

Emotion, religious practice, and cosmopolitan secularism

IAN JAMES KIDD

*Department of Philosophy, Durham University, Durham, County Durham,
DH1 3HN, UK
e-mail: i.j.kidd@durham.ac.uk*

Abstract: Philip Kitcher has recently proposed a form of ‘cosmopolitan secularism’ which he suggests could enable the members of a future secular society to continue to access and benefit from the moral and existential resources of the world’s religions. I criticize this proposal by appeal to contemporary work on the role of emotion and practice in religious commitment. Using the work of John Cottingham and Mark Wynn, two objections are offered to the cosmopolitan secularists’ claim that the moral resources of a religion could be both preserved by and employed within a secular society whose members lack emotional commitment to and practical engagement with the religions in question. I conclude that, *pace* Kitcher, cosmopolitan secularism cannot fulfil its promise to preserve the moral resources of religion in the absence of genuine religious traditions and communities.

Introduction

In recent writings, Philip Kitcher has proposed a form of ‘enlightened’ or ‘cosmopolitan’ secularism.¹ Cosmopolitan secularism is distinctive by virtue of its incorporating a recognition of the moral and existential value of religious belief and practice, a vision of a good life, and an account of why it is meaningful. But that recognition is accompanied by Kitcher’s advocacy of the establishment of a future society grounded in a ‘secular humanism’ that can ‘replace the functional aspects of traditional religions’.² A tension therefore arises between the recognition that religious belief and practice have deep moral and existential value for certain persons, and the imperative to establish a secular society from which religious beliefs and practices have been supplanted. To resolve that tension, Kitcher proposes that a suitably sophisticated form of cosmopolitan secularism could retain the moral and existential resources of religion such that the denizens

of that future secular society would suffer no diminishment of the resources available to them for the living of good and meaningful lives. Call this the *retention thesis*, for it is the focus of this article.

My aim in this article is to argue that the retention thesis that is built into cosmopolitan secularism is untenable because it fails to reflect the fact that the moral and existential value of religious belief is only available, especially in its deepest and richest forms, through sustained emotional and practical investment in a religious life. I begin by offering a characterization of cosmopolitan secularism is offered, based upon Kitcher's recent work, which clarifies its secularist credentials and the nature of the retention thesis. Once that is in place, I introduce my two main objections to the retention thesis, which focus on the role of *emotion* and *practice* in enabling persons to access the moral and existential resources of religion. I devote a section each to developing these objections, using the work of Mark Wynn and John Cottingham, respectively, before concluding the article with a critical discussion of the prospects for cosmopolitan secularism. The article concludes that because the moral and existential resources of religion are only fully available to persons participating in an emotionally toned and practically oriented religious life, they would be unavailable to a cosmopolitan secularist living in a society from which the institutions and traditions are absent. The retention thesis ought to be rejected, and cosmopolitan secularists ought to consider alternative means of safeguarding future societies against moral and existential impoverishment.

Cosmopolitan secularism

Kitcher is an eminent philosopher of science, and a central ambition of his work over the last decade has been the development of a model of 'well-ordered' science that would enable democratic control of scientific enquiry.³ A difficulty facing this project is the fact that many of the members of modern democratic societies, especially in the United States, have (to put it diplomatically) contrasting estimations of the cognitive authority of the sciences.⁴ Such religious communities can, and indeed do, employ 'hybrid epistemologies', deferring to the sciences on certain issues, but defaulting to religious authorities and traditions on others, in a way that jeopardizes the epistemic consensus upon which well-ordered science is premised. It therefore appears that well-ordered science could only become tenable within a secular society, such that the establishment of such a society, grounded in a commitment to the epistemic authority of the sciences, is part of Kitcher's wider programmatic aims.⁵

Although Kitcher is by his own account a naturalist and a secularist, the specific form of cosmopolitan secularism that he advocates is different in important respects from what he calls 'militant atheism'.⁶ The novelty of cosmopolitan secularism is that it recognizes and affirms the positive moral and existential roles that

religious conviction plays; that, for religious persons, their beliefs ‘plays a critical role in making their lives bearable’ and provide answers to the question of ‘why their lives matter’.⁷ Other secularists fail to appreciate the crucial moral and existential role of religious beliefs in the lives of religious persons, justifying Kitcher’s description of his secularism as ‘enlightened’.

Welcome as that recognition is, its purposes are strategic in nature. For without an appreciation of the moral and existential functions of religious belief and practice – of the sort lacking in militant atheists – the secularist cannot, argues Kitcher, properly understand, and hence challenge, religious belief.⁸ The secularist is confined to an account of the origins and tenacity of religious belief in terms of ‘cognitive deficiency’ to the neglect of the ‘psychological and social needs’ that are the real engines of religiosity.⁹ The success of secularist ambitions will therefore require their recognition of the role of religious belief and practice in giving religious persons moral guidance and a sense of the meaningfulness of their lives – for otherwise the cosmopolitan secularist can neither take over the ‘functions’ of religious belief nor provide effective ‘surrogates’ for it.¹⁰

The ‘surrogates’ are central to cosmopolitan secularism. Kitcher writes, in a pragmatist spirit, that it would be ‘hardly unreasonable’ for religious persons to reject the offerings of secularism if they judged that the result would be a ‘drab, painful, and impoverished life’.¹¹ For a religious person should hardly surrender beliefs which lend shape and purpose to their life and grant it what Charles Taylor calls a ‘fullness’ which, on his account, comes when our ‘highest spiritual and moral aspirations’ are directed towards, and satisfied in, God.¹² The secularist is, clearly, in peril if they ignore or neglect this vital role that religious belief and practice plays in giving to a life its ‘fullness’, such that it is not only enduring, but also meaningful. Kitcher therefore argues that secularists need to provide effective *surrogates* for religious beliefs, in the form of ‘replacements for the traditional ways of supporting the emotions and reflections essential to meaningful human existence’.¹³ Once secular surrogates for religious belief are available, a person can abandon their religious beliefs and instead embrace a thoroughly naturalistic picture of the world grounded in the deliverances of the empirical sciences, but without any loss of moral and existential resources. Moreover, the tenability of Kitcher’s secularism is mortgaged on its capacity to provide these surrogates, though of course he is optimistic about the prospects for a form of ‘secular humanism . . . responsive to our deepest impulses and needs’.¹⁴

It is worth considering just what form these secular surrogates might take, and what forms of religion are to be rejected within a secular society. Kitcher identifies three ‘types’ of religion, only the last of which a secular naturalist, like himself, could accept.¹⁵ First, there are *providentialist* religions, depicting the world as infused with ‘the purposes of a deity’, possibly but not necessarily inclusive of a ‘serious concern’ for human beings. Second, there are *supernaturalist* religions, incorporating a belief in ‘entities or forces’ – like God or *dao* – which

‘transcend . . . the ordinary physical world’, but which can be encountered through certain extraordinary experiences, such as religious experience. Kitcher notes, quite rightly, that a providentialist religion will necessarily be supernaturalist, but that a supernaturalist religion need not be providentialist – Buddhism and Daoism, say. Third, there are *spiritual* religions, which do not require ‘belief in transcendent entities’ but which, instead, promote an ‘orientation’, both moral and spiritual in nature, towards ‘particular attitudes’, like hope and reverence and awe. Although such spiritual religions may co-opt certain of the texts and practices of providentialist and supernaturalist religion, they require no belief in the metaphysical postulates of those forms of religion; one accepts the morals but rejects the metaphysics.¹⁶ That is just as well, for Kitcher is confident that ‘the substantive doctrines about supernatural beings offered by each of the world’s religions are all almost certainly false’.¹⁷ More generally, providentialist religion is subjected to ‘considerable pressure’ by Darwinism, while the supernaturalistic religions are faced by a battery of arguments – which Kitcher collectively dubs ‘the Enlightenment case against religion’ – which a religious person can only respond to by retreating into spiritual religion.¹⁸

Cosmopolitan secularism can therefore be understood as follows. The metaphysical claims of providentialist and supernatural religion are false and are generated by powerful psychosocial needs: ‘there are no supernatural entities’, like gods and ancestor spirits and sacred places and creatures, nor transcendent realities, and so no sense to be made of ‘accounts of the good life’ that are grounded in the idea that a ‘significant existence’ requires some ‘contribution to the cosmos’.¹⁹ A good life need not involve seeking salvation through Jesus, nor in the alignment of one’s life with *dao*, nor any of the other metaphysically exotic conceptions of a morally admirable and spiritually rich life that the histories of the world’s religions offer. The cosmopolitan secularist knows that ‘none of the world’s religions can make any serious claim to substantive truth’ about the nature of reality, such that one must look elsewhere for a basis for a good life.²⁰ But the cosmopolitan secularist is not left empty-handed in their search for moral and existential guidance: they can draw upon the various forms of spiritual religion, learning from their ‘texts or . . . oral performances’, taking them as repositories of moral guidance and practical wisdom.²¹

The idea seems to be that although the cosmopolitan secularist rejects supernatural metaphysics, of gods or *dao* or *kamma*, they can search the texts and practices of the associated religions for exemplars of moral conduct, identifying the ‘very best in the ideas and stories from many different traditions’.²² So one might take Jesus as a splendid moral exemplar, even if not as the Son of God, and one might learn lessons about compassion from the Buddha, even if one rejects the Three Marks of Existence – and so on. A cosmopolitan secularist can therefore consult the world’s religions for concepts, principles, and maxims that can help them gain ‘understanding of the deepest questions about ourselves and our ideas’,

even as they reject any and all that incorporate metaphysical claims that are incompatible with naturalism.²³ If so, the cosmopolitan secularist can call upon the diversity of historical and contemporary religious, philosophical, and cultural traditions in order to provide a range of resources for articulating and addressing questions of how and why to live: a potpourri of ideas, beliefs, practices, traditions, and 'forms of life'.

If such cosmopolitan secularism succeeds, it achieves two things. The first is that it could ensure that religious persons who abandon their metaphysically exotic beliefs will not suffer from any impoverishment of their moral and existential resources. God goes, but goodness remains. Moral chaos and disenchantment will not follow their resignation of the false metaphysical beliefs that once sustained their sense of the goodness and meaningfulness of their lives. The second is that the newly initiated cosmopolitan secularist would not come to regard the abandonment of her religious beliefs as a *loss*, but rather, to cite Taylor again, as the 'subtraction' of their 'earlier, confining... illusions'.²⁴ Religious people who embrace cosmopolitan secularism do not lose a veridical moral and religious tradition, but instead can finally confront the space of moral possibilities, and so become able, perhaps for the first time, to 'shape their... lives' in line with 'the settled facts that constrain the real possibilities for them'.²⁵ The cosmopolitan secularist is therefore able to consult the possibilities for living a morally praiseworthy and meaningful life, freed from dogmatic commitment to false metaphysical claims, and so able to 'find value in the teachings of Jesus... but also in ideas of the Torah or the Qu-ran, in the sayings of the Buddha, in Socrates and Augustine, Kant and Dewey, Gandhi and Du Bois', and so on.²⁶ The entire history of human thought becomes a venerable repository of moral and existential guidance, cutting across denominational, cultural, and historical boundaries, sustained by a 'cosmopolitan understanding of thought about what is valuable and worth achieving' and invested in 'a secular conception that celebrates the very best in the ideas and stories from many different traditions'.²⁷

The emerging picture of cosmopolitan secularism is as follows. Although the beliefs and practices of providential and supernatural religion have a vital role in sustaining the moral integrity and meaningfulness of the lives of religious persons, they rely on false metaphysical claims and so would not feature within a future secular society. But given the vital role of those beliefs, secularists are beholden to provide 'surrogates' for them, capable of taking over their moral and existential functions, for otherwise religious persons would be quite right to stick to their beliefs and reject secularism. The challenge facing the secularist is, then, to provide a guarantee that a future secularist society that lacked the beliefs and practices of providential and supernatural religion would suffer no loss or diminishment in its moral and existential resources; some cogent way to 'keep the morals, but drop the metaphysics'.²⁸ Kitcher, of course, proposes that cosmopolitan secularism can provide that guarantee, for it provides a means of retaining

the moral and existential value of the world's religions, even as it rejects their metaphysical claims.

In what follows, I argue that the retention thesis is untenable because it is incompatible with the role of emotion and practice in religious life. The moral resources of a religion are available only to those who are emotionally invested and practically engaged in that religion in a way that secularists, by virtue of their beliefs, cannot be. Any other problems with the retention thesis, or with Kitcher's cosmopolitan secularism more generally, are matters for other papers.²⁹

Emotion and practice in religious commitment

The tenability of cosmopolitan secularism turns on the viability of the retention thesis. In the following two sections I offer two closely related objections which focus on the role of *emotion* and of *practices* in a religious life, and use them to challenge the idea that a cosmopolitan secularist could access and enjoy the moral and existential resources of providential and supernatural religion (or from now on, for brevity's sake, just 'religion'). It will emerge that the vital resources of religion are only fully available to a person who is living an emotionally toned, practically based religious life, of a sort that is, first, unavailable to a secularist (whether enlightened or not) and, second, impossible in the absence of religious traditions and communities, as would be the case within the secular society Kitcher envisions. In the next section I make the argument for the role of emotion in religious understanding, using the recent work of Mark Wynn, for emotion and affect are essential aspects of our capacity to understand certain religious beliefs and doctrines, including those with the moral value which Kitcher's cosmopolitan secularist wishes to exploit. The following section then turns to the role of practice in religious life using John Cottingham's recent defence of the 'primacy of praxis', by which point the convergence of the emotion-based and practice-based arguments should be clear. The moral and existential value of religion can only be accessed through forms of religious understanding that are dependent upon emotional involvement and practical engagement, and since the cosmopolitan secularist can fulfil neither the 'emotional' nor the 'practical' criteria the retention thesis must be rejected.

Wynn on emotion and religious understanding

The first argument is drawn from Wynn's account of the role of emotion in religious understanding.³⁰ In *Emotional Experience and Religious Understanding*, Wynn argues that 'truth in religion' should not be understood 'objectively', in terms of either objective, propositional commitments, or 'subjectively', with reference to personal involvement and 'passionate inwardness'. Such disjunctive

approaches are premised on the mistaken claim that the form and content of religion are separable, thereby neglecting the thought that in religious experience the cognitive and affective – or ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ – are unified. The resulting ‘soft rationalist’ position, writes Wynn, ‘retains a role for evidence and argument while also assigning cognitive significance to personal, affectively toned experience’.³¹ Wynn goes on to emphasize that any decent account of the ‘psychology of religious belief formation’ must pay attention to both the emotional and cognitive aspect of religion; not least because neglect of the emotional significance of those beliefs, and the processes that form them, would be bizarre, blind to what William James called the ‘inner soul of faith’s reality’.³² Many writers have echoed that point, including Cottingham, for whom a ‘clinically detached stance’ may be ‘precisely the wrong mode’ for trying to understand religious belief and practice, distorting them into a ‘weird, irrational activity, separated from the rest of our lives’.³³

Certainly when one considers the nature and import of a person’s religious beliefs for their moral and existential sense, of how to live and why their life matters, it would be strange, to put it charitably, for one to suppose emotion would feature little. Certain experiences, especially those of immense emotional and personal significance, should naturally invite, if not demand, certain affective responses – grief or joy, dread or awe – and the absence of such responses should, in many cases, strike us as indicative of some failure of our emotional faculties. Wynn, for instance, quotes Graham Nerlich’s observation that we would be ‘chilled at the absence of grief in one who appeared so attached to another who has just died’, and hope that some extenuating psychological explanation might be offered for it.³⁴ The religious believer isn’t overwrought and perpetually tearful, of course, but their beliefs do have an emotional tone or character that it is important to recognize, and indeed to respect.

Two roles for emotion in religious life can therefore be identified. The first is that our understanding of certain religious beliefs and experiences is necessarily emotionally and affectively toned, that a religious life incorporates ‘some pervasive sense of what matters in human life’, which is, necessarily, ‘embodied in feeling’.³⁵ Indeed, putative cognitive understanding of a certain religious claim – such as divine providence – which was not marked by some affective response would be suspect, the absence of awe, joy, and so on being symptoms of a partial or incomplete understanding. The Buddha, for example, emphasized that enlightenment is not genuine or complete until it ‘cuts a person free’ from vices like avarice and greed and so morally transforms them; for, as David E. Cooper helpfully puts it, ‘properly to understand, and not simply to mouth, such doctrines as that of “not self” is in crucial part to be transformed in the way one sees, and feels and acts towards other people’.³⁶ To be enlightened is to be transformed both affectively and cognitively, and the lack of such transformation betrays a failure of, or imperfection in, one’s religious understanding.

More generally, since many religious beliefs and doctrines are potentially of immense moral and existential significance – affecting our comportment within and conception of the world – any purported understanding of them that did not invite emotional and affective response would be suspect. This is the question put to us by Kierkegaard in his discussion of the answer, ‘Live as an individual’ to the question: ‘What must I do?’ Kierkegaard remarks that this question is ‘not of the inquisitive sort’, but is, rather, a ‘serious question’ that must be considered and answered ‘as if [one] were considering [one’s] life before God’. It is only when that moral question is conceived and considered within that religious context that it is asked in the ‘fullest sense’.³⁷ For Kierkegaard, as one commentator writes, ‘truth does not happen’ until ‘an idea or possibility is realised . . . through being appropriated and acted upon by the individual’ and incorporated into the emotional and practical contours of one’s life.³⁸

The second role of emotion in religious understanding relates to its cognitive functions. Certain feelings can, says Wynn, ‘help guide our discursive enquiries’ and ‘render a certain religiously significant subject salient’.³⁹ This function of emotion can be illustrated using the example of teaching the philosophy of religion. Often, in my experience, there are two broad attitudes that students take towards the subject. The first is that they treat the subject and its component topics as intellectual puzzles involving logical wizardry and conceptual ingenuity – which have a place, for sure – but without any indication that the students have any emotional investment; the issues and debates do not ‘move them’, for they are, as it were, ‘mere problems’. The second attitude is typically evinced by students with religious beliefs: these students engage with the intellectual issues – about the metaphysics of the divine attributes, say – but they have, overtly and openly or not, emotional engagement with them. Such students are *troubled* by the implication that divine benevolence may be untenable, or that natural evil indicates that God may possess a substantially different moral character from the one they imagine. In these cases, the debates and issues *matter* to those students for the reason that the outcomes and implications of their philosophical reflections on religion matter to them; they are not simply ‘debates’ or ‘issues’, useful for an essay but no more, but are, rather, issues directly pertinent to their moral certainties and existential confidence, as they were for, say, Pascal or Kierkegaard.

The role of emotion in religious understanding is illustrated by these two sets of student attitudes. Those who are not emotionally affected by the issues might not regard them as especially pertinent, even if they are interesting, perhaps because they are not, as Kierkegaard put it, ‘considering their life before God’. Such lack of emotional investment has two aspects. The first is that without the requisite feelings, certain issues and topics, like those that constitute the philosophy of religion, will lack salience and significance. Such persons are only capable of what James described as ‘dispassionate intellectual contemplation of the universe’, which, he adds, could not in itself have ‘resulted in religious philosophies such as

we now possess'.⁴⁰ Or as Wynn puts it, the absence of such 'affectively toned responses' means that a necessary 'basis for religious understanding' is lacking.⁴¹ The second aspect, related to the first, is that if a person lacks these feelings and affective responses, their ability to attain to certain modes or levels of understanding is compromised. Wynn suggests that there is a 'certain kind of religious understanding [that is] available only in affective experience', and for which no alternative cognitive or intellectual substitutes exist.⁴² Even if a person did manage to render salient and intelligible certain aspects of religion, through hard cognitive graft, their capacity to access and appreciate certain forms or levels of understanding would be necessarily limited.

Such understanding will not pertain to minor or incidental points, but will typically reflect the 'deeper understanding' at which philosophical enquiry into religion presumably aims. Cottingham is therefore surely right to warn that, within the philosophy of religion, 'as long as the debate is conducted at the level of abstract argumentation alone, what is really important about our allegiance to, or rejection of, religion is likely to elude us'.⁴³ Put another way, philosophical enquiry into religion must include the emotional as well as the rational; or, better, the recognition that the familiar distinction between the rational and the emotional breaks down at a certain level of religious experience and understanding.

The emphasis that Wynn places on the role of emotion in religious experience and understanding can be summarized as follows. Contrary to familiar accounts in the philosophy of religion, emotion enjoys a central place in religious life, neither separate from nor inimical to reason and cognition. Religious understanding, especially in its deeper forms, will in fact 'arise from the reciprocal influence' of 'conceptually inarticulate feelings', on the one hand, and 'discursive thoughts' on the other.⁴⁴ Such reciprocity cannot be reduced to a clean assignment of precedence to either emotion or reason, and indeed Wynn suggests that although cognition 'may sponsor new forms of feeling' and thereby 'constitute unified states of mind', these will 'depend for their intentionality upon the contribution of both, and in such a way that neither can claim temporal or any other kind of precedence'.⁴⁵ Although his account is richer than this discussion indicates, it offers the point that is important for present purposes, namely, that certain forms and degrees of religious understanding are premised upon sustained emotional engagement with, or responsiveness to, religious beliefs and convictions. The absence or insufficiency of those 'affectively toned responses' will, then, impair a person's ability to understand certain religious beliefs, claims, and doctrines, and the moral and existential benefits that are contained within them.

To enjoy the moral and existential value of religious beliefs one must attain to a sufficiently deep level of religious understanding that is premised upon sustained and genuine emotional investment. The reason is that such investment must be grounded in objects and experiences – such as considering one's life before God – which a secularist cannot recognize or participate in by virtue of their

metaphysical commitments. Even if the secularist were initially to invest in the various beliefs and practices the process of investment would increasingly require them to either embrace the metaphysical beliefs – thus dissolving a distinctive feature of their secularism – or to cease at a certain level of depth. If so, the further moral and existential resources of religion will remain beyond their reach.

Cottingham on the primacy of praxis

The emphasis placed by Wynn upon the role of emotion in religious life is echoed by Cottingham, who also warns against the overly cognitive tendencies within the philosophy of a religion. In a memorable image, Cottingham warns that philosophers of religion ‘entirely fail to capture what is involved in someone’s adoption or rejection of a religious worldview if we suppose we can extract a pure cognitive juice from the mush of emotional or figurative coloration, and then establish whether or not the subject is prepared to swallow it’.⁴⁶ Such intellectualizing tendencies threaten to obscure essential aspects of religious life, including not only the emotional – as Wynn argues – but also the practical.⁴⁷ It is the practical aspect of religion that Cottingham emphasizes, although, for the record, neither he nor Wynn separates the emotional and the practical aspects of a religious life. Indeed, it is precisely through practices that religious emotions can be cultivated and expressed, and correspondingly it is emotion that gives to those practices their power, depth, and importance.

Central to Cottingham’s philosophy of religion is an emphasis upon the ‘primacy of praxis’. The appeal to practices is not the sociological truism that religious persons, as it happens, engage in certain kinds of structured individual and collective activities and ‘performances’, such as liturgical practices and the singing of hymns.⁴⁸ Although such sociological points stand, they do not, for Cottingham, exhaust the significance of religious practice; instead, they should be understood as prolegomena for a more wide-ranging reappraisal of the nature of religious life.

Recall that many philosophical analyses of religion focus on beliefs and other propositional commitments – for example, ‘Do you or do you not believe that *p*?’, where *p* stands for a statement (concerning God’s attributes, say). Cottingham objects that such analyses often tell us ‘surprisingly little about how far a religious worldview informs someone’s outlook’.⁴⁹ A main reason for this is arguably the fact that such analyses tend to overemphasize the propositional or doxastic aspect of religion, such that the history of analytic philosophy of religion tends to focus, mainly if not exclusively, upon religious beliefs and doctrines. Even though much good work can and has been done on the doxastic aspect of religion, it has tended to obscure the essential role of religious practices, and of the idea that a ‘religion is primarily a way of living life’.⁵⁰ Specifically, a cognitive or doxastic focus fails to reflect the point that for the majority of religious persons, their religiosity primarily

manifests through their practices – praying and thanksgiving, confessing and worshipping – such that the ‘life blood’ of the world’s major religions derives neither from ‘visionary and ecstatic’ experiences nor from the ‘disquisitions of the theologians’, but rather from ‘repeated practices of prayer and worship’.⁵¹ Indeed, many of the familiar topics of the philosophy of religion, such as divine ontology or mysticism, arguably play a minimal role in the lives of many religious persons, few of whom recognize the ‘God of the Philosophers’ and who turn, instead, to that other occasional philosophical cast member, the ‘God of Faith’.⁵² The ‘living heart’ of the religious lives of most persons consists in the shared and private practices – of prayer, worship, sacrament – by which religious sensibility and belief can be cultivated and expressed, such that to neglect religious practice is, therefore, to remain obstinately resistant to the primary form which religious life takes.

The significance of religious practice lies in its capacity to provide structures for sustained participation in collective activities that can initiate and sustain moral and spiritual transformation. Religious praxis, writes Cottingham, necessarily ‘involves a progressive transformation of our emotional attitudes’, culminating in ‘an interior change’.⁵³ Such transformative change is not solely or exclusively moral or spiritual, but has cognitive aspects as well, such that to engage upon a path of religious praxis is not to place our deliberative faculties into ‘permanent paralysis’. Indeed, an important aim of religious praxis is the improvement of ‘one’s knowledge of human nature [and] one’s moral sensibilities’, a process which ‘can only work against a background of what is held constant’.⁵⁴ The practices and communities that are required for a religious life are therefore essential if a person is to undertake those complex and often demanding processes of moral and spiritual transformation.⁵⁵

Cottingham recognizes the obvious objection that immersion in a system of religious practice may compromise one’s capacity for independent critical activity. Such objections are likely to come from those critics of religion who, rightly or not, would quickly equate initiation into a religious tradition with indoctrination; but as Cottingham notes, the need for a supporting framework is common to all human activities, in the form of ‘paradigms’, ‘forms of life’, and so on. Any human stance is ‘necessarily . . . conditioned by pre-existing frameworks of understanding’, such that if that is a problem, ‘it is a problem for the human condition in general, not for religious frameworks in particular’.⁵⁶ One can therefore accept the claim that religious practice is a constitutive feature of a religious life, and a precondition for moral and spiritual transformation, without that claim necessarily entailing indoctrination or cognitive incapacitation. A stable framework of religious practices creates what a scientist might call ‘controlled conditions’ which open up new experiential and cognitive possibilities, including ‘intellectual illumination’ and ‘understanding of one’s own emotional responses’, which would otherwise remain unrealized or inaccessible.⁵⁷ Crucially, those novel cognitive and affective possibilities and the sorts of understanding and illumination they enable

are dependent upon participation in the requisite religious practices and communities.

Cottingham therefore echoes Wynn's remark that certain religious truths 'can only be accessed via faith', which is itself premised upon one's participation in 'a living tradition of religious praxis'.⁵⁸ From this perspective, religious practice indicates the convergence or dissolution of a number of distorting dualities: the practical and the theoretical, the social and the psychological, the emotional and the cognitive. Within the context of a religious practice one is afforded new insights and feelings within an interpretive framework which is both intimately personal yet intensely social. The specific valences given to these aspects will vary according to the specificities of the practice and the religion, of course, but the result is that spiritual practices are 'capable of supplying a deficit in our fragmented and vulnerable human existence and thus rendering our lives incomparably richer and more meaningful than they would otherwise have been'.⁵⁹ Or, in the terms used earlier, the moral and existential resources of a religion can only be accessed through participation in its practices – and that will increasingly require the awareness that, by engaging in those practices, one can gradually come to understand Noble Truths about the world, or move closer to God, or purify one's soul as it ascends towards the One – and so on.

Cottingham's account of the primacy of praxis in religious life emphasizes the active, engaged character of religious life in parallel with Wynn's account of the necessary role of emotion in religious experience and the affective nature of religious practice. The edifying moral and existential value of religion, understood in terms of its capacity to guide action and lend purpose to one's life, clearly emerged as dependent upon an emotionally toned participation in religious practices within a shared community. Crucially, however, that value cannot be realized through a disinterested spectatorial stance; the sense that Wordsworth reported of a 'presence that disturbs', a 'sense sublime', is one that, as Cottingham explains, 'evades . . . detached scrutiny', of an objective, intellectualizing kind, because it is 'the fruit of a living commitment'.⁶⁰ Unless one can participate in religious practices and invest in them emotionally, the sort of 'living commitment' that Cottingham describes, and the affective and cognitive value it affords, remains unavailable.

The last two sections have stressed the essentially emotional and practical character of religious experience by appeal to and discussion of the work of Wynn and Cottingham. The moral and existential resources of a religion are available only at a certain level of understanding, which is itself dependent upon one's emotionally toned and practically engaged commitment to a religious life. But if that is the case, then cosmopolitan secularists, who are neither engaged in religious practices nor emotionally responsive to religious sensibilities and beliefs, cannot access and enjoy those resources, and the retention thesis emerges as untenable. Securing that claim is the aim of the next, and final, section.

Securing the charge

Since much ground has been covered, it is worth summarizing the discussion so far. The initial problem is that the cosmopolitan secularists' concession that religious beliefs are of deep moral and existential value is in tension with the judgement that those beliefs rest on false metaphysical claims and generate epistemic dissent, and should therefore be rejected. A religious believer must be given equal or greater resources for making sense of their lives, else they should, pragmatically and rationally, stick to their beliefs. Kitcher therefore proposes what I called the 'retention thesis', that cosmopolitan secularists could, in fact, consult and draw upon the moral and existential resources of a range of religious and secular traditions, thereby suffering no loss or diminishment of the resources available to them for the living of good and meaningful lives. My objection is that a capacity to access and employ the moral and existential resources of a religion are crucially premised upon a degree of understanding that is, itself, dependent upon one's emotionally toned participation in its practices and communities. To unpack that claim, let me emphasize four of its aspects.

First, cosmopolitan secularism relies upon a facile conception of the nature of religious commitment and understanding because it neglects the essential role of emotional-practical engagement. Understanding a religious life and what it can offer requires the unification of 'disparate areas of our human experience, emotional as well as intellectual, practical as well as theoretical, embracing the inner world of self-reflection as well as the outer world of empirical inquiry'.⁶¹ Such understanding is, of course, difficult, and an obvious purpose of religious practices and communities is to provide the appropriate sorts of contexts and environments within which such unification and self-reflection can take place. Put bluntly, it's *difficult* to achieve that understanding, requiring as it does 'initiation into traditions, practices and cultural contexts' that demand 'effort, imagination, and intelligence'.⁶² To suppose that the full or deep moral and existential value of a particular religion can be accessed without either sincere emotional investment or disciplined engagement in its practices should, then, appear as untenable.

Second, a concern arises that a cosmopolitan secularist cannot, in fact, appreciate the moral and existential role and value that a person's religion has for them. 'How', asks Kitcher, 'can voices celebrating secularism understand what many other people stand to lose if their arguments are correct?'⁶³ Following Wynn, it strikes me that, in fact, many secularists *cannot* understand what religious persons stand to lose, for their own moral needs and existential concerns are simply too different from those of secularists. To live a life filled with the love of God is not, in my judgement, something that an ardent atheist can actually appreciate or understand; so when an atheist like Richard Dawkins remarks that his 'view of life', 'bleak and cold though it can seem', in fact affords 'deep refreshment', he testifies to his incomprehension of the sorts of moral and existential

needs felt by religious persons.⁶⁴ Of course, a secularist might object that the theistic belief in question is grounded in psychosocial needs of a perfectly familiar sort, but that response neglects what Cottingham calls the ‘ethical psychology of religious belief’. The fact that theists might have distinctive existential needs does not, of course, entail the truth of their beliefs – certainly not – but it does underline the point that their moral and existential needs cannot be presumptively equated with those of their secular naturalist peers. A person who is cognitively closed to the very possibility of the existence of divine beings will find it difficult, if not impossible, to comprehend the sense of moral and existential confidence that certain forms of theistic belief afford – of what a life lived in the presence of God is like.

Third, cosmopolitan secularists might be limited in their ability to design or develop secular surrogates for providentialist and supernatural religious beliefs. Cottingham warns that, for those with the requisite religious sensibilities, the very idea of a life ‘lived in a Godless universe, without any of the supporting structures of religion to bolster faith in the power of goodness’, would, as Camus put it, offer nothing but ‘the refusal to hope and the unyielding evidence of a life without consolation’.⁶⁵ But unless a person shares those sensibilities or ‘spiritual impulses’, they will find it difficult to be moved by those worries, for the sense of ‘godlessness’ that Cottingham invokes will not resonate with them. Those sorts of moral and existential concerns cannot, as James once put it, ‘grow hot and alive’ within them, and of course it is frightfully difficult to develop adequate responses to problems and concerns that one does not fully understand.⁶⁶ A cosmopolitan secularist simply might not find that contemplation of the idea of a godless universe elicits a powerful affective response in them, for they will not feel the sense of ‘terror’ and ‘vertigo’ which, for John McDowell, attends the thought that human beliefs and concepts ‘rest on nothing more’ than contingent ‘forms of life’.⁶⁷ If so, their capacity to respond is impaired, and the cosmopolitan secularist who hopes to provide surrogates for the beliefs that guard the Christian or Muslim against existential ‘vertigo’ will find that they lack the form or depth of understanding required for the task. Instead, they may applaud Isaiah Berlin’s remark that, ‘As for the meaning of life, I do not believe that it has any . . . and this is a source of great comfort to me’, such that anyone who resists this fact, and ‘seek for some deep cosmic all-embracing . . . libretto or God are . . . pathetically mistaken’.⁶⁸ But clearly Berlin speaks for only some human beings, and it is obvious that many persons do need some ‘deep cosmic’ grounds for their sense of the meaningfulness of their lives; whether they are right to feel a need for such ‘measure’ is another question, but it is, still, one that Berlin or a cosmopolitan secularist ought to take seriously.⁶⁹

Fourth, the absence of those ‘affectively toned’ needs in many secular persons also compromises their capacity to understand and appreciate religious praxis, and hence the lived experience of a religious life. Consider Kitcher’s rejection of

what he calls the 'myth' of moral expertise, the claim that 'there are experts who can answer ethical questions', such as religious teachers who have access to 'the will of a being who sets the rules'.⁷⁰ Certainly some persons genuinely lack a sense of the need for ethical instruction, but many religious persons, of course, do deeply feel it, and would suffer from its absence; however, a need for ethical authorities – for priests or sages, say – is not a matter of a person's personal cognitive confidence (although it can sometimes be that), but can instead reflect that person's sense that there is an *order* to reality, which they must seek and understand if their life is to be a good and meaningful one. To borrow a Daoist idiom, such people will feel that their way through the world must be aligned with the Way of the world, but that is not a conviction that will be compelling – or perhaps even intelligible – to a person who does not share either the sense of there being any 'order' or 'way' to follow, nor the related sense of a need to align oneself with it.⁷¹

Here, then, are four aspects of cosmopolitan secularism that should undermine the idea that it has the resources adequately to understand the moral and existential needs of religious persons, and hence to provide surrogates for the religious beliefs that, at present, do fulfil them. The rich moral and existential resources of religion only become available, especially in their deeper forms, through forms of religious understanding premised upon emotional-practical commitment of a sort that is not possible for a cosmopolitan secularist, and would not be possible for anyone in a secular society from which religious communities and traditions were absent. No doubt some of the moral and existential resources of the world's religions would be available to the members of a future cosmopolitan secular society, perhaps in the form of stirring moral parables or heartening reiterations of accepted tables of the virtues; but the full range and richness of those resources would still be unavailable, occluded, or at best be available in diminished or imperfect forms. The retention thesis should therefore be rejected, and the cosmopolitan secularist ought to look elsewhere for plausible surrogates for the moral and existential resources currently offered by the world's religions. I hope that the ideas expressed here will help them in their search.⁷²

References

- CAMUS, A. ([1955] 2000) *The Myth of Sisyphus*, J. O'Brien (tr.) (Harmondsworth: Penguin).
- CARLISLE, C. (2006) *Kierkegaard: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Continuum).
- COOPER, D. E. (2002) *The Measure of Things: Humanism, Humility, and Mystery* (Oxford: Clarendon Press).
- (2005) 'Life and meaning', *Ratio*, 18, 125–137.
- (2009a) 'Mystery, World, and Religion', in J. Cornwell & M. McGhee (eds) *Philosophers and God: On the Frontiers of Faith and Reason* (London: Continuum), 51–62.
- (2009b) 'Visions of Philosophy', in A. O'Hear (ed.) *Conceptions of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1–13.
- (2010) 'Edification and the experience of beauty', in W. Keping (ed.) *Diversity and Universality in Aesthetics* (Beijing: Institute for Transcultural Studies), 62–80.

- (2012) *Convergence with Nature: A Daoist Perspective* (Dartington: Green Books).
- COTTINGHAM, J. (2003) *On the Meaning of Life* (London: Routledge).
- (2005) *The Spiritual Dimension: Religion, Philosophy, and Human Value* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- (2008) 'The Good Life and the "Radical Contingency of the Ethical"', in D. Callcut (ed.) *Reading Bernard Williams* (London: Routledge), 25–43.
- DAWKINS, R. (2004) *A Devil's Chaplain: Reflections on Hope, Lies, Science, and Love* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt).
- DEWEY, J. (1934) *A Common Humanity* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press).
- GRAHAM, G. (2009) 'Religion and Theology', in J. Cornwall & M. McGhee (eds) *Philosophers and God: At the Frontiers of Faith and Reason* (London: Continuum), 217–230.
- IGNATIEFF, M. (1998) *Isaiah Berlin: A Life* (London: Random House).
- JAMES, W. (1902) *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Longman, Green and Co.).
- KENNY, A. (1987) *The God of the Philosophers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- KIDD, I. J. (2012a) 'A phenomenological challenge to "enlightened secularism"', *Religious Studies*, doi:10.1017/S0034412512000327.
- (2012b) 'Receptivity to mystery', *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 4, 51–68.
- (forthcoming a) 'Epistemic vices in public debate: the case of "new atheism"', in C. Cotter & P. Quadrio (eds) *New Atheism's Legacy: Critical Perspectives from Philosophy and the Social Sciences* (Dordrecht: Springer).
- (forthcoming b) 'Is naturalism bleak?', *Environmental Values*.
- KIERKEGAARD, S. (1956) *Purity of Heart is One Thing*, D. V. Steere (tr.) (New York: Harper & Row).
- KITCHER, P. (2001) *Science, Truth, and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- (2005) 'The Many-Sided Conflict Between Science and Religion', in W. E. Mann (ed.) *The Blackwell Guide to the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell), 266–282.
- (2007a) 'Darwin and democracy', *Crosscurrents*, 56, 19–37.
- (2007b) *Joyce's Kaleidoscope: An Invitation to 'Finnegan's Wake'* (New York: Oxford University Press).
- (2007c) *Living with Darwin: Evolution, Design, and the Future of Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- (2008) 'Science, religion, and democracy', *Episteme: A Journal of Social Epistemology*, 5, 5–18.
- (2011a) 'Challenges for secularism', in G. Levine (ed.) *The Joy of Secularism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 24–56.
- (2011b) 'Militant modern atheism', *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 28, 1–13.
- (2011c) 'Philosophy inside out', *Metaphilosophy*, 42, 248–260.
- (2011d) *Science in a Democratic Society* (New York: Prometheus Books).
- KITCHER, P. & R. SCHACHT (2004) *Finding an Ending: Reflections on Wagner's 'Ring'* (New York: Oxford University Press).
- MCDOWELL, J. (1998) 'Non-cognitivism and rule-following', in his *Mind, Value, and Reality* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press), 198–218.
- NERLICH, G. (1989) *Values and Valuing: Speculations on the Ethical Lives of Persons* (Oxford: Clarendon Press).
- TAYLOR, C. (2007) *A Secular Age* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press).
- WORDSWORTH, W. ([1798] 1984) 'Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey', in *William Wordsworth: A Critical Edition of the Major Works*, S. Gill (ed.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 89–100.
- WYNN, M. (2005) *Emotional Experience and Religious Understanding: Integrating Perception, Conception, and Feeling* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Notes

1. See, *inter alia*, Kitcher (2007c), (2008), (2011a), (2011b), (2011c).
2. Kitcher (2011a), 24.
3. Kitcher (2001).
4. Kitcher (2011d).
5. See, for instance, his remarks on the need for a secular public reason and a 'radical transformation' in social environment in Kitcher (2011b), 12–13ff.
6. See Kitcher (2001), chs 1–5.
7. Kitcher (2008), 14.
8. For a critical discussion of the New Atheists' inability to appreciate the existential role of religious belief, see Kidd (forthcoming a).

9. Kitcher (2008), 10.
10. *Ibid.*, 12.
11. Kitcher (2007c), 160. The pragmatist aspect of Kitcher's work is not accidental, for much of his work on science, society, and secularism is inspired by the work of John Dewey (1934), and his next book is entitled *Preludes to Pragmatism*.
12. Taylor (2007), 160.
13. Kitcher (2007c), 161–162.
14. *Ibid.*, 162.
15. See Kitcher (2008), 8f.
16. The very idea that one could purport to embrace the moral teachings of the world's religions without also accepting the metaphysics is complicated and won't, for reasons of space, be addressed here; but for the record it strikes me as implausible – for instance, the Buddhist ethical virtue of compassion (*karuna*) is not separable from the idea of *dukkha* as a 'Mark of Existence'. But that is a matter for another paper.
17. Kitcher (2011d), 60 n. 10.
18. Kitcher (2008), 9. On the 'Enlightenment case against religion', see Kitcher (2005).
19. Kitcher (2011a), 24, 45.
20. Kitcher (2008), 10.
21. *Ibid.*, 8. Elsewhere, Kitcher (2007c, 7–8) offers other examples, including some Buddhist teachings and certain of the devotional practices of Christianity and Judaism, as well as in literary and musical sources like the works of James Joyce and Richard Wagner; see Kitcher (2007b) and Kitcher & Schacht (2004).
22. Kitcher (2007c), 154.
23. *Ibid.*, 161. See further Kitcher (2011c).
24. Taylor (2007), 22.
25. Kitcher (2008), 7.
26. Kitcher (2007a), 30.
27. Kitcher (2007c), 154.
28. I owe this handy phrase to an anonymous referee.
29. See Kidd (2012a) and Kidd (forthcoming b) for further lines of criticism of Kitcher's cosmopolitan secularism, focusing on his account of the nature of religious belief, and his presumption of the uniformity of human existential needs, respectively.
30. Wynn (2005).
31. *Ibid.*, xi.
32. Perhaps oddly, the philosophy of religion has neglected the significance of emotion, too often treating religiosity as cool intellectual assent to propositional claims. Many religious figures have also criticized claims concerning the role of emotional experience in religious knowledge and understanding; see *ibid.*, ch. 7.
33. Cottingham (2005), 84, 173. A student of mine put it nicely: 'It's like when you're hot for someone, you can't really be cool about it, being cool just isn't appropriate in that situation. Cool just isn't how you feel'.
34. Nerlich (1989), 164, quoted in Wynn (2005), 82.
35. Wynn (2005), 154.
36. Cooper (2009b), 13.
37. Kierkegaard (1956), 184, my italics.
38. Carlisle (2006), 67.
39. Wynn (2005), 146.
40. James (1902), 431.
41. Wynn (2005), 150.
42. *Ibid.*, 133.
43. Cottingham (2005), x.
44. Wynn (2005), 101.
45. *Ibid.*, 147.
46. Cottingham (2005), 80.

47. Cottingham notes, for example, that: '[t]o anyone brought up on the classic curriculum of canonical texts in the philosophy of religion, the parallel between religious knowledge and the kind of knowledge involved in emotional relationships may seem anathema'. See Cottingham (2005), 11.
48. *Ibid.*, 5–6 and 105f.
49. *Ibid.*, 80.
50. Graham (2009), 229.
51. Cottingham (2005), 163.
52. It is interesting to note that none of the terms 'affect', 'emotion', or 'feeling' appear anywhere in Kenny (1987).
53. Cottingham (2005), 8 and 12.
54. *Ibid.*, 15 and 16.
55. See Kidd (2012b) for a discussion of the difficulties attending the cultivation of one feature of a religious life, namely 'receptivity to mystery'.
56. Cottingham (2005), 16–17. See further Cottingham (2008).
57. Cottingham (2005), 12 and 14.
58. *Ibid.*, 16.
59. *Ibid.*, 126.
60. *Ibid.*, 138. Cottingham is quoting Wordsworth ([1798] 1984).
61. *Ibid.*, x.
62. Cooper (2010), 63–64.
63. Kitcher (2011d), 211.
64. Dawkins (2004), 13.
65. Cottingham (2003), 71. The Camus quotation is from Camus ([1955] 2000), 59.
66. James (1902), 193.
67. McDowell (1998), 212 and 207.
68. Ignatieff (1998), 279.
69. For a sophisticated argument for the claim that human beings necessarily require 'measure' for the meaningfulness of their lives, and that it is 'hubris' for them to deny that need, see Cooper (2002), (2005), and (2009a).
70. Kitcher (2011d), 257.
71. On Daoism, see Cooper (2012).
72. I offer my thanks to Simon James, Jonathan Winthrop, the Editor, and an anonymous referee for very helpful comments on this article.