

Contemporary philosophy of religion: Issues and approaches

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The following essays are presented in celebration of the publication of the fiftieth volume of the *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion*. Since the publication of the first volume in 1970, there has emerged a new era in western philosophy of religion characterized by pluralism in content and method.* Some philosophers identify themselves as traditional theists, often returning to their roots in medieval philosophy. Others seek either to reconstruct the God of classical theism or in some cases leave it behind altogether. Persons often associate the first with Anglo-American or analytic approaches to the philosophy of religion and the latter with Continental or phenomenological approaches to philosophy of religion. There is some justification for this. It is not unusual to see the work of a contemporary analytic philosopher of religion begin with the declaration that by God he or she means the God of classical theism. By contrast the work of a philosopher of religion in the phenomenological tradition may begin with the declaration that theism in its traditional form has lost its credibility.

The picture given above, however, over-simplifies the situation. First, significant diversity exists in both Anglo-American and Continental approaches to the philosophy of religion. Second, these approaches to the philosophy of religion tell only part of the contemporary story. There are other approaches to the philosophy of religion which cannot be classified easily under these headings. Third, in spite of striking differences among contemporary philosophers of religion, they often share a good bit of common ground. For example, many contemporary philosophers of religion reject the neo-positivist and classical foundationalist approaches to knowledge, and discussions of religious knowledge often center on religious experience or the religious dimensions of experience. There are important differences regarding theories of experience, but few philosophers of religion today limit experience to self-authenticating revelation or the empirically verifiable. There is also a growing awareness of the diversity of human experience and of the historical and interpretive dimensions of experience. These developments

* I have discussed these developments in more detail in Part Four of *Twentieth-Century Western Philosophy of Religion 1900–2000* (Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000).

challenge claims to universal truth in religion, send philosophers in search of new conceptions of rationality and in some cases lead to new conceptions of the nature and tasks of the philosophy of religion.

One of the important developments in the philosophy of religion during the last quarter of the twentieth century traces its roots to Martin Heidegger and the phenomenological tradition. One can hardly think of Heidegger and religion without thinking of Rudolf Bultmann and Paul Tillich. Yet Heidegger's emphasis upon interpretation and his understanding of language as the house of being helped prepare the way for what has been called a hermeneutical or linguistic turn in phenomenology. In its more radical form this is called deconstruction or postmodernism and is illustrated in the work of such philosophers as Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida. Postmodernism is an expression used widely in literature, philosophy and theology during the last decades of the twentieth century to signal a rejection in various degrees of the concept of rationality associated with modern philosophy or the Enlightenment.

The first essay by John Macquarrie, 'Postmodernism in Philosophy of Religion and Theology', provides an analysis of postmodernism and its influence in contemporary philosophy and theology. Macquarrie, whose own approach to philosophical theology is influenced by Heidegger and Bultmann, identifies several characteristics of postmodernism, including the limits of the intellect, the questioning of authority, the rejection of any unified world view, and the emphasis upon difference, the particular, pluralism and desire. From his own point of view he then illustrates and critically evaluates these characteristics in the work of three postmodern philosophers, Levinas, Jean-François Lyotard and Derrida and three postmodern theologians, Mark Taylor, Graham Ward and Jean-Luc Marion.

Adriaan Peperzak, the author of the second essay, 'Philosophy-Religion-Theology', is also indebted to recent continental philosophy. Defining the religious dimension of human existence in a broad way to mean the deepest dimension of human life in which all other dimensions are rooted, Peperzak argues that the religious dimension is a necessary and basic topic of philosophy, that philosophy itself is a kind of faith, and that if philosophy proclaims itself autarchic, it is a religion that must look down upon other religions as deficient forms of its own truth. From this perspective he challenges the modern self-conception of philosophy and argues that other religions can in turn criticize the impossibility of philosophy's faith in its autarchy and the arrogance that follows from it. Peperzak analyzes some relations between faith and thought in philosophy, philosophy of religion and theology and argues for a form of universality different from that professed by modern philosophy.

During much of the twentieth century, religion was relegated by many to the margins of the so-called modern political and intellectual worlds. Religion, however, has emerged on the geopolitical stage of the late twentieth-century as a significant force leading many to challenge an overly simplistic separation of the worlds of the religious and non-religious. In his article, 'Of Miracles and Special Effects', Hent de Vries argues that the narrative of Western 'secularist' modernity has obscured the fact that in most of its historical forms the concept of the political has to some extent always been dependent upon the religious. He is particularly concerned with what he identifies as an intrinsic and structural relationship between religion and the new media, and the transformative changes we are witnessing today. His study of miracle in relation to special effects provides a concrete example to illustrate this. Starting out from a discussion of Jacques Derrida's recent essay, 'Faith and Knowledge', de Vries investigates the structural resemblances and differences between the miracle and the special effect and sketches out the place and function of religion in relation to the new technological media.

Analytic philosophers of religion trace their twentieth century roots to the new realism that characterized much British and American philosophy in the early part of the century. Since the 1960s, however, many analytic philosophers have called into question classical foundationalism and the evidentialist challenge to religious belief in the work of such philosophers as W.K. Clifford, Bertrand Russell, and Antony Flew. Some of these philosophers are classified as moderate foundationalists while others, who are more closely indebted to the later Wittgenstein, are often called anti-foundationalists. Among the leading so-called moderate foundationalists is William Alston. Alston argues that a person may be justified in holding certain beliefs about God based on his or her direct experience or perception of God. Given what appears to be the incompatibility of perceptual religious beliefs formed in different religions, however, questions arise concerning the reliability or rationality of different religious practices and the closely connected issues of religious exclusivism and religious tolerance. In his essay, 'Religious Diversity and Religious Toleration', Philip Quinn discusses the work of Alston and related thinkers and challenges their tendencies towards religious exclusivism. Abstracting arguments from Pierre Bayle and Immanuel Kant, Quinn makes a connection between discussions of religious diversity in religious epistemology and discussions of religious diversity in moral and political philosophy. He argues that religious diversity reduces the epistemic status of religious exclusivism and intolerance, and makes it possible for a person to be justified in aspiring to be religious while living fully within a religiously pluralistic cultural environment.

Many contemporary analytic philosophers of religion are committed to traditional Jewish or Christian theism and this has helped stimulate interest in a diversity of topics associated with theistic faith and belief. The problem of evil has proven to be particularly acute for traditional theists and it has been the focus of much discussion in recent analytic philosophy of religion. In addressing this problem analytic philosophers have often explored medieval and other classical texts. William Wainwright's article, 'Theological Determinism and the Problem of Evil: Are Arminians Any Better Off?', plumbs the work of Jonathan Edwards in an effort to better understand contemporary debates concerning freedom, determinism and the problem of evil. Wainwright maintains that Edwards' theological determinism aggravates the problem of evil in three ways. It appears to make God the author of sin, exposes God to charges of insincerity and raises questions about God's justice. Wainwright argues that Edwards is correct in thinking that Arminianism is exposed to many of the same difficulties, but that his idea of God's justice inflicting infinite punishment upon persons whose actions have been determined by God is indefensible and may not be a difficulty for Arminianism.

The apparent incompatibility between divine foreknowledge and human freedom is another problem that has haunted the theistic tradition for many centuries and has received almost unprecedented attention in recent analytic philosophy of religion. In his article, 'The Foreknowledge Conundrum', William Hasker provides a survey and analysis of several classical and contemporary efforts to solve the problem of the incompatibility between comprehensive, infallible divine foreknowledge and libertarian free will, focusing in particular upon those solutions most actively considered by philosophers during the last three decades of the twentieth century. Concluding that none of the proposed solutions to the problem is fully satisfying, Hasker raises the question, whether theological incompatibilism might be less inimical to traditional theism than some have supposed. In this context he calls attention to 'open theism', a recent movement within evangelical Protestantism which, based upon its revised conception of God and of God's relationship with the world, affirms the incompatibility of divine foreknowledge and free will. While admitting that it is too soon to draw conclusions about the effects of this movement, Hasker suggests that at a minimum it demonstrates that one cannot simply assume that theological incompatibilism is inimical to Biblical faith and traditional Christian theology.

Thomism is the expression applied since the fourteenth century to philosophers whose thinking has its foundation in the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas. The expression Neo-Thomism is sometimes used to refer to the revival of Thomism which began in the middle of the nineteenth century

and was later officially endorsed by the Roman Catholic Church. The aim of this revival was not merely a restatement of Thomas' philosophy and theology, but an accurate understanding of the permanent truth of the principles of his thought that could be applied to contemporary thought. This has led to a re-vitalization of the Thomistic tradition as some have brought Thomas' thought into conversation with other contemporary philosophical movements and others have challenged traditional conceptions of how to read his thought. In his essay, 'Theology in Philosophy: Revisiting the Five Ways', Fergus Kerr calls into question what he calls the standard reading of Aquinas' arguments for the existence of God. On the standard view, Aquinas is understood to be a good example of those who think that the existence of God can be inferred from natural features of the world. Kerr challenges this reading of Aquinas and the general conception of philosophy of religion that arises from it. Reading the text in context, argues Kerr, suggests how theologically determined the philosophical arguments are. Thomas' approach in the *Summa Theologiae*, he suggests, may be read not as turning away from the Bible, choosing Aristotle and conducting foundationalist apologetics, but as continuing more than a thousand years of reading the Vulgate in the light of a certain neo-Platonism.

Process philosophy is widely understood today to refer to the kind of realistic metaphysics associated with Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne and those influenced by them. Although not limited to American thinkers, its greatest impact in recent years has been in the United States and in particular among those who declare themselves to be neo-classical or process theists. In general process theists are committed to the view that whatever exists in reality should be characterized in terms of processes rather than substances or things, and that we should look for God in the world process itself. They argue for a close relationship between philosophy and the natural sciences and understand God less in terms of timeless perfection and more in terms of temporal becoming. It is not their intention to deny the perfection of God, but to insist that perfect knowledge and love require involvement in the world.

In his article, 'Process Philosophy of Religion', David Ray Griffin summarizes ways in which he has sought to employ process metaphysics to address several topics, including the problem of evil and the relation between science and religion. Process philosophy's pantheistic view of God seeks to combine features of both pantheism and theism. This results in a rejection of *creatio ex nihilo* in the strict sense and a rejection of the traditional idea of God's omnipotence which leads to the traditional problem of evil. Creative power is understood to be inherent in the world as well as God, and God's power is understood to be persuasive rather than coercive. With

Postmodernism in philosophy of religion and theology

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The term 'postmodernism' has been often heard in the closing decades of the twentieth century, first apparently used in the visual arts, then spreading to other areas, including philosophy and theology. It is not easy to give any general definition of 'postmodernism'. Perhaps the end of the twentieth century with its ambiguous record of progress and retrogression has created a *fin de siècle* mentality in which there is rejection of the past and an intense desire to begin anew. Both the hopes and fears engendered at such a time are liable to be exaggerated.

The very word 'postmodern' is a polemical term, for if you claim to be a postmodern artist or theologian or whatever else, you automatically put all your contemporaries out of date. The merely modern has been outstripped by the postmodern, and in a society like ours the word 'postmodern' confers a certain prestige even before we have inquired just what it means. We can do justice to postmodernism only by looking carefully at particular examples as we find them in the work of some leading exponents. But first it will be useful to draw attention to some characteristics which occur in most of those who accept the postmodernist label and which seem to differentiate them more or less sharply from their predecessors. I am going to mention ten contrasts where the postmodernists break with the past. The number 'ten' is arbitrary – it could have been less, because some of my points overlap, or it could have been more, because almost certainly I shall have omitted points which other writers would consider important.

Contrast 1. Postmodernism and modernism

This is the most general of the oppositions to be considered. Modern religious thought has been observant of what might be called the 'canons' of the Enlightenment, that is to say, it has prized rationality, has been respectful toward natural science and critical history, has questioned authority and minimized the 'supernatural' in religion. Rudolf Bultmann would be a good example of a 'modern' theologian, especially in his radically critical historical criticism of the New Testament and even more in his program

of 'demythologizing', aimed at removing from Christianity those features which he deemed unacceptable to 'modern man'.¹ Postmodernists cannot simply reject rationalism if they wish to participate in serious dialogue, but they stress the limits of reason, and are at one with the modernists in questioning any authority or privileged opinion.

Derrida stated in an early writing that his philosophical method 'blocks the way to all theology'² but seems later to have modified his opinion, and if he has not become a theologian, he could at least be called a philosopher of religion in search of a theology.

Contrast 2. Objectivity and subjectivity

Whereas modernism laid great stress on objectivity, postmodernism seems to lean toward subjectivism. But we have to be careful in assessing this statement. As far as the natural sciences are concerned, I do not think that many postmodernists would urge a return to the view of Bishop Berkeley, that what we call material things are in reality ideas in the mind: *esse est percipi*, 'to be is to be perceived'. In fact, some postmodernists are convinced materialists, for instance, Lyotard. But in the question of history, the subjectivizing tendency is strong. A good example is the quest of the historical Jesus. In the nineteenth century, there was a vigorous attempt to arrive at a picture of Jesus such as we would have seen had we been present in his lifetime. This quest has been renewed quite recently. But the 'objective facts' can never be fully established. We would need to be able to travel back through time, and see Jesus for ourselves. In fact, we can never get beyond reports, and even the earliest gospel (Mark) was written more than thirty years after the crucifixion, and must itself have had its origin in earlier reports, most or even all of them unwritten. So we have to ask, 'Is there anything except interpretation of interpretations . . .?' What do we make of Derrida's claim that 'there is nothing outside of the text'³ Does postmodernism lead inevitably to skepticism or can the way to theology can be unblocked?

Contrast 3. Fragmentation and totalization

One of the most prominent features of postmodern thinking is its tendency to take apart the unities of thought on the ground that these unities have been subjectively projected on to a reality which is itself disparate and dismembered. Clearly, this is another rejection of the Enlightenment, which sought to work toward a unified view of the world. The natural sciences do aim at overarching theories which bring together apparently unrelated

phenomena under one roof. Philosophy was even more ambitious, especially Hegelianism, which earns the disapproval of most postmodernists. Hegel constructed a metaphysical system which embraced just about everything – logic, nature, law, history, art, politics, religion. But do the realities which constitute the cosmos, including the human realities, fit so neatly into the patterns of thought? Here the postmodernists go back of Kierkegaard, who criticized Hegel on the grounds that only God can view the cosmos as a whole.⁴

But one has to ask the postmodernists whether the sciences could have had their successes unless the cosmos has a rational structure of some sort. (Einstein believed that they could not). The situation is more problematic in the case of an all-embracing metaphysic. What about history, which holds special interest for religion? Extrapolating from records of particular periods, some theologians and philosophers claim to see a pattern in history as a whole. No conclusive proofs are available, but many postmodernists believe that history has neither beginning nor end nor overall pattern. But how can a postmodernist know that history is fragmentary and directionless if he denies that there is any access to objective facts?

Contrast 4. Particular and universal

Enlightenment or modernist thinkers have sought universal laws, and have treated the particular as only an instance of something universal. They have minimized difference for the sake of identity or sameness. Hegel, of course, did not deny difference and believed that throughout the universe there is an unending clash of opposites. But his dialectical method resolved these oppositions by bringing them together in a wider synthesis. The difference is ‘taken up’ (*aufgehoben*) into a new unity. But while this may be gain, it is also loss, for the particular has an excess of content which has to be discarded in the abstractness of a generalizing concept. Kierkegaard is hailed as a forerunner of postmodernism because he championed the particular. The universalizer should allow more weight to the particular in all its concrete richness (it may be nothing short of ‘revelation’), but could anyone have recognized the revelation as such unless he had already some general capacity for it? So this contrast has to be left undecided.

Contrast 5. Others and self

The theme of this contrast is closely related to the one we have just considered. The notion of the ‘other’ and ‘otherness’, also called ‘alterity’,

are very important in postmodernism. All men and women share a common humanity, yet each one has a certain uniqueness and a unique perspective on the world. Again we can refer back to the nineteenth century contrast between Hegel and Kierkegaard. Hegel took a poor view of Abraham because he chose to live in isolation. Kierkegaard claimed that the individual is a higher category than the community, and praises Abraham for rejecting the universal demands of morality in order to obey what he took to be the voice of God.⁵ Postmodernists are divided, not all following Kierkegaard in this matter. Many of them have accepted Buber's criticism of Kierkegaard, that he concentrated too much on individual experience and was oblivious to the fact that every individual is always involved with others. So the other and otherness figure prominently in postmodern philosophies.

It is the notion of otherness that allows some of them to introduce God into their philosophy, perhaps echoing Buber's teaching that every particular 'thou' is a glimpse through to the eternal 'Thou'.⁶ We shall also meet the idea that God is the 'wholly other'.

Contrast 6. Relative and absolute

There is a distinctly negative strain in postmodern philosophy, though it does not necessarily lead to nihilism or skepticism. But we have already seen that postmodernists are against authority and tradition, and they question whether human thought can come to grips with any objective reality. And what about God, as Creator and Source of all that exists? Postmodernism has been deeply influenced by Nietzsche as well as by Kierkegaard and Buber, and in particular by Nietzsche's proclamation of the death of God. So most postmodernists agree that there are no absolute foundations or criteria for our beliefs or moral judgements. Are we plunged into complete relativism?

Nietzsche proclaimed the death of God, but he also asked, 'Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing, when we unchained the earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Is there still any up or down? Are we not wandering as through an infinite nothing? Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us?'⁷ Nietzsche did not enjoy the prospect of utter relativism.

There is no foundation and we are all the time on shifting sands. Our line of questioning has brought us to a point that is no longer academic but touches on the whole of life. But if we say that this is the consequence of atheism, we have to remember that faith too is something like this. In a metaphor beloved of Kierkegaard, faith is like being cast on 70,000 fathoms of water. Faith

is indeed like walking on water, yet it is essentially affirmative, and needs something to which to cling.

And what about morality? Is it too undermined, so that right and wrong become a matter of personal preference, something that has happened already in some areas of human conduct? Some people have begun to look for new foundations, though where can they be found if we have taken a sponge and wiped out the entire horizon? For example, having dismissed the Ten Commandments, once supposed to be of divine origin, people now appeal to 'human rights', alleged to have a universal validity. But postmodernists, notably Lyotard, have shown that these rights are themselves relative. We are left with the worrying question raised by one of Dostoyevsky's characters: 'If there is no God, then is everything permitted?'

Contrast 7. Pluralism and uniformity

All the major post modernists agree in approving pluralism as opposed to uniformity. This has been foreshadowed in the preferences already considered. Pluralism implies the recognition of difference and opposes the dominance of any one group and its ideas. Pluralism is not only negative in denying privilege to any one way of thinking but teaches respect for a variety of traditions, believing that society is enriched by such diversity.

However, even a convinced pluralist recognizes that there are limits, or we may end up with an individualism which threatens the cohesion of society. Pluralism came into being in the modern periods, especially with the growth of religious toleration after the Reformation, and is a modern, not a post-modern idea, still struggling for acceptance in our present confused times. No group has a monopoly of prejudice, and the postmodernists are quite frequently guilty of stating a position quite arbitrarily and privileging it above all others. Presumably this may be expected, if there are no final criteria.

Contrast 8. Passion and intellect

Anti-intellectualism is an ever-present danger in human history. It seems that in all human beings, lurking below the surface, there are irrational passions and desires which can break out, bringing chaos and destruction. Examples have not been lacking in our own time, the most frightening being the anti-Semitism which raged through the civilized lands of central and eastern Europe in the middle of the twentieth century. But the problem with 'modernism' is that it glorified intellect to the extent of crushing the passionate side of human nature. The natural sciences aimed at being 'value-free', that

Philosophy – religion – theology

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This essay is a (meta)philosophical attempt to clarify the theoretical practice called ‘philosophy of religion’. It proceeds in stages. (1) Beginning with a very broad definition of ‘religion’, it claims (a) that the religious dimension is not only a necessary and basic topic of philosophy, but also its source, and (b) that *all* philosophers, in the practice of their life, rely on a basic ‘faith’. If this is true, the question arises as to whether they can abstract from their faith in practicing philosophy. (2) The existing ‘positive’ religions concretize the religious dimension, but it is universally realized and expressed, even in atheistic and agnostic attitudes and convictions. *All* humans rely on a basic faith. (3) The modern self-conception of philosophy rests on the assumption that because it is autonomous it can separate itself from the lived existence from which it springs. This conception is a dream that has not been and cannot be realized. It must therefore be replaced with a metaphilosophy that respects the faith-based essence of philosophy. (4) Religion (the religious dimension and its concretization in faith) is united with philosophy in at least two ways: (a) as its object, and (b) as the basic condition of the philosophical (re)search. (5) Philosophy is a *relatively* autonomous element of the self-aware and critical life of philosophers. Its language is simultaneously particular and universal. As an attempt to think in the name of and for all humans, it continues its traditional task. Insofar as it is done at the service of a religious community, it is a particular faith searching for understanding, both of the universe and of itself. In its latter function philosophy can be called theology; in its universal function, it brackets its theological character, though it neither can nor should repress it. (6) The union of religion, including its faith and theology, and philosophy is guaranteed by all the connections mentioned in (1)–(5). Lacking an Archimedean standpoint, philosophers of religion should concentrate not only on the religions that are their subject, but also on the religious dimension to which they owe their inspiration. Philosophy of religion is one possible mode of being religious, that is, in an enlightened way. It cannot master what it illuminates, but it can express its own mixture of dependence and independence in conceptual language.

Religion

From an existential perspective we can use the word 'religion' to indicate the deepest dimension of human life in which all other dimensions are rooted. This very broad definition of religion points to the basic fact that human individuals and communities feel more or less at home in the world and its history. Instead of 'feeling at home in the universe', we could also say that the religious dimension is the dimension (or the level) where the question of decisive or ultimate meaning is asked and – at least tentatively and in an embryonic form – answered. All living persons accept their existence as somehow and to some degree meaningful, despite the many doubts, frustrations, rejections, and rebellions that may assail them. Insofar as the meaning that is found or presumed in the universe is fundamental, supporting human existence as a whole, it permeates and colors all other dimensions. As such it decides about the meaning of human lives.

The definition of religion proposed here implies that all concrete (or 'positive') religions can be interpreted as symbolic, ritual, and practical enactments of specific modes of being at home in the universe, aware that existence is not absurd, but possibly meaningful. It also implies that modes of inhabiting the world without religion, such as agnosticism or atheism, are likewise 'religious', insofar as their acceptance of the universe expresses (or even confesses) that existence in it must have a meaning. Materialists, biologists, and historicists, for example, may locate meaning elsewhere than in a realm of God or the gods, but they, too, believe in a basic meaning of existence.

The self-awareness that belongs to the deepest dimension of human lives is a pre-predicative and pre-propositional experience with a primarily affective character: the awareness of a fundamental attunement, a basic mood. We feel more or less at home in a specific mood. The universe can inspire awe, admiration, gratitude, anxiety; we can feel threatened, safe, secure, content, frustrated, nostalgic, and so on. Being affected by the phenomena, we react by affectively responding to them. How we respond depends on our degree of openness, receptivity, sensitivity, character and life story, and many other conditions; but so long as we continue to live, there is always some sort of basic consent and trust, even if these are hidden or overwhelmed by anguish and temptations of despair. Somehow we remain attached to our existence and confident that it is better to be than not to be. Even suicide cannot be preferred without, for the time being, approving and using the tools and actions needed to assure one's own disappearance.

Trust, confidence, or 'faith', taken in a sense as broad as the basic concept of 'religion', implies the affirmation that existence (including the entire universe insofar as one has to deal with it) has an overall meaning. Even if it is not *full* of meaning, it must be more meaningful than nothingness. This

affirmation is lived, rather than pronounced or thought. It is the element of consent in our moods, the basic mood that grants us the possibility of having a position and an attitude with regard to the universe and our existence in it. It grants us a 'stance'.

To have a stance is not statically fixed. An originary desire keeps humans on the move. As propelled by desire, a stance does not only trust the present (despite all threats), it also tends forward in search of meaning. Although, on this level, a clear answer to the question of life's meaning is not available, desire darkly anticipates that it must be possible to discover it and that it is already operative in the search. 'Faith' is thus linked with hope. If it includes attachment and the will to continue, it is also animated by a basic form of love, which, at this stage, still may be confined to love for oneself.

A reader of the preceding lines may have become suspicious: is this an attempt to read the three 'divine virtues' of Christian theology into the originary dimension of human existence, encompassing even such areligious or antireligious ways of life as atheism or agnosticism? Or is it perhaps an attempt to reduce the Christian religion and its theology to existential categories that fit all human beings so well that religion in any normal sense of the word and the differences between religions no longer matter? Not exactly; but undeniably it attempts to identify a universal dimension, level, or structure that can be found at the core of all forms or ways of life. At the same time it remains well-aware of the impossibility of doing so from a completely neutral, Archemedean perspective. The universality of the religious dimension is always approached from the perspective of a particular attachment (faith, hope, and love). However, such a perspective no more prevents a discussion with different perspectives or approaches than the difference between French and English or Chinese and Russian prevents a dialogue; but it clearly departs from the modern dogmas about universality and autonomy.

Autonomy

By proclaiming its own independence, philosophy has positioned itself as a rival of all moral, religious, literary, and political authorities. No longer a tributary to the authority of dogmas, ancients, or traditions, philosophers had to reinvent the universe on the basis of self-evident facts and principles. Their task was no longer ruled by powers other than thought itself; instead of serving states or churches, a philosopher would from now on speak in the name of humanity and for its benefit.

The modern emancipation necessitated a separation of thought itself from all the particular features of communal, historical, and individual life. None

of the contingent, idiosyncratic, or epochal elements involved in human existence should play a role in the constitution of universally valid truth. The great variety of factual religions should either be interpreted as a series of variations on one general 'religiosity' (not a 'positive', but a 'natural' religion) or seen as approximations of one universally valid philosophy, or even as failed attempts to capture the truth, which is in any case the monopoly of philosophy.

Descartes has thematized the necessity of a clear separation between his life in the world and the philosophical abstractions on which he wanted to thoughtfully rebuild the world and his own humanity,¹ but his successors have dedicated little attention to the (im)possibility of the radical split between theory and practice he proposed. They resumed his program of an abstract reconstruction without showing the possibility of a thought that would be wholly free from existential particularities.

The history of modern philosophy has demonstrated with utmost clarity that none of its systems is self-sufficient and that all philosophers have remained heavily dependent on the questions, discussions, conceptual frameworks, methods, and terminologies of predecessors and traditions, even when they succeeded in their revolutions and transformations. The best philosophers appropriated their past in an original way, thus transforming their inheritance into new beginnings, but none of their systems can be understood as a creation founded upon an indubitable evidence and crystalline logic. All of them are rooted in some hidden faith, though these authors were perhaps not always clearly aware of it.

In order to separate their philosophy from their lives as they live them, philosophers must find a free-standing perspective outside their own worldly and historical existence. Only then can they form an objective and universally valid judgment about the universe, including their own functioning within it. This standpoint was sought in thought itself. Thinking thus became the activity of an extra-existential, supra-historical and supra-terrestrial thinker, either in the form of a transcendental consciousness or as a trans- or super-human subject whose thoughts must be revealed by a human interpreter. As a hermetic or prophetic service to humanity, philosophy had to reduce the entire variety of cultures and stories to general forms and structures that could be verified everywhere. A formal universe was (re)created that had to be filled in by the real diversity of individual lives and communal histories.

Philosophy and religion

How does religion fare in the context of a philosophy that claims to be autonomous?

If religion, like art and morality, is an essential phenomenon, it cannot be excluded from philosophy. For within philosophy all exclusions are arbitrary, or rather, they are impossible because the horizon of philosophy is unlimited or universal. If religion is not a genuine phenomenon, philosophy must show which more genuine dimension hides behind its mask; if it is genuine and irreducible to anything else, philosophy will have to confront the rivalry that emerges from this fact. An autonomous philosophy necessarily submits religion to its own perspective and principles. Either it takes itself to be the highest tribunal for questions of meaning, or it leaves open the possibility that the ultimate judgement can be expected from another, deeper or higher realm. If there is such a realm, philosophy accepts the subordinate, relative, and provisional character of its 'autonomy', whereas in the first case, it is philosophy that knows the meaning of religion *and more*: its truth or falsehood, the reason why religion is meaningful or not, the extent to which different religions represent different degrees of truth and meaning, and so on. Hegel's reduction of the religious phenomenon to an imperfect presentation of philosophical truth is a consummate example of this reduction, while the subordination of philosophy to religion is asserted or assumed by all those philosophers who see themselves as primarily religious.

Is the expression 'primarily religious' a pleonasm? Can one be religious, i.e., attached to and engaged in a religion without being aware that religion *founds and encompasses* the entirety of human existence? Is it inevitable that the thought of religious persons either fits into their faith, or puts this faith to the test, which then might result in turning away from it, modifying it, or reinforcing it with philosophical considerations?

The crucial question is where a thinker stands when observing and thematizing others' or her own religious involvement. Thinking from the stance of religion (which I have called the basis of lived existence) ipso facto relativizes philosophy as a branch that cannot separate itself from the tree it serves. How could the branch claim the final judgment about the meaning of the tree? Thinking from an Archemedeian position is either an abstraction – and to that extent only a provisional or hypothetical enterprise until it find its place in the whole of a life – or it is indeed autarchic, but then it expresses another faith: the faith (or the 'religion') that identifies autonomous thinking with the truest and deepest dimension of life. The main task to which existence calls humans is then nothing other than thought, and all other tasks, such as art, morals, sport, and love, are subordinate to it. Philosophy itself is then the true religion. It is not difficult to show that the God of this religion must coincide either with a grounding and all-encompassing thinker whose existence is imaginary as an unrealized ideal, or with a transcendental or transcendent consciousness whose truth is revealed in the finite messages of the philosophers.

Of miracles and special effects¹

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Though the phenomenon of religion might seem to have become obsolete in the recent intellectual and political history of ‘secular’ modernity, in late twentieth and early twenty-first century liberal-democratic states and worldwide, it has resurfaced with an unprecedented – and unanticipated – force. This ‘return of the religious’² at a geopolitical scale conflicts with the self-interpretation of modern states and their citizens. The emergence of a supposedly enlightened and increasingly differentiated public sphere had gone hand in hand with the formulation of ideals of identity and self-determination, individual autonomy and universalist cosmopolitanism, both of which *seem* at odds with the heteronomy and particularism – the authoritarianism or even the violence – commonly ascribed to religious doctrine and its practices.³

The uncontested and often self-congratulatory narrative of Western, ‘secularist’ modernity – whose hegemony has only been reinforced by current tendencies toward globalization and the almost unchallenged appeal of free market capitalism⁴ – has from the outset obscured the fact that, in most of its historical formations, the concept of the political had to some extent always been contingent, if not upon the authority or the explicit sanction of a dominant religion, then at least upon a plausible translation and renegotiation of the central categories of this religion’s historical beliefs, its central rituals, and their implicit politics. This was true for premodern times and during the first establishment of so-called nation-states. *Mutatis mutandis*, the same holds true for the so-called new geopolitics that follows in the wake of globalization and its medium, ‘informationalism’.⁵

Most analytical and empirically informed studies on the recent transformations of the information based economy, society, and culture, on the one hand, and of the contemporary role of religion in the public sphere, on the other, have a common blind spot. What they fail to see is that it is precisely an intrinsic and structural relationship between the new media and the renewed manifestation of religion that enables a comprehension of the ways in which socio-cultural identity, diversity, a certain commonality and universality as well as adversity and violence, are constructed *and*, so to speak, *diffused*.⁶ Turning to a recent essay by Jacques Derrida will help me to address this relationship in a systematic, theoretical or philosophical,

mode. But concrete contemporary examples of it abound. A certain *politics of the miracle*, such as the one regularly deployed by the Vatican, is only one of them.⁷ By presenting a concrete example (confronting the ancient concept of the miracle and its present day counterpart, the special effect), this article sketches out the place and function of religion in relation to the new technological media. In the understanding of these relatively new phenomena contemporary comparative religious studies find their most daunting task.

Thus far not much has been done to bring these two revolutionary and unanticipated developments – the rise of the new media and the re-emergence of religion – into a single perspective. At a major Harvard conference some years ago, entitled *The Internet and Society*,⁸ no one raised the question of religion and even the most interesting studies in media and networks that originate in literary studies, hermeneutics and system theory pass over religion in silence.⁹

Conversely, contemporary discussions in *Religion and Contemporary Liberalism* and *Religion in Public Life*,¹⁰ to cite just a few of the most compelling contributions to the question of democracy, pay little attention to the simultaneous rise of the new media technologies and the relation they may have to the phenomenon of religion and its return as a political factor of world importance. The renewed prominence of the religious and the proliferation of political theologies it entails, on the one hand, and the equally unanticipated revolution in information technologies, on the other, are analyzed as if we were dealing with two totally independent developments. And where a relationship between the phenomena is acknowledged at all, the assumed link is often that of an instrumentalization of the one by the other, as if media formed the mere vehicle of religion or as if the medium could ever succeed in creating religion in its own image. Yet the medium is not secondary, nor is the religious mere epiphenomenon. And this is precisely what even the most promising theoretizations of the contemporary social and cultural world would seem to suggest.¹¹

The sole exception to this mutual blindness, it seems, is Derrida's 'Foi et savoir: Les deux sources de la "religion" aux limites de la simple raison' (Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of "Religion" at the Limits of Reason Alone), a text that be taken as an reelaboration of certain insights first formulated in the analysis of the postal system in *La Carte postale* (*The Post Card*), a text in which the reference to religion could have seemed virtually absent at a first reading.¹² In Derrida's more recent analysis, the reassessment of the concept and the practice of 'religion' goes hand in hand with that of the new media of communication, the increasingly sophisticated form of teletechnology. The two cannot be separated; inquiry into the first forms an interpretative key to the latter, and vice versa. What is more, their

intersection – and virtual interchangeability – have everything to do with a peculiar ‘*artifactuality*’ and ‘*actuvirtuality*’ that is characterized by a singular temporality, a ‘deconstructed actuality’, of sorts.¹³

As his title indicates, Derrida’s whole analysis is driven by certain reticence concerning what seems to be central presupposition of the project of modernity and, perhaps, of the philosophical tradition *in toto* as it seeks to radically distinguish between *muthos* and *logos*, *phusis* and *nomos*, *doxa* and *episteme*, faith and knowledge:

one would blind oneself to the phenomenon called ‘of religion’ or of the ‘return of the religious’ *today* if one continued to oppose so naïvely Reason *and* Religion, Critique or Science *and* Religion, technoscientific Modernity *and* Religion. Supposing that what was at stake was to understand, would one understand anything about ‘what’s-going-on-today-in-the-world-with-religion’ . . . if one continues to believe in this opposition, even in this incompatibility, which is to say, if one remains within a *certain* tradition of the Enlightenment, one of the many Enlightenments of the past three centuries (not of an *Aufklärung*, whose critical force is profoundly rooted in the Reformation), but yes, in this light of Lights, of the *Lumières*, which traverses like a single ray a *certain* critical and anti-religious vigilance, anti-Judaeo-Christiano-Islamic, a *certain* filiation ‘Voltaire-Feuerbach-Marx-Nietzsche-Freud-(and even)-Heidegger’? Beyond this opposition and its determinate heritage (no less represented on the other side, that of religious authority), perhaps we might be able to try to ‘understand’ how the imperturbable and interminable development of critical and technoscientific reason, far from opposing religion, bears, supports and supposes it.¹⁴

There is, Derrida maintains, an intrinsic relationship between the mediatic and the religious. Translated into contemporary geo- and theo-political terms, this would mean that one cease to portray, for example, political Islam in an anachronistic way, as the epitome of fundamentalism, ‘*intégrisme*’, and the like:

the surge of ‘Islam’ [*le déferlement ‘islamique*’] will be neither understood nor answered . . . as long as one settles for an internal explanation (interior to the history of faith, of religion, of languages or cultures as such), as long as one does not define the passageway between this interior and all the apparently exterior dimensions (technoscientific, tele-biotechnological, which is to say also political and socioeconomic etc.).¹⁵

This interfacing between the interior and the exterior, to the point where the very distinction collapses (or is, at least, significantly displaced), must have held true for all times, even though the present day and age would seem to have witnessed a generalization and intensification beyond measure of the mode of communication and mediatization: the ‘*mondialatinization*’ of the ‘*nouvelles nouvelles*’, as he has it, but one in whose expansion the sheer quantity of scale and pace reverses – once more almost, albeit it not necessarily dialectically (as Hegel and Adorno believed) – into a virtual qualitative change:

Like others before, the new ‘wars of religion’ are unleashed over the human earth . . . and struggle even today to control the sky *with finger and eye*: digital systems and virtually immediate panoptical visualization, ‘air space’, telecommunications satellites, information highways, concentration of capitalistic-medicative power – in three words: *digital culture*, *jet*, and *TV* without which there could be no religious manifestation today, for example no voyage or discourse of the Pope, no organized emanation [*rayonnement*] of Jewish, Christian or Muslim cults, whether ‘fundamentalist’ or not.¹⁶

Derrida observes that if religion had ever been dead and overcome, surely in its resurrected form it is less predictable than ever before, most manifestly in the ‘cyberspatialized or cyberspaced wars of religion [*guerres de religion*]’ or ‘war of religions [*guerre des religions*]’.¹⁷ And these wars may take on all the forms of radical evil and atrocity and mask themselves behind the most enlightened and most universalist intentions. Indeed,

it is not certain that in addition to or in face of most spectacular and most barbarous crimes of certain ‘fundamentalisms’ (of the present or the past) *other* over-armed forces are not *also* leading ‘wars of religion’, albeit unavowed. Wars or military ‘interventions’, led by the Judaeo-Christian West in the name of the best causes (of international law, democracy, the sovereignty of peoples, of nations or of states, even of humanitarian imperatives), are they not also, from a certain side, wars of religion? The hypothesis would not necessarily be defamatory, nor even very original, except in the eyes of those who hasten to believe [*sic*] that all these just causes are not only secular but *pure* of all religiosity.¹⁸

Never before has it been so clear that there can be no such thing as an ultimate – analytical, *de iure*, let alone *de facto* – neutrality of the public sphere. Attention to the new and persistent prominence of religion could counterbalance the phantom of a culturally homogeneous society. And yet, it would be false to identify religion with inevitable resistance with particu-

laristic and idiomatic or even idiosyncratic views alone; religion has opposite, universalizing tendencies as well. What may be needed is a conceptual and empirical analysis of the multiple ways in which religion not only shapes the experience of possible tensions between collective and personal identities – and, perhaps, challenges the very concept of ‘identity’ – but also affects the conditions under which conflicts can be addressed, worked through, and ‘resolved’. The relationship between religion and media sheds light on the question of how cultural identity and difference are constituted, as well as on how they relate to the aims of socio-political integration. Religion, thus interpreted, forms the condition of the possibility *and* the impossibility of the political. Derrida offers a simple ‘hypothesis’, whose implications are far-reaching:

with respect to all these forces of abstraction and of dissociation (deracination, delocalization, disincarnation, formalization, universalizing schematization, objectivation, telecommunication etc.), ‘religion’ is *at the same time* involved in reacting antagonistically and reaffirmatively outbidding itself. *In this very place*, knowledge and faith, technoscience (‘capitalist’ and fiduciary) *and* belief, credit, trustworthiness, the act of faith will always have made common cause, bound to one another by the band of their opposition.¹⁹

On the one hand, it is increasingly difficult to deny that hyper-text manifests itself in a quasi-religious manner, in ways that we have, perhaps, not yet begun to comprehend. Indeed, there seems to be both irony and a deep truth in the description of media-produced and media-dependent celebrities a ‘icons’ and ‘idols’.²⁰ On the other hand, the return of the religious, Derrida points out, concerns a certain resistance toward the abstraction of technological in the name of language and of nation and be it in name of the *lingua franca*, the Latin, of the West:

if, today, the ‘question of religion’ actually appears in a new and different light, if there is an unprecedented resurgence, both global and planetary, of this ageless thing, then what is at stake is language, certainly – and more precisely the idiom, literality, writing, that forms the element of all revelation and of all *belief*, an element that ultimately is irreducible and untranslatable – but an idiom that above all is inseparable from the social nexus, from the political, familial, ethnic, communitarian nexus, from the nation and from the people: from autochthony, blood and soil, and from the ever more problematic relation to citizenship and to the state. In these times, language and nation form the historical body of all religious passion.²¹

Religious diversity and religious toleration

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Awareness of religious diversity is nothing new under the sun. The early Christian martyrs were doubtless aware that others in the Roman Empire did not share their religious beliefs. Yet it is arguable that awareness of religious diversity has recently assumed qualitatively new forms. Among the factors that might account for this transformation is the increased contact people now have with religions other than their own. Modern technologies of travel and communication foster interchanges between adherents of different religions. Modern scholarship has made available translations of and commentaries on texts from a variety of religious traditions, and cultural anthropologists have recorded fascinating thick descriptions of the practices of many such traditions. People who live in religiously pluralistic democracies have ample opportunities to acquire personal familiarity with religions other than their own without leaving home. It now is therefore harder than it once was to hang onto negative stereotypes of or rationalize hostile reactions to the practitioners of religions other than one's own. But many people succeed in doing so; increased contact often enough produces greater friction. News media have bombarded us with the sights and sounds of religious conflict in Belfast, Beirut and Bosnia. In Africa Muslims clash with animists, in India Hindus and Muslims struggle bitterly, and in Europe Catholic Croats go to war with Orthodox Serbs. The city of Jerusalem remains a focal point for religious quarrels among Jews, Christians and Muslims. In the eighteenth century, Kant complained that the history of Christianity could justify Lucretius's exclamation, *tantum religio potuit suadere malorum!*¹ At the beginning of the twenty-first century, support for Lucretius comes from several religions and many parts of the world. The religions of the world may be able to understand one another better now than ever before, but their ability to live together in peace still has not yet been secured.

Recent philosophical work that is responsive to the contemporary challenge of religious diversity has centered in the areas of epistemology and political philosophy. In epistemology, the main issue has been whether or not, given what we now know about religious diversity, exclusivism remains a defensible position. Exclusivism is the view that one religion is basically correct and all the others go astray in one or more ways. It has several dimen-

sions. Doctrinal exclusivism is the view that the doctrines of one religion are mostly true while the doctrines of all the others, where there is conflict, are false. Soteriological exclusivism is the view that only the path proposed by one religion leads securely to the ultimate religious goal, salvation or liberation. And experiential exclusivism is the view that the religious experiences typically enjoyed by the adherents of one religion are mostly veridical and conflicting experiences typical of all the others are nonveridical. It is, of course, entirely consistent to accept exclusivism in one of these dimensions while rejecting it in another. For example, some Christians who are doctrinal exclusivists hold that salvation is available to devout members of other religious traditions, though such Christians often insist that, unbeknownst to those outside Christianity, their salvation comes through Jesus Christ. Starting from the observation that, as far as we can tell empirically, all the world religions are more or less equal in their salvific efficacy, that is, their ability to transform their practitioners from being self-centered to being centered on a transcendent reality, John Hick has mounted a powerful attack on exclusivism in all three dimensions. While admitting that religious diversity does, or at least can, undermine the epistemic credentials of experiential or doctrinal exclusivism to some extent, William P. Alston and Alvin Plantinga have replied with arguments aimed at showing that Christian exclusivism of some sort continues to enjoy an epistemic status high enough to make it a rational option even when religious diversity is taken into account. And other philosophers have added their voices to the discussion of this issue.² In my opinion, the debate on this topic has more or less reached a stand off. The positions that are live philosophical options have been fairly thoroughly mapped out, and the main arguments for and against each of them have been developed in some detail. I doubt that there is a realistic prospect of the issue which divides exclusivists from their philosophical opponents being decisively settled or even moved appreciably closer to a resolution by additional arguments.³

One might think of exclusivism of another kind as the chief problem addressed by the response to religious diversity within contemporary political philosophy. In this case, exclusivism is the view, advocated by several liberal political philosophers, that religion ought to be excluded from the public square in modern liberal democracies. More precisely, political exclusivists hold that religious arguments should be excluded from the public political discourse of religiously pluralistic democratic societies on certain fundamental questions.⁴ Robert Audi has argued vigorously for a version of exclusivism that includes a *prima facie* obligation not to advocate or support any law or policy that restricts conduct unless one has and is willing to offer adequate secular reason for such advocacy or support. Appealing to grounds of fairness, Nicholas Wolterstorff has challenged Audi's position

and forcefully criticized the general exclusivist point of view of which it is an instance.⁵ The most nuanced liberal exclusion of the religious so far developed is contained in the political philosophy of John Rawls. According to its ideal of public reason, which imposes a duty of civility, we are not to introduce into public political discourse on constitutional essentials and matters of basic justice reasons drawn from comprehensive doctrines, religious doctrines all being understood to be comprehensive, unless we satisfy the proviso that we do so in ways that strengthen the ideal of public reason itself.⁶ My impression is that, unlike the debate about exclusivism in epistemology, this dispute remains in flux to some extent and has not yet reached a stand off. Confirming evidence for this impression may be derived from the fact that Rawls has modified his position to allow that reasons drawn from comprehensive doctrines, religious or nonreligious, may be introduced into public political discussions at any time subject to the proviso that in due course reasons in compliance with the ideal of public reason are presented to support whatever the comprehensive doctrines were invoked to support.⁷ To be sure, the modified view still has a proviso attached, but it is more permissive than the proviso of the original view and so is less likely to raise the hackles of religious citizens of a democracy.

I confess I find it a bit odd that the main response to religious diversity in recent liberal political philosophy has focused on the issue of whether or not religious argument should be excluded from public discourse. Given the widespread religious conflict mentioned previously, I cannot help thinking that religious toleration is a more urgent global political issue and that the rather narrow focus on religious discourse in liberal democracies is a bit parochial. I have some ideas about factors that may contribute to explaining the narrow focus, though they are somewhat speculative. One factor is fear of divisiveness. It would be natural to search for moral grounds for constraints on the use of religious arguments in the public square if one were afraid that in a religiously divided society their use would be likely to be destabilizing. Jeffrey Stout expressed such fear not so long ago. Arguing against Basil Mitchell's proposal that traditional theism be employed in order to revitalize public discourse, Stout claims that 'the risks of reviving religious conflict like that of early modern Europe are too great'.⁸ I myself reckon that the probability of reigniting the Wars of Religion by including religious arguments in public political discourse is quite low, and so I think that such fear, however real it may be, is unrealistic. It seems to me that, even if the practice of religious toleration in Western democracies is no more than a *modus vivendi*, it is supported both by the settled habits of religious citizens and by the weight of their traditions to a degree that lends it great robustness. Another factor that may play an explanatory role is complacency about the historical achieve-

ments of political philosophy. It would be understandable if people saw no need for new arguments to clinch the case for religious toleration because they thought conclusive arguments were already available in the classic works of liberal political philosophy. One might, for example, look to John Locke's work as a source of arguments for religious toleration.⁹ According to Locke, religious persecution is bound to be ineffective and hence is irrational because its goal is to get people to adopt different religious beliefs and people do not have direct voluntary control over their religious beliefs. However, as Jeremy Waldron has recently shown Locke's case for this position falls apart under critical scrutiny, and there is no way to reconstruct it to meet the objections.¹⁰ Or one might look to John Stuart Mill for an argument for religious toleration that at least is successful by utilitarian standards.¹¹ But David Lewis has shown that Mill will lose his case if he argues against a clever utilitarian religious Inquisitor.¹² So complacency about the justification of religious toleration is, I think, unwarranted.

My main aim in this paper is to broaden the focus of the discussion of religious diversity in political philosophy to include arguments against religious intolerance. I shall not try to refurbish the arguments of Locke or Mill; indeed, I shall depart altogether from the British historical tradition of liberal thought. I shall instead exploit the historical resources of a continental tradition of liberal thought by examining arguments against religious intolerance developed by Pierre Bayle and Immanuel Kant. I choose these particular arguments for scrutiny because they enable me to reach a secondary goal, which is to bring the discussion of religious diversity in political philosophy into contact with the discussion in epistemology and to try to establish some connections between them. The idea that there should be such connections has been rendered intuitively vivid by Avishai Margalit. He draws attention to the parable of the three rings, made famous in Lessing's play *Nathan the Wise*. In Margalit's version of the story, a king leaves a legacy of three rings in his three sons; one of the rings is of great value while the other two are no more than good imitations. The religious analogy is clear. The king is God; the real ring is revealed truth; and the three sons are Moses, Jesus and Muhammad. Reflecting on the parable, Margalit points out that, apart from the king, 'no one else knows for certain which ring is the real one. This doubt should lead to an attitude of "respect and suspect", because it is possible that the truth is in another religion'.¹³ It is precisely the connection Margalit sees between epistemic uncertainty and the relatively tolerant attitude of respect and suspect that interests me. I propose to explore that connection and to try to clarify what its implications are through an examination of the arguments of Bayle and Kant. I do not pretend to return a final verdict on the general line of philosophical thought to which those arguments are meant to contribute.

In this paper, I shall ignore some of the issues that have been prominent in other recent treatments of toleration in political philosophy. I am not going to investigate the topic of whether ordinary language marks a conceptual distinction between toleration and tolerance. Nor do I plan to take a stand on whether it is a necessary truth that one can only tolerate things one views as bad or evil. I do not have a definition or an analysis of toleration to offer. I shall work with an intuitive notion of religious intolerance that has within its extension behaviors such as killing people for heresy or apostasy, forced conversions and preventing people from engaging collectively in worship. My interest here is restricted to the fairly specific topic of the ethical or moral status of such intolerant behaviors.¹⁴

The remainder of the paper is divided into three parts. In the first, I rehearse arguments about the negative epistemic consequences of religious diversity. The other two parts address the question of what impact the conclusions of such arguments might have on further arguments against intolerance. The second part subjects to critical analysis an argument by Bayle; the third does the same to an argument of Kant.

1. Alston and others on religious diversity

William P. Alston acknowledges that religious diversity gives rise to an epistemological problem for his view that experience of God confers *prima facie* justification or beliefs about how God is manifested to the experiencer. He defends this view from within the perspective of a doxastic practice approach to epistemology.¹⁵ A doxastic practice is a practice of forming beliefs together with a series of possible overrides for the *prima facie* justification a belief derives from having been generated by the practice. Doxastic practices are to be evaluated, from an epistemic point of view, in terms of their likelihood of producing true beliefs, that is, in terms of their reliability. Basic doxastic practices, for example, sense perception, are socially established practices whose reliability cannot be established in a noncircular manner. Alston thinks it rational to grant *prima facie* acceptance to all basic doxastic practices that are not demonstrably unreliable or otherwise disqualified from rational acceptance. In other words, basic practices are innocent until proven guilty. He also observes that a practice's claim to rational acceptance is strengthened if it enjoys self-support. When he turns his attention to the religious realm, he supposes that each of the major traditions has within it a practice of forming beliefs about how Ultimate Reality, whatever it may be, manifests itself in or through religious experience. As he divides up the pie, different religions have different experiential practices because the systems of possible overrides vary so much from one religion to another. Among

them is the Christian practice (CP). For Alston, CP is a basic practice that is not demonstrably unreliable and derives self-support from, for instance, the way in which its promises of spiritual development can be seen, from within the practice, to be fulfilled in the lives of some of its practitioners. However, he allows that other religious doxastic practices are basic too, are also not demonstrably unreliable, and enjoy as much self-support as CP does. In short, CP has rivals that are on an epistemic par with it, and this is why religious diversity creates an epistemological problem for it. And, needless to say, each of these rivals is in the same situation; CP's problem is also a problem for Buddhist practice (BP), Hindu practice (HP) and so forth. Does this disqualify CP and its rivals from rational acceptance?

Alston thinks not. He does admit that religious diversity decreases the justification its practitioners have for engaging in CP, but he denies that it does so to such a degree that it is irrational for them to engage in it. His main argument for this denial deploys an analogy with a counterfactual scenario involving rival sense-perceptual doxastic practices. Imagine that there were, in certain cultures, a socially established 'Cartesian' practice of construing what is visually perceived as an indefinitely extended medium more or less concentrated at various points, rather than, as in our 'Aristotelian' practice, as made up of more or less discrete objects scattered about in space. Further imagine that there were, in yet other cultures, an established 'Whiteheadian' practice in which the visual field is taken to be made up of momentary events growing out of one another in a continuous process. Suppose that each of these three practices served its practitioners equally well in their dealings with the environment and had associated with it a well-developed physical science. Suppose also that we were as firmly wedded to our 'Aristotelian' practice as we in fact are but were unable to come up with any non-question-begging reason for regarding it as more accurate than either of the others. Alston concludes that, absent any non-question-begging reason for thinking that one of the other two practices is more accurate than my own, 'the only rational course for me is to sit tight with the practice of which I am a master and which serves me so well in guiding my activity in the world'.¹⁶ But the sheerly hypothetical sense-perceptual scenario is precisely parallel to our actual situation with regard to CP and its religious rivals. Hence, by parity of reasoning, the rational thing for a practitioner of CP to do is to sit tight with it and continue to form beliefs making use of it. And, again by parity of reasoning, the same goes for practitioners of BP, HP and other uneliminated rivals of CP.

Alston's critics have argued that he has not established his conclusion. Though he concedes that it is pragmatically rational for its practitioners to sit tight with CP, William J. Wainwright contends that Alston has not shown