THE RELATIONSHIP OF PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION

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ABSTRACT

Philosophy is the love of wisdom and religion has had a significant role in human history. This article investigates the relationship between the religious quest and the philosophical pursuit in the light of two sub-themes, namely, the philosophy of religion and religious pluralism. The article begins with an overview of the historical connection between Christian thought and philosophy in the West. To illustrate and explain this connection more effectively, the author presents arguments for the existence of God and discusses religious pluralism as illustrative examples of the 'philosophy of religion'. The article concludes by saying that the role of philosophy is to clarify the exact nature of religious identity to prevent it from becoming an exclusive attitude that militates against civilizational dialogue and religious harmony.

Keywords: Philosophy, religion, Christianity, existence of God, pluralism, critical thinking

INTRODUCTION

The term 'philosophy' derives from the Greek phrase *philo sophia* that means 'love of wisdom'. The task of philosophy has been described as "a rational examination of reality as a whole, aiming at a systematic set of universal maxims, principles or beliefs" (Richmond, 1966). At the same time, it is affirmed that no subject "has exercised as profound a role in human history as religion" (Pojman, 2001). Arguably, the quest for wisdom lies also at the heart of the religious impulse. Humanity has ever looked beyond itself in order to find answers about itself – whence we have come; whether we are going; how we should live; and so on. In virtually all the great civilizations and cultures of humankind, philosophy has arisen to ask the grand questions, and religion has very often been seen as providing the grand answers.

Love of and desire for wisdom has led humankind into various religious pathways and a myriad of intellectual pursuits. These can be seen as quite independent, even

mutually exclusive; they can equally be regarded as in principle interdependent, or at least not incompatible. The religious quest and the philosophical pursuit – each with a goal of wisdom, whether theoretical or applied – do not have to be at loggerheads. But philosophy, especially in its Greek-derived western modalities, tends to ask probing, critical, and analytical questions which require careful consideration and cautious answering. And the search for wisdom has led beyond the realms of grand speculative thought into spheres of empirical investigation and reflection, and so to the rise of the sciences. The love of wisdom leads to an open-ended search for knowledge and truth.

As a sub-set intellectual inquiry in the pursuit of wisdom, the philosophy of religion can be undertaken, broadly speaking, in either or both of two modes: as an exercise in philosophy itself, where religion happens to be the subject-matter; or as an exercise in religious thought that makes use of philosophy as an intellectual tool in the service of its own ends. Within those two, there can be a variety of methodological applications – logic, analytical philosophy, the philosophy of language, phenomenology, and so on. I shall now provide a brief historical sketch of the interaction of Christian thought with the philosophical quest in the West. Then I shall discuss two items – the classical ontological argument for the existence of God and the contemporary issue of religious pluralism. These may be regarded as illustrative examples of the philosophy of religion in action and a demonstration of how philosophy and religion exist in a form of asymmetrical symbiotic correlation.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

In the West, the emerging intellectual development of Christianity can be seen to have given rise, broadly speaking, to four major trends or tensions in respect to the love of and search for wisdom, and its relation to the religious quest. With regard to the essential dynamics inherent in these trends, the first discernible trend was to pitch the wisdom of God against human wisdom and conclude that the latter is subordinate to the former. In the early centuries of Christianity, there were leading thinkers who spurned the validity of philosophical and speculative thought on the grounds that true knowledge could only be given and apprehended through divine revelation. Tertullian (c.160-c.220CE), for example, objected to philosophy as ‘the root of heresy’ and posed the rhetorical question: “What is there in common between Athens and Jerusalem? What is the difference between the Academy and the Church?”

At the same time, there were other Christian thinkers, schooled in the philosophy of the day, who advocated a fruitful symbiotic relation between philosophical and religious thinking. They attempted to counter the apparent inherent tension as expressed by Tertullian, yet still maintain the priority of revelation. For example, Justin Martyr (c.100-c.165CE) and Clement of Alexandria (c.150-c.215CE) happily accepted the place of philosophy in their religious thought. Nevertheless, for quite a time – and, in some quarters, still maintained today – revealed knowledge was, in effect, everything; human ratiocination could at best only support and promote it, but in no way could contend with, or supplant, it.

Later, in the course of what we term the Middle Ages in the West, a second major trend emerged. This was to advocate philosophical endeavor as a parallel intellectual activity directly supportive of theology: the role of human wisdom was to discern, within the natural realm and by way of the application of reason, the evidence and corroboration of what revealed knowledge already declared. The wisdom of God still contrasted with human wisdom, of course; but human wisdom – that is, philosophical thinking – was here regarded as having a proper God-given role to play. The intention of the Christian scholastics of this era – importantly, at times engaged in fruitful interaction with Jewish and Muslim intellectuals – was to demonstrate the veracity and value of revealed knowledge, and to deepen human understanding of it.

The intention was to complement, even honor, divine revelation by way of the best application of human thinking to it. The 13th century scholastic philosopher John Duns Scotus (c.1266 – 1308CE), for example, employed in his endeavors resources from Aristotle as read through the Muslim scholar Ibn Rushd (Averroës, 1126-1198 CE), together with Christian Augustinian and Islamic Neo-Platonic sources. Significantly, ahead of Duns Scotus, it is Averroës who is acknowledged in the West as the greatest commentator on the ancient Greek philosopher, Aristotle. The impact of his work upon the development of the modern philosophical tradition in the West, as well as of theology, especially in terms of the contribution a century later of Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274CE), cannot be underestimated. Throughout the Middle Ages, the love of wisdom – philosophy – was pursued as the handmaiden to theology: the exposition of the truth, or Word, of God.

However, in as much as recourse to Aristotelian thought opened the way to engage in empirical investigation and analysis, and critical reflection thereon, a third trend emerged. This was the secularization of the quest for wisdom. It came about in the

context of the Renaissance and early modern periods in the West, culminating with the Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*) of the 18th century. This development had to do, by and large, with the rise of tensions between the presumed decrees of revelation on the one hand, and the findings and conclusions that the human search for wisdom was now arriving at, on the other. Such tensions were not just a matter of intellectual angst; they famously issued in the rather one-sided power struggles that took place between the authorities of the Church – as the guardian of the wisdom of God – and those scientists and thinkers who dared to challenge the received truth of that wisdom and so the authority of the guardian.

The case of the astronomer and physicist, Galileo Galilei, who spanned the 16th and 17th centuries (1564–1642 CE), is perhaps one of the more famous. Those who pursued the love of wisdom often found themselves at odds with those who promoted the love of God – even when they themselves also professed their love of God. Out of such tension and dispute, the ground was laid for the emergence of the now virtual standard presumption, from some quarters at least, of an inherent clash between science and religion. The relatively new pursuit in the human love of wisdom (i.e., science) is regarded, in this view, as competing with religion not just as the domain of belief, but as the repository of revealed knowledge – divine wisdom – as such.

In respect to the modern age (i.e., from the 18th century onwards) we may discern a fourth broad trend, one which has emerged parallel to the tension between science and religion, and indeed between philosophy as a secularized discipline and theology as a religious-confessional pursuit. This trend seeks to recover anew something of the earlier attempts to advocate for a positive and fruitful relationship between love of God and love of wisdom; between the idea of transcendent reality and revelation on the one hand, and the immediacy of lived reality and the empirical investigation of that, on the other. We might think of this trend as the recovery of genuine philosophical thinking about religion. It is by no means non-contentious. But it is certainly being pursued. It emerged first by the name of ‘natural theology’ and more recently as ‘philosophical theology’.

Both attempts to prove or demonstrate, by rational means alone, certain essential truths of religion; both are intellectual engagements in pursuit of what St Anselm called “faith seeking understanding” (*fides quaerens intellectum*). Both attempt to resolve the otherwise tension between faith and philosophy by promoting the application of philosophical reasoning and critical scrutiny to advance religious

ideals and ideas (cf. the Islamic concept of *deen*). Sometimes this is loosely referred to as the philosophy of religion; but it is by no means the dominant dimension within the philosophy of religion. Yet it certainly sits squarely alongside all other dimensions and today there are some serious attempts being made to advocate for a new era of philosophical thinking about, and inquiry into, religious questions and issues. And so we proceed from a consideration of philosophy to thinking about the philosophy of religion.

PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

Philosophers may discuss religious issues, or analyze and critique religion from philosophical premises; theologians may discuss religion philosophically, using the tools and language of particular philosophical schools. At the level of intellectual discipline, religion and philosophy may meet; but theology is not philosophy, neither is it philosophy of religion. So, what, then, is the philosophy of religion?

Mark Jordan speaks of it in terms of undertaking "philosophical analyses of certain concepts or tenets central to the monotheistic Western religions" (Jordan, p. 759). Subject matter that falls within the philosophy of religion has been at various times denoted as 'metaphysics' or simply 'philosophy' (so the ancient Greeks); as 'wisdom', 'holy teaching', 'theology' (so early Christian and medieval scholars); and in the modern period as 'natural theology' or sometimes as 'natural religion', as we have noted. But in the Western intellectual tradition, the counterpoint of skepticism and the application of critical reasoning to the field of religion also have a venerable heritage that stretches back into the ancient classical Greek world.

The Pre-Socratics were noted for criticizing anything that appeared implausible or contradictory and of proposing 'natural' causes in place of the supernatural, and attempting to understand the divine *per se* on rational grounds. On the other hand, Plato and Aristotle each offered their own rational defense of the religious tradition, critiques of religious sceptics and critics, and counters to atheistic arguments. They advocated for the quest of true illumination, the high goal of which was understood to be in accord with revelation such that, upon its achievement, the soul is led out from "the snares of sensory and especially political illusion" so as "to participate in the divine" by way of "various kinds of divine agency, including revelation and judgment" (Jordan, p. 760). Plato speaks of Deity as creative – the divine artisan who fashions the cosmos. And Aristotle later proposed an argument "for the existence of a divine first mover of the cosmos", and further held that "the

impossibility of infinite regress in motion requires that there be a fully actualized being who causes all other motions by being the universal object of desire" (Jordan, p. 760).
Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225-1274CE) would later develop this Aristotelian line of reasoning to change the trajectory of Christian thinking in the West forever.

Meanwhile, Platonic and Aristotelian thought were combined in various ways with Stoic philosophy, especially in advancing the powerful concept of divine providence in the face of misfortune. The Stoics held that physical processes were in the control of the divine mind. And both Judaism and Christianity early on made use of these philosophical trends in arguing for "the claims of revelation in philosophically articulate ways" (Jordan, p. 760). But it was the assumption and incorporation, into their own developing thought, of the ancient Greek philosophical traditions made by Muslim thinkers that set the scene for the eventual recovery by the West of this element of its own heritage, which had been all but lost during Europe's Dark Ages.

Thus, it should be noted that, whilst for a long time in the West the subject matter of philosophy of religion was regarded as being the concepts and tenets of Christianity, or perhaps the so-called 'Judeo-Christian tradition', in recent times – and in recognition of a genuine shared philosophical heritage – it is more common to find the inclusion of Islam, along with both Judaism and Christianity, either directly stated or clearly implied. Indeed, Jordan points out that from around the sixth century of the Common Era – that is, from the time of the inception of Islam as an historic religion – the intellectual field we call 'philosophy' was itself "subsumed within the three monotheistic religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam" (Jordan, p. 761).

> The most important thinkers of the three religions carried on teaching and wrote books that engaged the legacy of ancient philosophy powerfully and creatively… they understood their teaching and their writing not as philosophy, but as the study of divine law, as interpretation of divine revelation, as the codification and clarification of religious traditions… the aims of ancient philosophy had been met and decisively superseded in divine revelation (Jordan, p. 761).

For a thousand years (500-1500 CE, approx.), the focus of much religious intellectual endeavor within the Judeo-Christian-Islamic world was, in effect, "devoted to considering questions about God" such that, in the writings of many

scholars, "the conversion or ascent from philosophy to faith" was the central concern; although for others philosophy was regarded as simply a four-runner – "a propaedeutic to faith grasped and expressed as theology" (Jordan, p. 761).

In the Renaissance and early modern periods the religious "opposition to the philosophical implications of new science made philosophic authors cautious in expressing their views" (Jordan, p. 762). One can think here of a René Descartes or a Baruch Spinoza. In the late modern (i.e. Enlightenment) period, we find such figures as David Hume, Immanuel Kant and G.W.F. Hegel who acted both as philosophical critics and re-interpreters of religion. Their impact upon western sensibilities has been profound: intellectually, they opened the door to expressly atheistic philosophers – Karl Marx, Arthur Schopenhauer, and Friedrich Nietzsche, for example.

During the 20th century, the sub-field of philosophy of religion emerged within the broad discipline of Western philosophy, which had come no longer to have God or religion as its premier topic: philosophy seemingly attended to everything else but religion. Yet not anymore; religion – as opposed to theology – emerged by the middle of the 20th century as a worthy field of study in its own right; the world of academic philosophy began to pay attention again. Of course, religion has always been important: "No other subject has exercised as profound a role in human history as religion" (Pojman 2001, p. 1). And today religion is center-stage in so many respects; its place within the field of philosophical endeavor is without doubt.

So, in broad terms, as stated above, philosophy of religion can be undertaken in one or both of two ways: as an exercise in philosophy, with religion as the subject matter; or as an exercise in religious thought, making use of philosophy as an intellectual tool. It can embrace a wide diversity of topics and a spread of intellectual interests, with a number of methodological approaches at its disposal. At the very least, it involves the critical examination of the meaning and justification of religious claims. Charles Taliaferro notes that the "breadth of topics that are now addressed in philosophy of religion is wider than at any earlier time" (Taliaferro 1999, p. 1). Indeed, the philosophy of religion field, even before it was named as such, had "a central place in the history of philosophy" and it "continues to have an enduring place in the West and the East as part of a philosophy curriculum and general education" (Taliaferro 1999, p. 2).

At the same time, it is argued that

> The field of the philosophy of religion today is both novel and historical. It is historical insofar as questions that propelled earlier inquiry are now seen as fitting topics for cutting-edge philosophy. It is novel not just, because fresh arguments are advanced that bear on historically important topics, also, because there are new issues (Taliaferro 1999, p. 4).

So, if the philosophy of religion is an exercise in thinking critically and carefully about religion, what, precisely is its subject matter? What constitutes the range of topics within the field? Philosophy of religion typically includes examining "the rationality of belief in God, the demonstrability of God's existence, the logical character of religious language, and apparent contradictions between divine attributes and features of the world" among others (Jordan, p. 759). In particular, this may include critically discussing divine attributes such as the omnipotence, omniscience, and the omni-benevolence of God; investigating the relationship between natural law and the idea of miracles; or exploring the place of rational free will in respect to the all-powerful deity, and so forth (cf. Abernathy & Langford 1968; Pojman 2003; Taliaferro 2005).

Indeed, given that the foundation of the philosophy of religion lies in the philosophical thinking about God that has predominated through the centuries, and which is most often the starting point for philosophy of religion *per se*, the topic of 'God' is most typically the first port-of-call in any teaching programmed. As the Oxford philosopher Richard Swinburne has remarked, given the "central claim of Western religions is the existence of God" two major philosophical questions immediately arise: "Can a coherent account be given of what it means to say that there is a God, and, if it can, are there good reasons to show that there is or that there is not such a God?" (Swinburne, p. 763). There is, of course, a long tradition of arguments supporting the existence of God – most are based on observable phenomena the explanation of which, or implications derived from, point to the necessary existence of the Divine Being. Such arguments are assessed based on their being deductive, inductive, or abductive[1] and arguments for are weighed against arguments opposed.

[1] On distinguishing the different forms of argument: inductive argument = inferring by extension from limited evidence; deductive argument = drawing the (obvious) conclusion from the evidence; abductive argument = applying the best explanation.

A classic anthology of readings used as a textbook in the latter part of the 20th century began with a section exploring the foundational question: What is religion? The general issue of the relation of philosophy to religion comprised the second topic, with explorations of issues in relation to the problem of the existence of God as the third. Then followed the issue of epistemology – how God is known – and the topics of religious language, evil, immortality and final destiny (*eschatology*). The renowned English theologian and philosopher of religion, John Hick, also contributed a seminal textbook that was highly regarded and well utilized (Hick, 1973). His nine chapters ranged over the concept of God; grounds for belief in God; grounds for not believing; the relationship between revelation and faith; problems of language and of verification; ultimate destiny from the perspective of both Western and Eastern religious traditions; and an early exploration of the problem of conflicting truth-claims across the different religions.

Along with such recent wide-ranging 'classics', there are books that have focused on more specialized topics, such as the issue of a philosophical approach to religion as such (Hudson, 1974), the question of religious language (Jeffner) and issues concerning the concept and existence of God (Rosenkrantz, 2002). There is also a plethora of works on the subject of religious diversity, or plurality, to which I shall return below. Major recent textbooks encompass such topics as the classical arguments for the existence of God; the more recent argument based on religious experience; divine attributes; the issue of evil and the response of theodicy to it; miracles; revelation; personal identity, death and immortality; the relation of faith to reason; religion and ethics; religion and science; religious pluralism. Together with a very useful analogy, Louis Pojman has published a very helpful sole-authored text, which traverses much of the contemporary field of the philosophy of religion (Pojman, 2001). This range is reflected in the teaching of philosophy of religion courses that might begin with a consideration of the nature of the sub-discipline itself then move on to a review of various conceptual ideas that have been applied to God and an introductory discussion of miracles as a philosophical issue. It will typically traverse the three classical arguments for the existence of God – cosmological, teleological, and ontological – and explore issues of religious language and experience. The attributes of God – especially those of omniscience, omnipotence, and perfection – would receive close attention, as would the subject of religious pluralism. The place of reason, debates about religion and science, the question of evil and the subjects of death and immortality, as well as religion and ethics, would also be included.

THE ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

There are, broadly speaking, two types of arguments in support of the existence of God. One is empirical or *a posteriori* – it adduces evidence from the world around or from human experience – and attempts to draw clear conclusions about the nature and existence of God. The other is non-empirical and works rather by attending to the logical implication of concepts that are taken to be axiomatic. Put another way, these *a priori* arguments, as they are called, seek to arrive at a clear conclusion by examining the definitions involved. In the case of philosophical thinking about God, the Ontological argument is an example of this latter type and famous for attempting to demonstrate that God must exist *necessarily*. The term 'ontological' has to do with 'ontology', which refers to the study of 'being' as such; or, in this case, as applied to the being of God. But it is not just to do with the sheer fact of being.

It involves the association of value with being. Thus, the ontological argument is an argument for the existence of God based upon an analysis of God's being in respect to the value of supremacy, or greatness. This 'supreme being-ness' is taken as inherent to the definition of God, hence the idea that, by analyzing the definition, one can grasp the reality or 'being' of God as such.

The ontological argument hinges on the idea that the predicates (or adjectival descriptors – in this case 'powerfulness' 'knowingness' and 'goodness') of God are ascribed to the maximum degree. The argument received its classical formulation in the hands of the 11th century scholar Anselm (1033-1109CE). He lived around the same time as the great Muslim scholar al-Ghazali (1058/9-1111CE), and may well have been influenced by Islamic thought. For, in essence, his argument could just as easily be called the 'Akbar' argument: the foundational premise of the argument is the greatness of God – in Anselm's words 'that than which nothing greater can be thought', or *Allah-hu Akbar*.

> Anselm began with the assumption that even those who deny God's existence must have some idea what the word "God" means. Otherwise, how could they know what they are denying? If atheists and skeptics know what "God" means, then God exists in their understandings. Among other things, everyone understands God to be "something than which nothing greater can be thought." We cannot conceive of anything greater than God can. Anselm further assumed that it is greater to exist in reality than merely to exist in the understanding (Placher, p. 142).

In a nutshell, philosophy of religion offers an argument for the necessary existence of God that is compatible with both Christian and Muslim – and Jewish and any other monotheistic – thought. Although the argument as first formulated has been subject to various criticisms, mainly of a logical or formal nature, the argument has attracted renewed interest and contemporary reformulation in recent decades. But let us turn now to the second illustrative item, religious pluralism.

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

Scholars such as Gary Bouma describe our "twenty-first-century postmodern and secular world where spirituality are rife and religious diversity is an accepted feature" of our multi-cultural world (Bouma, p. 1). The context of contemporary religious life is without doubt that of plurality: one cannot with intellectual integrity claim that one's own religion is the only valid one. one's own faith as the only valid or true religion and thereby deny all others. We must try to understand other religions and their relationship with our own. As John Hick (2001, Preface) puts it: "How can we best understand the fact that there is not just one but a plurality of great world religions?" Can all religions be considered as equal in validity? Do all religions have the same goal? If so, how could this goal be described? Are the different religions simply different ways to reach that single goal? We must respond to the question of religious exclusivism and also the question of inclusivism where one religion claims that all other religions must submit to its own way of understanding religious plurality. Thus, John Hick remarks as follows:

> All world religions claim to be paths to a supremely good fulfillment in relation to the ultimate transcendent reality. Are none of the religions such paths because there is no such reality and no such fulfillment; or only one's own; or several of them to some extent but not so fully as one's own; or are they all, so far as we can tell, equally such paths? This last is the pluralist view (Hick 2001, Preface).

Religious plurality does not demand the denial of our own difference and distinctness but it is ready to enter into relationships with those belonging to other religions (cf. Griffiths, 2001). Hick's addressing the issue of a philosophy of religious plurality is no arm-chair speculation; it springs from the experience of living together with peoples of other faiths (Hick, 1995). Engaging with the fact of plurality precedes the advocacy of pluralism as a modality of apprehending, or contending with, the fact. Debates about religious pluralism have largely arisen from

within a Christian context, but they necessarily impact upon all other religions which likewise must contend with this irreducible reality.

Philosophically speaking, 'pluralism' denotes a paradigm, or set of paradigms, that have to do with multiple identities of the particular with the universal (Pratt, 2005). That is to say, pluralism may be defined as the general philosophical idea that each and every particular is an equally valid expression of the universal to which the particulars collectively relate. In the case of religion this means that different religions are equally valid expressions of 'religious reality' in the sense that specific religions – Islam, Christianity, Judaism, for example – all express the universal truth of religion. However, religious pluralism itself is no one thing but can be understood in a variety of different ways. Hick himself discusses only two paradigms, which are really variants of what has been taken by many as the single standard paradigm of pluralism, namely '*Common Ground*'. The other is '*Common Goal*' pluralism. With respect to religion, the former presumes an ultimate reality from which all religions spring, so to speak; the latter suggests all religions point to the same goal or ultimate destiny: there are many paths, all arriving at the same final point. The common goal is variously described within the different religions, relative to the way their own path toward it is understood and pursued.

Some critics of Hick, and some wanting to press beyond his own ideas, have suggested other ways, or paradigms, of thinking about pluralism, thus coming up with alternate paradigms for it. These paradigms endeavor to take serious cognizance of the plurality of religions as in some sense co-equally expressive of, or participants in, or components of, the universal reality that is named 'religion'; yet without diminishing the reality of distinctiveness and incommensurability of each. Hence, religions are not just variations on the same 'thing'; each is its own "thing"; each has its unique identity. Debate on this subject is by no means concluded. But the topic is a pressing one, for how civilizations contend with diverse religious identities and ideologies – plurality both between religions and plurality within religions – is now a major issue attracting attention at the highest level of many governments. For where unresolved plurality leads to rivalry and tension there may be found a seed-bed of extremism and a propensity for violence. Conversely, civilizational harmony requires some degree of mutual acceptance of plurality from the constituents of the plural mix.

What interests me, in particular, is the fact that on the one hand a measure of exclusivity is logically required for clarity of identity, and that clarity of identity is a

necessary prerequisite for dialogical engagement; yet, on the other hand, when taken to an extreme, exclusivity of identity militates against any sort of dialogical rapport by becoming exclusionary – and that is a hallmark of extreme religious fundamentalism, or perhaps better, "exclusive absolutism". So, the distinctive contemporary challenge is to clarify the exclusivity that adheres to proper religious identity as something distinct from the exclusion of religious exclusivism that is inimical of any validation of the 'other'. Here the work of the philosopher, as applied to the realm of religion, has the potential to impact significantly upon the field of civilizational dialogue and societal harmony.

CONCLUSION

If philosophy is the art of detailed examination of who we are, how we think and act, and so forth in a generic sense, the philosophy of religion is the field of applying philosophical acumen into that most important, ubiquitous, but also highly divisive and contentious sphere of human existence – religion. It is a commonplace of human experience that discussions and debates around religion often generate more heat of dissent than light of understanding. Religious discourse is all too often a volatile mix of well-intentioned but logically flawed argument based on unexamined and often incoherent premises, and the drawing therefrom of false conclusions.

Religions that espouse peaceful and harmonious living are at the same time the locus of intense passion and exclusive identities. These passions and identities often drive developments and conflicts within and between civilizations. Equally, there are depths of values and ranges of insight and perspective. As an academic exercise, the philosophy of religion is concerned with critical reflection, precise analysis and clear thinking. ■

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