
UNIT 1 DEFINITION AND SCOPE OF PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

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1.0. OBJECTIVES

- To initiate the students to the issues related to the philosophy of religion.
- To have a general understanding of religion and its philosophical studies.
- To understand the different ways of understanding religion and philosophy of religion.

1.1. INTRODUCTION

What is philosophy of religion? How do we define it? What is its scope? These are some of the issues we will be taking up in this unit. This unit attempts to introduce the students to some of the issues of philosophy of religion, including the definition of religion. Then it seeks to study the scope of religion.

1.2. PHILOSOPHY AS A COMMUNITY PROJECT

Etymologically, the word philosophy comes from two Greek words – *philos*, lover (or friend) and *Sophia*, wisdom. Philosophy then is “a love of wisdom” and the philosopher is a friend or a lover of it. Some important conclusion can already be drawn this fact. Philosophy is not the *possession* of wisdom, a philosopher is NOT a proud Mr Know-It-All, who has all of the answers to everyone’s question. He is a quester after truth, profoundly in love with *Sophia*, pursuing her, but never quite able to comprehend her elusive person. At most he touches her with his finger-tips, but she soon escapes his grasp. (I apologize for the sexiest-sounding implications of my

words: it would seem that I am implying only males can be philosophers – as I have reserved the pronoun “he” to indicate the philosopher. My only excuse is that I want to see the image of lever and the beloved frequently in this text and Sophia, besides being feminine in Greek, is a very common girls’ name in many languages.)

From this we could emphasize that humanity would be the first necessary qualification of any philosopher worth his/her salt. A philosopher is one who treks a weary, but ever so existing and adventure, way along paths less trod to an ever receding horizon. The truth is there, but is always, tantalizingly, just beyond his/her reach. A good philosopher leads us but one step nearer to the truth but is never so smug as to claim that we have ensured Dame Sophia once and for all in the meshes of human finite intelligence (Desbruslais 2000).

We might even go on add that philosophy must be a community project. There is only so much that an individual human mind can grasp. Reality is far too rich, far too complex to be stuffed into the slender limits of one individual brain, bet it that of Madame Curie or Professor Einstein. Besides, each of us approaches persons and things from our particular perspective (some have called this the “pre-understanding”), which comprises, among other things, our individual culture, our mother-tongue, family upbringing, religious background (even if we think we have rejected it long ago). All these, somehow or the other, influence (if not prejudice) our perceptions. It is impossible to take a totally natural, unbiased view of things: at best we can try to become progressively more aware of our “pre-understating” and give up native assumption about objectivity; I am, rather asking us to be on guard against hasty and presumptions assertions that we have come to plain, unvarnished and objective visions of reality. Whatever, it should be quite clear that none of us deliberately and willfully admits prejudices, into our perceptual make-up. People hold prejudices unconsciously, as a rule: once they become conscious of the fact that they have been nourishing prejudices, they give them up (assuming they have the honesty and courage to do so). But how can we become aware if our prejudices? Only by dialoguing with people of other backgrounds (other nations, other cultures, other creeds). If I isolate myself with people who think exactly as I do and never venture to meet people with other worldviews, I and my gang will simply confirm each other in way favorite prejudices and narrow-mindedness (Panikkar 1970).

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1. “Philosopher is not in possession of wisdom.” Comment.

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2. How can we be aware of our own prejudices?

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1.3 PHILOSOPHY AND SCIENCE

For quite some time, especially since the advent of the scientific age, philosophy has had a bad press. In fact, many philosophers themselves (including the “father of modern philosophy, Rene

Descartes (1596–1650) lamented because philosophy lacked the precision and certainty of themselves. At the turn of the last century Edmund Husserl (1859 – 1938) was still dreaming of a philosophy that would be an “exact science”, yielding unquestionable certainty based on indubitable evidence and proofs. And it does look as if philosophy is a kind of third rate disciple, since – as we have said above – it cannot give us guaranteed “once and for all” exact answers. But is this really such a blemish? Let us take a closer look at the issue (Desbruslais 2000).

If I may borrow an insight from the contemporary French existentialist thinker, Gabriel Marcel (1889–1973), we should make a clear distinction between problems and mysteries (even though, in popular speech we use them almost interchangeably): a problem is a question of which I am not a part, whereas a mystery is a question of which I am a part. For example, take the question, "What is the chemical composition of table salt?" I am not part of that question, so it is a problem. However, the question, "Is there such a thing as true love?" or "Is there life after death?"- these are mystery-questions because they concern me, personally. True love and life after death are issues with which my life is intimately bound up. Even the question, "Does God exist?" or even, "What is God like?" are mystery-questions - not because I am trying to say that I am part of God, but because if God exists then I would somehow be very intimately linked with the divinity. So far we've noted how problem and mystery differ from the point of view of the kind of question they ask. Let us move on to their answers.

Precisely because I am not part of a problem-question, I can detach myself from it, observe it objectively, submit it to experiments in the laboratory or elsewhere and, given enough time and equipment, work out a final, exhaustive, once-and-for-all answer. But I cannot do that with a mystery-question; inasmuch as I am part of it, I cannot detach myself from it any more than I can detach myself from myself. That is why I cannot, in principle, ever work out that kind of answer for a mystery. Science is busy with problems: that is why science can attain a high level of certainty and demonstration or proof (though even scientists, nowadays, are not so cocksure about their "certainties"). Philosophy (like theology and religion) is busy with mysteries and that is why it can, at best, throw some more light on the complexities of the issue; no more, It should be clear, critical and coherent (Panikkar 1979).

But this does not mean that philosophy (or theology, or religion) are irresponsible and whimsical subjects to be pursued by dilettantes according to their fads and fancies. Even if its responses cannot partake of that level of absolute certainty that the positive sciences (allegedly) claim, it has to be orderly, painstaking and observant as any other study. It has to be critical of its presuppositions and pre-understanding, submit all its reasoning to the strict canons of logic and so on. Philosophy is not a science, but it is a systematic scientific discipline (Desbruslais 2000).

1.4 UNDERSTANDING RELIGION

Religion is one of those words that dictionaries tell us have an unknown or doubtful etymology. There is a Latin word ‘religare’ (to tie up again) which is the closest contender for its source, but that is highly doubtful. Is this meant to tell us that religion is a set of rules and regulations that bind us up again, after the civil code has finished enmeshing us? This would imply a very legalistic and uninspiring understanding of religion, indeed - one that would hardly inspire much commitment from most of us. Theology is a kind of close relative of it and it means, literally, God-talk. In practice, however, theology is usually associated with the study of some allegedly revealed book. Thus, Christian theology takes off from the Bible, Jewish theology starts from the Torah, Islamic theology studies the Quran, Hindu theology delves into, say, the Gita and so on. However, it would not be quite correct to link all religions with some scripture claimed to be

divinely revealed, for there are many tribal religions without a "holy book" — other than the Great Book of Nature in which God stands revealed to His people. Indeed, not all religions even accept the notion of God. At least two religions, Jainism and one school of Buddhism reject the whole idea of God (i.e. they are aesthetic).

What, then, is the most basic idea common to all religions? It is the idea of the sacred. Various authors have tried to give a rough summary definition of this as the wholly other (*Ganz Andere*), the highly powerful (and hence dangerous - high voltage, do not touch.) and so on. In general, there seems to come a time when we suddenly become convinced that there is more to life than all that we can merely see or hear or touch or smell or feel. This can happen when one is caught up in the mystery of child-birth: when a young mother holds in her exhausted arms the first babe she is ever given birth to or when the proud and humbled father holds in his trembling arms his tiny firstborn; or when one stands on the seashore and contemplates the mighty ocean rolling back and forth; or when one is hushed by the panorama of natural and serene beauty that life exposed from lofty mountain-top; or ... in so many other cases where powerful emotions of love or anger or joy or resolve overwhelm us. Out of this arises the experience of the Sacred which some of us interpret merely as an aspect of ourselves ("the human shadow writ large") and others remind equally convinced that it is a genuine experience of the divine (Desbruslais 2000).

There is also the idea of salvation or liberation which is common to all religions, though it may be understood very differently. Don't we all feel, when we read the papers or watch TV that the time is really bad or that something has gone wrong, horribly wrong, with the world? Don't we all dream of a world of justice and love and peace, where all people will live in harmony as brothers and sisters and not bully or terrorise various groups on the basis of ethnic or other differences, just as Anna Hazare's team dream of a corruption-free India? And do not even the best of us recognise within ourselves what psychologists call a "shadow side", a strange inner urge to cheat and steal, to take the line of least resistance, to lie and exploit others. Very often we fight against these mysterious promptings ("temptations", as some prefer to call them)? Oftentimes we give in, due to pressure of circumstances, to peer influence or plain and simple cowardice and laziness. All religions offer us various ways and means to overcome these unpleasant tendencies: they offer us guidance and advise us to try' meditation, prayer and other ways to control our passions and less healthy drives.

Finally, all religions are communitarian expressions. Indeed, 'religions emerge when people come together, share their experiences and, somehow or the other, arrive at certain helpful structures which bind them to each other and facilitate the expression and celebration of their common vision. Thus religions, as communitarian expressions of shared Convictions, become structured or institutionalised. But this is what makes many serious-minded and sincerely religious people suspicious of religion, or to put it more precisely, at the highly organised and formal religious set-ups (or structures) that they are confronted with. Is it really necessary to pray and worship according to these strict and impersonal structures? Wouldn't it be more fulfilling, spontaneous and meaningful to do it quietly at home? And do we need to be bossed about by "religious leaders" who may be themselves self-centred?

1.5 PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION: TOWARDS A DEFINITION

According to some people, the very idea of philosophising about religion is blasphemy. Isn't it a form of the most crass arrogance and irreligiosity to submit the notion of the Sacred, of God and

of holy writ to the critical probings of finite, limited human intelligence? Would not the only appropriate human response - to the experience of the Sacred be humble - silent and respectful submission and adoration?. In the West, Martin Luther (1483-1546), the fiery German reformer, spear-headed this approach, fulminating against reason as "the devil's greatest whore", averring that it "can do nothing but shame and disgrace all that god says and does". For him there was a mortal enmity between faith and reasons "Faith strikes dead this reason, and kills this beast, which heaven and earth and all creatures cannot destroy." Among Eastern thinkers who have championed such a view, perhaps the most outspoken was the medieval Islamic scholar and mystic Al-Ghazali (1059 - 1111) who, in his *Destruction of Philosophers* tells us, in no uncertain terms, what he thought of those who used reason in the course of their search for God. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), later canonized by the Catholic Church, was more positive in his attitude towards reason and philosophy in the context of religion though he was no "crass rationalist". The same, too, could be said of Ibn Sina (980 - 1036), whose name was Latinised into Avicenna by the Scholastics and whom Al-Ghazali saw as his arch-enemy, co-religionist of his though he was (Desbruslais 2000).

Extreme polarisations are seldom productive and this is quite true of the "pure reason" vs "blind faith" clash over religion. The "faith alone" approach opens the door to uncritical, self-deluded psychotics and fanatics. But "reason alone" is no improvement. Absolute rationalism ("I'll only accept what can stand up to a rigorous proof.) is both impractical and irrational. Among other things it would exclude any possibility of inter-personal relationships, like love and friendship and not only religious faith. An absolute rationalist, were he or she to act consistently, would be condemned to a, lonely, loveless and friendless (and not just religious faithless) life. And, just for the record, it is interesting to note that the Catholic Church has officially condemned, as heresies, both of these attitudes: "fideism" (faith alone) and "exaggerated rationalism" (reason alone). From the preceding, we may conclude that the most appropriate response would be balanced "mid-point-between-the-two extremes" approach, which-I would venture to designate as "reasonable risk". Indeed, what we do to validate any inter-personal commitment, including love and friendship and not only religious faith. We establish some demonstrable ground to justify our commitment. However, since we are dealing with free persons and their invisible interior lives, there can never be fool-proof guarantee as to the certainty and security of the commitment one is making. There is a solid basis of reasonableness, but not absolute rationality. The commitment is not grounded on blind risk: there is some evidence in favour of one's personal commitment: it can stand up to considerable critical inquiry. Yet the possibility of being mistaken is not totally rule out: hence, there is an element of risk. It is neither unfounded risk nor indubitable argument, but halfway between both, drawing upon the strengths of each to avoid the excesses of either (Desbruslais 2000).

Between these two extremes of fideism and exaggerated rationalism comes philosophy of religion, which holds that religion can be critically examined. So philosophy of religion is an attempt based on reason, to criticize, evaluate and deepen religion. It may explain it, elaborate on it and even propose new theoretical concepts. Thus the American Philosopher, William P Alston (1921-2009), define Philosophy of religion as "a branch of philosophy concerned with questions regarding religion, including the nature and existence of God, the examination of religious experience, analysis of religious language and texts, and the relationship of religion and science" (Alston 1967).

In short, philosophy of religion is a critical response to religion, where the faith of the seeker is bracketed out.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1. What is religion?

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2. Describe, if not define, what is philosophy of religion?

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1.6 NECESSITY OF ORGANIZED RELIGION

The scope of philosophy is any critical appraisal of religion. It is an ancient discipline, being found in the earliest known manuscripts concerning philosophy, and relates to many other branches of philosophy and general thought, including Metaphysics, Epistemology, Logic, and History. Let us briefly raise some pertinent questions related to the scope and relevance of philosophy of religion in the following pages.

Let us begin by admitting the fact that, historically, no organized religion Can stand up to honest criticism and come' out of it with an unblemished report card. None of the mainline religions has proved itself to have been always and everywhere a reliable friend of 'people struggling for liberation and emancipation. Often religions have added to the oppression, discrimination and blood-letting that have plagued the world since time began. The subjugation of women has often been given religious sanction. The most cruel and bloodthirsty wars have been inspired by religious differences, with each side proclaiming an exclusive *Gott mit uns* (God with us), while hailing all opponents as hirelings of Satan incarnate. Religion has often opposed scientific research and sided with obscurantism and superstition, against trends of enlightenment. And politicians, especially in Third World countries, have learned that religion is the easiest handle with which to manipulate impoverished and oppressed masses, stirring up all kinds of mob violence and building up their "vote banks". Indeed, religious leadership seems to be the last bastion of male exclusivism, determined to holdout against "female: incursions" by all manner of pseudo-theological, philosophical and sociological argument, so. as to preserve power in the hands of men only. The priestly Conquerors. Club is a very powerful and jealously guarded coterie of old men who, with bulldog tenacity, clings with alarm to its ever shrinking list of "privileges and prerogatives."

Above all, it stands ready to flash its magic wand of "God's will" and "the divinely established scheme of things" to justify and protect the status quo (heavily loaded in its favour) and block any attempt at reform which just might among other things, help towards a more authentic encounter with God (Desbruslais 2000).

On the other hand (there always is another hand, isn't it?) religions have also inspired many to selfless service of the downtrodden, have given the human race a rich legacy of art and beauty as well as played a not insignificant role in opening our eyes to the essential dignity of the human person, irrespective of race, colour or sex; Some religious personalities - Mother Teresa, Dorothy Day, Mahatma Gandhi, Oscar Romero, Desmond Tutu - have been true friends to liberation movements.

Yet, when all is said and done, it would appear that some kind of institutionalization or organisation of religion is inevitable - unless we are quite prepared to accept the consequences of reducing it to some sort of private, abstract and "spiritual" preoccupation. In fact, we can cite at least three major reasons why some kind of organization in religion is not merely to be tolerated an unavoidable, but even accepted as inevitable.

First, inasmuch as we are embodied beings, we cannot be satisfied with an intangible something, which remains at that level. Anything that we take seriously must be embodied, "tangibilised" in some way, through some manner of institutionalization, just as our love for our country has to be given tangible expression in flag-hosting and march pasts and our love for our family and friends has to be rendered incarnate in birthday parties and family gatherings. Anything less would but touch us lightly and leave us with a profound sense of frustration. Secondly, if religion is to have some social significance, if it is to have some transformative, reformatory impact upon society - inspiring people to work for justice and peace, or in support of the environment - it requires some kind of communitarian expression. Finally, if it is not to become a fleeting, fly-by-night sort of thing, here today, and gone tomorrow, coming to birth and dying with each individual's alleged encounter with the powers that be, it must have some concrete form to ensure the sharing, preservation and development of its tradition.

Actually, if we look a bit more closely at the objections against organized religion, it would probably become clear that these objections are not so much aimed at the very fact that religions are organized but at rigid authoritarian way in which they have been organized. That is the real villain.

1.7 A TIMELY QUALIFICATION

I have maintained that organized religion is somehow inevitable and; even more, that it is not a bad thing. Indeed, there is no reason why we can not envisage institutionalized religions being organized in a more "user-friendly", democratic and less authoritarian way. Religions should encourage us to respect other traditions, religious or otherwise, learn from their insights and promote unity in diversity in lieu of upholding a soul less, monotonous uniformity.

In other words, my recognition of the necessity of organized religion does not, by any means, imply that I give my whole-hearted and uncritical support to the actual way in which contemporary institutionalized religions are, in fact, organized: Far from it. And when, later, I use terms like "oppressive" and "liberative" when speaking of concrete religious set-ups in today's world, I will not be insinuating that any one particular religion and its structures are liberative and to be encouraged, while that of all others is simply oppressive and to be resisted. My contention is that every organized religion is susceptible of a liberative and an oppressive

interpretation. Indeed, there is even such a thing as oppressive and liberative: atheism (Desbruslais 2000): It is all a question as to whether the atheist or believer is ultimately seeking the enhancement and development of the entire human person or not. It's this that makes all the difference.

1.8 THE THREE 'C'S OF ORGANIZED RELIGION

The basis of authentic religion is a personal and mystical encounter with God, the *ganz Andere* or 'whatever be ones preferred description of whatever is experienced in religious activity. Nor is this "mystical experience" as esoteric and unattainable as many people think. All that it requires, on our part, is a pre-disposing attitude of humility, of openness, "the heart of a little child." And this is difficult because it is so easy. The More we consider ourselves "religiously learned", the more meticulous we are in performing our "religious duties", the bigger is the occupational hazard of mistaking the pointing finger for the moon, not to mention the hazards of falling into spiritual pride or intolerance.

In fact, it is the religious fanatic - whose mind and heart is too far removed from that of a little child to be open to any genuine encounter with the *ganz Andere*- who invariably becomes the self-appointed, overzealous and merciless enforcer of the rigid observance of the unholy trinity of code-creed-cult which is his (deliberate choice of the masculine) tyrannical substitute divinity. And the religious fanatic is basically unsure of his convictions: that is why he has to burn, maim or blow up those who don't reduplicate his approach. The existence of people who see or think differently from him is a threat to bin own insecure vision.

Creed is a kind of summary list of the particular doctrines to which all would be followers of a specific religion are required to give their unqualified assent. In a very tightly organized religion, failure to do so would invite unpleasant repercussions. To begin with, one would be hailed a "heretic", "schismatic", "infidel", "gentile" or whatever be the current term of opprobrium in the reigning fanatics' vocabulary. Once upon a time, such qualification would have resulted in one's death sentence: being kidnapped, carried away, stoned, hanged-drawn-and-quartered, removed from the land of the living by some form of ostracism, excommunication or, another ingenious and efficacious means of silencing dissent. In our more "enlightened" times, the fanatic has to settle for more "civilised" and "un- bloody" devices: censure, withdrawal of one's license to teach, banning and/ or burning of ones books... Of course, the believing community has every right to judge which: enunciations of faith-convictions authentically express the commonly held convictions of the general body of the faithful. But it should be the community, or a truly representative body of it, that sees, judges and acts - not an over-centralised, overaged, conservative and all-male select band of people with vested interests, closed to all other points of view or perspectives. Such executive-legislative-judiciary power should not be allowed to be monopolised by a small, inbreeding Conquerors' Club, jealous of its power and position.

Code comprises all those moral rules and derived customs that followers of a particular organized religion are supposed to live by, day to day. These may include styles of dress, dietary prescriptions, allotted "holy days" for worship, "penitential times" for fasting and as on. Most religion seems to agree on basic moral principles as respect for elders, no stealing and the like. There is a difference of opinion, however, as regards certain issues on sex, such as birth-control and some other areas, as the use of violence, even in times of war and so on. There was a time when all religions were so intimately linked with State policy, that any contravention of the

religious code was considered a treasonous act against the State and the culprit was turned over to the secular arm for punishment. Nowadays, most religions have - voluntarily or reluctantly - relinquished such links and have had to content themselves with merely issuing moral condemnations against offenders, warning "true believers" against consorting with such persons or listening to their views, wale appealing to the recalcitrant to mend their ways. One might mention that penal sanctions for infringements of the religious code, whenever enforceable, have tended to be -rather inhuman, cruel, and undignified (Desbruslais 2000).

Cult refers to the various rubrics that govern how Official (individual or communitarian) worship of a particular religion is to be carried out. This may include a host of minutiae, such as 'who is authorized to conduct the form of prayer, what vestments the priests or officials are supposed to wear, what precise words and gestures are to be when, which symbolic objects are to be employed in what way and at what precise moment in the vent, and so on. The degree of meticulousness with which these are to be observed varies from religion to religion. Quite frequently it is required that the service be conducted in the same ancient language that was current when the religion first saw the light of day - even if the language's -a dead one, -a foreign tongue, in most cases, unknown to the vast majority of the devotees. Invariably the ritual is considered "invalid" and inefficacious if some item of these details has not been scrupulously observed.

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1. Do we need structures in religion?

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2. Differentiate between oppressive and liberative understandings of religion?

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1.9 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have attempted to give a definition of philosophy of religion. Then we tried to see its scope. We hold that the scope of philosophy of religion is the whole of religion. Thus we discussed briefly on organized religion and on the three C's that constitute religion. Then we noted that religion needs to be challenged and even purified by reason. It is these very concrete, very visible and obtrusive elements that most often irritate serious and sincere religious people. They want to encounter the divine in a community and express their devotion in words and gestures that rise spontaneously from themselves. But what happens when they enter a traditional place of worship? They are put into liturgical strait-jackets and told where they have to place themselves (far from *the* centre of activity), what passive roles they must play throughout (invariably, they are issued a handbook, with detailed instructions as to what pre-planned words and gestures they are permitted to use and at what' moment). And, quite often, they are not

permitted to address God in their own mother-tongue, the language of their hearts and most personal exchanges, but in some obscure discourse whose very alphabet (let alone meaning) is incomprehensible to them. As remote rituals, few can figure out what they are all about - save a handful of erudite archaic specialists. So much for cult.

What of the elements of creed and code? Many a time these are couched in a form that has remained impervious to the development of science and technology. If people dare to voice their questions or doubts, they are often, met with reproach and a call to practice the virtue of blind faith. It is these shameless bits of obscurantism, not' mention downright ignorance, that put off young people as well as religious seekers of a deeper, more personal conviction, driving them out of church, temple and other traditional places of worship (Desbruslais 2000).

This is borne out by the mushrooming of all manner of charismatic and "'peoples' communities", where worship is more spontaneous and free, where leadership is shared by all the worshippers, who have a more active role to play, where clerical intervention is minimal, if not down to 'absolute zero. It's not organized religion that is the real problem for most people, but the inhuman way it is organized. To call religion back to its original goal, we need discourse and criticism or philosophy of religion.

1.10 KEYWORDS

Ganz Andere: Rudolf Otto's ganz andere means "wholly other," or "of a different realm".

Fideism: Reliance on faith alone rather than scientific reasoning or philosophy in questions of religion. Alvin Plantinga defines fideism as an "exclusive or basic reliance upon faith alone, accompanied by a consequent disparagement of reason and utilized especially in the pursuit of philosophical or religious truth"

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UNIT 2 IMPORTANCE OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

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2.0 OBJECTIVES

- To see the significance and importance of philosophy of religion.
- To have a deeper understanding of philosophy of religion and its relationship to theology/metaphysics.
- To understand evolution in the human understanding of God and its importance.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we make an attempt to understand the importance of philosophy of religion both theoretically and practically. After seeing some of the basic features of religion, we attempt to define both religion and philosophy of religion. Then we see its relationship to theology and metaphysics, emphasizing all the time its significance for human beings. For this unit we are deeply indebted to the significant work of the American Philosopher, Eric v d Luft (2004).

2.2 THE MYSTERY OF RELIGION

Religious people — understood broadly as theists, deists, atheists, gnostics, agnostics, Jews, Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Taoists, Confucians, Shintoists, Zoroastrians, animists, polytheists, pagans, Wiccans, secular humanists, Marxists, or cult devotees — regard religion as a matter of ultimate concern. Everything they are and do finally depends upon such questions as whether there is a God, whether we continue to exist after death, whether any God is active in human history, and whether human ethical relations have spiritual or supernatural dimensions. If God is real, then this is a different world than it would be if God were not real. So our belief in God affects our commitment to the world.

In all of us there is a basic human longing for a better life – expressed as a search for salvation, deliverance, release, liberation, sunyata, nirvana, etc.. Such a longing seems to be among the main foundations of all religion. There may also be a basic human need for mystery, wonder,

fear of the sacred, romantic worship of the unknown, awe in the presence of the completely different, or emotional response to the “numinous.” The “numinous,” a mysterious, awe-inspiring feeling, is the topic of *The Idea of the Holy* by German theologian Rudolf Otto (1869-1937) and *The Sacred and the Profane* by Romanian philosopher and anthropologist of religion Mircea Eliade (190-1986) and it may also be a foundation of religion (Luft 2004).

Do we really need mystery? It appears that the human need to *solve* mysteries seems to be more basic than any need to *have* mysteries. For example, mythology in all known cultures has emerged from either the need or the desire to provide explanations for certain types of occurrences, either natural or interpersonal. Thus they try to solve mysteries, rather than perpetuate them. Moreover, if any basic human need exists for deliverance, salvation, etc., then it may be manifest in part as a need for deliverance from mystery, salvation from ignorance, etc. As an answer we may claim that when some mysteries are solved, other deeper mysteries emerge.

Even after Enlightenment, the primeval feeling of a need for mystery continues. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), the founder of German critical philosophy, wrote *Sapere aude*. (“Dare to know.”) in *What is Enlightenment?* — but “Daring to know” does not wipe away the genuine mystery from the face of the universe. Many remain sincere and unabashed about feeling a deep need for mystery in their lives. Such people are generally members of some kind of religious group.

The Supernatural —called by various names like God, Allah, Ishwara, Sunyata, etc. — form the basis of such a mystery. If one chooses to make the supernatural element a central aspect of one’s religion, scripture and tradition will certainly support such a set of beliefs. However — and this is well worth noting, according to the American Philosopher of Religion, Eric v d Luft (2004), — the various scriptures, “without adding more internal contradiction than is already present in their pages, will also support commonsensical, naturalistic, nonsupernatural, metaphorical, allegorical, or symbolic interpretations of their texts and theologies.”

Such a plurality of interpretations is possible, not because the texts are vague. In fact indeed they are usually not vague. Plurality of interpretations is possible because the content of these texts is typically universal in its domain of application. :They are ambivalent rather than ambiguous in its language. Thus it is a strength, not a weakness, of most scriptures that they speak to otherworldly as well as this worldly interests” (Luft 2004). Thus they assure us that they will continue to speak to every era, nation, and successive *Zeitgeist* in world history.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1. What is “numinous”?

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2. What is the basis of the mysterious in religions?

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2.3 MAKING SENSE OF LIFE

German British philologist Max Müller (1823-1900), one of the founders of the modern scholarly study of comparative religion, asserted that whoever knows only one religion knows none. Against this claim, German theologian Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930) responded in 1901 that whoever knows one religion knows them all. These assertions are not really contradictory though they sound to be. Both are correct. They use the word knowledge in two ways. The distinction remains ambiguous in English, but is clear enough for French and German speakers, who have at their service the respective juxtapositions of *savoir / connaître* and *wissen / kennen*. Müller means the scientific or objective knowledge (*savoir* or *wissen*) of a religion, which naturally entails scrupulous comparisons with the data of other religions; while Harnack, on the other hand, means the subjective acquaintance or familiarity (*connaître* or *kennen*) that only an insider, i.e., a devout believer, can achieve. Moreover, Harnack refers specifically to Christianity, implying that to know it intimately, i.e., to believe it, is in effect to know and believe the true essence and meaning of all religions, since they all aim at the same spiritual goal. In one word, Müller speaks as a philosopher; Harnack as a theologian (Luft 2004).

Religion must make sense to the believer, not necessarily easy common sense, but some sort of sense. In other words, believers must be able to justify their beliefs, at least to themselves. At the lowest level, such defense is accomplished by appeal to authority or tradition; at the highest level, it is done either through philosophy or through philosophical or systematic theology. Here lies the primary significance of philosophy of religion. That is the reason the preeminent philosopher, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), held that “religion in its highest form is philosophy, that philosophy in its true form is religion.” This led him to hold that “the true content of each is the same, even though their respective expressions may differ.” He elaborates this notion: “In their development they move toward each other, since in the historical development of culture, the concept of God moves toward the philosophical, i.e., away from the anthropomorphic and toward the ever more comprehensively spiritual” (Luft 2004).

2.4 FEW BASIC DEFINITIONS

A few definitions of key terms are necessary at the outset:

Theism: It comes from the Greek word for “God,” *theos*, is belief in a God who is active in human affairs. Deism, from the Latin word for “God,” *deus*, is belief in a God who created the world and then left it alone. Atheism, from the Greek meaning “no God,” is belief in just that. Atheism, theism, and deism are each claims to knowledge. Agnosticism, from the Greek meaning “not knowing,” *agnôstos*, is a refusal to decide.

Monotheism: it is derived from the Greek for “alone,” “single,” or “unique,” *monos*, and henotheism, from the Greek for “one,” each denote belief in one God. Monotheism means one God in and for the entire universe. But henotheism means one God for us, e.g., for our tribe, and it does not deny the possibility that other tribes might have their own equally valid Gods.

Pantheism: It is the belief that everything is God. Animism is the belief that everything is spiritual, or that even apparently inanimate objects have souls. Panentheism is the belief that God completely permeates everything, like water in a saturated sponge. This term has become very popular in contemporary discussions.

Polytheism: This is the belief in many irreducible Gods, perhaps two, perhaps three, usually more. The Christian trinity is monotheistic, not polytheistic, because Yahweh the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit are each recognized as aspects of one God, not as three separate Gods, just as ice, liquid water, and water vapor are each recognized as aspects of a single substance, H₂O, not as three separate substances. The Hindu trinity of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, may be regarded as part of a polytheistic tradition.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1. Is “mystery” something necessary for modern human beings?

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2. What is the etymological meaning of “monotheism”?

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2.5 DEFINITIONS OF RELIGION

As for a definition of religion itself, that is very controversial. The word might have from the Latin *religare* (“to tie” or “to bind”) and *religio* (“conscientiousness,” “respect,” “awe,” or “sanctity”). The idea is that the soul is bound to God. Religion has been defined as everything from the immediate awareness of identity with the absolute, to the passionate striving (*eros*) for the transcendent, to the psychological projection of the idealized human self onto the infinite, to the consciousness of the highest social values. For German theologian Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher (1768-1834), religion is the feeling of utter dependence; for Danish philosopher Harald Høffding (1843-1931), the individual’s desire to conserve value; for Kant, the recognition of moral duties as divine commands; for Dutch American anthropologist Annemarie de Waal Malefijt (b. 1914), any system of actions and interactions based on culturally shared beliefs in sacred supernatural powers; for Müller, the intuitive faculty of apprehending the infinite; for British historian Arthur Darby Nock (1902-1963), the human refusal to accept helplessness; for ancient Greek philosopher Plato (427-347 B.C.E.), the science of begging and getting gifts from the Gods; and for German socialist philosopher Karl Marx (1818-1883), the opiate of the people. For Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), the father of existentialism, religion is a matter of individual subjective passion and is a “leap” involving also “dread and fear”.

In essence, religion is an attitude, or a sum of attitudes, constituting a way of life. Religion may thus be the total of an individual's sincere attitudes and predispositions toward that which serves as the final expression of his or her particular primary interest or goal. The various institutions of religion would arise only after a group shares certain attitudes that were first felt by an individual, and as a result of this sharing.

Perhaps the most accurate definition, according to Luft combines the ideas of two German Americans, liberal theologian Paul Tillich (1886-1965) and psychologist Erich Fromm (1900-1980): "any system of thought, feeling, and action, typically shared by a group, which gives the individual a frame of orientation, a meaning of life, and an object of devotion, which is regarded as a matter of ultimate concern."

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1. What is panentheism?

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2. What could be the most accurate definition of religion?

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2.6 PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION

British American philosopher Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947) wrote in *Religion in the Making*: "Religion is what the individual does with his [or her] own solitariness." But what the individual actually does with true solitariness, that curious amalgam of loneliness and reflectivity, is philosophize. In the same book Whitehead wrote, "Religion is force of belief cleansing the inward parts. For this reason the primary religious virtue is sincerity, a penetrating sincerity." But similarly, philosophy is force of thought cleansing the inward parts. Thus the primary philosophical virtue is precisely the same penetrating sincerity, that is demanded of religion. Here we see another relationship between genuine philosophy and religion.

Algerian French novelist and philosopher Albert Camus (1913-1960) wrote in *The Myth of Sisyphus* that there is only one truly philosophical question: suicide. His focus was perhaps too narrow, but he was on the right track. The same question, more broadly stated, is whether life is worth living. Philosophers have asked this broader version at least since Socrates in the fifth century B.C.E. If life turns out not to be worth living, then that in itself is not sufficient reason to commit suicide. We may prefer just to endure life. Conversely, if we judge that life is worth living, then that alone is not sufficient reason to avoid suicide. Socrates himself, who believed quite firmly that life, especially a philosophically examined life was worth living, unfortunately, had to commit suicide to preserve his moral integrity (Luft 2004).

So the central question is life. What, beyond the obvious physical or empirical aspects, is life? What does it mean? Why live? Why persevere? Why surrender? Why bother? Why care? Why strive? Why have children? Why laugh? Why cry? What can I hope for? Reason seems sometimes to be at a loss to answer these penetrating questions. The devout religious believers who deliberately reject any scholarly conclusions about the content of their religious faith because of the great comfort and sense of importance they gain by believing in their own god cannot risk anything, even reason, shaking that belief. Thus there may exist a healthy tension between the need to believe wholeheartedly and need to raise critical and penetrating questions, both of which are basic human needs.

The historical development of religion proceeds in stages which can be analyzed in terms of dialectical progress. Such is the case both with individual religions and with religion in general. Anthropologists, psychologists, and sociologists, especially those who study folklore and oral traditions, have done much good work in classifying such stages, all the way from the most primitive animism to the most sophisticated philosophical monotheism. But their classification is in general forms only. What they have largely failed to do is to discover and define precisely the reasons why a given stage passes over into another, according to Eric v d Luft (2004). They have failed to see the progressive development of religions as plan of God to lead us gradually toward the most adequate understanding of God. In other word, can we show that humanity has been led gradually to a more perfect idea of God, by God himself? This is a question which only a philosopher can try to answer. Hegel conceived and attempted such a project — to learn the ultimate, divinely sanctioned reasons why one religious stage passes over into another — but that movement died out in the mid-nineteenth century (Luft 2004).

2.7 EVOLUTION OF GOD

The historical evolution of our understanding of God must also be seen as the evolution of human beings on the absolute scale, or *sub specie aeternitatis* (from the view-point of eternity). If we compare our understanding of God, it is quite different from that of the early primitives. That of DeuteroIsaiah (540 B.C.E.) more nearly approached the true nature of God than did that of Moses (ca. 1300 B.C.E.). Similarly, that of Augustine (354-430), it is claimed, was more highly developed and thus more accurate than Isaiah's. This means, not that Isaiah was either more intelligent or more devout than Moses, or Augustine more than Isaiah, but that their respective theologies/philosophies are to a significant degree products of the total of learned culture in their respective times (Luft 2004). Thus that these theologies themselves reflect these several levels of cultural development and philosophical refinement.

In the beginnings of twenty-first century many scientific, epistemological, and even metaphysical reasons to abandon former beliefs in the supernatural (or God) have been proposed. At the same time contemporary philosophers (e.g: George Karuvelil) and theologians (e.g.: Sebastian Kappen) who believe in religion try to propose new understandings of God that is more conducive to the general world-view of the times. True, the time may have come for another rationally ordained supersession of an old God. Today the God of eternal punishment and cruelty needs to give rise to a God who is with the poor and with everyone and everything. At the same time some atheistic thinkers urge that God be replaced by “earthly peace,” “cohesive

social order,” “social coherence,” “ethical solidarity,” “the order of ethical life,” or “theonomy,” (Paul Tillich) the law of God written in human hearts. But this social ideal of philosophical religion a goal toward which philosophy, religion, and politics must all cooperate.

One must acknowledge that in spite of the social solidarity that religions and non-religions foster, there is an essential difference between those who believe in God and those who do not. The difference between the many subjective worlds that involve God and those conceived without God drives immediately to the root of human existence. The various doctrines and traditions of established religions may not be adequate to answer the most serious and basic questions of human existence, life, and meaning. Contemporary theologies do a better job of answering them than doctrines or traditions do, but to address them in a fully satisfying way we need philosophy. Just like “war is too important to leave to the generals” religion is too important to leave to the priests. A more detached, objective, bird’s eye-view is needed. There lies the philosophical importance of studying religion.

Philosophy is the science that sits in judgment of all matters of concern. “Science” is any rigorous discipline that uses impartial powers of reason and logic. In fact, reason weighs topics of inquiry on their own merits, according to their own logic, and in relation to other topics, then completes its analysis without prejudice on the basis of wherever reason leads, according to its own logic.

The goal of philosophical scrutiny is clarity, accuracy, and truth. Given this mission of philosophy, its highest duty is to sit in judgment of the most important matters (not with arrogance or hubris), with a view toward improving human life, ethical relations, and the world in general by injecting reason into our judgments and by identifying, describing, and communicating what makes sense and what does not. Philosophy thus promotes intelligence, clear understanding, and civilization but condemns stupidity, ignorance, and barbarity. “This is the normative or prescriptive aspect of philosophy, which is most effective when done implicitly. Philosophy aims to become the architecture of ethical, meaningful life, not by preaching or by being dogmatic, but just by discovering the facts and displaying them in clear light to intelligent minds who will then make their own decisions” (Luft 2004).

2.8 PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION AND METAPHYSICS

The philosophy of religion is not the same as theology. While theologians examine a particular religion from within and interpret it for its own community of believers, philosophers of religion analyze religion in general, from external or objective points of view, and evaluate it systematically. Theology is part of the data for philosophy of religion. Theology may inspire philosophy of religion and vice-versa. But they are distinct disciplines.

The same is the case with philosophy of religion and metaphysics. The philosophy of religion was originally subsumed under metaphysics, the philosophical science of first principles. Its central issue, the reality and nature of God, was considered a metaphysical question. But in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries philosophers began to consider questions about God separately from other metaphysical questions and to ask about ethics in religious contexts. As a result of these new lines of inquiry, especially in Britain and Germany, the philosophy of

religion had become an independent discipline within philosophy probably by the end of the eighteenth century onwards.

Herein lies the added importance of philosophy of religion, which has now become distinct from both theology and metaphysics, traditionally considered as the bases of religion and society. Philosophy of religion, like theology and metaphysics, deals with issues of fundamental significance to ourselves. It is in fact a development of metaphysics (and theology).

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1. Who are the “masters of suspicion”? Why are they called so?

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2. Give the significance of the book edited by Graham Oppy and Nick Trakakis?

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2.9 LET US SUM UP

The philosophy of religion, like most philosophy and theology, is not a linear discipline. That is, its concepts cannot be learned sequentially, but must be gradually fitted together like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. In whatever order they are presented, some concepts presented earlier will remain obscure until other concepts are presented later. This is unavoidable, because life is too complicated an affair to be regulated linearly (Luft 2004). So in this unit we have tried to show what philosophy of religion is and its importance as a theoretical discipline with practical applications.

2.10 KEYWORDS

Panentheism: The belief or doctrine that God is greater than the universe and includes and interpenetrates it

Numinous: It is a term referring to a feeling of the mysterious, all-inspiring, holy or sacred, which is present without reason

Savoir / *connaître* and *wissen* / *kennen*: The difference between "kennen" and "wissen" is that "kennen" means "to know an object or person" and "wissen" is "to know a fact." In French *savoir* means 1) to know a fact 2) to know by heart or 3) to know how to do something. *Connaître* has two meanings: 1) to know a person or 2) to be familiar with a person or thing.

Zeitgeist: The defining spirit or mood of a particular period of history as shown by the ideas and beliefs of the time.

2.11 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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UNIT 3 PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION AND OTHER DISCIPLINES

Contents

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Three Sciences According to Aristotle
- 3.3 Myth, Religion and Philosophy
- 3.4 Theology and Philosophy of Religion
- 3.5 Philosophy of Religion and Social Sciences
- 3.6 Neurotheology
- 3.7 The Anthropic Principle
- 3.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.9 Key Words
- 3.10 Further Readings and References

3.0 OBJECTIVES

- To help the students to see the relationship between philosophy of religion and other disciplines.
- To be able to appreciate the relationship between myth, religion and philosophy.
- To see how contemporary sciences contribute to philosophy of religion.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

"Philosophy" means "the love of wisdom." Wisdom is the knowledge of ultimate causes, explanations and principles. It includes knowledge of values, not just facts. It gives you a "big picture," a "world-view" and a "life-view." It explores such questions as these: What is the essence of a human being? What is the meaning (value, goal, purpose) of human life? What is a good life? What is a good society? Are there higher laws than man's laws? Are we here by chance or design? Are we fated or free? How do we know what is good or evil? How do we know anything? Is anything certain? Can reason prove (or disprove) the existence of God? Why do we suffer? Why do we die? Is there life after death?

Coming to the Greek tradition: Although it may be common to speak of a Greek "religion," in fact the Greeks themselves didn't use such a term. Further, they might not have recognized it, had someone else attempted to apply it to their practices. At the same time, it is difficult to accept the idea that the Greeks were completely secular and irreligious, however. This is why a better understanding of Greek religion helps illuminate the nature of religion generally as well as the nature of religions which continue to be followed today. This, in turn, is critical for anyone who wants to engage in a sustained appreciation and critique of religion and religious beliefs.

If we mean by "religion" a set of beliefs and behavior which are consciously chosen and ritually followed to the exclusion of all other alternatives, then the Greeks didn't really have a religion. If, however, we mean by religion more generally people's ritual behavior and beliefs about sacred items, places, and beings, then the Greeks most certainly did have a religion - or perhaps a

set of religions, in recognition of the great variety of Greek beliefs (Cline 2011). Perhaps when discussing religions, we should look more closely at the beliefs about what is sacred and holy as was done by leaders of comparative study like Mircea Eliade.

So in this unit we first deal with the three sciences of Aristotle, that helps us to see religion as one of the foundational disciplines. Then we see its relationship to myth. This helps us to relate philosophy of religion to theology and then later to social sciences. Then we take up two more related disciplines from science and see how they can dialogue with philosophy of religion.

3.2. THREE SCIENCES ACCORDING TO ARISTOTLE

Probably the most commonsensical and influential philosopher of all time was Aristotle. Aristotle says that there are three "whys," three purposes, ends or reasons for anyone ever to study and learn anything, in school or out of it. Thus there are three kinds of "sciences," which he called "productive," "practical" and "theoretical." (Aristotle used "science" in a much broader way than we do, meaning any ordered body of knowledge through causes and reasons.)

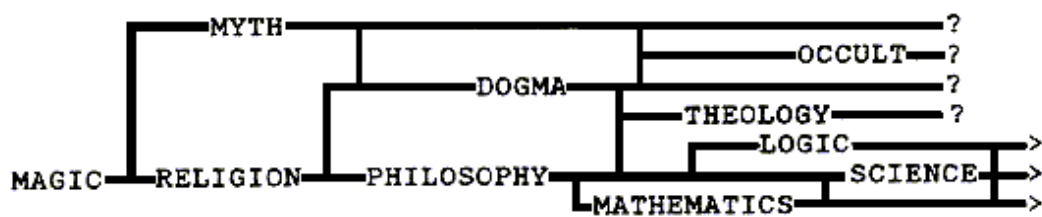
The purpose of the "productive sciences" (which we today call technology) is to produce things, to make, improve or repair material things in the world, and thus to improve our world. Farming, surgery, shipbuilding, carpentry, writing and tailoring were examples in Aristotle's era as well as ours, while ours also includes many new ones like cybernetics, aviation and electrical engineering (Kreeft 2009).

The purpose of the "practical sciences" (which meant learning how to do or practice anything, how to act) is to improve your own behavior in some area of your own life. The two most important of these areas, Aristotle said, were ethics and politics. (Aristotle saw politics not as a pragmatic, bureaucratic business of running a state's economy, but as social ethics, the science of the good life for a community.) Other examples of "practical sciences" include economics, athletics, rhetoric and military science.

The third kind of sciences is the "theoretical" or "speculative" (contemplative), i.e., those that seek the truth for its own sake, that seek to know just for the sake of knowing rather than for the sake of action or production (though, of course, they will have important practical application). These sciences include theology, philosophy, physics, astronomy, biology, psychology and math.

Theoretical sciences are more important than practical sciences for the very same reason practical sciences are more important than productive sciences: because their end and goal is more intimate to us. Productive sciences perfect some external thing in the material world that we use; practical sciences perfect our own action, our own lives; and theoretical sciences perfect our very selves, our souls, our minds. They make us nobler persons (Kreeft 2009).

And that is the reason for pursuing philosophy in general and philosophy of religion in particular: not to make money, or things, or even to live better, but to be better, to be more, to grow your mind as you grow your body.

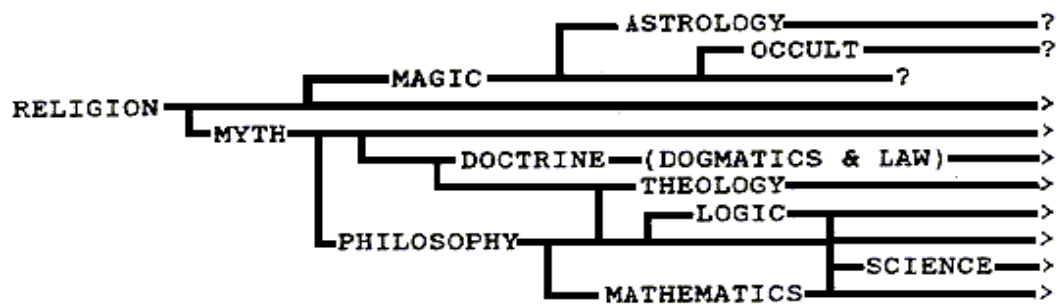


occurs because of the historical accident that the religion of people like Socrates and Plato later ceased to exist. The old gods of the Greeks, Egyptian, Babylonians, Phoenicians, Romans, Celts, Germans, Slavs, etc. were later entirely replaced by one old religion, Judaism, and two new ones from the same tradition, Christianity and Islam. It is now possible to say "religion" and mean one of those and to say "philosophy" and simply mean "that Greek stuff" where the religious side of Greek thought just need not be taken seriously.

The historical circumstances that allow for that simple pattern of distinction does not occur in India or China. A book like the *Bhagavad Gita* is a profoundly important religious document for Hinduism, yet it is also one of the fundamental documents of Indian philosophy. Indeed, the *Gita* appears to have been first *produced* by Indian philosophy, the Sankhya and Yoga Schools. Then it been *transformed* into a religious document, and finally *used* for both religious and philosophical purposes later on. This kind of intermingling makes distinctions between religion and philosophy very difficult in the Indian tradition. In fact most of the Indian scholars do not even approve of such a distinction.

Similar difficulties exist for Chinese thought but also for Mediaeval Western thought, where philosophers are easily classified as Christian, Jewish, or Moslem. If philosophy had nothing to do with religion, then presumably it would be superfluous to identify Moses Maimonides (1135-1204) as Jewish or Avicenna (Ibn Sina, 980-1037) as Moslem. It is not, and this was a question that many such philosophers had to face at the time. The way that one of the greatest Christian philosophers, St. Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274), dealt with it was to identify different sources of *authority*: he distinguished "natural theology," which is based on reason alone, from "dogmatic theology," which is based on revelation. Jewish and Moslem philosophers had made similar distinctions, and some of them had even thought, which St. Thomas didn't, that reason could ultimately justify everything in religion (Ross 2002).

Definitions for religion and philosophy must involve similar distinctions, where the original context of all thought is mythic. Since myth does not argue, but philosophy does, a rule of thumb for religion is that it mixes in philosophic elements but always retains an *authoritative* link to a mythic context. The most important thing about that mythic context, however, is not always that it exerts a dogmatic authority, but that it is *historical*, as the American Philosopher, Kelley L Ross (2002), points out. Philosophy cannot conjure up historical particulars out of pure reason, but religion always relates its truth to historical particulars, the actual source of the religion or its received tradition. Furthermore, contrary to the earlier evolutionary schemes about human thought, it must be accepted that mythic thought, and so religion, *cannot be replaced* by philosophy, or by science. Thus a revised and evolutionary pattern, acceptable to most contemporary scholars, thus could look like this:



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The above discussion leads us to the relationship between theology and philosophy of religion. As such both of them deal with the same topics. The crucial difference is that theology presupposes faith while philosophy of religion does not. As such philosophers of religion are required to bracket off their faith, in their philosophical discussion. Since the field of research of both the topics are related, many themes and insights are also shared between the two disciplines.

3.5 PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

Starting from 19th century, there have been quite much of debate among sociologists (Émile Durkheim 1858 –1917, Karl Marx (1818 –1883) and psychologists (Sigmund Freud 1856 – 1939; Carl Gustav Jung 1875 –1961), whose ideas has profoundly influenced philosophy of religion. As such philosophy of religion have borrowed many findings from sociology, psychology and even from (cultural) anthropology. Recently sociobiology (Edward O. Wilson 1929- and Richard Dawkins 1941-) has also dialogued with philosophy of religion, on issues like the origin and evolution of altruism and evolutionary equilibrium. Further, we give two contemporary disciplines, which contribute our thinking about God. The first one studies our brain (Neurosciences or Neurotheology) and the second one the universe (Astronomy or Big Bang Theories). Both these sciences find traces of God, which may be used by philosophers of religion, to understand God and human beings better.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1. How will you see the differences and relationship between philosophy of religion and theology?

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2. Are social sciences necessary to do philosophy of religion?

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3.6 NEUROTHEOLOGY

Neurotheology, also known as spiritual neuroscience, is the study of correlations of neural phenomena with subjective experiences of spirituality and hypotheses to explain these phenomena. Neurotheology has been defined as "science's attempt at explaining religion within the physical aspect of the brain using rational thought."

Proponents of neurotheology, like Jacob Abraham and Augustine Pamplany from India, hold that there is a neurological and evolutionary basis for subjective experiences traditionally categorized as spiritual or religious. The subject has formed the basis of several popular science books (See For Further Reading).

Indian born Vilayanur S. Ramachandran explored the neural basis of the hyperreligiosity seen in temporal lobe epilepsy (TLE) using the galvanic skin response, which correlates with emotional

arousal, to determine whether the hyperreligiosity seen in TLE was due to an overall heightened emotional state or was specific to religious stimuli. By presenting subjects with neutral, sexually arousing and religious words while measuring GSR, Ramachandran was able to show that patients with TLE showed enhanced emotional responses to the religious words, diminished responses to the sexually charged words, and normal responses to the neutral words. These results suggest that the medial temporal lobe is specifically involved in generating some of the emotional reactions associated with religious words, images and symbols.

Andrew B. Newberg and others describe neurological processes which are driven by the repetitive, rhythmic stimulation which is typical of human ritual, and which contribute to the delivery of transcendental feelings of connection to a universal unity. They posit, however, that physical stimulation alone is not sufficient to generate transcendental unitive experiences. For this to occur they say there must be a blending of the rhythmic stimulation with ideas. Once this occurs "...ritual turns a meaningful idea into a visceral experience. Moreover they say that humans are compelled to act out myths by the biological operations of the brain on account of what they call the "inbuilt tendency of the brain to turn thoughts into actions".

Based on current neuroscientific research, Eugen Drewermann, one of today's most prominent and controversial theologians in Europe, developed in two monumental volumes (*Modern Neurology and the Question of God*), published in 2006 and 2007, a radical critique of traditional conceptions of God and the soul and a sweeping reinterpretation of religion in light of neurology.¹

3.7 THE ANTHROPIC PRINCIPLE

It has recently been realised that if some of the fundamental physical constants of the universe were only slightly different then the existence of life in this universe would have been impossible (see Martin Rees's *Just Six Numbers*). There are many of these fortuitous coincidences which have led some to believe that the universe has been fine-tuned. Many explanations for this have been proposed: Is there some necessity for life to exist - sentient intelligent life which could observe and ponder the universe - or else the universe could not come into being? Can the conditions for life be set less rigidly? Is there a multiplicity of universes with the constants set differently in each universe? (Thomas 2011)

But perhaps the most famous (infamous?) interpretation of the Anthropic Principle is that we are we living in a "designer universe" (Pandikattu 2001). In other words, can Anthropic Principle point to a God, who has created this universe specifically for human beings?

Critics of the Anthropic Principle dismiss such thinking by saying that human life exists in its current form purely as a result of the nature of this particular universe. If the constants were set differently, then life might well not exist and we would not be around to ponder these questions. As Steven Weinberg says: "To conclude that the constants of nature have been fine-tuned by a benevolent designer would be like saying, 'Isn't it wonderful that God put us here on earth, where there's water and air and the surface gravity and temperature are so comfortable, rather than some horrid place, like Mercury or Pluto?' Where else in the solar system other than on earth could we have evolved?"

Other critics would also say that carbon-based life is not the only possible type of life: maybe an entirely different form of silicon-based life would exist, for example, if the physical constants were set differently. However, from the list of coincidences, it would appear that the majority of values which the constant could take would result in no life ever being possible, the universe either spreading too far too quickly, or else collapsing back on itself. According to the proposer of string theory Leonard Susskind: "The notorious cosmological constant is not quite zero, as it was thought to be. This is a cataclysm and the only way that we know how to make any sense of it is through the reviled and despised Anthropic Principle." (Thomas 2011)

Recent discussion of the Anthropic Principle has moved away from the "designer universe" type of interpretation towards a so-called "multiverse" interpretation. This rehabilitation has seen the Anthropic Principle come in from the cold from being perceived as a slightly cranky theory on the periphery of science towards playing a central role in the latest interpretations of string theory and cosmology (Pandikattu 2004).

The multiverse interpretation suggests that there are a vast number of different universes (infinitely many?), the collection of universes being commonly referred-to as the *multiverse*. The physical constants are set to different random values in each universe. This arrangement would require no fine-tuning: we just happen to be inhabitants of a universe in which the physical constants are suitable for life. (Thomas 2011)

Further, according to string theory in physics, elementary particles are not particles but small vibrating strings. For the equations of string theory to be mathematically consistent, a string has to vibrate in 10 dimensions, which implies that six extra dimensions exist but are curled-up too small to be detected. The laws of physics in this universe would depend on the geometry of those hidden dimensions.

But the solution to the equations is not unique as so many different geometries are possible in these extra dimensions. The bundle of curled-up extra dimensions can have many different shapes such as a sphere, a doughnut and so on. The vast collection of solutions differ in that each configuration has a potential energy associated with it called the *vacuum energy*, the energy of the space-time when the four large dimensions are completely devoid of matter and fields (Thomas 2011).

Each solution to the equations could be taken as representing a universe with different physical constants and laws of physics. We could represent each of the 10^{500} possible solutions as an abstract mathematical graph, plotting the vacuum energy against the geometrical parameters. The geometry of the small dimensions would try to adjust to minimise the vacuum energy, just as a ball placed on a slope will roll downhill to a lower position. As the physical constants and laws of physics in our universe do not appear to be changing with time, we must be sitting at a minimum in the bottom of a valley. In particular, we seem to be sitting at a minimum with a slightly positive vacuum energy (Thomas 2011).

In such a scenario, can we speak of anthropic principle pointing to a Designer (God), who has helped the evolution of our particular universe, so that human beings could inhabit this planet? This is only a question posed, without a definitive answer.

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1. What is the significance of neurotheology?

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2. How does anthropic principle contribute to a better understanding of philosophy of God?

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3.9. LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we first saw that right from the beginning of Western culture philosophy is related to sciences. Then we saw how religion, philosophy and even sciences stem from the myths. Then we saw in an elementary manner some modern sciences are related to philosophy of religion.

3.10. KEYWORDS

Anthropic principle: The cosmological principle that theories of the universe are constrained by the necessity to allow human existence. This implies that the universe evolved (was directed by an intelligence agency?) in such a way that the universe would give rise to human beings.

Neurotheology: It is the application of the neurological studies to theory and God-concerns. For instance, it searches for the place(s) in the brain where religious beliefs originate and studies the brain connections for spirituality. It tries to see if God can be understood better (or explained away?) using the latest neurological research.

3.11. FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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UNIT 4 HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

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- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 God and/or The Sacred
- 4.3 The Sacred: Durkheim and Others
- 4.4 The Sacred: Soderblom and Others
- 4.5 In Response to Durkheim and Others
- 4.6 The Masters of Suspicion
- 4.7 The History of Western Philosophy of Religion
- 4.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.9 Key Words
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4.0. OBJECTIVES

- To take up some historically significant persons in the philosophy of religion.
- To give a general view of the vast history of this topic.
- To see how some philosophers of religion are critical and other sympathetic to religion.

4.1. INTRODUCTION

Philosophy of religion is philosophical reflection on religion. It is as old as philosophy itself and has been a standard part of Western philosophy in every period. In the last half of the twentieth century, there has been a great growth of interest in it, and the range of topics philosophers of religion have considered has also expanded considerably.

Philosophy of religion is sometimes divided into philosophy of religion proper and philosophical theology. This distinction reflects the unease of an earlier period in analytic philosophy, during which philosophers felt that reflection on religion was philosophically respectable only if it confined itself to mere theism and abstracted from all particular religions; anything else was taken to be theology, not philosophy. But most philosophers now feel free to examine philosophically any aspect of religion, including doctrines or practices peculiar to individual religions. Not only are these doctrines and practices generally philosophically interesting in their own right, but often they also raise questions that are helpful for issues in other areas of philosophy (Stump 1998).

So in the first part of this unit we take up some significant themes as developed by some philosophers (sociologists) of religion and then give a general overview of the philosophers associated with this topic.

4.2. GOD AND/OR THE SACRED

Most textbooks on the Philosophy of God or Religion tend to start with a discussion of proofs for the existence of God and, having dealt with that issue, proceed to talk about the essence of God (i.e. what does the term mean, what qualities or attributes are to be ascribed to the divinity?) However, my approach is just the opposite. I prefer to begin with a critical reflection on our understanding of God and thence take up the debate on whether God's existence can be proved or not. The reason is that I, with many others, am quite convinced that the reason why one believes in God or no depends on the concept of God one has previously formed in life. If that concept is meaningful and seen to be, not just no barrier to human growth and development, but a positive inspiration and support for it, he/she will believe in God, and only then cast about for "proofs" to justify his/her stance. Conversely, if a person has, in the light of his or her experiences and upbringing, formed a negative concept of God (e.g. is convinced that belief in God necessarily degrades human dignity, responsibility and freedom), then such a person will become an atheist and as a result, will assemble arguments against God's existence (Desbruslais 2000).

God or the Sacred?

One naturally tends to think that the notion of God (though conceived differently) would be a kind of "least common denominator" in all religions. But this is not quite true. There are at least two great religions that have existed for thousands of years and are quite capable of an atheistic interpretation; indeed, many of their adherents are "devout atheists" (however paradoxical to some of us that may seem). I am referring to Buddhism and Jainism, the latter being the religion that Gandhi was born into (he, of course was a firm believer in God). But, if these systems are atheistic, why call them religions at all, one might, quite understandably ask? Well, for one thing, they in common with other theistic religions – offer some kind of redemption or salvation from the human condition of ignorance, sin and suffering. They suggest ways and means to overcome our passions and attaining a depth of self-mastery and inner tranquility. And isn't this part of the goals of all authentic religion (Desbruslais 2000). The most basic concept, common to all religions (including the atheistic variety) is the notion of the sacred. Some religious people interpret this is but a deeper, little-understood and lesser attained aspect of our own selves; others remain equally convinced that this is something totally new and unlike anything that we can experience in ourselves or the world around us, something that cannot be simply identified with any limited, finite thing of this worlds.

4.3 THE SACRED: DURKHEIM AND FRIENDS

Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), a Frenchman who is considered the founding father of contemporary sociology, was a positivist, i.e. a philosopher of the nascent scientific age. Thus, he believed that only things that could be measured, weighed and counted, as in the field of the physical sciences, are real (posita, in Latin, would mean things that can be measured). He set himself the task of explaining religion and religious experiences in terms of posita. He humanizing the distinction between things sacred and things profane and sought to isolate the "elementary forms of religious life"; in other words, just as a scientist establishes particular elements, molecules and atoms as the "building blocks" of the material world, he was quite

convinced that, with a little effort, we would be able to separate out basic material units as the real elements of the so-called sacred which would then be shown up for what they were: nothing but material things wrongly invested with supernatural qualities. Falling back on the study of Melanesian tribal religious practices pioneered by R. H. Codrington, an English anthropologist, he proposed “mana” as the archaic source of the sacred. With Codrington, he believed that the totemism practiced by the Melanesians was the most primitive expression of human religiosity and all our contemporary sophisticated religious practices and doctrines were no more than more complex elaborations of the same. In tribal worship, there emerged a strange, fearsome force (called mana) – especially in the frenzied ritual dancing around the totem pole – which accrued to the totem, symbol of the tribe or clan. It was believed by the natives that somehow their tribal identity, tribal lore and tribal skill and courage in hunting and fighting accrued to the totem through the dancers and, at the same time, the accumulated wisdom and insights of their ancestors was transferred from there, through them, to the whole tribe. Totemic cult boils down to the cult of the clan and “the gods were the people conceived symbolically.” Thus religion, God, the sacred, are nothing but useful ways to teach primitives how to be loyal to, and integrate themselves fully into, tribal society. Thus, having discovered the empirical identity of mana, Durkheim was quite convinced that he had shown convincingly enough that religion had no extrawordly, supernatural grounds whatever (Desbruslais 2000).

Two contemporary scholars both French and both Freudians, offer views along the same lines: Laura Makarius and Rene Girard, both of whom published their research in 1947. The former links her conclusions to issues linked to sex and gender bias, the latter links his findings to the sublimation of our alleged instinct for violence.

Makarius traces the origin of the sacred to the sense of awe with which the primitive mind was accustomed to regard blood and the various taboos associated with it. The efficacy of mana (she uses the same word as Durkheim) stemmed from the ambivalence of blood: the fact that one who shed blood would experience its malefic effect which would render him impure; at the same time, however, some of its mysterious, ineffable and efficacious power would be also transmitted to the violator of the taboo (Desbruslais 2000). Makarius was sure that her theory would put to rest, once and for all, centuries of “pseudo – theological speculation” and enable us to see truly wherein the secret of religious experience really lay.

Girard suggests that the sacred is nothing but a disguised sublimation of our violent instinct. He adverts to the unabashedly violent element that is present in all religious worship – a victim is slaughtered, its blood is spilt on the altar and sprinkled on the worshippers (though in an “unbloody” manner in some circles). The “scapegoat theory” (i.e. an innocent creature is cruelly slain to exile the sins of the community by taking them on itself) is rejected by him. Rather, it is a “surrogate victim”, which thereby absorbs the violence that men (.), prey to their drive, would otherwise be driven to vent on each other. His thesis, he sees, is confirmed by his claim that “sacrifice languished in societies with a firmly established judicial system – ancient Greece and Rome, for example.” Now that we have an efficient legal system and a well-trained police force to enforce it, we no longer require the sublimatory effects of religion to control our violent drives (Desbruslais 2000).

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1. How is God related to the Sacred?

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2. What is the significance of “mana”?

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4.4 THE SACRED: SODERBLOM AND FRIENDS

Nathan Soderblom (1866 – 1931) was a Swede, one of the pioneers in the study of Comparative Religions, at his native University of Upsala, Sweden. He wrote a significant article, “Holiness” for the “Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics” which proved to be a landmark in the development of the Philosophy of Religion. “The sacred is the most important word in religion; it is even more than God”, he tellingly remarked. He then went on to say why: “For a religion can really exist without any conception of the divinity, but there is no religion without the distinction between the sacred and the profane.” Next, provides us with a kind of descriptive definition of the sacred: it is an “entity, mysterious, and bound up with certain things events or action. Finally, he sub-divided the sacred into two constitutive parts, one with a more positive connotation, “mana,” a beneficial efficacious power and another with a more negative connotation, taboo, “implying the notion of danger, of interdict and prohibition.” Soderblom was an orthodox Christian and rejected any interpretation of the sacred as an impersonal force, a deeper and most often untapped resource of the individual or society. For him an encounter the sacred stemmed from a genuine contact with God. He concluded that all would agree that “the psychological origin of the concept of the sacred seems to have been the reaction of the mind when confronted with something which is new, starting and terrifying.” Since then, most scholars use the term *ganz andere* as a kind of synonym for the Sacred (Desbruslais 2000).

Rudolf Otto (1869 – 1937), the German savant and mystic was impressed with the work of Soderblom and set out on his studies with the last quoted phrase of the latter ringing in his ears. A profoundly religious man himself, he avowed he was a “Lutheran Benedictine” and made no secret of his love for the beauty And solemnity of the Roman Catholic liturgy, together with its scope for facilitating an encounter with the divine. But he devoted himself with equal zeal to the study of non-Christian religions as to Christian theology. A visit to India convinced him that the Sacred can be encountered more fully through intuition and symbol and far less adequately through reason. His Indian experience, coupled with his delving into the Upanishads, convinced Otto of the greatness and completeness of Indian mysticism. He was further gratified to discover a tremendous convergence in the mystics of Europe, India, Israel, Iran, China and Greece.

But behind the wealth of ideas and practices that he documented in religions across the globe, there seemed to loom one common and incontestable phenomenon, the sense of the Holy. In practice, however *das Heilige* was also used in Ethics and was applied to certain human beings. In search of a more precise and humanizing term that could be exclusively used for the encounter with the divine in religion, he decided to leave the “holy” to Ethics and coin a new term for religious language: “(The Latin) omen has given us ‘ominous’ and there is no reason why from

numen (Latin for 'divinity') we should not coin, similarly, a word, 'numinous'." (Desbruslais 2000).

He then sifts through piles of writings of mystics of every race and age and creed to summarise these into four phenomenological steps in the human encounter with the numinous. First, there is elicited, from us a "creaturely feeling" (das Kreaturgefuhl). Here is an expression of "the emotion of a creature, submerged and overwhelmed by its own nothingness in contrast to that which is supreme above all creatures." Then comes the stage of the tremendum, holy fear and mystic awe, which makes one tend to draw back in the face of the mystery of the All-Good and the All-Pure. This is practically simultaneous with a kind of contrary movement, which he uses two Greek words to describe, "eusebeia" or "elubeia" overwhelming urge from deep within to express ones feelings through deep piety and cultic acts. Any authentic cultic rite, Otto unceasingly reminds us, must issue forth in a powerful confession of the Mystery, the Wholly Other, the Totally Transcendent. This, culminates in the final experience of the "fascinans", the fascinating – that which seduces, enraptures and draws human into bliss.

Mircea Eliade (1907-1986), the celebrated Rumanian scholar of religions, arrived in India in 1928, studied at Calcutta and produced a brilliant doctoral thesis on Yoga. When his country turned Communist after World War II, he assumed voluntary exile, relinquishing his governmental post and settling down in France. From Paris he launched a series of books, articles and conferences On the History of Religions. Later, he shifted to the United States and was attached to the University of Chicago. He agrees that the Sacred is the basis of all religious experience and observes, "Man becomes aware of the sacred, because it manifests itself as something quite different from the profane." He coins the term hierophany to describe this manifestation of the Sacred. It is significant, he notes, that a hierophany always occurs through the medium of "myths or symbols," but never completely in an immediate manner in its totality." In other words, the infinite humbly historicises Itself in and through some finite reality. "This is the great mystery, the mysterium tremendum", he avers, "the fact that the Sacred decided to limit Itself" – in a hierophans.

4.5 IN RESPONSE TO DURKHEIM AND OTHERS

Durkheim's reductionist approach would hardly stand up to contemporary views. Understandably was he so enamoured by the positive sciences as they were just coming into being. Postmodernism would make short shrift to erstwhile claims to found epistemological certainties on the findings of science. Even contemporary philosophers of science, from Capra to Einstein and Heisenberg are wary about any claims to absolutism and naive objectivity that are associated with nineteenth century positivism. Besides, as further anthropological and sociological studies have shown, it is far too simplistic a thesis to hold that all religion is nothing more than souped-up totem dancing.

As for Makarius and Girard, they have certainly made some insightful comments on the phenomenon of religious rites, but can we afford to receive them without serious critical thought? Again, it is sociologists, like Evans-Pritchard who caution us against any hasty tendency to study or explain away one discipline from the perspective of, or in terms of, another. It is not scientific to rule out a priori the reality of any discipline's subject matter and then proceed to study biology as if it were engineering or vice versa.

More to the point, the American thinker and psychologist, William James (1842-1910) had this to say about people who try to "show up" religion as perverted sexual or sublimated violence: "It

is true that in the vast collection of religious phenomena, some are undisguisedly amatory – e.g., sex deities and obscene rites in polytheism and ecstatic feelings of union with the Saviour in a few Christian mystics. But then, why not call religion an aberration of the digestive function and prove ones point by the worship of Bacchus and Ceres, or the ecstatic feelings of some saints about the Eucharist? Religious language clothes itself in such poor symbols as life affords, and the whole organism gives overtones of comment whenever the mind is strongly stirred to expression. Language drawn from eating and drinking is probably as common in religious literature as is language drawn from sexual life (James 2010).

The quote is from his classic, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. Now, danger of all reductionisms is that they fasten themselves upon a point which may be true, but thence proceed to the simplistic assumption that all instances of anything linked with the fact are to be explained in the same way. This is the traditional fallacy of arguing, “That convicted murderer has red hair, therefore all red-haired people are prone to commit murder.” Trying to maintain that gall religious activity can be explained away as sex and violence would force one to conclude, with equal (il)logic that “the religious life depends just as much upon the spleen, the pancreas and on the kidneys as on the sexual apparatus, and the whole theory has (by now) lost its point in evaporating into a vague general assertion of the dependence, somehow, of the mind upon the body” (James 2010). And no one would quarrel with that last remark – except to note that it is so vague and general as to practically say nothing worth paying attention to.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1. Who are the “masters of suspicion”? Why are they called so?

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2. How do you respond to Durkheim’s view on God?

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4.6 THE “MASTERS OF SUSPICION”

It was Paul Ricoeur, the devout Christian French phenomenologist, who dubbed the atheist trio Nietzsche-Marx-Freud, “Masters of Suspicion”, since they, in effect, have taught us to be suspicious of hastily assuming that we have had mystical experiences: often times, they point out, what we were really encountering was nothing divine or supernatural but some little understood and unhealthy aspect of ourselves. J. P. Stern, in his deceptively slim, masterful work, *Nietzsche*, summed up their perennial critique of religion:

“They saw their undertaking as the solving of a secret, and all opposition to it as a conspiracy; a conspiracy of men with vested social interest, thought Marx; of men with vested space moral and religious interest, thought Frued; of men who chose to be only half alive and resent the few who live generously and dangerously, thought Nietzsche.”

Karl Marx (1818 – 18831): According to the father of all leftists, “Religion is the opium of the

people.” This is one of the world’s most famous quotations. What is not so well known, however, is that he held that it was the oppressed people who dose themselves with opium (a pain-killer in Marx’s days) to deaden the pain of their sufferings. It was not the oppressors who gave it to them to make them keep quiet. Now, there’s nothing wrong with making use of a pain-killer when there’s no way of removing the source of ones pain (as in some cases of cancer, or in a post-operation situation). But if one has, say, a thorn in the foot, the proper remedy would be to remove the thorn, not leave it there and take pain-killers. Marx is quite right in attacking all those victims of social injustice who, instead of rising up to challenge their oppressor and demand their just rights, resign themselves to their lot for “pie in the sky when they die”. And when such is the case, we cannot but endorse Marx’s critique and do all we can to extirpate such pseudo-religiosity, conscientising the people to put forward concerted action for justice. However, not all religion functions as an opium, nor are all believers miserable and oppressed people. Authentic religion, far from being the opium of the people, can be a catalyst for revolutionary action for justice, as the activists of liberation theology (and philosophy.) show (Desbruslais 2000).

Friederich Nietzsche (1841- 1900): Granted, Nietzsche ended his days in an asylum for the insane; granted, many of his strident rantings against God and religion appear to warrant no more attention than we’d give to the babblings of any madman. But, behind and the apparent arrogance and decidedly schizophrenic utterances, there is a solid vein of critical truth that we would be foolish and irresponsible to ignore. His charge is that religion in general, and Christianity in particular, has proved for a good many people a pious subterfuge for cowardice and mediocrity, masquerading under the “virtues” of humility and resignation to God. For too long have religions frowned upon ambition, self-assertion and courageous initiative, over-stressing counterfeits for meekness and gentleness. Nietzsche does well to remind us that the former have a positive side and the latter hide a negative aspect. On the other hand a disproportionate emphasis on the “manly” virtues, without situating them in their proper humanizing context, can lead to the worst excesses of colonialism, oppression ... and Hitlerism

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939): If Marx qualified religion as an opium, for Freud it was illusion. .By this he didn't mean that it was patently false - in which case he would have qualified it as delusion. What the Austrian father of psycho-analysis meant was that "wish-fulfillment", more than any - thing else was its basis. As an illustration of what he meant by this, he asked us to consider the case of a servant girl, who is badly treated by the family for which she works. She could protest and throw up her job, but instead she carries on her miserable drudgery, hoping all along that a handsome prince will one day come along, marry her and rescue her from her pitiful state, taking her to live happily ever after with him in a glorious castle. Now, handsome princes do exist and it is at least theoretically possible that one of them just might come her way, fall in love with her and take her with him to his fairy palace. But it is highly unlikely and she is pinning her hopes on an idle dream. People in misery fashion for themselves an illusotry being called God, who, they hope will one day set them free from their suffering and take them off to heaven. Again, Freud compared religious believers to adults who are afraid to grow up and accept the responsibility for their own lives and futures. Realising that they cannot always be running to their earthly fathers for protection and for solutions to their problems (their earthly fathers die or are discovered by them, to their horror, not to be the strongest and most knowledgeable people on earth), they project their frustration into a "heavenly father" to whom they can run with all their problems and fears. Now, here too we must admit that there is a good

deal of truth in what Freud has said: for many people "god" is nothing but wish-fulfillment and & projection of the father Image-very specially for the psychologically disturbed people who came to him for counselling and healing. But Freud's mistake was his over-generalisation: not every one who believes in God or practices religious worship is psychotic. Henri Bergson (1859 - 1941), the French thinker and scholar on evolution, joining his research to that of William James (whom we have referred to above) has pointed out that in every culture and every age there have been- and continue to be – great mystic, people of age and sexes who claim to have encountered god.

Now it is possible to study their life and writings and dismiss many of them as cranks, social misfits, psychologically deranged people who had - consciously or no - fabricated such "mystical experiences" out of their own inadequacies, insecurities and fears, seeking thereby a kind of escapist solution to their worries and anxieties. But we can't write off with equal ease all the claims of all mystics everywhere and at all time. Some of them, when critically examined, emerge as personages of obvious and evident psychological maturity and balance, radical thinkers who challenged the existing social and religious structures of their times and were frequently persecuted and pilloried by the powers that were at the time, both sacred and secular. They evince the qualities of gifted administrators, inspiring leaders, launching revolutionary movements and gathering around themselves charismatic and radical personalities who have helped to keep alive, even to our times, some of the action groups that they built up. These are hardly qualities we'd associate with "crazies"; instead, they stand out as psychologically sound as the best of us, if not more so. Thus, not all mystics and their writings would wilt and pale before the ruthless assault of philosophical "suspicion" (Desbruslais 2000).

4.7 THE HISTORY OF WESTERN PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

Two Australian philosophers have brought out a Five-volume set on the history of philosophy of religion. Graham Oppy is a Professor in the School of Philosophy & Bioethics at Monash University in Australia. Nick Trakakis teaches Philosophy and Religious Studies at Monash and Deakin Universities. Their *History of Western Philosophy of Religion* covers Ancient, Medieval, Early Modern, Nineteenth Century and Twentieth Century philosophy of religion. Written by an international range of leading scholars, the entries, each devoted to a major philosopher of religion, have been chosen to reflect the breadth and variety of perspectives in the history of Western philosophy of religion. In addition to entries on major philosophers and schools, thinkers whose work has greatly influenced the philosophy of religion--notably Darwin, Marx and Freud--are also included. Rightly it is claimed to be the "most comprehensive history of the philosophy of religion."

Designed to be accessible to a wide range of readers, the entries focus on the key themes in a clear and jargon-free fashion. Each volume works independently to provide an overview of a period, opening with an introduction to the period and concluding with a timeline of major events and full bibliography. With 100 essays sweeping across the history of Western philosophy of religion in five volumes, this set is an indispensable resource for anyone conducting research or teaching in one of the most exciting and vibrant fields in philosophy.

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1. Who are the "masters of suspicion"? Why are they called so?

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2. Give the significance of the book edited by Graham Oppy and Nick Trakakis?
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4.8 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have studied a historical over-view of the philosophy of religion. In fact, it must be mentioned, that right from the beginning of philosophy, themes related to God and religion has emerged directly and indirectly. We have studied some significant persons, chosen almost arbitrarily, who have contributed to the philosophy of religion and then given a very general list of the important persons involved.

4.9 KEYWORDS

Das Heilige: Rudolf Otto's most famous work is *The Idea of the Holy*, published first in 1917 as *Das Heilige - Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen* (*The Holy - On the Irrational in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational*). The book defines the concept of the holy as that which is numinous. Otto explained the numinous as a "non-rational, non-sensory experience or feeling whose primary and immediate object is outside the self". He coined this new term based on the Latin *numen* (deity). The numinous is a mystery (Latin: *mysterium*) that is both terrifying (*tremendum*) and fascinating (*fascinans*) at the same time. It also sets a paradigm for the study of religion that focuses on the need to realize the religious as a non-reducible, original category in its own right. This paradigm was under much attack between approximately 1950 and 1990 but has made a strong comeback since then, after its phenomenological aspects have become more apparent, and written about by Karl Rahner's presentation of man as a being of transcendence.

Hierophany: A visible manifestation of God to humankind.

Mana: Mana is an indigenous Pacific islander concept of an impersonal force or quality that resides in people, animals, and (debatably) inanimate objects. The word is a cognate in many Oceanic languages, including Melanesian, Polynesian, and Micronesian.

4.10 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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