances. In particular, my saying it does not reveal that I have misunderstood how Fred is using 'The Quarmsquoggle exists.' Similarly, even if we were to concede that the atheist who says 'God does not exist' in response to the believer who says 'God exists' (using 'God to mean TTWGCBC) does not strictly speaking *contradict* the believer, their saying 'God does not exist' may nevertheless be appropriate and reasonable, and need not betray any failure to grasp how 'God exists' is used.

A second option would be to understand 'God exists' as saying what 'TTWGCBC exists' says, where the latter sentence says in effect that *there exists a solution to the riddle*.

But if that is what 'God exists' says, then there is no obstacle to the atheist contradicting what's said. For, in saying 'God does not exist', the atheist is simply denying, perhaps very reasonably, that there exists a solution—that's to say, that there's any such thing as TTWGCBC.

In short, The Riddle View, at least as developed here, does not obviously deliver the conclusions that the atheist is no position to contradict what the believer (who, by 'God', means TTWGCBC) says when they say 'God exists' and that their rejection is therefore off-target (and, to be doubly clear, I don't suggest that Mulhall or Diamond claim otherwise).[1]

Notice, by the way, that the Riddle View, as outlined above, focuses solely on how 'God exists' is used. It's unclear to me how it might be extended to the use of other religious sentences, such as 'Jesus rose from the dead' and 'There will be a Judgement Day.'

5. Conclusions

This paper outlines five different views about how religious language is employed. All five maintain that criticisms aimed at religious belief by Dawkins and other 'modern atheists' are off-target because such critics fail to properly grasp how religious language is used. All maintain that, when it comes to (at least some of) the target sentences (a) through (d), the atheist is unable to contradict what the religious use such sentences to express.

As explained at the outset, I make no claim here about which, if any, of the five views are Wittgenstein's. While all five have links with Wittgenstein, none may be his.

My interest is in whether any of the five views succeed in delivering the conclusion that the criticisms of religious belief offered by Richard Dawkins and other 'modern atheists' are indeed off-target. In my view, all five views, at least as they stand, fail for at least one of two reasons.

First, while some of the views (Non-Cognitivist and No Overlap) would, *if* they accurately captured how religious language is used, deliver the result that our 'modern atheist's' criticisms are off-target, the accounts they offer of how religious language is used strike me as highly implausible.

Second, while other views (Juicer, Atheist-Minus, and—at least as applied to 'God exists'—Riddle) offer rather more plausible as accounts of how religious language is used, they fail to deliver the conclusion that the 'modern atheist's' criticisms are off target.

Notice that some of these five views can be combined. For example, a religious person might combine the Juicer and Atheist-Minus approaches, insisting that they use sentences (a) through (d) to make claims, claims that in some respects extend beyond what the atheist supposes but in other respects involve rather less than what the atheist supposes. However, it's not clear to me how combining the views in this way would do much to remedy their individual failings.

A concern atheist critics may have about the suggestion that their criticism is off-target is that it may be unclear which, if any, of the various justifications outlined above is being used. It's difficult to respond to the suggestion that you, as a critic, have misunderstood what you are criticising if the nature of your misunderstanding has not been made clear.

We have seen, for example, that Karen Armstrong in *The Case for God* (Armstrong 2009) suggests that atheist criticisms such as the evidential problem of evil are off-target because of the atheist's failure to realise how 'God' is used (at least by believers like herself). However, it's not clear to me which of the five views I outlined, if any, Armstrong would endorse. Armstrong's suggestion that 'God' is merely a label for some 'indescribable transcendence' (Armstrong 2009, pp. 267–68) is suggestive of the Riddle view, while other of Armstrong's comments are suggestive of the 'forms of life' variant of the No-Overlap View, or perhaps even the Non-Cognitivist View. However, I could not, with any confidence, attribute any of the views outlined here to Armstrong, and I remain in the dark about why

Armstrong's believes the atheist's criticisms are off-target. That they are off-target seems to me to amount to little more than an unsubstantiated assertion rather than a conclusion for which Armstrong offers some clear line of argument.

We have seen that Simon Glendinning suggests that the 'modern atheist'—the atheist who aims to contradict what the religious person believes—is confused about how religious language is used. But again, it's unclear to me what Glendinning thinks it is about the religious use of language that has the consequence that the 'modern atheist' fails to contradict what the religious person says. Glendinning does say that Wittgenstein, with whom he concurs, tries to

> persuade us not to focus on religious statements in isolation and to think of them instead as traversing and inflecting great swathes of someone's thinking and believing; that 'what belongs to a language-game,' here as elsewhere, 'is a whole culture'. (Glendinning 2013, p. 49.)

Glendinning's thought here seems to be that, when we take several steps back and survey their whole culture, we see that for the appropriately religious person belief is not a matter of reason at all, and so they should not be understood as the modern atheist understands them: as someone who 'reasons wrongly'. (Glendinning 2013, p. 49) Glendinning's comments here are suggestive of something at least akin to the 'forms of life' variant of the No-Overlap View, but they are also consistent with at least some of the other five views, and so I remain in the dark about which, if any if the views outlined in this paper Glendinning would be willing to endorse. Glendinning's claim that the 'modern atheist' cannot contradict the properly religious person seems, again, to amount to little more than an unsubstantiated assertion rather than a conclusion for which Glendinning has supplied some clear line of argument. So how should the 'modern atheist' be expected to respond?

In providing a map or overview of five different Wittgenstein-linked views about why atheist criticisms/rejections of religious belief are off-target, I hope to give thinkers like Armstrong and Glendinning an opportunity to identify much more clearly precisely which view they have in mind—whether it be one of the five mapped out here or else some other view—and why they believe it succeeds.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Note

[1] I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for the suggestion that the kind of riddle views presented by Diamond and Mulhall might have the consequence that atheist attempts to contradict what the religious believe will be off-target, and that Armstrong and Lash might be interpreted as offering just such an explanation of why the atheist cannot contradict what the religious express using 'God exists'.

References

Armstrong, Karen. 2009. *The Case for God*. London: Bodley Head.

Ayer, Alfred Jules. 2001. *Language, Truth and Logic*, new ed. London: Penguin Books.

Cottingham, John. 2009. Lessons in Life: Wittgenstein, Religion and Analytic Philosophy. In *Wittgenstein and Analytic Philosophy: Essays for P.M.S. Hacker*. Edited by Hans-Johann Glock and John Hyman. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 203–27.

Diamond, Cora. 1995. *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy, and the Mind*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Glendinning, Simon. 2013. Three Cultures of Atheism: On Serious Doubts About the Existence of God. *International Journal for The Philosophy of Religion* 73: 39–55. [CrossRef]
Glock, Hans Johann. 1996. *A Wittgenstein Dictionary*. Oxford: Blackwell.
Lash, Nicholas. 2008. *Theology for Pilgrims*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd.
McFague, Sallie. 1982. *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.
McGrew, Timothy, and Lydia McGrew. 2009. A Cumulative Case for the Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. In *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*. Edited by W. L. Craig and J. P. Moreland. Oxford: Blackwell.
Morison, Frank. 1930. *Who Moved the Stone?* London: Faber and Faber.
Mulhall, Stephen. 2011. Wittgenstein on Religious Belief. In *The Oxford Handbook of Wittgenstein*. Edited by O. Kuusela and M. McGinn. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 754–74.
Mulhall, Stephen. 2012. Reaslism, Modernism and The Realistic Spirit: Diamond's Inheritance of Wittgenstein, Early and Late. *Nordic Wittgenstein Review* 1: 7–33.
Nielsen, Kai. 1967. Wittgensteinian Fideism. *Philosophy* 42: 191–209. [CrossRef]
Schonbaumsfeld, Genia. 2007. *A Confusion of Spheres*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Schroeder, Severin. 2007. The Tightrope Walker. *Ratio* 20: 442–62. [CrossRef]
Turner, Denys. 2002. *Faith Seeking*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Weiberg, Anja. 2025. Religious Belief in the Later Wittgenstein—A 'Form of Life', a 'Hinge', a 'Weltanshauung', Something Else or None of These? *Religions* 16: 1046. [CrossRef]
Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 1970. *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*. Oxford: John Wiley and Sons.
Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 1998. *Culture and Value*. Oxford: Wiley Blackwell.
Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 2009. *Philosophical Investigations*. Oxford: Wiley Blackwell.