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GLOBAL DIALOGUES IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

From Religious Experience to the Afterlife

edited by

YUJIN NAGASAWA & MOHAMMAD SALEH ZAREPOUR

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YUJIN NAGASAWA

and

MOHAMMAD SALEH ZAREPOUR

To my wife, Sylwia Katarzyna Glozinska
—Y. N.

To my wife, Samaneh Ehsaninezhad
—M. S. Z.

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Editors' Introduction

Yujin Nagasawa and Mohammad Saleh Zarepour

The philosophy of religion addresses many important issues concerning religious concepts and beliefs. Among these are the existence and nature of deities, evil and suffering in the world, faith and belief, religious and mystical experiences, and death and the possibility of immortality. Notably, these problems are relevant to a wide variety of religious traditions. Yet the scale and diversity of the philosophy of religion have both been decidedly narrow. Over the last fifty years, the analytic philosophy of religion has been led almost exclusively by scholars in the Christian tradition, and there has been little interaction between philosophers from distinct traditions. The aforementioned issues are usually discussed through the lens of Christianity and by the philosophers raised in this tradition. Even defences of atheistic and naturalistic perspectives often appear in specific contrast to Christian theism. In this way, discussions in the philosophy of religion have been mainly centred around arguments for and against Christian belief. Until recently, the range of interpretations of belief and their criticisms within Christianity has represented the limits of the extent of diversity in the philosophy of religion literature. Moreover, such criticisms seldom rely on opposing views that other religious traditions advocate. Therefore, saying that the philosophy of religion has so far been primarily the philosophy of Christianity is not much of an exaggeration.

To be fair, the philosophy of religion has become rich and influential in ways that were difficult to predict in the early days of analytic philosophy, mostly due to the endeavours of the brilliant Christianity-oriented minds who have made significant contributions to the field. Nevertheless, the field lacks the diverse insights that could be garnered by engaging with a variety of religious traditions alongside Christianity. The field would benefit significantly from expanding its scope and reach by promoting contributions concerning other religions. Fortunately, the situation is slowly changing for the better. The philosophy of religion is becoming more diverse, inclusive, and global. If we look at works the leading philosophy of religion journals have published over the last couple of years, we can see the gradual growth in the number of articles that engage with problems and perspectives of non-Christian traditions, such as Judaism, Islam,

Hinduism, and Buddhism. This can provide solid ground for cross-religious engagement thus far largely neglected.

Some have already recognized the lack of cross-religious engagement as a problem and tried to advance so-called interreligious dialogues. However, often, promoting interreligious dialogues between religious traditions only seeks to encourage a conversation that fosters an appreciation of similarities and differences. This is certainly important for several reasons. For example, such dialogues can potentially prevent religious conflicts, which often arise from misunderstanding one another's beliefs or from failing to appreciate the diversity of beliefs. Yet, the introduction of interreligious dialogue alone cannot contribute to *philosophical* progress. Globalizing and diversifying the philosophy of religion is not fruitful if it occurs merely as a polite gesture expressing interest in other people's beliefs. Interreligious dialogue is an important step towards globalizing the discipline, but it is only a means to an end, not an end in itself. The end is to grasp a better philosophical understanding of the ultimate reality of the world and our existence in it, in relation to religious beliefs and practices, by employing the best intellectual tools and resources philosophers have developed. A philosophically fruitful interreligious dialogue must include not only sharing similarities and differences between different religions but also examining the philosophical values of these ideas in an instructive manner. This is exactly what you can see in the following chapters of the present book, which aims to contribute to the transformation of the philosophy of religion into a global and vibrant field in which scholars from diverse backgrounds participate.

In this book, leading scholars representing five great religious traditions—Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism—tackle, in a dialogue format, specific philosophical problems that these traditions (at least some of them) share. Besides the final chapter, the book consists of five parts. Each part focuses on a specific philosophical topic, to which three authors, representing three distinct religious traditions, contribute. Each author first provides a chapter addressing the topic from his or her own perspective, then offers short responses to the two other authors' chapters.

The first five parts of this book address the following topics, respectively: (I) Revelation and Religious Experience, (II) Analysis of Faith, (III) Science and Religion, (IV) The Foundation of Morality, and (V) Life and the Afterlife. Unfortunately, due to space limitations, covering all five traditions in every part of the book was not possible. Therefore, we adopted specific criteria for selecting three distinct religions for each part of the book. For example, we do not cover Hinduism and Buddhism in the part entitled *Analysis of Faith* because we find the issue of faith most closely relates to the Abrahamic traditions, such as Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. To take another example, we do not cover Christianity and Hinduism in the part entitled *Revelation and Religious Experience* for two reasons: First, there is already extensive literature on the problems of revelation and

religious experience in Christianity. Second, we believe that it is not necessary to consider both Buddhism and Hinduism in this part because these two traditions share commonalities in their approach to this topic.

We do not offer summaries of each chapter here because Kelly James Clark's afterword does that masterfully in its role as the final chapter of the book. In the chapter, he provides a comprehensive picture of the discussions the book develops and assesses their philosophical significance. Moreover, he presents his own views on why the philosophy of religion should become more diverse and inclusive, and how to achieve this goal. All the discussions in the present book reflect the philosophical opinions of the authors, opinions that might differ from the mainstream views of the religious tradition that each author represents. Nevertheless, we can see through these discussions some of the most fascinating philosophical challenges we face when we consider philosophical issues from diverse religious viewpoints. Moreover, some of the discussions in this book can serve as explorations of how a philosophical insight born in a certain religious tradition can be useful in tackling a problem that arises in a different tradition. In these respects, we hope that this book will contribute to the transformation of the philosophy of religion into a global, multifaith discipline.

PART I

REVELATION AND RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE (BUDDHISM, ISLAM, AND JUDAISM)

1

Indian and Tibetan Buddhist Accounts of the Epistemology of Awakening

Jay L. Garfield

1.1 What Is Omniscience, and Why Do We Care About It?

When we begin to ask in a European language about the omniscience that we are told is attained upon awakening (buddhahood) we are almost inexorably drawn to understanding the term *omniscience* in the way that it is used in the Abrahamic traditions.[1] In that context, it is often (though not always) taken to indicate comprehensive knowledge of the truth of all true propositions.[2] But if we were to import these presuppositions into an Indian or a Tibetan context, we might find the relevant discussions incomprehensible. And if we pay attention to the way that the terms often translated as *omniscience* are used, we might learn something about how to think about soteriology, knowledge, and epistemic ideals. So, I enter this discussion not primarily to settle Buddhist debates concerning the epistemology of awakening, but to elucidate them in the hope that this cross-cultural exploration might expand our understanding of what omniscience and knowledge itself might be.

Buddhist Sanskrit has at least 27 terms for omniscience or for specific kinds of omniscience (Griffiths 1990, pp. 88–89). Some of these are used to draw important distinctions between different epistemic states; others are interdefinable. But the most fundamental is *sarvajñatā* and its cognates. Just as the Latin *omni* means *all,* the Sanskrit *sarva* means *all.* But while it is easy to translate the Latin *scientia* as *knowledge,* with declarative knowledge in roughly the contemporary sense of that term in mind, we must handle *jñāna* with greater care. That term *can* denote

declarative knowledge, but it can also denote awareness, or acquaintance, or understanding.

Moreover, while the *omni* in *omniscience* is usually understood to be unrestricted in scope—an omniscient god knows exactly how many grains of sand are to be found in the River Jordan—the scope of the *sarva* in *sarvajñatā* is contested in Indo-Tibetan religious literature. Some read it as broadly as a Christian theologian might read *omni*. Others, however, restrict its scope. It might refer only to knowledge relevant to liberation; it might refer to general knowledge of the nature of things; it might refer only to knowledge of what is directly relevant to the present.

This term and its kin invite other debates: is omniscience an occurrent or a dispositional state? Does it describe a single cosmic cognition, or a host of specific cognitions? Does it refer only to ultimate truth, or to conventional truths as well? There is no consensus in the Indian or Tibetan Buddhist tradition on *any* of these questions. So, when we consider questions about the scope of omniscience we a profusion of debates concerning what it means to say that buddhas are omniscient, and what it means to say that we can attain that state. In what follows we will chart a few of those debates, moving swiftly over very complex terrain, beginning with early discussions of just what a buddha comes to know, and ending up in medieval Tibetan debates about whether an omniscient Buddha can be said to know anything at all. We will see that questions about the epistemic powers of a buddha lead to questions about what knowledge itself is, and that the presumption that omniscience means that the buddha knows everything that we do and more gives way to the possibility that a buddha knows nothing at all, at least in the sense that we know things.

1.2 Awakening: A Historical Perspective

Buddhism is first and foremost an Indian religion, and it is impossible to appreciate intramural Buddhist debates, let alone the debates between Buddhists and their non-Buddhist interlocutors about omniscience without some understanding of the larger Indian context. Attributions of omniscience and debates about what omniscience entails have a long history in India. We find ascriptions of omniscience to Viṣṇu in the Vedas that sound a great deal like the ascriptions of omniscience to the Abrahamic God (Naughton 1991: 29). Nyāya philosophers argue for the complete omniscience of God as well (Goodman 1989, p. 39).[3]

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[3] We also find such attributions in the Vedānta tradition. See Vācaspati Miśra's (9th–10th c. CE) argument for God's omniscience in his commentary to the *Nyāya-sūtra* (Dasti and Phillips 2021, pp. 125–136) as well as his subcommentary to Śaṅkara's commentary on the *Brahmasūtra* (Guha, Dasti, and Phillips 2021, pp. 46–60).

Mīmāṃsakas defend not the omniscience of any deity or person, but of scripture. Buddhists took these colleagues as philosophical interlocutors, and their own understanding of omniscience developed in critical dialogue with them.

Perhaps the most important dialogical opponents for early Buddhists on the topic of omniscience, though, were the Jains. The Jain tradition attributed a strong form of omniscience involving knowledge of every aspect of every existent to their founder (Jaini 2014, p. 266). This forced early Buddhists—whose epistemology could not countenance such comprehensive omniscience—both to criticize the Jain position and to articulate an alternative conception of omniscience that they could attribute to the Buddha.

In the *Aṅguttara Nikāya,* it is reported to the Buddha that a Jain sage claims 'to be all-knowing, all-seeing and to have complete knowledge and vision. He says, "Whether I walk or stand or sleep or wake, my knowledge and vision are always and without a break present before me"' (Naughton 1991, p. 30). The *Sandaka sutta* reports that, when criticizing this doctrine, the Buddha says:

> As to this, Sandaka, some teacher, all-knowing, all-seeing, claims all-embracing knowledge-and-vision, saying: 'Whether I am walking or standing still or asleep or awake, knowledge-and-vision is constantly and perpetually before me.' He enters an empty place, and he does not obtain almsfood, and a dog bites him, and he encounters a fierce elephant, and he encounters a fierce horse, and he encounters a fierce bullock, and he asks a woman and a man their name and clan, and he asks the name of a village or a market town and the way...
>
> (quoted in Jaini 2014, pp. 32–33)

The Buddha not only ridicules the claim that Jain saints are omniscient given their propensity to ordinary errors, but affirms that his own extraordinary knowledge is limited to his knowledge of past lives, his understanding of the workings of karma and his knowledge of what is soteriologically efficacious. (See also Goodman 1989, p. 63.) In the *Kaṇṇakatthala sutta*, the Buddha is quoted as saying, 'There is neither a recluse not a brahman who at one and the same time can know all, can see all—this situation does not exist' (Jaini 2014, p. 35).

So, although there is a rhetoric of omniscience in the Pāli *suttas*, and although several *suttas* note that the Buddha is characterized as omniscient, that claim is regularly qualified: the Buddha is taken to know *a lot,* and to have cognitive capacities that exceed those of normal people, but not to know *everything*. So, *omniscience* in this sense—in this particular literature—is used in the way that it is often used colloquially today: when Prithvi Shaw says of Rahul Dravid that 'he knows everything about cricket', he doesn't mean that Dravid knows how many blades of grass were growing at the Oval during the last test match. Instead, we take him to mean that his coach knows *a lot* about cricket, much more than ordinary mortals. If we understand this to be the kind of omniscience acquired at

awakening, it is impressive, valuable, but not transcendent. It is *soteriological* omniscience—knowledge of whatever is necessary to achieve liberation and to help others to do so—but not *complete* omniscience.[4]

Nonetheless, even in Pāli literature we find plenty of examples of what seem like attributions of complete omniscience to the Buddha. In *The Questions of King Milinda,* the monk Nāgasena reports to the king that the Buddha has unrestricted omniscience, even though that omniscience is dispositional—the ability to know anything to which the Buddha turns his attention—and so is not comprised in a single cognition (Book 4, chapter 1, 5.1.2). Two important Pāli commentaries provide more direct evidence for a Theravāda position that the Buddha was completely omniscient, suggesting significant evolution of thought about omniscience beyond the *suttas* we discussed earlier. *The Path of Discrimination* (*Paṭisambhidāmagga, c.* 1st c. CE) asserts that the Buddha knows 'everything that has been seen, heard, sensed, thought, attained, sought and searched by the minds of those who inhabit the entire world of gods and men' ((59) 81 in Jayatilleke 1963, pp. 380–381).[5] Once again, although there might be room for some hedging, this seems to be an assertion of complete omniscience.[6]

All of this suggests that in early Buddhist thought, multiple understandings of the omniscience that characterizes awakening are already in play: it may be soteriological or complete; it might be occurrent or dispositional. While there is a consensus *that* a buddha is omniscient, there was no consensus among early Buddhist scholars regarding the scope or nature of that omniscience.

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[4] Shulman (2018) also notes that in the Jātaka stories, the bodhisattva's omniscience is most often portrayed in terms of his thorough understanding of past lives and the karma they create (18–19), the patterns of conditioning that determine present events (21), and understanding of people's motivations, (22) suggesting a soteriological omniscience. And in the Saṃyutta Nikāya the Buddha is reported to have said, 'So long as I did not…know…gratification, the danger, and the escape in the case of these five aggregates…I did not claim to have awakened.…But when I directly knew all this as it really is, then I claimed to have awakened to the unsurpassed perfect enlightenment in this world' (22.26.5.1), suggesting omniscience only with respect to the aggregates themselves.

This distinction is marked a millennium and a half later by Ratnakīrti (10th–11th c. CE) as that between *upāyukta-sarvajñāna* and *sarva-sarvajñāna* (omniscience regarding what is skillful and omniscience regarding everything (Goodman 1989, pp. 40–41)). The *Ornament of the Mahāyāna Sūtras (Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra)* defines omniscience as mastery of the five principal fields of study in a medieval Indian monastic university: religious studies, logic, linguistics, medicine, and art theory, a definition endorsed by Sthiramati (sixth century) in his commentary. Omniscience is this sense amounts to little more than a doctorate. But in his commentary to the *30 Verses (Triṃśikakārikā-bhāṣya)*, Sthiramati argues that omniscience is the knowledge of *everything that can be known* (which appears to be an endorsement of complete omniscience, or at least an ascription of that view to Vasubandhu).

[5] *Points of Controversy (Kathāvatthu,* a Theravāda Abhidharma text, *c.* 3rd c CE) makes very similar claims.

[6] This doctrine of complete omniscience also appears to have been a central tenet of the Mahāsāṃgikha school, an early Buddhist school that might have been a cradle for the development of the Mahāyāna, who are reported to have maintained that the Buddha is simultaneously aware of all dharmas in each moment of his cognition.

1.3 Differences within the Mahāyāna

The Mahāyāna movement (itself quite doctrinally heterogenous) introduces a number of new rhetorical devices and debates to Buddhist philosophy. Among those is a more expansive, transcendent view of buddhahood. The Mahāyāna also installs the bodhisattva as a moral ideal: one who has cultivated *bodhicitta,* or the aspiration to attain awakening in order to liberate all sentient beings from cyclic existence. Many Mahāyāna philosophers in India and Tibet, argued that buddhahood is necessary because it affords the omniscience that enables this magnificent capacity to benefit others. The Mahāyāna schools also place a special emphasis on the two truths, with an understanding of conventional truth as deceptive and on emptiness as the non-deceptive ultimate reality. This opens the startling possibility that omniscience entails not the comprehensive knowledge of what ordinary people take themselves to know, but rather the absence of any awareness of conventional entities and awareness only of emptiness. This possibility gives rise to new questions about the nature and scope of a buddha's omniscience.

Foundational Mahāyāna scriptures, including the *Perfection of Wisdom (Prajñāpāramitā) sūtras* and the *Teaching of Vimalakīrti (Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa)* regularly ascribe complete omniscience to buddhas, including the knowledge of what is happening in all of the levels of reality, galaxies of worlds realms of cyclic existence, of the contents of the minds of all sentient beings past, present, and future. The *Ornament of Clear Realization* (*Abhisamayālaṃkāra*, c. 4th c. CE) repeats the Mahāsāṃghika assertion that all of this knowledge is present in a single cognitive state of a buddha.[7]

Once again, we should handle these statements with some care. Hyperbole, figurative speech, and the use of grand epithets are frequent literary devices in these texts, and ascriptions of this kind of omniscience might sometimes be used this way. The *Ornament of Clear Realization* opens the ground for further debate by distinguishing three senses of omniscience: omniscience regarding the path (*mārgajñānatā*); omniscience regarding representations (*sarvākārajñānatā*); and complete omniscience (*sarvajñānatā*). The first of these is the kind of practical omniscience relevant to soteriology; the second is awareness of the content of all of one's representations—a kind of omniscience regarding experience; the third is knowledge or awareness of all phenomena (McClintock 2010: 34).[8] Although the

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[7] Griffiths (1990) argues that the *Ornament* appears to follow the *Path of Discrimination* and the *Points of Controversy* in resolving earlier ambivalence about the scope of omniscience by identifying complete omniscience as the knowledge of all phenomena (85). He also notes that the *Ornament* introduces distinctions between omniscience understood in terms of the subjectivity of a Buddha (in terms of *ākāra* or representation), and in terms of objects of knowledge (*ālambana* or intentional object). This suggests debates regarding whether omniscience is properly understood subjectively as a kind of hyper-awareness or objectively as a set of true propositional attitudes, debates that have clear resonance in subsequent Tibetan discussions (90–93).

[8] McClintock also notes that Śāntarakṣita (9th c. CE), in his *Handbook of Metaphysics (Tattvasaṃgraha),* develops a different threefold classification: omniscience regarding the path;

Ornament itself argues that buddhas acquire all three of these, commentators often disagree. These texts hence cannot be treated as 'smoking guns' demonstrating that the Mahāyāna tradition per se is committed to a doctrine of complete, occurrent, single-cognition omniscience for buddhas. At best they open new debates.

These debates are informed in very different ways by the thought of two seventh-century philosophers Candrakīrti and Dharmakīrti. Candrakīrti and Dharmakīrti each cast long shadows in India and Tibet, with Candrakīrti setting the terms of Madhyamaka metaphysical debates, and Dharmakīrti setting the agenda for epistemology. The tensions between their respective positions animate Tibetan discussions of the nature and scope of a buddha's omniscience.

Candrakīrti's contributions to these debates rest on his understanding of the relation between the two truths and on his understanding of epistemic warrant (*pramāṇa*) and its relation to ontology and to epistemology. In *Introduction to the Middle Way (Madhyamakāvatāra)* as well as in *Clear Words (Prasannapadā)*, he develops an account of the two truths that emphasizes the reality of conventional truth, or the realm of dependently originated phenomena. Ultimate truth is their emptiness of intrinsic existence.[9] Emptiness is the ultimate nature of all phenomena, because all phenomena lack any intrinsic existence. Candrakīrti glosses the term *conventional (samvṛti)* in several ways. It can mean *interdependent*, *everyday*, *by agreement*, or merely *nominal*. But it can also mean *deceptive* or *concealing*.[10] Conventional truth is then real, but deceptive. Ultimate truth is non-deceptive, but is only emptiness, understood as interdependence. That emptiness is not a separate ontological domain, but simply the emptiness of all conventional phenomena.

Candrakīrti emphasizes that despite the deceptiveness of conventional truth, there is a difference between conventional truth and conventional falsity. It is true that mirages are real, but false that they contain water. Candrakīrti argues that we can determine the difference between conventional truth and conventional falsity using conventional epistemic instruments, such as perception, inference, testimony, and analogy, none of which is autonomous, but which are mutually confirming, and which are confirmed by their success in delivering objects of knowledge (Cowherds 2010). But the domain of possible objects of knowledge, on Candrakīrti's view, comprises both truths.[11]

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complete omniscience; and spontaneous omniscience. The latter denotes a complete, effortless awareness of all phenomena in every moment of cognition, a direct perception of all that is in its mode of existence (39).

[9] For more on the two truths and Candrakīrti's account of their relationship to one another, see Tsongkhapa (2000–2004, vol. 3), Cowherds (2010), or Garfield (2015).

[10] These two families of meaning reflect an ambiguity in *samvṛti* that cannot be replicated in English. The choice of which family of meanings to take as primary motivates the Tibetan debate about knowledge and omniscience with which we will close this study.

[11] I am oversimplifying exegetical matters here as there is considerable debate among Tibetan exegetes regarding how to read Candrakīrti's position on conventional truth. See Yakherds (2021) for an exploration of these debates.

This expansive understanding of objects of knowledge, taken together with the thesis that conventional truth is always deceptive and that conventional phenomena are unreal raises an important question concerning the nature of the omniscience attained at awakening: do the objects of omniscient knowledge include the conventional truth as well as the ultimate truth, or just the ultimate truth. If one excludes the conventional, then a buddha would seem to know less than an ordinary person, and omniscience sounds pretty thin; if, on the other hand, one includes the conventional, than the Buddha apprehends deceptive phenomena, and so is deceived, and so once again falls short of omniscience, ending up being just like the rest of us. This dilemma, we will see, structures important Tibetan debates not only about buddhahood, but about the nature of knowledge and the enterprise of epistemology (Yakherds 2021).

When Candrakīrti himself turns to the subject of the Buddha's omniscience he relies not on this distinction, but on a verse from Āryadeva's *400 Verses* (*Catuḥśataka*, 3rd c. CE):

> To see the nature of one thing
> Is to see the nature of all things.
> The emptiness of one thing
> Is the emptiness of all things.
>
> (8.16)

Candrakīrti argues in *Introduction to the Middle Way* that since all things are empty, and since to know a thing is to know its nature—its emptiness—a buddha's omniscience consists in the direct insight into that emptiness, which can be achieved through the thorough understanding of any single phenomenon.[12] On this view, a buddha's omniscience does not involve the occurrent awareness of each individual entity in the world—let alone the knowledge of every fact—but rather the ability to directly perceive the nature of all phenomena, viz., their emptiness. Candrakīrti summarize this in the following verse:

> The Buddha's omniscient wisdom
> Is understood to be perceptual.
> Since all other forms of knowledge are incomplete,
> They are not said to be perceptual.
>
> (6.214)

Candrakīrti takes omniscience to be a *capacity*, or a *perceptual set'*—a form of awareness. Its universal scope consists in the fact that it is a way of seeing everything, not in the actual seeing of each phenomenon. To put this another way, a buddha's

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[12] See McClintock (2000, p. 230) for further discussion of Candrakīrti's account of omniscience.

omniscience takes only one object of knowledge—emptiness—but sees it in all things. This delicate balance between understanding omniscience as taking only the ultimate as an object of knowledge and taking that to constitute the knowledge of all conventional phenomena also animates Tibetan debates on this topic.

Dharmakīrti offers a different deflationary understanding of omniscience. Unlike Candrakīrti, who focuses on the Buddha's transcendent awareness of ultimate truth, Dharmakīrti adopts a soteriological understanding of omniscience reminiscent of that in early Pāli materials. The context of his discussion is the chapter establishing the Buddha's authority as a teacher in his *Commentary on Epistemology (Pramāṇavārttika)*. Dharmakīrti argues that the attribution of omniscience to the Buddha is only important because it vouchsafes his epistemic authority, and this does not require the knowledge or awareness of every empirical fact. The crucial verses are 32 and 33:

> One who knows what is to be adopted and what is to be rejected
> Is said to be authoritative.
> Given this approach,
> To be aware of all phenomena is not to be authoritative.
>
> Whether or not they have great distance vision,
> Those who are authoritative see what is important.
> If you think that epistemic authority involves great distance vision,
> Put your trust in the vultures!

The kind of omniscience we need to ascribe to buddhas is soteriological knowledge, not the comprehensive awareness of facts in the empirical world. That is the domain of the vultures.[13] This reading is confirmed by Gyelstab's (rGyal tshab rje 1364–1432) commentary on these verses:

> Others assert that the meaning of omniscience is knowing how to create all things, as we use the term 'omniscient' in the conventional worldly sense in relation to those who know how to do many things, such as painting, smithing, tailoring, etc. If [they] are omniscient, then they also have made the suffering of the lower realms. Thus, one should take as one's teacher someone who is omniscient regarding karma and the defilements, and who … is omniscient regarding how all objects of knowledge really exist.   (trans. Jackson 1993, p. 219)

Dharmakīrti was not the last word on his own position, however. His texts are the subject of a vast commentarial literature in India, and he is most often read in Tibet through the commentaries of Prajñākaragupta (c. 9th c. CE) and Jñānaśrīmitra

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[13] See Jackson (1988, 1993) for more on Dharmakīrti's discussion of omniscience in this chapter and for a detailed discussion of Gyelstab's commentary.

(c. 10th–11th c. CE). In his commentary on these verses from Dharmakīrti, Prajñākaragupta argues that a buddha's great compassion requires him to develop complete omniscience in order to be able to benefit all sentient beings in whatever realms they exist (Moriyama 2005, pp. 333–334). Jñānaśrīmitra further comments that once one cultivates soteriological omniscience, 'a clearer cognition of all entities, including each atom, in accordance with their time, space, and condition [will] arise' (trans. Moriyama, 335). So, however circumspect Dharmakīrti may have been, his position was transformed by his commentators—and read in Tibet—as entailing that a strong form of complete omniscience is attained upon awakening.[14]

Our final stop in this tour of the multiplicity of positions and debates regarding the epistemology of awakening takes us to the high water mark of Indian Buddhism: the work of the Nālandā missionaries Śāntarakṣita (705–788 CE) and Kamalaśīla (740–795 CE) who brought Buddhism to Tibet. Once again, we encounter not consensus, but debate, and the articulation of that debate with increasing nuance.

As McClintock (2000) points out, much of the final chapter of the *Handbook of Metaphysics* is devoted to a discussion and refutation of a deflationist reading of omniscience. Śāntarakṣita argues that a buddha's knowledge of the single nature that all entities share (emptiness) implies that he also knows the individual nature of each entity. Śāntarakṣita puts it this way: 'One who understands everything in terms of a nondifferent nature understands precisely the individual natures of all things' (3631, trans. McClintock 237).

This does not, however, mean that Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla themselves *endorse* the thesis that the Buddha is completely omniscient, only that they believe that the claim that he perceives the nature of all things entails complete omniscience. And as Hayes (1984) notes, Śāntarakṣita also accepts the claim that 'Trying to establish that anyone has knowledge of a multitude of individuals and all their particular features is as pointless as an inquiry into the teeth of a crow' (3137, trans. Hayes 663) For one thing, Śāntarakṣita argues, following Dharmakīrti, all that really matters is soteriological omniscience. But there is also an oblique reference to another argument advanced by Dharmakīrti. Dharmakīrti rebuts a claim that the Buddha is not omniscient by arguing that one could only know that if one were completely omniscient oneself. Śāntarakṣita turns that around in this text, arguing that one could only know that the Buddha *is* completely omniscient if one were completely omniscient oneself. The Buddha's complete omniscience, he therefore argues, is undecidable, at least for beings like us.

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[14] So, for instance, the early Tibetan Scholar Yeshe De (Ye shes bde, 9th c. CE) writes in his *Distinguishing the Views (lTa ba'i khyad par),* that when one achieves awakening, 'all conceptuality is cleared away and obstructions are fully purified....Then...all the cognitive objects that exist are manifest at once' (trans. Makransky 1997, pp. 351–352).

This does not rule out our ability to recognize other kinds of omniscience, such as a qualified, or a spontaneous omniscience. One might have good evidence that the Buddha is soteriologically omniscient by seeing how effective he is at helping sentient beings, and how reliable he is when he speaks about matters one can verify. Śāntarakṣita, however, argues for the more radical thesis that the Buddha is omniscient *despite having no cognitive states at all*, an omniscience in which there is no knowledge at all of the kind with which we are familiar. As Kamalaśīla puts it, '"unseeing" means that he does not see, i.e. does not perceive' (commentary to *Handbook* 2047, trans. McClintock 2000, p. 354).

Śāntarakṣita defends this position in reply to Śubhagupta's (650–700 CE) claim that a buddha is completely omniscient—that, as he puts it, 'it is not that the Buddha grasps objects as they are, nondeceptively and without duality, but that *he knows everything in every respect*'. Śāntarakṣita replies (2048–2049) that the Buddha's omniscience consists not in his actually knowing or being aware of all things—or indeed of anything at all—but rather in his propensity to respond spontaneously, without thought to the needs of sentient beings in virtue of the dispositions he has cultivated through his previous practice. The Buddha, on this view, has no cognitive objects at all, and because of not being obstructed by dualistic appearance or the need to think, he acts with consummate skill. Kamalaśīla glosses this reply in his commentary:

> They call all sages the omniscient because the sages, like the Kalpa tree, bring benefits to all sentient beings by the force of the vow they made in their previous lives, and not because they cognize all things. For it is improper to say that they cognize in every way possible a different essential nature.
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> (trans. Matsuoka 2014, p. 305)

We have seen that Indian Buddhist accounts of the epistemic powers of an awakened mind lead not to consensus, but to a range of accounts of what omniscience might be, of their relations to one another, and of our own knowledge regarding omniscience and to increasingly refined disagreement, even to a position in which omniscience entails no knowledge at all of the kinds with which we are familiar. Let us now see what happens when these debates arrive in Tibet.

1.4 Tsongkhapa and Taktsang on a Buddha's Knowledge of Conventional Truth

We now turn to a Tibetan iteration of the debates about omniscience, one that raises the level of discussion one more notch, and that indicates the broader issues at stake in Buddhist debates about omniscience. This debate is grounded in

Tsongkhapa's (Tsong kha pa bLo bzang grags pa, 1357–1419) discussion of the role of epistemology in the Madhyamaka programme, and in Takstang's (sTag Tshang lo tsa ba Shes rab rin chen, 1405–1477) critique of Tsongkhapa's position, a debate that continues today.[15]

Tsongkhapa is the forefather of the Geluk (dGe lugs) order of Tibetan Buddhism. Taktsang was a prominent scholar of the Sakya order, whose critique was launched in a chapter of his *Freedom from Extremes Accomplished through Comprehensive Knowledge of Philosophy (Grub mtha' kun shes nas mtha' bral grub pa zhes bya ba'i bstan bcos rnam pas bshad pa legs bshad kyi rgya mtsho)* entitled 'Eighteen Great Contradictions'. Tsongkhapa and Taktsang, following Prajñākaragupta, agree that a buddha is completely omniscient. They also each take themselves to follow Candrakīrti. They disagree, however, regarding what complete omniscience means, as well as regarding Candrakīrti's own position on conventional truth and epistemic warrant. The debate is important in part because it shows just how much ordinary epistemology is imbricated with the theory of omniscience.

Tsongkhapa, in the section of his *Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment* on conventional truth and pramāṇa (2000–2004: vol. 3, 125–185), argues that conventional and ultimate truth are each objects of knowledge. He infers, drawing on Candrakīrti's account of those instruments in *Clear Words*, that there are epistemic instruments appropriate to each domain of truth, and that these instruments can warrant judgements in these domains. On this view, while the inventory of epistemic instruments is understood merely as descriptive of our everyday epistemic practices, those practices are norm- and knowledge-constituting: to know is to participate correctly in epistemic practices.

While Tsongkhapa takes conventional truth to be deceptive, he also takes there to be a difference between conventional truth and conventional falsehood, and a difference between warranted and unwarranted assertions about the conventional. Since a buddha is completely omniscient, he concludes, a buddha utilizes all available epistemic instruments and knows *everything*, including conventional truth. Moreover, he argues, since the two truths are extensionally identical, and since emptiness is merely a property of empty conventional phenomena, to deny that a buddha knows conventional truth would be to deny that he knows ultimate truth as well (Yakherds 2021, pp. 22–24, 63, 97, 132–140).

Taktsang argues that this account of a buddha's knowledge is incoherent. Since conventional truth is deceptive, he argues, if a buddha were to know them, that buddha would be deceived, contradicting omniscience. Moreover, since conventional phenomena are unreal constructions, and since knowledge must be warranted by reality, they are not even objects of knowledge (Yakherds 2021, pp. 22–23, 25–26). Moreover, Taktsang argues that we can make no sense of an

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[15] See Yakherds (2021) for a history of that debate and for translations of the relevant texts.

omniscient buddha simultaneously knowing the two truths. In the commentary on the fifteenth of his eighteen contradictions he writes:

> Our opponents hold that while a single instance of a buddha's gnosis knows things both as they are and in their diversity, those two kinds of knowledge can be distinguished conceptually. A sound's qualities of being a product and being impermanent are constituted by distinct characteristics, and so they exist in separate, conceptually discernible instances. They say that analogously, gnosis that realizes things as they are and gnosis that realizes things in their diversity must also exist in separate, conceptually distinct instances.
>
> We may therefore ask: If gnosis of things as they are becomes an epistemic instrument for knowing things in their diversity, is it so as an analysis of what is ultimate or as an analysis of conventions? In the first case, it would follow that things in their diversity constitute the ultimate truth. If we take the second horn of the dilemma, we can argue as follows: consider the gnosis into things as they are—it turns out to be an epistemic instrument that discerns the conventional, because it is an epistemic instrument that engages with things in their diversity.
>
> (Yakherds 2021, pp. 140–141)

Taktsang argues that since a buddha knows things as they are Tsongkhapa's position faces a fatal dilemma: on the one hand, to know things in their diversity would be to know them as they are, in which case their diverse manifestations—the conventional truth—would be ultimately real. On the other hand, if to know things in their diversity is to have merely conventional knowledge, and if a buddha knows them, then a buddha's insight is merely conventional, and hence deceptive. A buddha, therefore, cannot know conventional truth.

Taktsang's own position rests on his distinction between three contexts of analysis (Yakherds 2021, pp. 106–120). The first is the context of no analysis. In that context, we can talk—in a descriptive or anthropological register—about epistemic practices and warrants, and the difference between conventional truth and falsity. But there is no omniscience in this context, for it is inhabited only by ordinary beings. In the second context—that of slight analysis—we find the two truths, and all of Madhyamaka. In this context, however, we learn that epistemic warrants make no sense at all, and hence that there is no knowledge at all of the conventional world. This is because to be warranted is to be non-deceptive, and everything in the conventional world is deceptive; emptiness, or the ultimate truth is the only non-deceptive object, but it cannot be accessed by conventional warrants. But understanding emptiness leads us to understand that even it and the distinction between the two truths exist only conventionally, and so, like anything accessible to discursive thought, are deceptive.

Rejecting these, and all objects of thought, takes us to the third context, the context inhabited by a buddha. That context is inconceivable and indescribable,

and that is the only context in which omniscience arises. For this reason, a buddha's omniscience and cognitive relation to the world is simply inconceivable. Even these terms—even the claim that it is inconceivable—can only be taken provisionally, or figuratively. What does a buddha actually know, and how does the world appear from the perspective of a buddha? Taktsang tells us that these questions have no answer.[16] Competing Buddhist accounts of omniscience now include knowledge of a lot about soteriologically relevant stuff; knowledge or awareness of *everything*; the apprehension of the nature of *all* things; the apprehension of the nature of *each* thing; the knowledge of emptiness alone; an undecidable state of complete awareness or knowledge; and something entirely inconceivable.

Takstang's account of omniscience and of epistemology is hardly the last word. It sparked centuries of debate. Geluk interlocutors, for instance, wondered whether Taktsang's version of omniscience, in virtue of lacking *any* objects of knowledge, might be better regarded as complete ignorance, and argued that the denial that knowledge is possible in the context of deception renders conventional truth impossible, and so the possibility of coming to know ultimate truth. But this is a useful place for us to conclude this tale of two millennia for it illustrates what is at stake when we begin to inquire into omniscience in the Buddhist context: we must ask what epistemic experience is like; what kind of knowledge matters; what constitutes an object of knowledge; whether finite minds can even conceive the omniscience that may represent their perfection; and even whether we can answer any of these questions.

1.5 Final Thoughts on a Buddha's Omniscience and on Cross-Cultural Methodology

My hope is that this exploration shows us that the bland consensus in the Buddhist world that awakening issues in omniscience hides enormous diversity regarding what omniscience might be. That diversity was present at the earliest stages of Buddhist philosophical thought, and only ramified as debates about the epistemology of awakening developed. But this exploration is of more than historical interest: it reveals that the term *omniscience* can mean many things, even though it always points to the perfection of some epistemic state. Paul Griffiths writes that

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[16] This rhetoric of inconceivability and ineffability was taken even further by the ninth and tenth Karmapas Mikyö Dorjé (Mi skyod rdo rje, 1507–1554) and Wangchuk Dorjé (dBang phyug rdo rje, 1556–1603), who argue that we can say nothing at all about the nature of reality of buddhahood (Yakherds 2021, pp. 188–210).

It has become almost entirely standard in recent Anglo-American philosophy of religion to assume that for any being to be omniscient it is certainly necessary (and probably sufficient) for that being to know every true proposition. This assumption is parasitic upon the standard propositional account of what it is to know: if belief is a propositional attitude and knowledge a species of belief, then it would seem to follow that a being who knows everything has all and only true beliefs. Once this basic account is accepted, debate centers upon the difficulties generated by it. . . . [T]he model of omniscience set forth [in the *Ornament of the Mahāyāna Sūtras*] is very different. The knowledge at issue here is not a species of belief but rather a species of direct unmediated awareness . . .

(Griffiths 1990, p. 106)

My hope here is that by addressing the multiplicity of perspectives on omniscience we find in the Buddhist tradition, our attention is drawn to new and different epistemic ideals and problems. If we focus on knowledge as justified true belief plus or minus Gettier, we tend to think of its perfection in the state of omniscience as scoring 100 per cent on the true–false quiz whose questions are all of the Tractarian elementary propositions. But that might not be an ideal worth pursuing. As Townley (2011) argues, often the best knower is one who refrains from knowing what it would be better not to know. Perhaps it would be better to become more sensitive, more epistemically skilled, more beneficial to others, more selective about what we come to know. Reflecting on omniscience forces us to ask which of these ideals is worthy of pursuit. Maybe we are wrong about what constitutes an object of knowledge and perhaps omniscience reduces, rather than expands our ken. Do we want to be vultures or buddhas?

This is why we do cross-cultural philosophy—neither to discover that others think just as we do, deploying the same concepts and asking the same questions, nor to note stray differences and contrasts to stock a philosophical curio cabinet—but to escape the wells of our own traditions and to roam more freely in conceptual space. That goal requires not that we answer existing questions, but that we ask new ones.

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A1.1 Reply to Jay L. Garfield

Aaron Segal

In his rich essay, Jay Garfield opens a window to a highly variegated and lush landscape. It's a landscape populated by Buddhist views, spread across geographic regions and historical epochs, about the sort of omniscience which, according to Buddhism, ensues from 'awakening'. But would we see through the window Garfield opened if we were awakened? After all, the landscape is variegated. But diversity, according to the views Garfield analyzes, is merely conventional–and deceptive; the ultimate truth is that everything is uniformly empty. Someone who's truly awakened presumably won't be deceived. So, the awakened presumably won't be taken in by Garfield's essay.

Not so fast. Garfield notes that there's a debate, beginning most clearly with Tsongkhapa and Takstang, and continuing to today, about whether a buddha has knowledge of conventional truths as well as of ultimate truth. Tsongkhapa agrees that conventional truth is deceptive. But 'he also takes there to be a difference between conventional truth and conventional falsehood, and a difference between warranted and unwarranted assertions about the conventional'. Since a buddha is omniscient, he knows everything, including the conventional truths, in the distinctive ways of knowing them. He'd know the details of Garfield's essay.

But Takstang disagrees. 'Since Conventional truth is deceptive, he argues, if a buddha were to know them, that buddha would be deceived, contradicting omniscience.' So, he concludes, a buddha knows no conventional truth. But this inference seems too hasty. Someone can know a conventional truth *p* (if conventional truths can be known at all), while also knowing that *p* is *only a conventional truth*. Presumably, if a buddha knows a certain conventional truth, he would also know *that* it's only a conventional truth. Indeed, plausibly, he'd in any case have to know regarding every conventional truth *q* that: *q* is only conventionally true if *q* is true at all. Each such truth (e.g., '*That the Sahara is hot* is only conventionally true if it's true at all that the Sahara is hot'), after all, is itself an ultimate truth; or, at least, each such truth *follows* from the general ultimate truth that everything is emptiness. So, the buddha won't be deceived merely in virtue of knowing conventional truths.

Takstang has another argument, this one for the claim that no one–buddha or not–could know a conventional truth. Here's Garfield's summary: 'Since conventional phenomena are unreal constructions, and since knowledge must be

warranted by reality, they are not even objects of knowledge.' I'm not sure exactly what an 'unreal construction' is, or what it is to be 'warranted by reality'. But whatever those amount to, I don't see how by those standards *emptiness* manages to be the object of knowledge. How could emptiness be any *more* of a real thing than something else? But then, if ultimately everything is empty (emptiness?)—and we accept Takstang's epistemological standards—we'll be left with no possible knowledge at all. And not just no propositional knowledge—no knowledge, *period*. After all, if you could have some other kind of knowledge of emptiness, despite its lacking any reality, then nothing in this last argument would stop you or a buddha from having the same kind of knowledge of conventional truth. So, apparently, there's simply no knowledge of any sort to be had.

This in fact seems to be the result that Takstang embraces. But here I identify with those 'Geluk interlocutors', who 'wondered whether Taktsang's version of omniscience, in virtue of lacking any objects of knowledge, might be better regarded as complete ignorance'. I wonder the same thing. How is a buddha any better, or even any *different*, from a cognitive/epistemic point of view (where, I emphasize, 'cognitive' and 'epistemic' are construed as broadly as you'd reasonably like), from a total ignoramus?

I am reminded of some standard criticisms of Maimonides' radical negative theology. Setting aside certain exegetical complications, Maimonides' God seems not to have any knowledge at all.[17] (He can be said to *know*, but the italicized 'know' means something we can't conceive of.) That's usually thought to be bad enough theologically in its own right, but it's especially bad when trying to account for divine revelation. It seems plausible that for A to reveal some truth to B, A has to *know* that truth. If God, strictly speaking, doesn't have any knowledge at all, there could be no divine revelation. (There could only be divine *revelation*, where the italicized 'revelation' means something we can't conceive of.) More generally even: it seems plausible that for A to reveal some truth to B, A has to be in a better cognitive/epistemic position (at least vis-à-vis that truth) than B. But if there's no comparing God and us in any way at all–including the cognitive/epistemic—then, again, there can be no divine revelation.[18]

A similar point seems to hold regarding the sort of revelation that is supposed to constitute Buddhist awakening. If one is awakened, then one has to be in a better cognitive/epistemic position than one was before. But if a buddha has no knowledge of any sort (again, not just no propositional knowledge, but no knowledge, period), then it's hard to see how a buddha's state could constitute a

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[17] See *Guide of the Perplexed* 1.35, 1.52, 1.56. The complication comes in 1.68–69, where Maimonides seems to concur with 'the philosophers' that for God, just as for creatures, knowledge involves an identity between subject, object, and the act of intellection.

[18] I myself actually think this paragraph represents a misreading of Maimonides, albeit a standard and understandable one. See Segal (2021).

cognitive/epistemic improvement over her previous state (again, even if 'cognitive' and 'epistemic' are construed as broadly as you'd reasonably like). But then the awakening in question hardly seems like a revelation, or even like an awakening.

So I wasn't convinced by Takstang's arguments (at least the ones that Garfield discusses) for the conclusion that a buddha can't know conventional truths. Maybe, just maybe, a buddha could appreciate Garfield's wonderfully kaleidoscopic essay, after all.

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A1.2 Reply to Jay L. Garfield

Hamid Vahid and Mahmoud Morvarid

Jay Garfield's chapter deals with omniscience and epistemic authority in Buddhism. We are not, however, told how the issues that are raised in this chapter bear on the question of revelation, or whether that question has any place in the Buddhist tradition. Garfield seems to treat 'awakening' as some sort of religious experience with omniscience (grasped through awakening) as an instance of revelation. But neither 'awakening' nor the (possible) connection between omniscience and revelation is explained in sufficient detail. We will therefore focus on his account of omniscience in Buddhism and the conclusions that he takes to follow from his discussion of this notion.

Garfield begins by outlining how 'omniscience' is understood in the Buddhist tradition. It turns out, however, that there is a large number of debates concerning whether 'omniscience' refers to knowledge relevant to liberation, or general knowledge of the nature of things. There are also questions about whether omniscience is an occurrent or a dispositional state, and whether it refers only to ultimate truth, or to conventional truths as well. Having gone through various traditions within Indian and Tibetan Buddhism, Garfield concludes that there is no consensus on any of those questions. He concludes his chapter, however, by bringing the conflicting accounts of omniscience within Buddhism to bear and cast doubt on the contemporary use of omniscience as involving knowledge of all truths with knowledge understood as justified true belief plus some further conditions. He thinks that the contemporary view might not be an ideal worth pursuing: '[O]ften the best knower is one who refrains from knowing what it would be better not to know. Perhaps it would be better to become more sensitive, more epistemically skilled, more beneficial to others, more selective about what we come to know' (p. 17).

Although Garfield's caution about the dangers of being wedded to a particular view of belief formation is laudable, we are not sure that the issues that he raises, namely, sensitivity and selectivity about what we come to know or being beneficial to others undermine the standard picture of epistemology. The kind of considerations that Garfield takes to undermine the standard evidential account of belief formation can be classified as belonging to the general category of practical, as opposed to epistemic, considerations. But it is easy for an evidentialist to explain away their intuitive force by drawing our attention to the context of our practices. Our practices can be subject to a variety of norms that are not necessarily

epistemic. In addition to truth and knowledge, other sources of normativity like morality, etiquette, and aesthetic can warrant action or form a particular belief. To give an example, when the Mafia comes looking for your brother, asserting the false sentence that 'your brother is not at home' saves his life despite your contravening the truth norm of assertion. This is not, however, because the norm is defective but because in this context moral norms are salient and take precedence over other norms. The same seems to be true of the considerations that Garfield takes to undermine our standard epistemic practices and norms.

To explain, having highlighted the circumstances in which 'the best knower is one who refrains from knowing what it would be better not to know... [that] it would be better to become more sensitive...more beneficial to others', Garfield immediately adds that reflection on omniscience can help us to identify which of these ideals are worthy of pursuit. Although we fail to see how thinking about omniscience can be helpful in that respect, it seems to us that what he calls 'ideals' are best understood as drawing attention to the relevance of the practical and moral aspects of belief to its epistemic status. But one can acknowledge this point without accepting that there is a conflict between such requirements and the evidentialist conception of epistemic permissibility. According to some prominent recent epistemological theories, the non-epistemic features of a subject's environment can make a difference to whether the subject is warranted enough to act or believe. The features in question include practical and moral considerations.

These theories that go by the names of 'pragmatic'[19] and 'moral'[20] encroachment maintain that the practical and moral import of belief can encroach upon its epistemic status. The idea, in other words, is that what is epistemically rational for a subject to believe can, in some cases, be influenced by practical and moral factors. So, while practical encroachers take facts about what matters to a subject to influence whether or not her belief is justified or rational, moral encroachers allow the moral import of belief to play the same role. The important thing, however, is that these theories are compatible with the standard evidentialist position according to which epistemic justification is determined solely by factors pertaining to evidence and truth. For what they maintain is that the practical and moral import of belief merely raise the threshold of evidence that is sufficient for its justification. In the end, it is evidence that provides justification for belief. So, if Garfield's remarks are intended to highlight the relevance of practical and moral considerations to our epistemic practices, it is possible to grant this without allowing those considerations to function as grounds or reasons for such practices.

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[19] See, for example, Fantl and McGrath (2002).
[20] See, for example, Basu and Schroeder (2019).

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2

Revelation and Religious Experience in the Islamic Tradition

Historical and Contemporary Perspectives

Hamid Vahid and Mahmoud Morvarid

2.1 Introduction

All great theistic religions rest their belief systems on faith in divine revelations which are commonly recorded and preserved in sacred texts and writings. However, while such religions share this common starting point about revelation, they differ between themselves regarding how this claim should be properly conceived. These differences include, among other things, distinct responses to such questions as to whether God Himself is the author of the sacred texts or whether they are written by humans who are merely inspired by Him; the sense in which God has spoken those words and the role that the prophets have played in the ensuing process. In the Islamic tradition, God is regarded as the sole author of the Quranic verses, which are said to have been dictated to Prophet Mohammed. This 'dictation model' of revelation ('*waḥy*') raises, however, a host of problems. In addition to the metaphysically oriented questions just noted, it also raises the spectre of the epistemological problem of error and accuracy, that is, whether revelation is to be viewed as completely inerrant. As far as the metaphysical debates are concerned, however, the Islamic scholarship about the nature of revelation has been enriched by the contributions of a combined force of theologians (*mutakallimūn*), mystics, and philosophers.

The main debate in this area pertains to the question of the sense in which God speaks and the mechanism by which the prophets receive the revelation. Some theologians (such as Muʿtazila and Imāmīyya) have claimed that since God is omnipotent, He can create the relevant sounds that are then heard and grasped by the prophets. Nevertheless, such a picture of revelation was not found satisfactory by the Muslim philosophers (such as al-Fārābī and Avicenna) who subsequently exercised much ingenuity to put forward an alternative account of revelation, and in particular, of the mechanism by which the prophets receive it. On the other hand, some Muslim mystics (such as al-Ghazzālī) have been more inclined to

ground revelation in the mystical or religious experiences (narrowly understood) that the prophets enjoy. On such accounts, revelation constitutes the higher reaches of divine inspiration (*ilhām*), which other human beings can also enjoy. Such experiential accounts have been particularly popular in modern times. This chapter aims to elucidate the notion of revelation as it is particularly understood by such Muslim thinkers as al-Fārābī, Avicenna, al-Ghazzālī, and their modern successors such as Mohammad Iqbal, and to show how it has been progressively enriched by the different philosophical disciplines that have been brought to bear on it.[1]

2.2 Al-Fārābī and Avicenna on Revelation: The Historical Perspective

Revelation in Arabic is '*waḥy*' which has as its meaning a family of similar concepts such as 'implicit remark' and 'inspiration'. But the word is mostly intended to mean 'conveying information in a covert manner' or 'covert information' for short. To investigate how revelation is understood in Islamic thought, we must see how the concept itself is understood and used in Islam's book of revelation, namely, the Quran. *Waḥy* is sometimes used to mean 'instinctive guide' as when the Quran says 'Your Lord revealed to the honeybee: "Make homes in the mountains, in the trees and in the structures they raise"' (16:68).[2] Sometimes it is used to refer to an 'induced temptation' as in 'The Satans inspire their friends to dispute with you; if you obey them, you are idolaters' (6:121), sometimes as 'divine predetermination' as in 'and He revealed in every heaven its Command' (41:12), and sometimes as 'inspiration' as in 'And We inspired to the mother of Moses, "Suckle him; but when you fear for him, cast him into the river and do not fear and do not grieve."' (28:7). However, it is in the sense of 'conveying a message to a person covertly', as in 'Then He revealed to His servant what He revealed. The heart did not lie about what it saw' (53:10), that *waḥy* finds its most distinctly relevant use as 'revelation'. And it is the analysis of such use that has proved to be controversial among Muslim philosophers and theologians.[3]

   At any rate, the phenomena of *waḥy*, as conceived of in Islamic thought, seems to involve the following features: (i) Divine 'speech', which might be direct or through a mediating agent; (ii) the prophet's 'hearing' the relevant 'sounds' as the

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[1] For reasons of space, we have to leave out the works of such philosophers as Suhrawardī (1154–1191) and Mullā Sadrā (1571–1636).

[2] This and other quotations from the Quran are taken from the standard translations of the holy book, such as Abdullah Yusuf Ali's and Ali Quli Qara'i's translations.

[3] In the contemporary literature on the nature of revelation, it is commonplace to distinguish between *manifestational* and *non-manifestational* (or *propositional*) revelation (Wolterstorff 1995). It is the propositional revelation that is at issue when '*waḥy*' is understood as 'covert information' in the Islamic tradition.

vehicle of the divine speech; (iii) the prophet's acquiring knowledge by way of receiving the revelation; and (iv) the text of the revealed words (the Quran in the case of Islam). Muslim scholars of different schools, including *mutakallimūn*, philosophers, and mystics, have different accounts of, at least some of, the features just mentioned.

First and foremost, *mutakallimūn* were inclined to interpret God's speech quite literally. Among them, the *Muʿtazilī* and *Imāmī* theologians often held that the divine speech can obtain by God's creating the relevant physical sounds which are then heard and grasped by the prophet who then recites them, which eventually constitute the revealed text.[4] Although this view proposes a straightforward picture of the aforementioned four features of revelation, it was not deemed satisfactory by most Muslim philosophers and mystics. One initial problem with this view was that it did not offer any explanation of why the prophet's companions could not hear the purported physical sounds. Another worry was that it failed to substantiate the privileged status of the prophet as the unique recipient of *waḥy*.

In addition to these concerns, there were also some philosophical reasons against such a picture of revelation. For example, philosophers, such as Avicenna, held that God cannot create the material stuff directly. Appealing to what he called the 'al-Wāḥid' principle (namely, the One can produce only one thing), Avicenna argued that God's influence in the material world can only obtain utilizing a chain of mediating causes.[5] A more important problem that was not explicitly raised by Avicenna is that *mutakallimūn*'s picture of revelation could not sit well with Avicenna's conception of God. For the mere creation of physical sounds does not count as speech unless it is preceded by some special (communicative) intentions on the part of the speaker. But, for Avicenna, attributing intention and goals to God was not an option as he took such states to signify imperfection. So, it was only natural for philosophers to opt to travel along a different route from that suggested by their theologian colleagues.

Despite some earlier attempts by philosophers such as al-Kindī to provide an analysis of revelation,[6] it is in al-Fārābī's work that we first come across a systematic account of the mechanism by which *waḥy* obtains. Whereas the *mutakallimūn*'s focal point in explicating the process of revelation was God's *speech*, al-Fārābī concentrated, for the most part, on identifying the mechanism by which the prophet acquires revelatory *knowledge*. Crucial to his account of revelation is his theory of the stages of the human intellect, which is itself a faculty of the soul.

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[4] See e.g. al-Hamadānī 1962, pp. 6–63; al-Ḥillī 2003, pp. 32–33.

[5] Avicenna 1984, pp. 78–79; Avicenna 2004, p. 122 [2014, pp. 139–140] (brackets denote English translations). See also Amin 2020.

[6] al-Kindī 1950, pp. 372–376 [2012, pp. 286–289].

Following Aristotle and the subsequent Greek commentators, al-Fārābī distinguishes three stages of the human intellect. At the initial stage, we have the 'potential intellect' (al-ʿaql al-hayūlānī), which is a pure disposition as it is not yet actually thinking. By acquiring knowledge of the primary concepts and principles, the human intellect proceeds to enter the stage of the 'actual intellect' (al-ʿaql bi-l-fiʿl), whereby human agents are placed in a position to obtain further knowledge. The actual intellect is so-called because the intellect can now acquire certain intelligibles that are abstracted from material things. However, while it is actual concerning such intelligibles, it is still a potential intellect concerning those intelligibles that it has not acquired yet. Al-Fārābī postulates a further stage, the 'acquired' intellect (al-ʿaql al-mustafād), where the agent acquires all intelligibles. For al-Fārābī, this is the ultimate stage of human intellect.

But how does human intellect manage to think and acquire the abstracted intelligibles? This is where we have to look at the epistemological theories to which Muslim philosophers such as al-Fārābī and Avicenna subscribe (later we shall suggest a gloss on such theories to justify their rationale). Al-Fārābī's main idea is that the human capacity for knowledge cannot be realized on its own. Rather, there must be another entity that, possessing all the intelligible forms, facilitates the path of the human intellect from potentiality to actuality. Al-Fārābī identifies that entity with an incorporeal substance, namely, the so-called 'Active Intellect' (al-ʿaql al-faʿʿāl). To explain, al-Fārābī assimilates the human mind's acquisition of intellectual knowledge to the process of vision. Following Alexander's De Intellectu (itself a commentary on Aristotle), al-Fārābī distinguishes between three factors constituting perception: the potential sensory faculty, the Sun, and the coloured objects. By making the objects visible to our eyes, the Sun behaves as an active agent that enables the transition of the sensory faculty from mere potentiality to actuality and the potentially visible objects to the seen objects. By analogy, thought and thinking is also taken to be constituted by three factors: the potential intellect, an active agent, and the potentially intelligible thought. As in the case of perception, the second factor (Active Intellect) is expected to render a hitherto potential intellect into an actual intellect and potential intelligibles into actual intelligibles.[7]

But what is this 'Active Intellect'? Here Muslim thinkers such as al-Fārābī and Avicenna go beyond their Aristotelian predecessors and identify the Active Intellect with the tenth incorporeal intellect from among the ten Intellects that were posited to explain divine emanation. Starting from certain philosophical theses, such as the principle of al-Wāḥid, and being influenced by the Ptolemaic geocentric model of the planetary system, al-Fārābī believed that the universe consists of nine organism-like spheres, each of which is created by an incorporeal

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[7] al-Fārābī 1964, pp. 34–36 [2015, pp. 32–33]; al-Fārābī 1985, pp. 196–202 and pp. 240–245.

intellect. The intellect that creates the first sphere is the highest being that is created by God, and through which God's emanation engulfs the world. It is the tenth intellect that is identified as the Active Intellect, and one of its jobs is to lead the potential human intellects to actuality. The more universal concepts and knowledge human souls acquire from the Active Intellect, the more their souls would resemble that intellect. Finally, by entering into conjunction with the Active Intellect, human souls arrive at the stage of the acquired intellect, thereby possessing all sorts of universal concepts and knowledge.

Although the preceding observations were intended to explain how humans manage to acquire theoretical knowledge, for al-Fārābī they also underpin an explanation for *waḥy* and prophecy. For this reason, al-Fārābī identifies the Active Intellect with Archangel Gabriel (or *al-Rūḥ al-Amīn*) who is represented in the Quran as the messenger who delivers God's messages to the prophets.[8] A prophet's soul possesses the same faculties like that of other human beings. The only difference is that some of his faculties have acquired a degree of perfection that enables him to perceive things that ordinary humans are incapable of. The two faculties that distinguish prophets from others are those of the intellect and imagination.[9]

As was just noted, by entering the stage of acquired intellect, human souls will acquire varieties of intellectual knowledge. Only a few people, such as philosophers and prophets, can reach this stage. When the members of this group enter conjunction with the Active Intellect, they will directly receive emanation via their acquired intellect. What distinguishes prophets (like Moses, Jesus, and Mohammed) from philosophers, however, is that their imaginative faculty has also reached the stage of perfection. This faculty, according to al-Fārābī, plays two roles in the process in which prophets acquire *waḥy*. One role is to receive 'particular percepts' from the Active Intellect on the basis of which prophets come to acquire knowledge of particular events that have occurred in the past or will occur in the future. The other role is to enable prophets to undergo extraordinary experiences such as 'seeing' angels. According to al-Fārābī, although the normal function of human imaginative faculty is to store and process the sense impressions that the soul receives when interacting with his or her environment, the imaginative faculty can also *symbolize* (*muḥākāt*) the data it receives. This normally takes place when the body goes to sleep, and the imaginative faculty is no longer engaged in the processing of the sensory data. In the process of *muḥākāt*, the imaginative faculty delivers figurative images, which symbolically (rather than literally) represent certain internal or worldly features.

These images constitute what we 'see' in our dreams. Al-Fārābī further holds that since prophets' imaginative faculty has reached the state of perfection, the

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[8] al-Fārābī 1964, p. 32 [2015, p. 30]. See also Avicenna 1980, p. 223.
[9] al-Fārābī 1985, pp. 240–245; cf. al-Fārābī 1964, pp. 79–80 [2015, p. 69].

emanations of the Active Intellect are transmitted to their imaginative faculty by passing through the prophets' acquired intellect. This way, the imaginative faculty transforms the emanations it has received into figurative images that symbolically represent the relevant truths. At any rate, the possession of the highest level of imaginative capacity is what distinguishes the prophets from intelligent people such as philosophers. The fact that, according to al-Fārābī, the emanations of the Active Intellect have to go first through the prophet's acquired intellect shows that his imaginative faculty will only receive those thoughts that the faculty of reason has approved of. This further distinguishes the working of the imaginative faculty of the prophets from those of the ordinary people that are not necessarily constrained by reason.[10]

At any rate, al-Fārābī is widely believed to be among the first Muslim philosophers to explain *waḥy* by appealing to the conjunction of the prophet's intellectual and imaginative faculty with the Active Intellect. After al-Fārābī, another philosopher who strived to give a systematic account of *waḥy* was Avicenna. While accepting al-Fārābī's basic structure of the mechanism by which *waḥy* obtains, Avicenna tried to expand on it by filling what he took to be certain gaps in that account. Although both he and al-Fārābī appeal to the stages of intellect in their account of *waḥy*, there are some minor differences between them. Moreover, the two differ over whether receiving the emanations is a case of causation by the Active Intellect or the unification with that intellect.[11] However, the most important difference between the two concerns Avicenna's claim that, in addition to the imaginative faculty, what distinguishes a prophet from a philosopher or a highly intelligent person concerns the perfection of another faculty, namely, *ḥads* or 'intuition' or 'acumen'.

According to Avicenna, *ḥads* is a capacity that enables people to find a link (a middle term) between two propositions to conclude when constructing a rational argument (syllogism). While some people are slow to find such a link, others (like philosophers) are often very quick to identify it. So the possession of this capacity comes in degrees, and Avicenna thinks that the prophets possess this capacity to the highest degree. Accordingly, he takes them to possess a 'holy intellect', which, when exercised, enables them to enter conjunction with the Active Intellect. Thus, in virtue of their rational and holy faculties, prophets receive universal concepts or intelligibles from the Active Intellect, after which their imaginative faculties transform them into figurative (visual or auditory) images.[12]

However, the postulation of the capacity of *ḥads* and the holy faculty raises an important issue for Avicenna. The question concerns whether, given the way this capacity operates, the divine knowledge that the prophet acquires is no more than

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[10] al-Fārābī 1985, pp. 210–227 and pp. 244–245.
[11] See al-Fārābī 1985, pp. 242–245; Avicenna 2004, pp. 294–295 [2014, pp. 170–171].
[12] Avicenna 1985, pp. 339–341 [1981, pp. 35–37]; Avicenna 1996, pp. 338–340.

a mere testimony with its grounds hidden from him, or whether it is a species of knowledge whose reasons and grounds are also transparent to the prophet. For Avicenna, divine knowledge is a rationally grounded knowledge because, by spotting the link between the premises of the reasoning process through the capacity of ḥads, the prophet acquires (or is always in a position to acquire) the reasons in question. Accordingly, revealed knowledge is a species of rational knowledge that is stable under reflection.

To conclude this section, let us see how al-Fārābī's and Avicenna's views of waḥy account for its salient features, namely, (i) the divine speech, (ii) the prophet's hearing the relevant sounds, (iii) his revealed knowledge, and (iv) the revealed text. Their views seem to imply that God does not literally speak to the prophet. Rather, He imparts all sorts of knowledge upon him through the mediation of the Active Intellect. Furthermore, Avicenna seeks to explain things like the prophet's 'hearing' sounds by appealing to the prophet's imaginative faculty, which, on his view, takes the emanations of the Active Intellect as input and produces symbolic representations (auditory 'images' couched in a natural language) as output.[13] This picture naturally suggests that the Quranic verses are transcripts of these auditory experiences produced by the prophet's imaginative faculty. This also seems to comport well with al-Fārābī's account, which is silent on this aspect of waḥy. Finally, as for the nature of revealed knowledge, Avicenna holds that it is not merely testimonial, but is also a rationally grounded species of knowledge.

2.3 Some Methodological Reflections on the Historical Perspective on Waḥy

To understand the reasons behind al-Fārābī's and Avicenna's reliance on the Active Intellect as a way of acquiring theoretical knowledge, as well as waḥy, it would be helpful to uncover the rationale behind it. To do that, we need to go back to their analogy of perceptual knowledge, which, we may recall, provided the impetus behind their account of theoretical knowledge. As we saw, following Aristotle and his commentators, Muslim philosophers identified an active element in perception, namely, the Sun whose role was to enable the sensory faculty to perceive the sensible form, thereby realizing its potential. An important feature of sensible forms is that they can exist as physical objects in the external world and as mental entities in the mind. Since it is the same form that exists in the two realms of the mental and the physical, perception is guaranteed to be externally directed. This externally directed character of experience is what is nowadays called

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[13] Avicenna 1996, p. 240.

'intentionality'. Perceptual experiences are thought of as springing from the outside, thus pointing beyond themselves. Accordingly, the externality of the active agent in perception guarantees that many of our perceptual experiences are externally directed and veridical. It guarantees that it is not the human mind that is creating such data. After all, in the beginning, the mind, as pure potentiality, requires assistance from the outside to realize its powers.

As we saw, Muslim philosophers also conceived of our perception of universal intelligibles along similar lines: the potential intellect is affected by an active agent (the Active Intellect) to issue in theoretical knowledge. Once again, the external character of the active agent guarantees that our beliefs involving the intelligibles are externally directed and veridical rather than being a set of false and unfounded thoughts. Moreover, being the highest form of such thoughts, revelation is also guaranteed to be authentic and veridical.

Despite the dominance of this approach to cognition, there have, however, been dissenting views that were particularly critical of appealing to the independently existing incorporeal intellects. Such views tended to 'internalize' the functions that philosophers such as al-Fārābī and Avicenna attributed to the Active Intellect. This is indeed the route that al-Ghazzālī took in some of his later works. Having criticized Avicenna's account of revelation for relying on the cosmic souls and the ten incorporeal intellects, al-Ghazzālī also turned inwards to explain how revelation obtains. In his later ruminations on this subject, al-Ghazzālī is a Sufi and views the Sufi's account of sacred knowledge with favour. He takes the human 'heart' to be essentially disposed to acquire such knowledge. But there are two ways to do so: knowledge by means of learning and knowledge through inspiration. The latter is conditional on the purification of the soul from sins and the things that disrupt this inner faculty ('heart') from functioning properly. Just as one can perceive the sun either directly by looking at it, or indirectly by looking at its reflection in a mirror, one can either acquire knowledge indirectly by learning or directly by way of being inspired: 'The heart sometimes grasps the true essence of the world through the senses and sometimes through the Preserved tablet. However, once the veil between heart and the Tablet is lifted, it can see the true nature of objects as they really are.'[14]

So, al-Ghazzālī takes *waḥy* to be the direct knowledge that the 'heart' receives when inspired. This seems to identify revelation with the highest level of the mystically inspired knowledge whose obtaining is conditional on the purification of the soul. Just as the obtaining of the enabling conditions in the case of perception (such as normal lighting, etc.) makes the sensory faculty perceive objects, likewise, with the purification of their souls, humans can acquire an eye that enables them to perceive things that lie beyond the reach of their senses and

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[14] al-Ghazzālī 1991, p. 23.

intellect: 'Just as the intellect is one of the stages in which the human being acquires an eye that can see various kinds of intelligibles...so is prophecy an expression signifying a stage in which the prophet acquires an eye that has a light wherein the unknown and other phenomena, which the intellect cannot perceive, becomes visible'.[15] Although al-Ghazzālī initiated a new way of understanding *waḥy*, his account is silent on a number of its features. In particular, it is not clear if he believes that God literally speaks, or whether he intends to see the prophetic experience itself as a conduit through which the prophet 'hears' God's revelations. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that it is this view of how revelation obtains that continues to engage the minds of modern Muslim philosophers and scholars to which we shall now turn.[16]

2.4 Revelation and Religious Experience: The Modern Approach

While the more traditional explanations of revelation in the Islamic philosophical tradition were influenced by the prevailing philosophical psychology and cosmology of that period, we see a gradual retreat from such psychology with the scholars paying more attention to human faculties as we approach the modern period. What characterizes this period is the attempt to ground theistic beliefs in general, and revelation in particular, in the kind of experience that believers are said to enjoy when interacting with God. As we saw, grounding revelation in religious or mystical experience is not an unprecedented idea in the history of Islamic thought. It has its roots in al-Ghazālī's work, among others, whose revolt against philosophers led him to reconsider his earlier, philosophically oriented, views about revelation. Moreover, with the collapse of ancient cosmology and the growth of modern science and philosophy, this was an obvious step for modern Muslim thinkers to take. One such thinker is Mohammad Iqbal whose *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* constitutes a watershed in modern Islamic thinking.[17]

Iqbal's attitude towards revelation was inspired by what he takes to be the Quranic account of a 'complete vision of Reality' as that which is gained through

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[15] al-Ghazzālī 1993, p. 54 [2010, p. 43].

[16] For a recent account of revelation that is completely grounded in dreams, see the work of the contemporary Muslim thinker, 'Abdu-l-karīm Sourūsh 2018. His main motivation for such an idiosyncratic approach is to allow error to get a foothold in the process of revelation. However, in the absence of a viable account of the cognitive content of dreams, and an explanation of how dreams might reliably track the facts in the world, this account is, at best, severely incomplete. Moreover, the fact that Quranic sentences come with diverse syntactical structures (negative existential, universal, conditional, counterfactual, and their combinations thereof) makes it completely mysterious how they can be extracted from the content of dreams.

[17] For another modern account, see Rahman 1978.

the perception of Nature, as well as what is acquired through the functioning of, what the Quran describes as *Fu'ād* or *Qalb*, i.e. heart: 'He Who excelled in the creation of all that He created. He originated the creation of man from clay; then made his progeny from the extract of a mean fluid, then He duly proportioned him, and breathed into him of His spirit, and bestowed upon your ears and eyes and *heart*. And yet, little thanks do you give' (32: 7–9). In Iqbal's view, the 'heart' is a kind of inner intuition or insight whose function is to acquaint us with those aspects of reality that are not accessible to sense perception. The resulting (religious) experience is, however, no less real than any other experience. He further takes the richness and vivacity of religious experience to come in degrees ranging from the experiences of ordinary believers to those of the mystics and, eventually, to the prophetic consciousness. All in all, he views the religious or mystical experience as the conduit through which the prophet receives the revelation.

Iqbal characterizes religious or mystical experience by two of its salient features: immediacy and unanalysability. He takes the immediacy of mystical experience to be akin to that of our knowledge of other minds: 'the immediacy of mystic experience simply means that we know God just as we know other [minds]'[18] as 'we feel that our experience of other minds is immediate'.[19] Secondly, such experiences are unanalysable and primitive: the 'mystic state brings us into contact with the total passage of Reality in which all the diverse stimuli merge into one another and form a single unanalyzable unity in which the ordinary distinction of subject and object does not exist'.[20] Moreover, mystical experience transcends the private personality of the subject of experience. This, in his view, means that mystical experience is a veridical experience with objective content. It seems that Iqbal's concern here can be better expressed by taking mystical experience to have intentional or representational content (more on this shortly).

Some may find religious experience a shaky ground for (the rationality of) theistic beliefs let alone revelation and, thus, dismiss Iqbal's appeal to such experiences. Such doubts have been expressed by philosophers who are particularly worried about the epistemic worth of religious experience. According to certain recent accounts of the rationality of religious belief, religious experience plays the same role in their rationality that perceptual experience plays in the rationality of perceptual belief. An important obstacle in the way of utilizing this analogy is that while the objects of our environment are represented in our perceptual experience as having certain qualities, the same cannot be said of God as the object of religious experience. It seems that religious or mystical experience is often characterized by its effective character as when one describes one's religious experience in terms of such feelings as love, bliss, peace, awe, and wonder. This has led some philosophers to express misgivings about appealing to

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[18] Iqbal 1989, p. 14.   [19] Ibid., p. 16.   [20] Ibid., p. 15.

such emotions on the ground that they lack intentional content, thus, rendering them inadequate as the (justifying) grounds for theistic beliefs. William Alston has given a particularly succinct description of this worry: 'One nagging problem is the possibility that the phenomenal content of mystical perception wholly consists of affective qualities, various ways the subject is feeling in reaction to what the subject takes to be the presence of God.'[21]

However, as recent discussions of emotions have revealed, such views of emotion depict a wrong picture of its nature. Generally speaking, theories of emotion can be thought of as occupying the space between two extreme positions: the feeling theory and judgementalism. The former construes emotions as non-representational and devoid of cognitive content whereas the latter identifies emotions with evaluative judgements. However, while the feeling theories fail to do justice to the intentional character of emotions, the cognitive theories fail to account for their felt quality, namely, the fact that there is something that it is likely to undergo an emotion. An account of emotions that lies somewhere between these two extremes is the perceptual model of emotion which recommends seeing emotional experience as being analogous to perceptual experience. Accordingly, it maintains that the intentional character of emotion is best understood in terms of the perception of value. For example, shame involves a perception of something shameful, admiration involves a perception of something admirable, and fear involves a perception of something as dangerous. So, on this view, emotions are essentially perceptual experiences of evaluative properties. They present their objects as having particular evaluative properties.[22]

Interestingly enough, that seems to be the line that Iqbal himself takes in his discussion of the content of religious experience. To begin with, he takes, as we have seen, the content of mystical experience to consist of feelings but is quick to reject the view that they lack representational content: 'mystic feeling, like all feeling, has a cognitive element also; and it is, I believe, because of this cognitive element that it lends itself to the form of idea'.[23]

Finally, Iqbal concludes his discussion of revelation by maintaining that the quality of mystical experience cannot be communicated. Mystical states, he says, 'are more like feeling than thought. The interpretation which the mystic or the prophet puts on the content of his religious consciousness can be conveyed to others in the form of propositions, but the content itself cannot be so transmitted'.[24] In support of this claim, he takes the following verses of the Quran (53: 1–18) to give the psychological profile, rather than the content, of the experience that the prophet undergoes during the revelation.

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[21] Alston 1991, p. 49.   [22] See, for example, Tappolet 2018.
[23] Iqbal 1986, p. 17. Of course, the perceptual model of emotions cannot explain all the contents of the Quranic revelation. So, Iqbal's account needs some modifications to overcome this problem.
[24] Ibid., p. 16.

By the star when it setteth,
Your compatriot erreth not, nor is he led astray.
Neither speaketh he from mere impulse.
The Qur'an is no other than the revelation revealed to him:
One strong in power taught it him,
Endowed with wisdom with even balance stood he
In the highest part of the horizon:
Then came he nearer and approached,
And was at the distance of two bows or even closer
And he revealed to the servant of God what he revealed:
His heart falsified not what he saw:
What! will ye then dispute with him as to what he saw?
He had seen him also another time
Near the Sidrah tree which marks the boundary:
Near which is the garden of repose:
When the Sidrah tree was covered with what covered it:
His eye turned not aside, nor did it wander:
For he saw the greatest of the signs of the Lord.

(53: 1–18)[25]

Although Iqbal does not try to substantiate his incommunicability thesis, the perceptual model (explained above) can nicely do it. The idea is that just as without having an experience of, say, blueness we cannot gain access to the property of blue, we cannot likewise gain access to the evaluative properties (attributed to God) without having an affective engagement with God. That is to say, just as the content of having an experience as of, say, a blue ball cannot be accessible to a colourblind person, the content of having an affective experience of God cannot be likewise available to someone who lacks that emotional state.

Iqbal claims that the incommunicability of mystical experience is the result of its inarticulate affective content (feeling). However, although the content of the prophetic experience cannot be communicated, he thinks that '[t]he interpretation which the mystic or the prophet puts on the content of his religious consciousness can be conveyed to others in the form of propositions'.[26] This passage seems to suggest that what is eventually transmitted as the (interpreted) content of the revelation is inevitably influenced by human intervention through the prophet's interpretive gloss on that content. Such a view would seem to be quite a revisionary one when contrasted with the orthodox belief in the Islamic thought that the *text*, as well as the content or meaning, of the Quran, is also

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[25] This passage from the Quran is taken verbatim from Iqbal 1986.   [26] Ibid.

revealed. However, this does not seem to be Iqbal's considered judgement for he goes on to claim that 'it is no mere metaphor to say that idea and word both simultaneously emerge out of the womb of feeling, though logical understanding cannot but take them in a temporal order and thus create its own difficulty by regarding them as mutually isolated. There is a sense in which the word is also revealed.'[27] Unfortunately, Iqbal does not identify the mechanism by which this verbal revelation obtains, nor does he explain how the very idea of divine speech fits with his religious experience account of revelation. This is something that he shares with al-Ghazzālī.

2.5   Conclusion

To conclude, we began by drawing the contours of *waḥy* (revelation) as characterized in the Quran and the Islamic tradition. The salient features of *waḥy* turned out to include the divine speech, the prophet's perception of such speech, and the mechanism by which he acquires revealed knowledge. To explain and account for such features, two distinct, though related, approaches were adopted by Muslim philosophers and *mutakallimūn*. While Muslim philosophers were mostly concerned to explain the mechanism through which the prophet acquires revealed knowledge by appealing to the various stages of the evolution of the human intellect, the *mutakallimūn* were more inclined to interpret and understand the features of *waḥy* in a more or less literal fashion. Despite their differences, however, both approaches shared in their dependence on the roles of certain supernatural entities in the transmission of *waḥy*. Against this background, attempts were also made to internalize some of those roles and ground *waḥy* in the human mystical (religious) experience. We saw that it was this latter tendency that mostly engaged the minds of the modern Muslim thinkers regarding the question of *waḥy*, though, as with some of the previous accounts, the question of Divine speech was left wide open. What is, however, particularly distinctive of the modern Islamic approach is its preoccupation with the hermeneutical dimension of *waḥy*, i.e. the interpretative principles or methods that are needed to be brought to bear on the text of Quran when both truth and comprehension seem to crumble. It is, thus, fair to say that while, for the early Muslim thinkers, the issues of truth and comprehension of *waḥy* were largely determined by its metaphysical foundation, for the modern thinkers the question of the metaphysical foundation of *waḥy* very much depends on how the hermeneutical issues are to be decided.

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[27] Ibid., p. 18.

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A2.1 Reply to Hamid Vahid and Mahmoud Morvarid

Jay L. Garfield

Hamid Vahid and Mahmoud Morvarid's rich account of revelation in the Islamic tradition raises important questions regarding the nature of the reception of revelation by human beings. Revelation promises an end-run around human fallibility, offering an infallible source of religious and philosophical truths. The appeal to revelation locates the *origin* of these ideas in an omniscient and omnibenevolent deity. But if the transmission from the deity through the prophet to the rest of us is not equally infallible, there is reason to worry about the content alleged to be revealed. If we cannot provide an independent account of the reliability of the texts and ideas *we* receive, the putative divine origin does nothing to guarantee their authenticity.

Vahid's and Morvarid's discussion of the Arabic term *waḥy* reminds one of the Buddhist epistemological distinction between *evident*, *hidden*, and *deeply hidden phenomena*. (28) Briefly, evident phenomena are those to which we have access through our senses; hidden phenomena are those we infer on the basis of evident phenomena; *very hidden* phenomena are those to which we have no epistemic access either through our senses or through inference. In the Buddhist context, we need not rely on any religious or philosophical authority for our knowledge of evident or hidden phenomena: perception and inference are available to each of us, and will get us to knowledge of these phenomena. It is only when we want to know about *very* hidden phenomena, according to this tradition, that we need to rely on the authority of adepts. So, for instance, we are urged to have confidence in the existence of past and future lives and in the workings of karma because the Buddha has seen and communicated these things.

But this tradition recognizes an epistemological problem: in order to determine whether the speech of the Buddha is a reliable epistemic instrument, we need to have evidence for the Buddha's omniscience. And that evidence cannot be his say-so, on pain of circularity, or the word of someone else, on pain of regress. Instead, we are asked to trust the Buddha with regard to very hidden phenomena on the grounds that he gets evident and hidden phenomena right. This approach to thinking about revelation recognizes the need for independent verification of the reliability of the pronouncements of a transcendent source. Just as we only trust

the Webb telescope to give us accurate information about celestial objects and epochs that only it can detect once we are assured that it has given us accurate information regarding objects to which we have independent access, we are told that we should trust the Buddha regarding very hidden phenomena only because we have independent evidence that he gets everything else right. Epistemic reliability must be established using source other than those revealed by that very transcendent being. Nevertheless, there are obvious problems with this approach to calibration. Just as somebody might be reliable with regard to evident phenomena, but unreliable with regard to hidden phenomena, someone might be good at reporting on evident and hidden phenomena, but regularly wrong about very hidden phenomena. Perhaps really smart sages in heretical religious traditions would fall into this camp.

This has implications for the evidential chain leading from revelation to us as well. Even the words of an omniscient deity could be misheard by an inattentive prophet; even what is communicated by an infallible prophet might be misunderstood or misinterpreted by those who hear that message, etc . . . So, by the time that doctrine comes down to ordinary folk, unless we have evidence not only for the omniscience of the source, but also for the veridicality of every link in the chain of transmission, what we are told is revealed can gain little or no credibility from that fact alone. This is why, as Vahid and Morvahid note (30) early Muslim philosophers attended to the fact that the Prophet Mohammed's companions worried about the fact that they had not heard the words that the Prophet says that he heard.

Ibn Sina's (Avicenna's) worry about the necessity of intention to communication is also serious. (30–31) The communication between God and his prophet(s) is meant to be linguistic: God *speaks* to his prophets; in the case of the Quran, he asks the Prophet Mohammed to take dictation. But to count as meaningful speech, whatever God does must be caused by a communicative intention. Ibn Sina observes that an intention suggests a gap between what is the case and what one wants to be the case, and such a gap is evidence of imperfection. So, if God is perfect, He cannot communicate; if he is imperfect, his communication may be fallible. This is a second epistemic worry about revelation.

Al-Fārābī suggests an ingenious model of revelation to solve both of these problems. He avoids the need for Divine intention by interposing the archangel Gabriel between God and the Prophet as the embodiment of an Active Intellect, and affirms that the Prophet is possessed of a perfect faculty of imagination. Gabriel's Active Intellect transmits God's words (with no need for Divine intention) directly to the perfect prophetic imagination. We thus end up with an infallible and perfect source in God, a perfect transmission of the Divine message by the archangel, and perfect reception by Mohammed.

But this proposal replicates the problems it is meant to solve. We now need evidence not only for Mohammed's reliability, but we also need evidence for the

infallibility of Gabriel's Active Intellect. And we need an account of how Gabriel gets hold of God's ideas without God intending him to do so. Moreover, on al-Fārābī's explanation, the real revelation is coming from Gabriel. And since he is neither omniscient nor omnibenevolent nor omnipotent, the advantages that revelation is supposed to achieve are absent. As Vahid and Morvarid put it, revelation degenerates into testimony, and at that, 'testimony with its grounds hidden' (33–34).

Al-Ghazzālī's attempt to avoid these problems fares no better. He treats revelation as *inspiration* (35). While it might be more plausible to explain what is taken be Divine revelation as the inspired visions of the ostensible recipients of that revelation, this approach strips the content of such inspiration of any epistemic credentials. The contents of such inspiration may be beautiful, psychologically or soteriologically efficacious, themselves inspiring, etc. But inspiration is no guarantor of truth and the feeling of being inspired by itself does not make us infallible.

This approach was attractive to the modernist master poet Mohammad Iqbal, but Iqbal also fails to burnish its epistemic credentials. Iqbal takes mystical inspiration to be immediate, and because it is immediate, he argues that it stands in relation to the Divine mind as we stand in the relation to other minds when we communicate with and interpret our fellows. (37) There are at least two things wrong with this strategy. First, our knowledge of other minds is *not* immediate: it is mediated by language and by the hermeneutic attitude we take to the utterances and behaviour of others. That is why it is imperfect, and why we are often *mistaken* about what others think. Therefore, even if we were to understand inspiration on the model of interpersonal understanding, we would have to regard it as a mediated and fallible theoretical access to the Divine mind, once again, stripping it of the very epistemic credentials that revelation was meant to confer.

Secondly, there is a disanalogy between inspiration understood as revelation and interpersonal understanding: when we understand others, we are in their presence; we use as evidence speech and behaviour that is in principle accessible to others who can correct or vindicate our interpretation; and we are in dialogue with those we interpret, allowing those we interpret to concur or to dissent from our interpretation and to respond to it. This is what makes interpretation possible and meaningful. Without it, there are no standards of correctness or incorrectness for interpretation, and so no facts of the matter about what anyone thinks or says. But these features are missing in the case of Divine inspiration. There is hence no standard of correctness, and no real object of interpretation, only the inner states of the inspired prophet, and their epistemic credentials are meagre.

Moreover, Iqbal takes mystical experience to be ineffable. If he is *correct,* this also undermines the epistemic credentials of revelation. If the content of mystical experience is ineffable, it cannot be derived from any premises; we cannot say what its basis is; we cannot even transmit it to others. It hence is impossible either

to verify its content and or for it to constitute the doctrine of any religious tradition: if the Quran is revealed, and if revelation is mystical experience, and if mystical experience is ineffable, the contents of the Quran are ineffable. But they are expressed in language, and so can't be. It therefore seems that Islamic theology cannot be grounded in an ineffable revelation.

Vahid and Movarid have taken us on a fascinating scholarly tour of the heroic efforts of a succession of brilliant Islamic scholars to make sense of Divine revelation as an epistemic justifier of the contents of the Quran and as an understanding of the relationship between God and his prophets. This tour confirms that every attempt to rehabilitate revelation as a foundation for religion not only fails, but it provides additional evidence that revelation can never justify anything, whether in religion or in daily life.

A2.2 Reply to Hamid Vahid and Mahmoud Morvarid

Aaron Segal

There's a widespread assumption lurking in the background of the contemporary philosophical literature on revelation. I hadn't really given much thought to how prevalent it is or how foreign it is to much of the Jewish philosophical tradition until reading Vahid's and Morvarid's essay. The Islamic philosophical conceptions they develop resonate with Jewish philosophical approaches in a way that sets them both apart from the contemporary background assumption. At the risk of painting with too broad a brush, that background assumption is perhaps more at home in the Christian tradition.

God revealed certain truths to humanity. And some of the truths that God revealed couldn't have been known by us if God hadn't revealed them—we have what we might call 'indispensably revelational knowledge' of those truths. So much, I take it, is common to the great monotheistic traditions. But what is the *nature* of our indispensably revelational knowledge? On what *grounds* do we know that which we know only because of revelation?

It's easy to think that once we've restricted the class of truths to those we know *only* because of revelation, the answer to the question of its grounds is trivial: it could only be *testimonial* knowledge. Because if its grounds were anything else—such as intuition, or perception, or memory, or whatnot—then it wouldn't be *indispensably* revelational.[28]

That answer is the widespread assumption I referred to above.[29] The idea that in a divine revelation God *attests* to certain otherwise unknowable truths, and that we thereby come to know them solely on God's say-so, is not only widespread but

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[28] Mavrodes 1988 points out that there might be cases in which we know *p* by deducing it from the conjunction of something revealed (and, we might add, which couldn't have been known without having been revealed) and something we know just by reason. Even so, it's easy to think that our justification for believing *p* in such a case is at least *partly* testimonial, since it has to bottom out in some knowledge that is entirely testimonial (i.e. whatever it is that we knew based on revelation and couldn't have known without revelation). So we can restrict our attention to our knowledge of the *immediate* deliverances of revelation; or we could put the 'easy thought' as saying that any indispensably revelational knowledge is *at least partly* testimonial.

[29] See *inter alia* Anscombe 1975; Zagzebski 2012; Dougherty 2014; Hudson 2014.

also entrenched historically. Here, for example, is a well-known passage from John Locke (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, IV: 18):

> Faith, on the other side, is the Assent to any Proposition, not thus made out by the Deductions of Reason, but upon the **Credit of the Proposer**, as coming immediately from GOD; **which we call Revelation**...In these, Revelation must carry it, against the probable Conjectures of Reason: because the Mind, not being certain of the Truth of that it does not evidently know, but is only probably convinced of, is bound to give up its Assent to such a **Testimony**, which, it is satisfied, **comes from one who cannot err, and will not deceive.**

But even if the 'testimonial account of indispensable revelation' is entrenched, it faces serious problems. First, the familiar divine communications—if that's what they are—don't wear their meanings on their sleeves. They need interpretation; we need to know what to take literally, what metaphorically, for example. But these communications can be very easily misinterpreted. And they clearly have been, since they've given rise to incompatible interpretations. So the belief-forming process type, *beliefs formed based on (apparently) divine testimony*, plausibly isn't reliable; and a given token of that type plausibly isn't safe. It's thus not obvious that it can produce knowledge (see Dunaway and Hawthorne 2017). Second, God's ways are not our ways, and plausibly God has justifying reasons for acting in prima facie (but not ultima facie) immoral ways. (This sceptical plank of so-called 'sceptical theism' is plausible, whether or not you think it provides an adequate solution to the problem of evil.) But then we can't really come to know anything solely based on divine testimony, since for all we know God has justifying reasons to lie or to deceive us (Hudson 2014). Worse still, for those who accept the Hebrew Bible (Deuteronomy 13:4): God *told* us that He would send (or at least permit) a false prophet just in order to test us!

The testimonial account of indispensable revelation hardly plays a role in the Jewish philosophical tradition. (To avoid confusion: you might, like Sa'adia (*Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, Introductory Treatise §5), highlight the importance of testimony in explaining the *transmission* of revealed knowledge from one generation to the next; but this isn't to endorse a testimonial account of the knowledge gained in the *original* revelation.) And judging by Vahid's and Morvarid's essay, it is not a particularly central account in the Islamic philosophical tradition, either. Neither the al-Farabian/Avicennian account nor the Ghazalian/Iqbalian account appeals to testimony in explaining the grounds of our knowledge by revelation.

Eschewing the testimonial account allows you to skirt the above challenges of reliability and divine deception. But if you do so, you face the simple question: how could revelation play an indispensable role in our coming to have knowledge that isn't even partly testimonial? I attempted an answer in my own essay in this volume: that God called attention to a *system*, whose truth the Jewish *collective qua collective*

has been able to grasp, but which wouldn't and maybe couldn't have been known by them without the divine revelation. (Perhaps a group of individuals who had on their own 'arrived' at the system in question could only have been acting too irrationally (as a collective) to even count as an epistemic agent.) Vahid and Morvarid offer us two other suggestions.

Their first suggestion draws on the medieval philosophical psychology of al-Farabi and Avicenna. Both of them make the activity of the Active Intellect necessary for intellection (grasping of the intelligibles and the relationships between them) *in general*. This allows them to reconcile the non-testimonial nature of knowledge-by-revelation with its being indispensably revelational. See, we've been assuming that if our grounds are something other than testimony–intuition, reason, perception, memory, or whatnot—then we can't be relying on revelation. But in their view, this is simply false. Even when we use our faculties of intuition and reason, we're still relying on revelation—at least from the Active Intellect. Recipients of revelation, i.e. prophets, are just particularly gifted philosophers, whose imaginative faculty is both rich and discerning, and who (according to Avicenna) have a perfected faculty of 'intuition' (ḥads). But all philosophers—and even non-philosophers—are relying on a kind of revelation when they're thinking about the intelligibles.

This account of revelation—which is shared by a number of prominent medieval Jewish philosophers (see Kreisel 2015)—is interesting. I won't challenge the philosophical psychology behind it. Replace the Active Intellect with God and I think you have as promising an answer to how we can have a priori knowledge as any other (see Segal 2019). My main concern is that it makes the distinction between what we ordinarily classify as revelation ('special revelation') on the one hand, and general philosophical and scientific inquiry on the other hand, merely a matter of the quality of the recipient(s)/inquirer(s), and merely a matter of degree. Of course, the account's advocates would say that's a feature, not a bug. But whatever your level of theological comfort with that sort of thing, it raises an epistemological problem. The problem is that for any given instance of special revelation, there are *nearby cases* in which the recipients are slightly less perfect, and then they're just plain-old philosophers; and we know how reliable plain-old philosophers are! (I've put the problem externalistically. But here's a challenge from an internalist perspective: what compelling grounds does anyone have for thinking they're a prophet and not a plain-old philosopher?)

Their second suggestion draws on Iqbal's account of revelation as grounded in mystical experience. They note that according to Iqbal, mystical experiences can *represent* God as having certain properties, in particular, evaluative properties. Moreover, they note that according to Iqbal, 'without an experience of, say, blueness we cannot gain access to the property of blue, we cannot likewise gain access to the evaluative properties (attributed to God) without having an affective engagement with God'. This ingeniously allows for another way to reconcile the

non-testimonial nature of knowledge by revelation with its being indispensably revelational. The idea is this: some of what we can represent about others can be so represented (and hence known) only if we experience those others as *acting* in a certain way. And perhaps some of what we can represent about God—such as God as Lover, or God as Master—can be so represented (and hence known) only if we (broadly speaking) perceive God as *engaged in revelation*. So knowledge by revelation can be broadly perceptual, and so non-testimonial, while still being indispensably revelational.

You might think this would require no more than revelation by manifestation, rather than by communication. I said as much in my own essay in this volume. But now I'm not so sure. There might be *some* truths about God that we can come to know on something like perceptual grounds only by being on the receiving end of a divine *communication*. For example, it could be that we're in a position to understand divine love, and to know that God loves us in the way God does, only by God *communicating that love to us*. Uncommunicated love isn't fully divine.

I think this approach is definitely worth pursuing, at least as an account of how *some* truths can be known only by way of revelation but not on testimonial grounds. I close with a friendly suggestion. Vahid and Morvarid express unease about an apparent implication of Iqbal's account: a prophet can't fully communicate to others the content of the revelation she received. At best what can be fully communicated is the prophet's human gloss on that revelation. I share their unease with that implication. But I'd commend to their attention the strand of Midrashic theology I mentioned in my essay (n. 3), according to which God revealed (whatever it is God revealed) *also to future generations,* by way of the initial revelation. Those attuned to the divine voice that speaks through the scriptural text—aided in their endeavours, perhaps, by the teachings of those human beings who transmit the original revelation—are literally recipients of that original revelation. Testimonial grounds can thereby be eliminated not only from the epistemology of original revelation, but from the epistemology of the transmission of revelation as well.

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3

Revelation of the Torah

What For?

Aaron Segal

3.1 Introduction

It is a central claim of Judaism that God has spoken to human beings. Indeed, the Hebrew Bible (henceforth 'the Bible') is filled, from beginning to end, with such episodes of divine communication. Soon after creating Adam, God instructs him about the Tree of Knowledge. Shortly after we encounter Abraham, God instructs him to leave his homeland. And these are pretty typical for the Bible. Many individuals receive prophecies and instructions tailored to their specific situations.

But without question, the divine communication most central to the Bible, and to the Jewish tradition more broadly, was the 'giving of the Torah' at Mount Sinai (Exodus, chapters 19–24). The content that was then communicated—let us call it 'the Torah'—was evidently far broader and more fundamental than any of the custom-tailored messages God communicated to individual prophets. The exact details of the Sinaitic revelation—what was then revealed, to whom, and how—are far from crystal clear, even within the Bible and later Jewish tradition.[1] But what's clear, both from the narrative report in the Book of Exodus, and from how it was told and retold, is that the Torah was understood to be directed not just to those whom God immediately addressed, but to a much wider audience. The wider audience included at least all future generations of Israelites, 'all your generations to come' as the Bible repeatedly puts it.[2]

According to a rather influential strand in Rabbinic theology, the Torah was directed to this wider audience not *just* in the sense that God intended them to learn of the Sinaitic revelation and of the Torah that was revealed. Rather, it's meant in the stronger sense that *God revealed to those yet unborn*, in a way mediated by the events at Sinai, whatever it is that God revealed to those physically

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[1] See Sommer 2015, ch. 2.
[2] And some sources suggest that it was directed to humanity as a whole. See *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishmael* Yitro Parsha 1, *Sifre Devarim* 343.

present then and there.³ The Sinaitic revelation, as a number of Jewish thinkers have put it, reverberates throughout time and space.

If God revealed the Torah to people spread across time and space, it is evidently of more than merely local interest, and is not simply a response to some particular need or circumstance. The Torah, as we might put it, *transcends* spatial, temporal, and circumstantial variation.⁴

Indeed, a somewhat more controversial but still highly influential strand in Rabbinic theology understands the transcendence of the Torah in an even stronger, *teleological* fashion. It's not just that the Torah's relevance isn't vitiated by geographical or historical variation; it's that in the *explanatory order* of God's creation of and interaction with the world, the Torah is *prior to* any geographical and historical variation, and indeed prior to the creation of the world, period. It's not as though in the logical stages of divine deliberation God first decided to create a world with such-and-such kinds of creatures, and with thus-and-such a history, and *then* saw that the Torah was what these creatures needed in all manner of times and places. Rather, it was that God *first* saw that the Torah was the thing that had to be known and observed, and then saw that this would necessitate certain kinds of creatures in certain sorts of circumstances. The creation of the creatures we have and in roughly the circumstances they're in is a *means* to the *end* of bringing the Torah into view and practice. Thus, in his comments on the very first words of Genesis, the foremost medieval Jewish exegete, Rashi, cites a Midrashic play on the Hebrew word (*reishit*) for 'beginning':

> 'IN THE BEGINNING GOD CREATED':   God created the world *for the sake of* the Torah, which is called (Proverbs 8:22) 'The beginning of His (God's) way'⁵

On this view, the Torah transcends spatial, temporal, and circumstantial variation much like a Platonic universal: not only is it made *present* to each addressee, but it would have existed in some form or other whether or not there had *been* any addressees, and it is part of the explanation for why there are the addressees that there are.

To be sure, this view is not the only classically Jewish one. Maimonides, for example, won't allow *anything* to be explanatorily prior to (or the telos of) the

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³ See, e.g. *Midrash Tanhuma Pekude* 2, and *Pirke D'Rabbi Eliezer*, chapter 41. For a philosophical analysis of this sort of phenomenon, see Mavrodes 1988.

⁴ A couple of clarifications: first, this isn't meant to be inconsistent with the widely held view that the *manner* and *language* in which it was initially formulated were in some sense especially fitting for the intellectual and moral capacities of its first recipients. Second, it isn't meant to imply that all of the instructions contained in the Torah are *applicable* and *practicable* in all circumstances. Many of them have non-trivial conditions of application or implementation, such as being in the land of Israel, or having a standing Temple. But such instructions could still be of cardinal importance, even when they can't be implemented, because of what they teach. See Babylonian Talmud *Sanhedrin* 71a.

⁵ See also Babylonian Talmud *Shabbat* 88a and *Zohar Terumah* 161a.

creation of the world (*Guide* III:13). But the 'Platonic view' is sufficiently central to the Jewish theological tradition that as a committed Jew I find it worthwhile exploring its cogency and consequences. So I shall indeed assume that the Torah is a transcendent telos of the world.

3.2 The Puzzle

But that assumption naturally invites the question: why the need, then, for *revelation*? You might think this is a rather silly question. Given the cardinal importance of what was revealed, *of course* God would want us to know it. But this misunderstands my question. I'm asking: why did our knowledge of these matters of cardinal importance *come by way of revelation*? Why didn't God have us discover them through the use of our own general-purpose cognitive faculties?

You might think the question-so-clarified is only a tad less silly than the question as initially understood. After all, even the brightest of us are pretty feeble-minded. So, as philosophers like Sa'adia and Aquinas have argued, even if we could eventually discover these things on our own, it would presumably take us a *very* long time. Indeed, it might take so long that we'd bring about our own extinction, through nuclear weapons, or greenhouse gases, or whatnot, before we came to discover them! Given, then, just how important the content of the revelation at Sinai was, it seems to make perfectly good sense that God wouldn't leave us to our own devices to try to figure it out ourselves.[6]

But this fails to reckon with the explanatory priority of the Torah. My question isn't: given that we are the way we are, and that the world is the way it is, why did God reveal all of this? It's the question: given that God presumably had a plethora of creative possibilities, and that the Torah was 'in the driver's seat', why did God arrange things to begin with in such a way that we'd *need* to rely on revelation to come to know the Torah? After all, presumably God *could have* made us far less feeble-minded than we are. It seems that human beings—or some creature or other that would have been able to observe the Torah—could have had general-purpose cognitive faculties powerful enough as to be up to the task of discovering the wisdom of the Torah with their own natural capacities.[7] So why didn't God create beings like that?

Note well certain presuppositions of my question: I am assuming that the Torah, or a good part of it, is a kind of *wisdom*: it contains deep and illuminating

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[6] Sa'adia's Introductory Treatise to *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*; Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* Prima Pars Q. 1.

[7] And, moreover, that they could have nonetheless—or maybe *for that reason*—recognized how dependent they were on God, and how humble they ought to be. With such a plethora of creative possibilities, it's hard to believe that the cultivation of virtues like humility would have *necessitated* our being reliant on revelation. Thanks to David Shatz for discussion here.

truths about God and reality, about who we are and how we ought to be. If the heart of God's Sinaitic revelation consisted instead in, say, eschatological details or non-trace-leaving pre-historic truths, then my question wouldn't really get off the ground. Even much more powerful general-purpose cognitive faculties wouldn't necessarily give us insight into *those* things; the latter might not be the *kind* of things that can be known by the light of reason or other natural means. (If God were to simply have implanted the belief in these things, or even if He had endowed us with some special-purpose faculty for uncovering just these truths, this wouldn't be to bypass the need for revelation, as much as to provide the revelation in a different way. It would be to reveal these things by way of simply causing us to believe them. See Mavrodes 1988.) And perhaps in some religions those things are at the heart of their putative revelation.

But Judaism is not like that. Even a cursory glance at the content of what was taken to be revealed at Sinai reveals little by way of eschatology, and nothing about pre-history that isn't clearly theological. The Torah is devoted to describing God, humanity, and their relationship in the here-and-now. And in a number of places the Bible itself conceives of what was so-described as exhibiting great wisdom–indeed, it assumes that *once revealed* we can *see* the wisdom in the Torah.[8]

So, I take it that there isn't any *obvious* obstacle to us uncovering the sort of things the Torah essentially consists in. If there is an obstacle—and I will later contend that there is—it's not going to be *obvious* what it is.

But on the other hand, I am assuming that the Torah *was* revealed. At least since Hobbes and Spinoza many modern theologians and Biblical scholars have contended, on theological, moral, textual, or historical grounds that no part of the Five Books of Moses was strictly speaking *revealed*, that there was no *genuine* divine communication at Sinai. Those theologians and scholars who maintain this, but also strive for some consistency with the Bible, are forced to reinterpret a good deal of what the latter actually says. Thus, they might understand Biblical statements that depict God as speaking the words of Torah as a figurative way of saying that some particularly wise and spiritually gifted Israelites came to discover those truths upon encountering God or reflecting on God's nature. Of course, if that were so, my question wouldn't really get off the ground. It would turn out that God *did* create us so we could discover the Torah on our own.

But by my lights this would make the accounts in the Bible highly misleading. Misleading enough that it would call into question the moral probity of their authors, which would in turn undermine the claim that they were so spiritually gifted as to have deep theological insights.[9] But in any case, my project is to try to understand the view that God indeed communicated some content at

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[8] See, e.g. Deuteronomy 4:6–8 and Psalms 19:8.   [9] See Heschel 1976, p. 227.

Sinai, and that we human beings weren't able to reason our way to what was communicated.[10]

Finally, I am assuming that there aren't *other* creatures—perhaps on some exoplanets, or in some other universes–who *are* endowed with faculties powerful enough to discover the wisdom of the Torah with their own natural capacities, and who can then live the way of life the Torah prescribes. If there are such, then again my question couldn't get off the ground. To someone who asks why God didn't create beings with faculties powerful enough to discover the wisdom of the Torah on their own, and who could then live the way of life the Torah prescribes, the answer would be: 'God did'. To those who would ask why God didn't create *human beings* that way, a plausible answer might be that 'God couldn't, because they wouldn't be human beings', or 'God likes plenitudinous diversity,' or some such thing. Either way, there isn't much of a question.

In effect, the puzzle consists in the following combination of commitments: the Torah is a repository of wisdom, so central to the cosmos that its concrete realization is the end for which creation took place. But on the other hand no creature was endowed with a sufficiently powerful general-purpose cognitive faculty to easily discover that wisdom on their own, a fact which necessitated God communicating it. And that's puzzling, since it seems like creation wasn't properly matched to its purpose.

Though none of the individual commitments is universally endorsed by Jewish thinkers, none is particularly quixotic, either. And even their combination strikes me as pretty widely held by traditional Jews. In any case, I wish to examine how we might make sense of it.

In the next two sections I will suggest two ways of making sense of it. Both draw on existing strands in Jewish thought. And both contend that while a way of life in keeping with the Torah exhibits great wisdom, it's not the kind of thing that a wise individual could discover.

But first I briefly want to mention another possible solution, and explain why I don't think it's adequate. One might suggest that the wisdom in the Torah— about God and man and the relationship between them—can be known only *second-personally*; it can be known only by *actually encountering God, as a person* (or reading narratives about such encounters).[11] Since that's so, even if God had endowed us with a much more powerful cognitive faculty, there's simply no way we could have come to discover the Torah without a divine revelation. Someone needed to actually encounter God.

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[10] Thus, the view I'm trying to understand is opposed not just to those who deny divine revelation altogether, but to those, such as Franz Rosenzweig in his most radical moods, who would restrict the divine revelation to God's self-disclosure. See Sommer 2015, pp. 29, 104–105.

[11] For a seminal treatment on the idea of second-personal knowledge of God, see Stump 2010, chs. 3–4. On its application to the question of why revelation is necessary, see Berkovits 2004, ch. 2.

I think there's a great deal of truth in this solution. But I don't think it's adequate as a solution to *our puzzle*. The reason is that it elides an important distinction between two senses of divine revelation: revelation by way of manifestation, and revelation by way of communication. As George Mavrodes (1988) points out, you can reveal a truth by *manifesting* it—say, revealing that you can speak English, by speaking English. And you can do that without communicating that you can speak English. You might have said 'I can speak French', and not 'I can speak English'. Indeed, you can manifest a truth without communicating anything at all. You might inadvertently reveal to me that you have a wart without so much as being aware that I'm there. Communication requires at the very least intentionally bringing another person to understand or believe something, by way of some meaningful sign; and manifesting a truth doesn't entail doing that at all. Conversely, you can communicate a truth that you do not thereby manifest: when you say 'I can speak French', you communicate your competence in French without manifesting it.

Now, according to the Biblical account, God undoubtedly revealed a lot about Himself without saying a word. He revealed His level of providential care for humanity at large, and the Israelites in particular; He revealed His absolute control over nature and its laws; and He revealed much else besides, just by doing what He did. He might well have revealed by way of manifestation, *at Sinai*, truths He didn't otherwise reveal.

But remember, I am assuming that God also *communicated* some content at Sinai. (To be clear, this does not entail that God employed ordinary human language, or other conventional signs, to communicate; just that God did in fact communicate.) The Decalogue, the heart of the Torah if anything is, begins with 'God spoke all these words, saying' (Exodus 20:1). And so do countless other verses. Thus, manifestation is not the *only* way He revealed things, and not *everything* that He revealed was revealed by manifestation. God *spoke* much of the Torah, and seems to have revealed it in no other way.

Now, even if we grant, what seems plausible, that many of the truths that God revealed by manifestation could only be known by coming to know God Himself; and even if we grant, what seems plausible, that many of the truths that God revealed by communication could be known only if we had *already* come to know God Himself; that does nothing to explain why, or make remotely plausible the claim that, *the truths that God revealed by communication had to be revealed*. It just explains why God had to reveal Himself if He wanted to reveal anything at all. What remains mysterious is that no creature was endowed with a sufficiently powerful general-purpose faculty to discover the wisdom that God *communicated* to humanity.

3.3 The Necessity of Contingency

Suppose, as many natural theologians think, that a suitably powerful creaturely intellect could discover the existence of God, and so discover that the greatest

good for humanity is to stand rightly with respect to God, and finally discover that standing rightly with respect to God consists primarily in loving devotion to God above all else.[12] (To be clear, being devoted to God above all else doesn't entail being devoted to God to the *exclusion* of all else. Caring for one's neighbour might be absolutely necessary to stand rightly with God.) *We* might even have such suitably powerful intellects.

Now, it might seem like this supposition has made my task much harder, if not impossible. If a creature endowed with a suitably powerful intellect could discover all *that*, then what of great significance is left that could possibly need to be communicated by God? In what important truths about God or man could the Torah consist, which are not the *kinds* of truths that could be accessed by a general-purpose faculty, given that even *we* could supposedly figure out ourselves what our greatest good is?

Here's a simple-minded proposal: the important truths in which the Torah consists are about the things that God wants from us that *aren't entailed by our attaining our greatest good*.

But if they aren't entailed by our attaining our greatest good, then why *would* God want those things from us? It doesn't seem like it could be for our good, since we could attain our greatest good without them; and it doesn't seem like it could be for God's good, since that is theologically unbecoming. More importantly, even if we set aside such theological sensibilities, we can ask: where is the *wisdom* in living a life in accordance with those things? Sure, if an all-powerful being tells you to do something, it's pretty sensible to keep your head down and comply. But that's not a display of real wisdom; it's just common sense. Wisdom is about living life well and fully, not about exercising your survival instinct.

My answer, which draws from the medieval Jewish philosopher, Hasdai Crescas (1340–1411), is this:[13] Loving devotion to God above all else requires that there be *something* God asks of you, the doing of which *isn't* already necessitated by standing rightly with respect to God, and which you go ahead and do. The reason, in brief, is this. Loving devotion to God—just like loving devotion to anyone— requires a willingness to act for God. But since there's no way we can give something to God that isn't already His, or otherwise make God any *better*, the only way we can act for God is by doing what God wants us to do *because God wants us to do it*. That is, loving devotion to God requires that there be something God wants you to do that you are willing to do because God wants you to do it.

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[12] This last claim agrees with the Biblical take as well. The verses of the *Shema*, the most central theological affirmation in the Jewish tradition, move immediately from the solemn declaration of God's oneness to the cardinal command, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might' (Deuteronomy 6:5). As the second century sage, Rabbi Eliezer, elaborates, in order to relate properly to God, whatever it is you otherwise value most—whether that's your life, or your possessions, or whatnot—you must love and devote yourself to God even more (Babylonian Talmud *B'rakhot* 61b).

[13] See Segal forthcoming-a, §4 for a more extensive discussion and several variations of the answer I develop here.

What's more, though: loving devotion to God *above all else* requires placing God above everything in one's life, *including oneself and one's own greatest good*. And this plausibly requires that there be something God wants you to do that you are willing to do *just* because God wants you to do it–and not, say, because it's entailed by your own greatest good. As Crescas says, 'for the one who serves God and loves Him truly…does not consider his advantage but only service; *and therefore all his good counts for nothing*' [2018, 225].

But then if God asked nothing of us other than what is entailed by standing rightly with respect to Him, then no one who was well-informed and prudent could love God above all else—and so no such person could achieve their greatest good. For if they were well-informed, they'd see what is necessary for achieving their greatest good; and if they were prudent they'd endeavour to do what is so necessary, because it's necessary. So they'd have no opportunity to do what God wants of them *just* because God wants them to do it. On the other hand, presumably no creature who isn't well-informed and prudent could achieve her greatest good. So if God asked nothing of us other than what is entailed by standing rightly with respect to Him then none of us could achieve our greatest good.

That puts God in a bind. Unless, that is, God asks of us to realize some state of affairs that *isn't* entailed by our standing rightly with respect to Him: something like, *Thou shall honour the Sabbath*, or *Thou shalt not wear wool and linen*. God would thereby create an opportunity for us to do something *just* for God.

That's the stuff of the Torah, on this view. To answer the question why God would ask us to do these things: it's for us. *Because in order to achieve our greatest good (our relationship with God) we have to aim at something other than our greatest good (at God and God's will).* There's great wisdom in that. And it's a wisdom that even *we* could discover on our own.

But the wisdom is at the level of the form, not the substance; the quantifier, not the particular instance. Which is why revelation was necessary. The truths about what God wants from us, beyond what is entailed by our standing rightly with respect to Him, needed to be 'filled in by [the divine] Hand'.[14] Just like non-trace-leaving prehistoric truths, they're not the kind of things that can be known by reason or other general-purpose faculties. But unlike such truths, living by them can be a mark of wisdom.

3.4 Systematicity

You might think that not all of the commandments and instructions in the Torah needed to be filled in by Hand. Some of them, like the prohibitions on murder and

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[14] This effectively inverts the view of Franz Rosenzweig that the only content that *was* divinely revealed was the command to love God above all else, while the details of how we would do so were a human response. See Rosenzweig 1971, p. 178. That view does nothing to resolve our puzzle.

theft, can perhaps be known independently of revelation—even while others, like the command to honour the Sabbath or the prohibition to wear wool and linen, can't. That might be the distinction the Talmud (*Yoma* 67b) draws between so-called *hukim* ('matters that Satan challenges because the reason for them are not known') and *mishpatim* ('matters that even had they not been written, it would have been logical that they be written').[15] It's definitely the distinction that medieval Jewish philosophers drew between *mitzvot shim'iyot* (commandments known only through tradition) and *mitzvot sikhliyot* (commandments knowable through reason).

In any case, it gives rise to a simple solution that I've neglected until now: why not just divide up the two jobs we've identified for the Torah—of being a repository of wisdom, and being the kind of thing that no general-purpose cognitive faculty could discover—between the two kinds of commandments? Why can't we solve the puzzle simply by letting the commandments knowable through reason do the job of exemplifying the wisdom of the Torah, and the commandments known only through tradition do the job of requiring a revelation, without there being any wisdom at all (whether in substance *or* form) in the latter?

Well, for one thing, that solution doesn't fit well with the central Biblical text that speaks to the wisdom of the Torah (Deuteronomy 4:6–8), since the latter mentions the whole gamut of commandments. For another thing, it's not clear why the Israelites' adoption of nearly universally held and rationally derivable moral norms would be evidence of great wisdom.

But most importantly, I think the proposed divide is too neat. The questions of whether there *is* a norm forbidding murder, and if so, what its contours are (whom can't you murder? is it ever justified? what counts as murder anyway?), are tied up in intricate ways with other more vexed moral questions, which are in turn wrapped up with even more difficult metaphysical and theological and epistemological questions, the Torah's answers to which lie on the other side of the proposed divide. The case of the norm prohibiting murder is just one instance of a wider phenomenon: the *intrinsic systematicity of philosophy*. One philosophical question leads to another, which leads to another, and so on—so much so that any two philosophical questions are connected, whether directly or indirectly. And so no substantive philosophical claim—no matter how innocuous it might initially seem—can be sequestered off from highly contentious philosophical debates.

It's impossible to do justice in the space I have here to the claims in the previous paragraph. They need to be made far more precise and given a proper defence.

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[15] Although, probably not. As David Shatz pointed out to me, the Talmud's characterization of *mishpatim* is *consistent* with our not being smart enough to discover them on our own. Also, the Talmud's distinction is not exhaustive.

I have tried to do so elsewhere.[16] But we need to at least spell out a few of the consequences of intrinsic systematicity, since they're at the heart of my own, second solution.

The intrinsic systematicity of philosophy has consequences for the *the space of grand philosophical theories*. Philosophical issues are interconnected to the extent that the viable grand philosophical theories—internally coherent comprehensive packages of views that settle every philosophical question—are few and far between. Not just any miscellaneous collection of viable individual philosophical theses is going to be a viable collection; very far from it. If you start with a viable grand philosophical system, and start tinkering around with one piece of it, you'll need to play around with a whole host of others in order to make the new system viable. Indeed, given just how far apart the viable grand philosophical theories are, we can't sensibly do a wholesale *comparison* regarding their intuitive plausibility or theoretical virtues. Any single intellectual character, cast of mind, perspective, or sum total of life experiences will distort the plausibility and overall assessment of some number of viable grand theories.

But on the other hand, the intrinsic systematicity of philosophy has the consequence that you can't proceed piecemeal either. Philosophical issues are interconnected to the extent that philosophical inquiry is *evidentially unstable*. One issue invariably leads to another, and to another, and so on, in ways that have non-trivial evidential bearing. However far you've gotten in inquiring into a particular philosophical question, it's very likely that if you were to continue to chase down the implications of the position that is currently best supported by your evidence, you will *at some point* hit upon a connection that induces a shift in plausibility. So philosophy cannot properly be pursued piecemeal; any attempted isolation or sequestration of issues would be objectionably arbitrary.

So you can't properly proceed piecemeal; and you can't properly proceed by comparing overall systems. There seems to be no way to proceed, period. And this would appear to have rather serious sceptical implications. None of us could know or even reasonably believe any answer to any substantive philosophical question. Wisdom would forever elude us.

I say this *appears* to have sceptical implications, because I think it *does*, if each of us is working on his own, or even collaboratively, but without any special revelation. And it would, even for creatures with much more powerful general-purpose cognitive faculties, so long as they were finite and saw the world from a particular perspective. One special thing about this sort of scepticism is that it can't be remedied simply by super-charging our standard cognitive faculties. It has nothing really to do with specifically human weakness or limitations; it has everything to do with the way reality itself is.

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[16] Segal 2020, forthcoming-b.

You can probably see where this is going now. The second proposed solution to our puzzle begins with the claim that the Torah, across all of its facets and commandments, constitutes a comprehensive philosophical system. If not *fully* comprehensive, then still rather wide-ranging; and though rarely explicitly philosophical, still often implicitly so; and though *presented* very *un*-systematically, all the ingredients are there from which a system can be constructed. It speaks to the biggest metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical questions about God, humanity, and the world. Like every viable comprehensive system, its parts hang together rather tightly. If you start tinkering around with a part or two, you'll need to adjust many other parts to arrive at another viable comprehensive system. But arrive you will. And the other viable systems will be radically different from the Torah's: Spinozistic necessitarian monism, Buddhist emptiness, Neo-Platonist axiarchic plenitude, Lewisian Modal Realism cum Humeanism, and still others—each with their own very different take on the world and how to live well. Some will even be theistic, but still quite 'far away' from the Torah. Each one purports to be the deepest wisdom. But only one manages to be correct. And despite its being full of wisdom, the systematicity of philosophy prevents any of us from coming to know it on her own.

Divine revelation could bring this story to a close, without the need for much elaboration. We might suggest that God simply pointed to one of the viable systems, and said, 'This is the true one.' Or, if we're thinking of matters inquiry-theoretically, God said, 'You can stop inquiring here.' (What was revealed, then, was not where to *start* our inquiry, but where to *stop*.) And those who relied on God's say-so came to have testimonial knowledge of the truth of the Torah. The end.

I imagine this *deus ex machina* device has an unsatisfying ring to it. And there might well be substantive epistemological problems to confront if divine revelation is taken to provide testimonial knowledge of what we lack independent grounds to believe.[17] In any case, the truth might be more interesting, and subtle. The idea that the Torah contains a system is relatively commonplace among Jewish philosophers—at least medieval ones. But probably none expresses it more forcefully than Nahmanides (1194–1270).[18] And in a striking passage, Nahmanides offers an explanation of an interesting feature of the revelation at Sinai: that it's *collective*. As we noted at the outset, the Torah wasn't revealed just to a single individual; nor was it revealed to each and every Israelite one-by-one. God revealed the Torah to all of the Israelites at once, when they were all gathered together at Sinai. And what God did at Sinai amounted to a revelation of the Torah to the Israelites across all generations. It seems that the addressee of the

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[17] See Hudson 2014.
[18] Nahmanides 1963 maintains that the Torah, properly interpreted, is *complete*, in the sense of being an *absolutely* comprehensive and highly integrated system.

revelation at Sinai was, at least in the first instance, the Israelites *as a people*. Why might this be? Nahmanides has this to say:

> One's character varies with one's countenance...and our Rabbis had a tradition that the number of different countenances [and hence, underlying characters] is sixty myriads, and this number encompasses all the characters. And therefore the Torah was given with this number [of Israelites present], and they [the Rabbis] said, 'It would not be fitting for the Torah to be received by anything less than all of the characters.'   (1963, p. 162)

Nachmanides doesn't explain *why* that wouldn't be fitting. But we may be well positioned to do so. God's revelation at Sinai didn't function as testimony. Rather, God pointed to a system, the wisdom of which can be fully appreciated, and which can be known, only by an epistemic agent that somehow embodies highly divergent characters, casts of mind, perspectives, and experiences—so divergent that no single person could contain such multitudes. The narrowness of character, cast of mind, perspective, and life experience that beset any single person prevents him from grasping the wisdom of the totality; and it precludes a proper assessment of any system as a whole—his vision is too fragmentary, partial, and, when taken in isolation, skewed. A collective, on the other hand, which contains *a multitude* of characters and casts of mind, and which 'lives the Torah' through many different historical scenarios—ranging from great prosperity and peace in its homeland, to the deprivations and degradations of a diasporic existence, and much else in between—can appreciate the Torah's wisdom, and even come to have (non-testimonial) knowledge of the Torah's system. But it's not a system that any of us could have individually come to know; nor is it one that any group of fully rationally individuals would have converged on—except by accident. Indeed, it might well be that none of us knows it *even now*, except in the derivative sense of belonging to a collective that knows it. But it is a system whose realization in concrete reality was of such importance that God was guided by it in shaping the course of Jewish, human, and even cosmic history, so as to ensure that we could collectively latch on to it.[19]

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[19] I am indebted to David Shatz for extremely helpful comments.

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A3.1 Reply to Aaron Segal

Jay L. Garfield

Aaron Segal's exploration of the implications of the revelation of the Torah and of the multiple interpretations of that revelation in the Jewish commentarial tradition is fascinating. It calls our attention to some perennial problems raised by theories of divine revelation and the attendant sublimation of the texts taken to be so revealed, problems that would be familiar to students of Mīmāṃsā, the Indian school most concerned with the status of the Vedas as revealed, eternal, transcendent texts. These are primarily epistemological problems: How do we know that the source of the revelation is trustworthy as opposed to being deceptive, reliable as opposed to being fallible? How do we know that the recipient of the revelation is correct or even honest regarding the content of what was revealed? What do we do when what was apparently revealed clashes with what we know on the basis of other, apparently reliable epistemic practices?

These questions are acute when they arise because of the apparent circularity of the most obvious resolutions of these questions in favor of revelation. To know that the revelation as it is handed down to us is worthy of reliance and veneration, we need to know that its source is infallible and honest as well as that the prophet(s) to whom the revelation was entrusted were competent, reliable, and honest in their reception, interpretation, and transmission of the revelation. But if our only grounds for our confidence that these conditions are satisfied is the content of the revelation or the assurance by the prophet(s), our justification is patently circular. And given the general inaccessibility of deities to most of us, and the difficulty of subjecting them to tests of epistemic competence, it is unclear how anything external to the revelation could do the trick.

There is also a cluster of general metaphysical problems for revealed texts that is also apparent in the case of the revelation of the Torah, one that animates the debates to which Segal introduces us, and that is also familiar from the context of Indian debates about the status of the Vedas: assertions of revealed status and divine authorship carry with them implications of the eternality and transcendent status of the texts themselves. Unlike texts authored by mere mortals, these texts have origins outside of space and time, and are often taken not to be instrumental to human good or knowledge, but to constitute the very *telos* of creation. So, we must ask what kind of existence a text can have outside of space and time; how

something so transcendent can be relevant to or efficacious in the human world, and how such a text can be transmitted in the first place.

Each of these problems arises in the case of the revelation of the Torah to the Jewish people, and each is acknowledged in some form and to some degree by Segal in his elegant presentation. When Segal assumes 'that the Torah . . . is a kind of *wisdom* [containing] deep and illuminating truths about God and reality, about who we are and how we ought to be' (53), he presupposes that the epistemological problems can be resolved somehow. And the bulk of his essay is devoted to the metaphysical problem of understanding what he calls 'the explanatory priority of the Torah', the idea that the eternal and transcendent text of the Torah explains, rather than is explained by the existence of the world and of those to whom it is revealed. These are hard problems in theology and the philosophy of religion, but they are not the ones on which I would like to focus in this comment.

Instead, I am intrigued by a new kind of problem regarding the perfection of God that emerges from the account of the Torah as a transcendent text and global telos, a problem that develops in several forms in the course of Segal's exposition. I suspect that that a problem like this one is the inevitable consequence of a sufficiently robust doctrine of divine revelation, and I fear that it poses as deep a challenge to any account of a text as transcendent in this sense as do the general epistemological and metaphysical problems that are more salient. As we will see, it is hard to justify revelation without deprecating the deity who does the revealing.

The first occurrence of this problem regarding the compossibility of God's various perfections is in Segal's observation that 'It seems that human beings . . . could have had general-purpose cognitive faculties powerful enough as to be up to the task of discovering the wisdom of the Torah with their own natural capacities. So why didn't God create beings like that?' (53) This is a classic version of the problem of reconciling God's perfections with the existence of human suffering: given the Abrahamic God's omniscience, omnipotence, and omnibenevolence, together with the presumption that the Torah is packed with wisdom, it would seem that God could have just made us capable of knowing its contents on our own, or even that God could have created us with innate knowledge of its contents. Since that would have saved us the trouble of studying a difficult text and its commentaries, benevolence suggests that he should have done so. But he didn't.[20]

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[20] Now, I must say that the presumption that the Torah is simply packed with wisdom—a presumption necessary to make all of this interesting, and with Segal grants—is itself problematic. A text that urges that I stone adulterers to death, that prohibits me from wearing wool-linen blends, that makes highly implausible claims about the longevity of certain individuals, or that endorses slavery might be a bit less wise than any I would regard as transcendent in origin. But I leave that worry aside for present purposes. On the other hand it raises perhaps a more vexing problem: why think that a deity with those particular views is worth reverence or obedience?

The plot thickens. Segal writs that 'the Torah is devoted to describing God, humanity, and their relationship in the here-and-now' (54). That is not literally correct. Leaving aside the large amount of text that does *not* describe God, humanity, or their relationship, at best, we could say that the Torah does this in the *there-and-then,* where that is the middle east several millennia ago. Things have changed since then. If the Torah is truly a transcendent revelation to *all of us,* as Segal urges it is intended to be understood, we must ask why a triple-omni God could not have updated the revelation.[21] Here is how the problem we have been exploring ramifies: a truly omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent deity would not have revealed a document that is to become obsolete, at least without regular updates.

Almost immediately, Segal notes another puzzle. The words of the Torah must be interpreted either literally or figuratively. If the former, we are faced with the fact that much of what it says is false or repugnant; if the latter, we have a text that could have said what it meant, but which didn't do so. The first gives us an epistemically and morally flawed deity; the second gives us one who was incapable of or unwilling to say what he meant. Once again, we are plunged into the same difficulty (55). Segal concedes as much when he writes:

> In effect, the puzzle consists in the following combination of commitments the Torah is the repository of wisdom, so central to the cosmos that its concrete realization is the end for which the creation took place. But on the other hand, no creature was endowed with a sufficiently powerful general-purpose cognitive faculty to easily discover that wisdom on its own, a fact which necessitated God communicating. And that's puzzling, since it seems like creation wasn't properly matched to its purpose. (55)

This is yet another formulation of the problem induced by revelation.

Things get even more mysterious when we consider the fact that according to Jewish understanding, God didn't simply reveal the Torah causally; he did so through language; he communicated it; he spoke to us. As Segal notes (56) the Torah is replete with formulae like '*vedebar Elohim* ... (and God spoke ...)' telling us that God is speaking to particular individuals. Why speak? After all, an omnipotent god could just as easily directly cause one to have the beliefs that any speech is meant to induce. And speech is always problematic, requiring interpretation by a competent addressee. One might hear wrong, or misunderstand a communicative intent, or mis-remember ... And this suggests that God chose an unreliable way to reveal the Torah over more reliable means. Why? This is yet another instance of the difficulty we have been exploring: how could a

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[21] As the old joke goes: I found a bottle, rubbed it, and out came a genie offering one wish. I asked for the wisdom of Solomon, and now I know everything I need to know to run a Bronze Age kingdom.

perfect deity use such an imperfect means to reveal information so important for us to have?

And there is a further problem: if the Torah is truly revealed for our own good, containing truths the understanding of which and commandments the obedience to which make our lives better, why not simply equip us with the wisdom to know what is good for us? Surely, a triple-omni god could have done so. Segal proposes a solution to this conundrum when he writes:

> Here's a simple-minded proposal: the important truths in which the Torah consists are about the things that God wants from us that *aren't entailed by our attaining our greatest good.* (57)

How is this supposed to help? Here's the idea. On this interpretation, the Torah does not only command us to do things that are *good for us* (say resting on the Sabbath, or avoiding some foods that might have been dangerous to eat in the Bronze Age Middle East), but also to do things that are of no particular benefit in themselves, but which are commanded by God nonetheless. These we do, on this account, because

> The only way we can act for God is by doing what God wants us to do *because God wants us to do it.* That is, loving devotion to God requires that there be something God wants you to do that you are willing to do because God wants you to do it. (57)

So, on this view, part of the wisdom of the Torah, and what makes it necessary that it be revealed and not just figured out, is its essential *arbitrariness.* The idea is this: if God revealed only the wisdom we need to lead a good life, we would not need revelation, since presumably we are smart enough to figure that stuff out; but the Torah also contains stuff that we could never figure out because it has no rational relation to a good human life. This stuff we are asked to do in order to demonstrate our love for God, doing it just 'because God wants us to do it'.

On this view, then, we should refuse to wear blended fabrics not because there is anything wrong with that fashion statement, not because 100 per cent linen or 100 per cent wool is healthier than a wool-linen blend or confers some other advantage, and we stone adulterers not because there is no less brutal way to discourage infidelity, but because it is an arbitrary request from God, and by satisfying his arbitrary requests, we demonstrate our love for him. This account does show why the Torah, in virtue of containing lots of laws like this, needed to be revealed. Perhaps it also explains its role as the *telos* of creation: God created the world so that there could be people who love him, and they could only demonstrate this love if the Torah was already existent as the relationship guide. And this would

also explain why the Torah, which is taken in this tradition to be a pristine fountain of wisdom, contains so much arbitrary injunction and fallacious history.

Alas, though, I fear that while this account might provide some kind of explanation for the revelation of a transcendent text and for its role in justifying the existence of the world, it does so at the risk of yet another, even deeper problem regarding God's perfection. If we are asked to think of the Torah as a cosmic relationship guide to get us right with God by showing him that we love him, and if the only way to do that is to engage in a lot of otherwise pointless (and often cruel) activity, it sounds like the guide to maintaining a pathological codependency between us and a rather insecure, immature deity, one perhaps suffering from a narcissistic personality disorder. After all, if you found yourself in a relationship with a partner who asked you to engage in otherwise pointless activities, and even activities that caused great harm to others *just because they want you to do it* in order to demonstrate your love, you would be well advised to leave that relationship, or at the very least, to seek serious couples therapy. And trust me: it is a really bad idea for you ask your partner to demonstrate their love for you by foregoing blended fabrics, stoning adulterers, or by eating only certain kinds of insects.

So, if we accept this account of the need for the revelation of the Torah and of its transcendence, the cost of explaining its status is a conception of a neurotic deity hardly worthy of love, let alone gratitude or worship, a deity who wishes to lure us into a toxic relationship, a deity more in need of counselling than of veneration. This is perhaps the most serious problem of all in this neighbourhood. I conclude that it would be better to look elsewhere for an account of this revelation.

Segal attempts to rescue this account from a critique such as this through a questionable account of philosophical debate. He argues that any sufficiently compelling philosophical system forms such an organic unity that you can't safely tinker around with parts of it without making the whole thing incoherent. Moreover, you can't, he argues, compare entire philosophical systems, since each system will be committed to its own epistemic principles and practices and there will never be an Archimedean point from which they can be compared. If this is true, the only way to settle philosophical disputes is through revelation (10).

I think that each of the crucial premises here is demonstrably false, as is the conclusion. The history of every major philosophical system is that of internecine as well as external debates that lead to refinement and adjustment of ideas in that system. Examples are too easy to come by and too numerous to be worth providing. And the history of philosophy is also marked by the clash of great systems: Platonism and Aristotelianism; idealism and realism; Nyāya and Buddhism; Confucianism and Daoism. And each of these has proceeded through debate that presupposes no Archimedean fulcrum. This is therefore not a plausible way to motivate the necessity of revelation.

Revelation is an undeniable trinket of temptation: it seems like a great end run around fundamental epistemological problems, providing an unassailable ground for the truth of the claims to which a religious tradition is committed. And the sublimation of texts is yet another such trinket: it seems like a great way to elevate even the most problematic aspects of sacred texts to a level that demands patient commentary and defence rather than critique. Both of these impulses are at work in the strategies Segal so ably scouts for taking the Torah to be a transcendent text that must have been revealed by God and that motivates creation itself. Unfortunately, revelation and sublimation, when you scratch beneath the surface turn out to be fools' gold. They not only fail to resolve the epistemological questions they are brought in to address, but they raise a host of insuperable problems that threaten the undermine the religious traditions they are meant to vouchsafe.

A3.2 Reply to Aaron Segal

Hamid Vahid and Mahmoud Morvarid

Aaron Segal's chapter seeks to respond to what he regards as a 'puzzle' about the revelation in Judaism. The idea is that, given the importance of what God revealed at Sinai (the Torah), why did our knowledge of these matters come by way of revelation? Couldn't He provide us with cognitive faculties adequate enough to discover the wisdom of the Torah, namely, its profound truths about God and reality, about ourselves, and how we ought to be? To answer these questions, Segal begins by rejecting the claim that there was no genuine Divine communication at Sinai. He also rejects the suggestion that the wisdom in the Torah would be known only by actually encountering God on the ground that it fails to make plausible 'the claim that, *the truths that God revealed by communication had to be revealed*' (p. 6). Drawing on the works of certain Jewish scholars, Segal proposes two ways of making sense of the claim in question which involve the central idea that the wisdom of the Torah is not the kind of thing that a wise individual could discover. One 'points to the intrinsic systematicity of philosophy and theology, and the collective nature of the Sinaitic Revelation' (*Abstract*), and the other involves loving devotion to God above all else.

The idea behind the latter suggestion is that such devotion requires there be something that God asks of us (through revelation) which we go ahead and do it. This is something that goes beyond our standing rightly with respect to God: 'Loving devotion to God—just like loving devotion to anyone—requires a willingness to act for God. But . . . the only way we can act for God is by doing what God wants us to do *because God wants us to do it*. That is, loving devotion to God requires that there be something God wants you to do that you are willing to do because God wants you to do it . . . —and not, say, because it's entailed by your own greatest good' (p. 7).

The puzzle that Segal discusses is something that can be raised in all the Abrahamic traditions, including Islam, where Divine revelation plays an important part. In addition, his assumption regarding the revealed nature of the Torah is something that is also acknowledged in the Islamic tradition. There are many passages in the Quran that highlight the significance of the Sinaitic revelation: 'We wrote for him [Moses] in the tablets advice concerning all things and an elaboration of all things, [and We said], Hold on to them with power' (7:145—Qarai translation).

We are also inclined to go along with Segal's appeal to man's loving devotion to God as providing a satisfactory answer to the puzzle. Moreover, it seems that a similar suggestion can be made by following a different route, i.e. by focusing on a particular constitutive feature of faith whose realization requires, among other things, the authenticity of revelation. It is widely believed that, as a multifaceted notion, faith has both cognitive as well as, conative aspects.[22] The cognitive aspect of faith is manifested in such attitudes as belief, acceptance, and assuming. However, in addition to having a positive cognitive stance, faith also involves a positive conative orientation towards the truth of the faith propositions like (p) 'God exists'. To have faith that p is to consider the truth of p to be good and desirable, or wanting p to be true. This seems to follow from the consideration that having faith that p requires caring that p where one cares that p only if one has some desire for p to be true. The conative aspect of faith is what undermines its reduction to mere belief. One can believe that p while finding the truth of p to be disagreeable. It is presumably this aspect of faith that lies behind Wittgenstein's opposition to treating religion as some sort of science where God is regarded as a theoretical entity that is waiting to be discovered by empirical and non-empirical means.

What the conative orientation of faith adds to its cognitive aspect is to turn it into a passionate commitment to a system of reference. Thus understood, religious attitude requires a partial treatment of its object. One widespread context where this sort of partiality is naturally manifested is in the relationship of 'friendship'. Friendship presents a certain kind of intimate relationship that imposes certain demands of partiality on our behaviour as well as on our psychological states.[23] We are disposed to treat our friends differently from the way we treat strangers. This is manifested in our reactions to our friends as when we rush to help them when they are in trouble, or when they simply want a helping hand to, say, move house. We are disposed to come to their defence when they are criticized despite lacking reasons to dismiss those criticisms. Our partiality towards our friends is displayed in the ways in which we deal with evidence that is brought to bear on their actions and characters: 'We tend to devote more energy to defeating or minimizing the impact of unfavorable data than we otherwise would . . . . [W]e are more liable to scrutinize and to question the evidence being presented than we otherwise would be.'[24] What is important in such a relationship, however, is that our attitudes towards our friends are formed purely by selfless motivations. We act the way we do towards them because that is what being a friend requires rather than because we think that we will be rewarded in some fashion. Accordingly, reasons of friendship are neither reducible to broader impartial moral assessments nor reasons of self-interest. It is such selfless attitudes that ground mutual affections in friendship.

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[22] See, for example, Howard-Snyder 2013. [23] See, for example, Keller 2004 and Stroud 2006.
[24] Stroud 2006, p. 505.

The same thing holds for our friendship with God. If faith is to be more than a cognitive relationship with God, it must involve some sort of friendship with Him for only then can its conative orientation be secured. In this context, we may view revelation as, among other things, providing an opportunity for us to enter into a friendship-style relationship with God. We would be willing to do things because he has asked us and wanted us to do them and, as Segal says, not because they are 'entailed by [our] greatest good'. The idea that revelation involves an element of friendship is given expression in certain passages in the Quran where God addresses Moses thus: 'Certainly, we have done you a favor another time, when We revealed to your mother whatever was to be revealed: Put him in the casket, and cast it into the river. Then the river will cast it on the bank, and he shall be picked up by an enemy of Mine and an enemy of his. And I made you endearing, and that you might be reared under My [watchful] eyes … And I chose you for Myself' (20: 37–41—Qarai translation). Finally, although Divine revelation primarily involves God's communion with the prophets, other people can also joint it by engaging with the sacred texts that embody the communicated content as well as through their own personally founded friendship with God.

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PART II

ANALYSIS OF FAITH (CHRISTIANITY, ISLAM, AND JUDAISM)

4

The Virtue of Saving Faith

Jonathan L. Kvanvig

4.1 Introduction

In the Christian tradition, it is standardly noted that it is by faith we are saved, and faith is not only central to the story of salvation, but a virtue as well. These two aspects raise the central problematics for a Christian understanding of faith. First, what is the relation between faith, understood generically, and the kind of faith that saves? Second, what is the relationship between this prudential feature of faith and its moral status as a virtue? An adequate Christian conception of faith must be able to account for how saving faith is really a kind of faith, and not something akin to a decoy duck, and must also do so in a way that allows a path to explaining the importance of faith in a way that doesn't reduce its significance to mere prudential value.

A note of caution is in order before embarking on this task, however, because any account of saving faith that arises from the Christian tradition will need to be sensitive to the language of faith in Christian Scripture. One immediate consequence of such sensitivity is noticing the way in which faith and belief are intimately linked in English translations. After noticing this link, it is easy to conclude that faith is something built on top of belief, leaving the only remaining questions those concerning what additional elements are needed. Here, however, we should resist this facile endorsement of doxastic accounts of faith, for the translations themselves encode philosophical assumptions that should be resisted at least initially. Exploring this issue in any detail would take us too far afield,[1] but one point is worth noting to aid in seeing why we shouldn't make any such doxasticist assumption. In New Testament Greek, the language of faith comes in both noun and verb forms, whereas in English there is no verb form for the noun. So when verb forms of the language of faith are translated into English, some other verb will have to be chosen, and the language of belief, though standard, can easily be seen to involve doxasticist assumptions concerning the nature of faith. Depending on the context of use, other possibilities include the language of

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[1] I develop and defend resisting this endorsement both initially and at the end of full consideration of the view in Kvanvig 2018.

trust, loyalty, and allegiance,[2] and noting these options will help avoid facile assumptions about the relationship between saving faith and doxastic as well as other cognitive states.

This cautionary prelude is important here because, below, one of the central issues will be whether cognitive or non-cognitive accounts of faith are best suited for resolving the issue to which this chapter is addressed, and that issue can't even be raised until we shelve doxastic assumptions. Our central issue, to repeat, is how to explain the nature of saving faith so that it is both a kind of faith and a moral virtue, and we will want to consider the credentials of doxastic and other cognitive accounts concerning the nature of faith. As I will argue, the best accounts for addressing our central issue will not be cognitive accounts of the nature of faith, which explains why the cautionary note in the last paragraph is important before addressing our topic.

4.2 General Contours

We can begin by noting that, in order for faith to be a virtue, it needs to be a disposition, one that is typically directed toward an object of some sort. So, for example, one might have faith *in* something or faith *that* something is the case. In both cases, we can distinguish between the disposition itself and its object. So, for example, one might have faith in democracy, and if one does there is both the disposition in question and an object, which in this case is democracy. We will explore later what is involved in the disposition itself, but let's focus first on the object of faith, for when the kind of faith is saving faith, the Christian conception of it will link to some central part of Christian theology. I leave this point quite vague at present, since anything more precise will be contentious, but whatever one endorses on this issue, it will presumably have something to do with, as St Paul puts it, God being in Christ for purposes of reconciliation. We should be careful at this point, however, not to formulate more precise propositional attitudes required for the presence of saving faith. Doing so fails to distinguish between correct theology and saving faith, inclining an entire tradition towards the language of the Athanasian Creed that quite freely damns not only those who disagree about the correct theology but also those lacking sufficient theological sophistication to formulate properly what they think on these matters.[3]

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[2] These alternative possibilities are explored in detain in Bates 2017, defending, as the title suggests, a preference for the language of allegiance.

[3] In Kvanvig 2018, I explore in detail what a list of cognitive commitments might look like in order to count as Christian, and reject that project as misconceived. Instead, I argue for an account of cognitive commitments that is more generic, not needing to encode any precise content involved in creedal formulations of Christian doctrine. The reasons for preferring such generic content are likely to generalize to other theistic traditions as well.

The point to emphasize, though, is that the account of the disposition and the account of the object of the disposition have to mesh in such a way as to make clear how the kind of faith in question could be thought to be *salvific*. To see why, note the mystery that would accompany accounts that don't address the point. For example, suppose one's religion claimed that faith directed toward certain wooden objects is saving faith. The obvious question to ask is what power wooden objects might have to save one from anything. For faith to be saving faith, we first must identify something that is less than ideal, salvation from which would be benefi-cial. Perhaps there is a problem that needs solving, such as the problem of sin and misery, as the Westminster Catechism maintains. Wooden objects have no power of redress regarding such problems, so any religion that claimed that faith needs to be directed towards some wooden object has no resources to explain why the faith in question might plausibly be thought of as salvific.

Yet, even if the object of faith is an object with the needed power in question, the explanatory link can still be absent. So, for example, suppose the object of faith is a deistic being, one who lacks interest in the course of human affairs. Such a view not only cannot explain how such faith could be saving faith, but also why such faith is of much value at all. The feature of faith that addresses these issues is that an adequate account of faith can be found only where the object of faith is taken to involve ideality of some important sort, to put the point vaguely and generically. In Christianity, for example, God is conceived not only as powerful and wise, but also as loving, caring, forgiving, and wholly good. Without the latter evaluative dimensions of the object of faith, the faith in question could not plausibly be thought of as salvific. Having the power of redress is not enough; what also is needed is some aspect of the object of faith that can be identified in terms of an evaluative ideal that involves such redress. God, conceived in this way, is both able and motivated to provide redress, and a disposition to the kind of unity of thought, will, and affections in service of such an ideal could plausibly be defended to explain how and why such faith is saving faith.

I mention this feature of unification because it allows us to explain how some instances of faith can be stronger than others. We can measure the strength of the disposition in question by measuring the degree of unity present among these mental features, the features of thought, affections, and will. In measuring such unity, we might identify maximal faith in terms of various certainties, an ordering of affections and a priority of willing so that nothing ever would or could compete with one's commitment to the ideal. In such a case, one would be certain that God will solve the problem of sin and misery and wipe away all our tears, and one's affections and will would be ordered in such a way that nothing would or could interfere with the orienting of one's life in service of this eschaton. Yet, even if such faith would count as saving faith, however, the details involved in such ideal faith would have little hope of being necessary for any faith capable of being saving faith. For one thing, one needn't be certain that redress will come, in contrast with,

say, seeing in the ideal in question the only possibility of such. That is, the object can be appropriately ideal by providing hope of redress rather than some certainty of such. For it is the solidarity with the ideal and the way in which a life can be structured in service of the ideal that provides the explanatory basis for why the faith in question might plausibly amount to saving faith.

So the unity of thought, affection, and will involved in saving faith can come in stronger and weaker varieties, leaving open ranges of attitudes, both cognitive and affective, that nonetheless fall within the territory of saving faith. A disposition to organize a life in service of something ideal derives value, deserves credit, from the source of the ideality in question, in much the general way in which we value loyalty and allegiance from our friends. In describing the way in which such faith can be salvific, we need not claim that such unity of thought, affect, and will can be demonstrably shown to be salvific—such a claim would be at the very least presumptuous—but rather only that it could be *fitting* for it to be such.

This account of saving faith, then, involves an object of faith, conceived to be able to provide redress and inclined towards it, in such a way that a life organized in terms of that ideal might plausibly be given the kind of credit that would be expressed by redress for the problem identified. This generic account of the ideality involved in the object of faith isn't specifically Christian, but that is as it should be at this point. We should expect to find distinctively Christian elements once the object of faith is more fully identified and the ideality displayed is articulated. The form that faith takes is dispositional, whereas the content of that faith is determined by the nature and characteristics of the object of faith, especially the characteristics of ideality that call for loyalty, commitment, fealty, and allegiance to the object of faith. Such a conclusion lets us focus on the form of faith itself, to see what this dispositional character needs to be in order for it both to be saving faith and also a virtue, so we turn to this issue in the next section.

4.3 Dispositional Faith

I begin by reinforcing the point that the kind of faith under discussion is not to be assumed to be propositional (as in 'MLK had faith that justice would triumph in the long run'). One can have faith that democracy will triumph, and such faith is propositional, but one can also have faith in democracy, and this language is the language of objectual rather than propositional faith. Of particular note here is that the primary way in which saving faith is described in Christian Scripture is in objectual terms such as having faith in God or in Christ. One might try to argue that there is some propositional faith implied by such objectual faith, but as the example about faith in democracy suggests, arguing for an implied propositional commitment is going to be difficult. One can have faith in democracy and yet be pessimistic enough about human nature to lack faith that democracy will triumph

(one's faith in democracy would then be about what our best hope for humanity is, combined with a kind of despair on the issue).

Those wanting to find some propositional commitment in objectual faith are not likely to give up the search on the basis of this example alone, and perhaps further refinement might save some version of the thesis. I have my doubts on this score, but pursuing this issue will take us away from our central subject matter, so I will leave the point here as the simple preliminary one that in describing faith, we shouldn't begin from any assumption that faith is fundamentally propositional in character.

The other assumption we shouldn't make is that faith, whether objectual or propositional, is a kind of mental state. It is true that mental states are often, and maybe always, are things content, but the mere fact that we specify a person, a proposition, and a relation between them doesn't imply that the relation designates a mental state. For example, if we say that Joe thinks that the world is flat, we attribute to Joe a mental state. But if say that Joe complained that the earth is flat, no mental state is attributed to Joe.

Even if we set aside speech acts and other actions such as proving that arithmetic is incomplete or guessing that it is, we still shouldn't assume that mental states are involved in attributions involving a 'that'-clause. Joe might forget that arithmetic is incomplete, and that construction doesn't involve a mental state of forgetting. Once we appreciate this point that mental state involvement is not generated by constructions of the sort in question, the point may generalize. If we know, realize, notice, confirm, or discover that it is raining, perhaps we will conclude that such constructions attribute mental states and perhaps we won't.[4] For one further example, we might agree with Tamar (Gendler 2008) that there is a phenomenon of alief, different from belief and often in tension with explicit belief,[5] while wondering whether she is correct that alief is actually a mental state, rather than a complex disposition made up of various mental states.[6]

We thus have examples enough to warrant caution about attributing mental states in other cases as well. We often presume, presuppose, or assume, and though these might involve mental states, we need not assume that there is a specific mental state for the given 'that'-clause in question. Perhaps they are constructions from some underlying mental state, such as belief, but presumptions, presuppositions, and assumptions aren't identical with belief. Moreover, we also might want to be cautious about the idea that each of these involves belief. Some have thought, for example, that acceptance doesn't require belief, and that

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[4] As to the kind of argument needed to settle the matter, see Williamson 2000.
[5] As when we experience panic when standing on the cantilevered glass walkway over the Grand Canyon, even though we know that doing so is safe.
[6] For discussion of this issue, see Gendler 2012.

acceptance isn't really a mental state at all, but rather a disposition toward behaviour.[7]

If both of these claims are true, acceptance could still involve mental states other than belief, and if so, it would be a substantive project to determine exactly what mental state or states might be involved.

The lesson to learn, then, is that we should proceed cautiously concerning the nature of faith. Faith is a property of a person and a disposition toward behaviour that may imply the presence of certain mental states, including cognitive, affective, and connative states, but even if faith is composed solely out of such mental states, it doesn't follow that it is itself a mental state. As I see things, it isn't one, but is a complex property of a person the identity conditions of which allow for some variability in the central factors involved in faith. For example, the same saving faith can be displayed by different individuals with different cognitive assurances, where those with lesser assurance might have a greater degree of hope (or some other relevant affective state) than some with greater levels of assurance. Faith is in this way like concrete. The latter is formed by mixing gravel, cement, sand, and water, but there is no precise ratio of each required. Just so, the ingredients of faith can be present in variable amounts without compromising the status of the resulting combination as an instance of faith (or saving faith).

To get a better understanding of this approach, it is worth contrasting it with the standard view of faith and some recent alternatives to it. The standard view of faith in the Christian tradition seems to be that faith is, at bottom, a type of belief. The Greek noun for faith is *pistis*, and when this term appears in verb form, it is typically translated using the language of belief. Even if we note that the kind of belief is normally belief-in rather than belief-that (as in John 14:1: 'You believe in God, believe also in me'), it is usually assumed that belief in God or Christ has as a necessary condition, and is explained in terms of, believing that God or Christ exist. This necessary condition thus seems to be the foundation on which faith is built, adding to the doctrinal base whatever other elements are needed to complete the edifice. Other elements might include affective components such as preferences and hopes, behavioural elements such as resilience or grit or risky commitments, as well as perhaps other things. The central idea, though, is apparently to start from belief and add other ingredients as necessary to yield the nature of faith.

Even though I'll argue that this position is unsound, it is worth acknowledging up front that the kind of disposition that faith involves is typically generated on the basis of firmly held convictions on the part of the individuals displaying such faith. Moreover, firmly held convictions are certainly properly characterized using the language of belief, so for such individuals, the faith they display traces directly to the underlying beliefs that generate it.

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[7] For a useful discussion of such views, see Weirich 2004.

Nevertheless, what is typical might not be what is necessary, and recent work on the nature of faith calls the doxastic view into question.[8] These rejections of doxasticism may leave the necessity of belief unquestioned, arguing only that something other than belief is fundamental to faith. Instead of holding that faith is a kind of belief, one might argue that faith is fundamentally a kind of proattitude such as preference or hope, or is fundamentally a disposition such as resilience.[9] So the distance they move from doxastic accounts of faith depends on whether they question the necessity or only the fundamentality of belief for faith. In addition, some of them point to further distancing as well, questioning not only whether belief is fundamental to faith but also whether faith is a kind of cognitive state at all. The possibilities just noted all reject the idea that faith is fundamentally a kind of cognitive state, whether doxastic or not, but they also put on the table the issue of which, if any, cognitive states are necessary for faith. We turn to this issue next.

4.4 Cognitive and Non-Cognitive Accounts

If some cognitive state is necessary for faith, what possibilities are there other than belief? There are plenty of cognitive states that don't imply belief, such as credences, confidence interval levels, suspicions, hunches, and the like. But none of these seem to be suitable substitutes for belief in an account of faith, even if some of them could plausibly be thought to be necessary for faith. (How could one have faith in God, for example, without have some level of confidence that there is a God? It looks like a vacuous requirement, one satisfied by everyone, since the scale of such levels is from zero to one inclusive.[10]) Perhaps, though, a suitable substitute could be found in the notion of acceptance, as some have suggested. A modicum of scepticism is in order about this idea, however, given considerable uncertainty about what acceptance might be that doesn't involve belief and whether it is a cognitive state or simply a disposition to treat certain hypotheses as worthy of one's attention.

Regardless of how these issues are resolved, even if in favour of there being a cognitive state of acceptance that is weaker than that of belief, there is a more

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[8] See e.g. Pojman 1986, Audi 1994, Alston 1996, Buchak 2012, Howard-Snyder 2013, McKaughan 2013.

[9] See e.g. Buchak 2017 and Howard-Snyder 2017, though neither of these accounts embrace the necessity of belief for faith.

[10] Such vacuity arises straightforwardly in standard Bayesian epistemology, where it is assumed that everyone's credences or confidence intervals are complete. That is, for every proposition p, everyone takes some incremental attitude or other toward p. Abandoning this assumption leaves open the possibility of taking no attitude at all toward claims about one's object of faith, but it would still be enormously implausible to suppose that one could have faith in a person while taking no incremental attitude whatsoever towards the claim that such a person exists. The kind of approach favoured in van Fraassen 1980.

serious difficulty facing approaches to faith that are cognitive in character, whether the cognitive state is one of belief or something weaker than belief. This difficulty arises from noting that faith is supposed to be a virtue, and it is hard to see how something that is fundamentally a cognitive state could be a virtue. I am not sure whom to credit for first noticing this problem, but I first encountered it in C.S. Lewis's writings. He wrote, 'But what does puzzle people—at least it used to puzzle me—is the fact that Christians regard faith in this sense as a virtue. I used to ask how on earth it can be a virtue—what is there moral or immoral about believing or not believing a set of statements?' (Lewis 1952, p. 138).

We should not endorse this particular complaint in its totality, since it contains mistakes. The first mistake is minor, involving an identification of faith with belief (though this identification isn't in the quoted material itself). It is about as obvious as anything could be that such an identification is mistaken (I believe that I'm now writing, but I have no such faith), but it is an easy mistake to correct, so we'll move quickly towards a more important mistake. That mistake is in the quoted material itself, which mistakenly equates displays of virtue and vice with what is moral and what is immoral. Such an identification forgets that moral actions can be out of character and that virtues in excess can be immoral.[11] Even so, it is not hard to see these concerns as niggling, missing the central and pressing concern voiced by Lewis.

To appreciate this difficulty for doxastic accounts of faith, imagine a theology on which one's eternal destiny was determined by whether one had a particular tattoo behind one's left ear, and in which being so tattooed was touted as a virtue that partially explains the distinction between the sheep and the goats. Care must be shown in constructing the counterexample, for there can be legitimate outward signs one is asked to take on in order to show, e.g. that one's commitments are serious. But that's not the kind of case I'm discussing. Instead, the explanation of salvation bottoms out at the tattoo level itself. It is not a sign or mark of something more basic that accounts for salvation, but is simply the entire story about who is saved and who isn't. Such a theology is puzzling indeed. Being so tattooed is clearly not a virtue of any sort, and the proposed explanatory link between the tattoo and eternal destiny undermines any possibility of understanding how and why salvation might be possible rather than illuminating it.

Just so with fundamentally doxastic accounts of faith. As Lewis remarks, how could merely believing, even believing correctly, count as a virtue? There is, we might admit, some value in believing the truth and avoiding error, but the lofty status of being a virtue is hardly achieved by such a value. There is also value in believing rationally, and even in knowing, but these values don't seem to be the

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[11] These points are somewhat controversial, rejected by e.g. Philippa Foot 1978. For defence of the side I come down on, see Watson 1984.

right kind of value when assessing why faith might be intrinsically worth having in the way virtues in general are intrinsically worth having.

First, the values of believing, believing correctly, believing rationally, and even knowing are values that fall short of implying virtuosity. There is also value in being a living thing, but the lofty virtues of courage, prudence, temperance, and justice are hardly thought of properly in terms of being some kind of living thing. It is true that one can't have those virtues if not a living thing, but as the ancients reminded us, you also can't be human without being featherless. In each such case, necessary conditions distract from the search for natures. So if faith is a virtue, we should look for something that could plausibly be regarded as such when looking for what is fundamental to this character trait.

Second, if one wishes to find something cognitive that could be a virtue, we should turn to the intellectual virtues themselves, but they aren't the right kinds of virtue to explain how and why faith is a virtue. Perhaps being a person of understanding or theoretical wisdom is to be a person with intellectual virtues, but being a person of faith is to have a virtue that reaches outside the purely intellectual realm. The criticism of doxastic accounts that Lewis is pointing towards is this one: faith is a more general virtue than anything purely intellectual. So even if faith did require belief, it would not be fundamentally a kind of belief, given that we want our account of the fundamental character of faith to be responsible for its status as a virtue.

Here the functional account of faith tells a better story. If faith is a function of a variety of possible combinations of affective, cognitive, and conative elements that yield some kind of distinctive disposition, the question of whether and how such faith could be a virtue turns into a question concerning the nature of this disposition. On this issue, something along the lines proposed by John Dewey (1934) can be developed, the slogan for which is that faith, whether religious or not, is a disposition to respond in service of an ideal. Such an account insists that faithfulness, allegiance, and loyalty to a cause or person are intimately linked with faith,[12] leading to a promising and perhaps plausible story as to why this character trait should count as a virtue. Perhaps the typical way in which the function is realized is through firm convictions of the sort the belief model of faith demands, but that function might be able to be realized in other ways as well. A functional account of faith can remain neutral as to whether faith requires belief instead of some weaker cognitive condition. Moreover, it is the disposition to respond in a characteristic way that takes centre stage in the story, not the cognitive state involved in it, so we are not left with the mystery that arises when making some cognitive state fundamental to our account.

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[12] This claim is vague, leaving open whether the link in question is one of necessity or sufficiency, and whether any such link would count as monotonic or non-monotonic. Such issues are beyond the scope of this paper.

We can understand this proposal better by considering other examples. Some entities have intrinsic natures, as we typically find among natural kinds, and such things are not properly understood as functional entities. Other entities, such as artifacts, are functional entities. A table, for example, is a function entity, typically involving a support system for a surface. But there is not much more to be said about what is required for being a table. Without a surface of some sort, it isn't a table, but the size of the surface and the composition of it are variable, as is the height of the support system and its structure. It may, for example, have legs, but there need not be multiplicity here, and maybe a pedestal table has no legs at all. The point to note, then, is that a functional entity leaves variability among the features that together make for the existence of such an entity.

For a functional account of faith, we should say something similar. Faith is composed of cognitive, affective, and conative attitudes, but this composite leaves considerable variability regarding the particular attitudes in question. Perhaps weaker cognitive attitudes can be countered by stronger affective ones, so that one who cries, 'Help thou mine unbelief' is voicing not only a weak cognitive condition but also a depth of emotional and affective attraction to an ideal found in the Petrine query of John 6: where else can we go? The presence of faith can thereby remain the same when weaker elements are counterbalanced by the strength of other elements. This point applies both to faith across persons as well as to faith in the same person across time. A functional account of faith thus helps us to understand the phenomenon of faith and the variety of ways in which it occurs in ways that the belief model cannot, perhaps even encompassing cases in which belief itself comes and goes, as it apparently did in the life of Mother Teresa.[13]

Regardless of whether one is moved by such examples, however, the basic point is about the contrast between the belief model and other cognitive models of faith with a functional account. Presumably, belief itself is a functional entity as well, and so if faith were built out of belief, the resulting story about the nature of faith would also be a functional one. The point, though, is that it is the wrong kind of functional entity to have any prospect for explaining why faith is virtue, and so a functional account of a different sort is needed.

4.5 Conclusion

The best accounts of faith, then, do not begin from either doxastic or cognitive starting points, though it would be astonishing to find an account jettisoning such states altogether in explaining the nature and value of faith. Among non-cognitive

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[13] As emphasized in Howard-Snyder and McKaughan 2021.

starting points, there is a variety of choices available, from purely dispositional to affective to conative starting points, and it has not been my intention to settle disputes between various non-cognitive accounts of faith. Instead, the point to note is where the best account of the virtue of saving faith is to be found. All such accounts will find a place for cognitive states and perhaps even for belief, but they will focus on functional elements, whether in the form of non-cognitive mental states such as preferences, desires, or hopes, or in the form of more generic dispositions to responses that involve combinations of mental states, both cognitive and non-cognitive. The larger task of filling the details to determine which particular version of a non-cognitive account is best we leave to another time and place, noting that the burden of sorting between cognitive and non-cognitive accounts is conclusion enough for the present.

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A4.1 Reply to Jonathan L. Kvanvig

Imran Aijaz

Jonathan Kvanvig's discussion of Christian faith is lucid and plausible. I generally agree with his points about the features required for an adequate conception of religious (Christian) faith. In considering the standard view of Christian faith, Kvanvig criticizes and rejects cognitive (in particular, doxastic) accounts that 'start from belief and add other ingredients as necessary to yield the nature of faith' (p. 80). As an alternative, he proposes a functional account of faith comprised of cognitive, affective, and conative attitudes; these three attitudes, he says, leave 'considerable variability regarding the particular attitudes in question' (p. 84). A consequence of this account is that some composites of these attitudes permit faith *without* cognitive states such as belief.

In an Islamic context, the proposal that one can have faith without belief is, in the main, rejected. Many Muslims would argue that this proposal is fundamentally flawed because it contradicts the understanding of faith as an appropriate response to (propositional) *knowledge* of God. If I *know* that God exists, then I also *believe* that He does, as belief is a necessary condition for (propositional) knowledge. *This* understanding of faith, many Muslims would further argue, is not only the Islamic norm but is justified in light of sacred sources, such as the Qur'an and *aḥādīth* (reports of sayings and actions attributed to the Prophet Mohammed). Even so, I do think that (Islamic) faith without belief *is* possible, a position for which I have argued elsewhere.[14] In doing so, I contended with Islamic objections predicated on the view that knowledge of God is universal. On this view, those who respond favourably to this knowledge have faith.[15] Let me introduce a Christian analogue of such objections, prompted mainly by an outsider's (Muslim's) curiosity to see how intra-Christian disagreement about faith and religious knowledge will be handled.

In his lecture 'Does (Saving) Faith Imply Belief?', William Lane Craig takes issue with analyses of Christian faith that commence with ordinary language expressions and personal intuitions about faith in general and then apply the results of such analyses specifically to Christian faith (Craig 2021). Craig's main objection to this approach is that it risks contravening theological adequacy in

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[14] See Aijaz 2023.   [15] Ibid., esp. pp. 506–510.

understanding Christian faith. To avoid this problem, he says, one must take Scriptural (Biblical) teaching seriously (ibid.), a point that Kvanvig concurs with: '[A]ny account of saving faith that arises from the Christian tradition will need to be sensitive to the language of faith in Christian Scripture' (p. 75). According to Craig, New Testament teaching makes it clear that saving faith implies both personal faith in Christ and propositional faith that Christian doctrine is true (e.g. the existence of God, Christ's resurrection, etc.). Moreover, avers Craig, propositional Christian faith implies belief (i.e. doxastic, as opposed to non-doxastic, views of Christian faith are correct). To support this particular claim, he proffers three main points against non-doxastic views of faith: (1) they are incompatible with Reformed epistemology (which Craig endorses); (2) they import into the New Testament a modern philosophical distinction between belief and acceptance, one that is foreign to the mindset of the New Testament writers and commentators; and (3) a cognitive stance less than belief is incongruent with Biblical teaching that everyone knows about God's existence. Let's briefly consider what Craig says about (1) and (3), since the essence of his remarks resonates with what many Islamic thinkers affirm. Before that, some Scripture. In *Romans* 1:18–20, we read these remarks from Paul:

> The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

Commenting on this passage, Craig says the following:

> Since such persons know that God exists, it follows that they believe that God exists, even if they, lacking the favorable attitude and conation requisite for faith, do not have faith that God exists, much less faith in God. Whether their belief in God is properly basic, formed in the context of their observation of nature, or a natural inference from the created order around them is a question which may be left aside for now. What is important for now is that *all men know that God exists even if they wickedly suppress that knowledge. Moreover, God's existence is so plain to them and so clearly perceived by them that they are without excuse for their failure to acknowledge God so that the wrath of God rests upon them.*
> (Craig 2021; italics mine)

Many Islamic thinkers would agree with Craig's account here, noting that, in mainstream Islamic theology, knowledge of God is regarded as evident to all, whether or not they have faith. Qur'an 14:10, for instance, asks rhetorically: 'Can

there be doubt about Allah, Creator of the heavens and earth?' Other Qur'anic passages expressing similar sentiments can easily be cited. Elaborating on this Qur'anic idea, the popular Muslim apologist Hamza Andreas Tzortzis asserts that God's existence is self-evident, that 'the belief in ... God is universal, untaught, natural and intuitive' (Tzortzis 2020, p. 84). If Craig and Tzortzis are correct, then appropriate models of religious faith, whether Christian or Islamic, require belief. Craig even goes further, warning that disregarding the doxastic component of faith is dangerous. Non-doxastic views of faith, he cautions, 'may lull unbelievers who are in fact merely nominally Christian into a false sense of security concerning their spiritual condition, when they are, in fact, unregenerate persons' (Craig 2021).

How should a Christian or Muslim defender of non-doxastic models of faith respond to such views? I suggest that one way to respond is to appeal to *our experience of persons*, particularly those who maintain that they have faith despite the absence of belief, someone like Mother Teresa, whom Kvanvig mentions (pp. 83–84). Is it really plausible to think that, during her periods of religious doubt, Mother Teresa did not have faith and was wickedly suppressing knowledge of God? Indeed, to speak more generally, don't Christians and Muslims encounter individuals who do not profess religious belief but do not appear to be in wicked rebellion against God? Indeed, they may even identify as Christians or Muslims. The general point here is that Christians and Muslims shouldn't indulge in *a priori* constructions of the religious profiles of others merely based on Biblical or Qur'anic data, as the Swiss Reformed theologian Karl Barth seems to have done. The Sri Lankan pastor and theologian, D.T. Niles, in recounting his conversation with Barth when the two first met in 1935, notes how Barth did this:

> In the course of the conversation he said, 'Other religions are just unbelief.' I remember replying with the question, 'How many Hindus, Dr. Barth, have you met?' He answered, 'No one.' I said, 'How then do you know that Hinduism is unbelief?' He said, 'A priori.' I simply shook my head and smiled.
>
> (as quoted by Van den Toren 2021, p. 156)

Craig may object that one never truly knows the heart of another, so we can't reasonably judge the spiritual condition of those who say they lack religious belief. Putting aside the questionable inference here (many Christians and Muslims *do* judge, at least to some degree, the spiritual condition of others, e.g. when they judge that so-and-so is suitable to be a pastor or Imam), notice that more than one inference from the premise is available. If we are unable to know the heart of another truly, why infer that those who say they lack religious belief are wickedly suppressing knowledge of God? Perhaps such individuals are sincerely non-resistant in their nonbelief, as some even state (e.g. Mother Teresa). Craig might reply that Biblical evidence states otherwise and should always *override* whatever

our experience of others may tell us when we judge their religious or spiritual condition. Such a move, however, easily lends itself to a *reductio*; its logic would, for instance, give legitimacy to Biblical arguments for holding slaves and for regarding certain individuals as slaves if the Bible supports it. Even if the Bible or Qur'an does support slavery, I submit that most Christians and Muslims would nevertheless judge slavery to be a serious moral wrong primarily because of their experience of other people (e.g. personal encounters with black people and a recognition of their full humanity). Our experience overrides Biblical or Qur'anic evidence, not the other way around.

Taking the experience of others seriously, especially those who identify as people of faith despite lacking religious belief, constitutes an important condition, one neglected by Craig and his ilk, for generating suitable models of religious faith, whether these models are Christian or Muslim.

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A4.2 Reply to Jonathan L. Kvanvig

Nehama Verbin

At the heart of Kvanvig's paper is C. S. Lewis's puzzle. As Lewis puts it: 'Christians regard faith . . . as a virtue . . . what is there moral or immoral about believing or not believing a set of statements?' (Lewis 1952, p. 138). Indeed, 'how could merely believing, even believing correctly, count as a virtue?' (Kvanvig 10). Kvanvig's purpose is to provide a conception of faith that elucidates this puzzle. He argues that the functional account of faith can rise to the challenge:

> If faith is a function of a variety of possible combinations of affective, cognitive, and conative elements that yield some kind of distinctive disposition, the question of whether and how such faith could be a virtue turns into a question concerning the nature of this disposition.   (Kvanvig 83)

Kvanvig relies on John Dewey's formulation in characterizing the nature of the disposition:

> [S]omething along the lines proposed by John (Dewey 1934) can be developed, the slogan for which is that faith, whether religious or not, is a disposition to respond in service of an ideal.   (Kvanvig 83)

Kvanvig clarifies that 'such an account insists that faithfulness, allegiance, and loyalty to a cause or person are intimately linked with faith, leading to a promising and perhaps plausible story as to why this character trait should count as a virtue' (Kvanvig 83).

I am sympathetic to Kvanvig's non-reductive conception of faith, which includes various possible combinations of affective, cognitive and conative components that yield a distinctive disposition. I am, however, concerned that his account of virtuous faith in terms of 'faithfulness, allegiance, and loyalty to a cause or person' is in danger of rendering the extremist fanatic as the paradigmatic believer (Kvanvig 83).

Our moral evaluation of an ideal plays a key role in our evaluation of a person's wholehearted commitment to it. We do not consider wholehearted faithfulness or commitment to a racist ideal as a virtue. Even when the ideal is a worthy one (even the worthiest one, if there is such a thing), it is contentious to maintain that

wholehearted faithfulness, allegiance, and loyalty to it, while disregarding other values that bear upon the situation is virtuous. Faithfulness to an ideal to the exclusion of all others characterizes the murderous zealot.

The kind of 'faithfulness, allegiance, and loyalty' that is virtuous is not generalizable. It cannot be objectively defined, least of all by the readiness to sacrifice or self-sacrifice for it. As Halbertal emphasizes, readiness to sacrifice or self-sacrifice for an ideal does not turn the ideal into a worthy one. Halbertal points out that in ordinary circumstances, self-interest sets a limit on aggression and violence; when the readiness to sacrifice and self-sacrifice for an ideal is idealized, the potential for violence and destruction becomes boundless (Halbertal 2012). Indeed, idealization of the readiness to sacrifice oneself for an ideal or person and wholehearted commitment to it underlies some of the worst atrocities that humanity has witnessed.

Awareness of the potentially ambiguous moral nature of commitment to an ideal or person is expressed by various religious authors when contemplating their knights of faith. For Jews and Christians, the binding of Isaac has functioned as a paradigmatic example of virtuous faith as faithfulness to an ideal or a person. In his *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard, however, emphasizes the thin line between virtuous faith, madness, and murderous fanaticism:

> What is omitted from Abraham's story is the anxiety...just suppose that someone...wants to do just as Abraham did, for the son, after all, is the best. If the preacher found out about it, he perhaps would go to the man...and shout, 'You despicable man, you scum of society, what devil has so possessed you that you want to murder your son.'   (FT 28)

For *Johannes de Silentio*, it is because Abraham is Abraham that his readiness to sacrifice Isaac is *not* a vice. Considered as an instance of a general principle, e.g. loyalty to an ideal, it is condemnable; considering it outside of its specific idiosyncratic context turns it into an 'offence'.

This celebrated example of commitment has also received critical evaluations in various Jewish sources. In a *piyyut* recited during Shavuot, the holiday that marks God's giving of the Torah, the Hebrew poet, Rabbi Eleazar ben Kalir (570–640), carefully comments on Abraham's failed *commitment to Isaac* during the Akedah. Words of criticism are placed in the mouth of the Torah, who explains the fault that she had found in Abraham, owing to which she had decided to wait for the arrival of a more suitable recipient—Moses.[16] Due to Abraham's stature within the

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[16]   Other critiques that render problematic a conception of faith as commitment can be found in e.g. the medieval collection of *midrashim*, *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer* 31, which presents the angels as interceding on behalf of Isaac. Rashi, the great medieval biblical commentator, proposes that God did not intend Abraham to sacrifice Isaac but merely to raise him up, dissociating the verb *ha'alehu* (literally, raise him up), from its object, *olah* (burnt offering).

tradition, the poet frames his critique of Abraham within words of praise, to soften his critique:

> Being blessed with a lad at old age
> He bound him on the woods of the altar
> Delayed [by God] for three days [to contemplate God's command]
> He turned his little chick into a burnt offering
> Its odor pleasing to God
> Spreading throughout the land.[17]

After describing Abraham's obedience and God's approval, the Torah turns to explain the fault she had found in Abraham, owing to which she had decided to wait for Moses:

> He had forgotten to act as a father who has compassion on his children,
> He should have pleaded to God in prayer

The Torah does not criticize Abraham for fulfilling the divine command but for suppressing his compassion for his son Isaac. He did not respond to him as a loving father is expected to respond; he did not feel for him love, pity or compassion then. Not feeling these emotions, he could not and did not act upon such emotions—he did not plead to God during the three-day journey to Mount Moriah or thereafter, begging Him to change His mind and override His command to sacrifice Isaac. From the Torah's point of view, one-sided commitment even to the holiest of holies, to the maker of the universe, to the exclusion of all other values is condemnable; it renders Abraham unworthy to receive the Torah. The *piyyut* nevertheless ends with words of praise to soften its critique:

> 'Now I Know' is voiced in praise
> By the maker of the earth in His power

Henceforth other poets too considered Abraham's acquiescence, his refraining from praying that the command be overridden, as a failure owing to which he was judged unworthy to receive the Torah. Rabbi Yochanan the Priest, a seventh-century poet, goes beyond Eleazar ben Kalir's critique; he explicitly accuses Abraham of cruelty:

> But toward his only one he showed no mercy,
> Sending forth his hand as a cruel one, to spill blood . . .

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[17] My translation; quoted in Shulamit Elizur, 'Did Abraham Sin when Binding Isaac?' *The Binding of Isaac for his Descendants: An Israeli Approach* (2012), p. 219. My exposition of the two *piyyutim* in this paper relies on Elizur's discussion.

Similarly to Rabbi Eleazar ben Kalir, he too, accuses Abraham of not pleading to God to override His command to sacrifice Isaac, insisting that Abraham should have begged for God's mercy on behalf of his son:

> He should have pleaded to You, he should have begged for mercy
> And spare his only one from fire ...

Rabbi Yochanan, similarly to Rabbi Eleazar ben Kalir, does not criticize Abraham for fulfilling the divine command; rather he criticizes him for his wholehearted commitment to obey, to the exclusion of all other values. Rabbi Yochanan emphasizes that had it not been for God's mercy, Abraham would have slaughtered his son; he thereby contrasts God's mercy with Abraham's cold-hearted cruel obedience:

> He did not spare [Isaac]—but you spared [him] merciful one
> He had no pity, had you have had no pity—merciful one.

An ethics of compassion emerges in these *piyyutim.* It seems that for these poets, *compassion* must be brought to bear on any and every commitment that one holds dear, toward everything and everyone. It is to inform one's commitment to God, and by extension, to any other ideal or person. Virtuous faith is not a matter of commitment or obedience; it is not determined by how far one is ready to go for one's commitments and ideals. The *quality* of one's commitments and one's ability to bring the fulness of one's humanity to bear upon them is emphasized.

These reservations, however, which render problematic a conception of faith as a commitment to an ideal, are compatible with much else in Kvanvig's functional account, which resists reductions, and which is appreciative of the diverse manners in which faith shows itself. I dare say that both Kvanvig and I tend to consider the elusive and perhaps mysterious nature of faith, which defies definitions, as a feature of its 'grammar'.

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5

Islamic Faith and Knowledge of God

Imran Aijaz

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I aim to offer a critical analysis of a particular view of faith (*iman*) in Islam that I will call the 'faith is knowledge' view.[1] According to this view, Islamic faith involves an appropriate response to *knowledge* of God (His existence, commandments, etc.); the absence of faith is also constituted by a response to this knowledge, albeit one that is inappropriate and blameworthy. The person who responds appropriately to knowledge of God is known as a *mu'min* (a person who has *iman*). In contrast, one who responds inappropriately—by refusing to acknowledge it—is known as a *kafir* (a rejector of *iman*, one who is guilty of *kufr*). In her explanation of these terms of Islamic theology, Samira Haj offers a summary account of the 'faith is knowledge' view that I will be examining in this chapter:

> [T]he Islamic notion of iman presupposes that knowledge—which is provided by God—is absolutely and invariably true. Therefore, the validity of this knowledge is never in doubt.... One can either accept this knowledge and become a mu'min or disacknowledge or 'conceal' it and turn into a *kafir*.... A mu'min is a Muslim, one who willingly accepts and submits to God... is never doubtful or skeptical (of this knowledge)..., and is cognizant of his or her obligation to God and his commands. Even with the concept of kufr, the counterpart of iman, knowledge is also presupposed. *Kufr* literally means 'veiling' or 'concealed in blackness'.... [A] kafir is one who not only disacknowledges God, but who also lacks the virtues that define a faithful Muslim. (Haj 2009, pp. 49–50)

In the following discussion, I will evaluate whether, from the perspective of the reflective Muslim, the 'faith is knowledge' view is rationally defensible. By a 'reflective Muslim', I mean an Islamic approximation of what Philip L. Quinn calls the 'intellectually sophisticated adult theist' (Quinn 1985, p. 470). The

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[1] Strictly speaking, on this view, faith *entails* knowledge but isn't the *same* as knowledge.

reflectiveness of such a theist, as Quinn explains, rests in part on awareness of significant challenges to the reasonableness and plausibility of theistic belief. As he writes,

> [A]n intellectually sophisticated adult in our culture would have to be epistemically negligent not to have very substantial reasons for thinking that [God does not exist]. After all, non-trivial atheological reasons, ranging from various problems of evil to naturalistic theories according to which theistic belief is illusory or merely projective, are a pervasive, if not obtrusive, component of the rational portion of our cultural heritage.   (Quinn 1985, p. 481)

To the profile of the reflective Muslim, I will add a few more details. The primary sort of reflective Muslim that I have in mind is someone who believes that God exists but has concerns about the epistemic propriety of this belief. Having the propositional attitude of belief is not, however, a necessary constituent of what I take a reflective Muslim to be. Some reflective Muslims struggle with religious doubt of the kind that is sufficient to cancel belief, which Daniel Howard-Snyder and Daniel J. McKaughan call 'belief-canceling doubt' (Howard Snyder and McKaughan 2021, pp. 71, 74).[2] Such reflective Muslims do not believe that God exists, but they do not *disbelieve* it either; they are not atheists. Reflective Muslims struggling with doubt may also reject the classification of their stance as 'agnostics' because the Islamic religion continues to present itself to them as a 'live hypothesis', to use William James' helpful language (James 1896). Despite lacking the belief that God exists, these reflective Muslims may nevertheless affirm Muslim identity because they continue to uphold practical religious commitment, e.g. by praying to God, reading the Qur'an, studying books on Islamic theology, trying to understand their religion better, etc. The reflective Muslim's cognitive element in faith, then, does not have to be doxastic.[3]

As I shall further understand him or her, the reflective Muslim is interested in questions about the reasonableness or plausibility of theistic belief from a 'second-order' perspective *on* Islam. A 'first-order' perspective *of* Islam *presupposes* that its core tenets (e.g. the existence of God, the Prophethood of Mohammed, etc.) are true. It is this first-order perspective that animates Islamic theology and 'scholastic theology' (*kalam*) in which theistic belief is seen as true and eminently reasonable.[4] By contrast, a second-order perspective on Islam does not rest on any

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[2] For an interesting survey of the causes of religious doubts among American Muslims in recent times, see Chouhoud 2016.

[3] I have argued for this point in my article 'The Sceptical Muslim' (2023).

[4] The Islamic tradition of *kalam* is fundamentally apologetic in nature, committed to defending the reasonableness of Islamic belief. As Ibn Khaldun explains in his *Muqaddamah* (Prolegomena), *kalam* is 'a science that involves arguing with logical proofs in defense of the articles of faith and refuting innovators who deviate in their dogmas from the early Muslims and Muslim orthodoxy' (Rosenthal 1958, p. 34).

such presuppositions, 'standing apart from its subject matter' (Hick 1990, p. 1).[5] From a second-order perspective on Islam, the reasonableness and plausibility of its core tenets are matters open to serious discussion and debate. As an intellectually sophisticated adult theist, the reflective Muslim is aware of this and is (at least somewhat) familiar with challenges to the rationality of theistic belief, such as the various problems of evil that Quinn mentions.

To say that we all have knowledge of God, as the 'faith is knowledge' view maintains, is regarded by many in our modern secular climate as a bold claim. A reflective Muslim's reflections on theistic belief may be prompted, and perhaps even exacerbated, by this fact, especially if he or she is urged to adopt faith understood as a response to religious knowledge. Other views of faith that do not make such a claim may seem less puzzling. For instance, in his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Soren Kierkegaard offers this definition of faith:

> Without risk there is no faith. Faith is precisely the contradiction between the infinite passion of the individual's inwardness and the objective uncertainty. If I am capable of grasping God objectively, I do not believe, but precisely because I cannot do this I must believe. If I wish to preserve myself in faith I must constantly be intent upon holding fast the objective uncertainty, so as to remain out upon the deep, over seventy thousand fathoms of water, still preserving my faith.   (Stewart 2017, p. 259)

If Islamic faith is understood in this Kierkegaardian manner, then the fact (if it is granted to be so) that the core tenets of Islam may be reasonably doubted or even rejected would not appear especially puzzling.[6] Yet these alternative ways of looking at faith are rejected by Muslims who subscribe to the 'faith is knowledge' view, such as, for instance, Encik Ahmad:

> When we Muslims talk about faith or belief, we mean that which is reflected by the term iman, namely 'true belief', belief which is sanctioned by knowledge and certainty. Islam is a conscious and willing submission, [*sic*] therefore, it can not [*sic*] be founded upon doubt, since doubt is antithetical to knowledge.
>
> (Ahmad 2006)

How can such claims of religious knowledge be rationally defended, the reflective Muslim may wonder, given that they are about matters that seem less than

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[5] This is how Hick describes the Philosophy of Religion, which he distinguishes from both theology and apologetics. The reflective Muslim's second-order perspective on Islam will be shared by the philosopher of religion interested in philosophical thinking about Islamic belief.

[6] Other puzzles may arise, of course. If Islamic faith requires one to accept matters that are unknown and uncertain, one might ask whether one can or should adopt it.

certain? In the next section, I will look at a recent attempt to answer this question in the affirmative.

5.2 Examining an Islamic Case for Knowledge of God

In his article 'The Case for Allah's Existence in the Quran and Sunnah', Justin Parrott, a Fellow of the Yaqeen (Certainty) Institute, presents a summary Islamic case for the view that we have knowledge of God's existence (Parrott 2017).[7] Parrott's case exemplifies apologetic efforts that most reflective Muslims will be familiar with. For this reason, it provides a useful reference for thinking about how attempts may be made to defend claims about knowledge of God in an Islamic context. In this section, I will examine Parrott's case and argue that, for a reflective Muslim, it fails as a rational defence of the claim that we have knowledge of God's existence.

Parrott divides his case into two branches, utilizing Justin Barrett's distinction between non-reflective and reflective belief formation. Non-reflective belief formation involves 'intuitive beliefs that result from experience', whereas belief formation of the reflective kind consists of 'conscious beliefs that result from thought' (Parrott 2017, p. 3). Applying this distinction more specifically to belief in God, Parrott maintains that 'the case for God's existence in the Quran and Sunnah [traditions and practices attributed to the Prophet Mohammed] involves both sources of beliefs, heart-based appeals based on intuition and mind-based appeals based on rational reflection' (Parrott 2017, p. 3).

5.2.1 The Fitrat Allah (Natural Disposition towards God)

The first branch of Parrott's case for the claim that we have knowledge of God's existence rests on the Islamic idea of *Fitrat Allah* or 'the instinct and inherent disposition with which God created people' (Parrott 2017, p. 4). According to this Islamic view, at least the way that Parrott interprets it, we sense God's existence (or at least some 'higher power') instinctually and without recourse to prophetic revelation (Parrott 2017, p. 3). Parrott states that expressions of the *Fitrat Allah* have appeared in cultures and religions worldwide (Parrott 2017, pp. 3–4). The Islamic explanation for this is that people are acting on their God-given impulse to seek God (Parrott 2017, p. 4). Since all people are born believing in God, true revealed religion serves simply to awaken and reinforce the *Fitrat Allah* (Parrott 2017, p. 5). In practical terms, the *Fitrat Allah* is made especially manifest during

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[7] Subsequent references to this article will be to the PDF version which contains page numbers.

perilous moments: 'Since all humans can sense the higher power, they will instinctively turn to God in times of danger' (Parrott 2017, p. 5). There are, then, no atheists in foxholes: 'Every person, at some point in his or her life, will have an intense experience that causes a natural reaction to turn to prayer' (Parrott 2017, p. 5). The *Fitrat Allah* also manifests itself more generally in a person's spiritual longing to discover meaning and purpose in life (Parrott 2017, pp. 6–7). Parrott connects these manifestations of the *Fitrat Allah* to knowledge of God:

> Knowledge of God resides primarily in the heart. . . . The greatest proof for the existence and Lordship of Allah, then, is discovered in the visceral experiences of the heart through which the believers find comfort, inner-peace, moral education, and meaning in life – the spiritual fruits of true religion.
>
> (Parrott 2017, p. 7)

Knowledge of God is consolidated through these experiences and is done so more effectively than logical or philosophical argumentation (Parrott 2017, p. 12). The instinctual knowledge of God can, however, become suppressed in a person because of negative experiences or influences, and require argumentation to materialize (Parrott 2017, p. 13).

This, in brief, is Parrott's account and defence of the view that we have non-reflective knowledge of God. I will here confine my criticisms to two basic points, keeping the perspective of the reflective Muslim in mind.[8]

I will begin with what seems to be the key failing, and clearly so, in Parrott's case, if it is not intended, as it doesn't seem to be, merely as preaching to the choir. It reads as a *first-order* exercise that *presupposes* the core tenets of Islam, such as God's existence. As an effort in Islamic theology or *kalam*, Parrott's account of non-reflective knowledge of God is acceptable. He cites the relevant and appropriate Qur'anic verses, *hadith* references, and Islamic thinkers in detailing his case. These religious references help to construct an Islamic account of convictions about God. Within the Islamic *Weltanschauung*, these convictions can be interpreted as arising from the work of God Himself; God has created us all in a way where, through the *Fitrat Allah*, we can come to know about Him. From a *second-order* perspective, however, Parrott's case is obviously question-begging, since it presupposes the very thing that is in question for the reflective Muslim. Religious experiences that are taken to be the result of Divine activity (e.g. through the *Fitrat Allah*) are *correctly* interpreted only if there is a God. But it is precisely this assumption that is in question for the reflective Muslim. How does he or she

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[8] See Aijaz 2014, pp. 196–200 for further critical analysis of appeals to the *Fitrat Allah* in attempts to justify claims regarding religious knowledge.

know that this assumption is true? In his discussion, Parrott is aware that there are other explanations for the etiology of theistic belief:

> [B]elief in God and the quest for existential truth is not an easy prospect for many people, especially in a social environment in which faith is derided as superstition, wishful thinking, or even as a dangerous fantasy.   (Parrott 2017, p. 3)

I take it that reflective Muslims are also aware of this fly in the ointment and want to know why they should accept Parrott's theistic etiological account over some of the non-theistic alternatives he lists.

A helpful illustration of the obstacle facing Parrott's case for thinking that we do, in fact, have non-reflective knowledge of God can be found in a comparable problem with Alvin Plantinga's 'Reformed Epistemology' (RE). In his acceptance speech for receiving the Templeton Prize in 2017, Plantinga explains the gist of his RE as follows:

> My argument, very simply, is that if theism is true—if there really is such a person as God, then in all likelihood God would make his presence known to us human beings. If theism is true, God is a God of love and concern: in fact his most essential property is that of loving. But the most important thing for us human beings to know is that there is indeed such a person as God; hence in all likelihood God would make his presence known to human beings. And if this is so, then it would make sense to think of God as creating us in such a way that there is an innate tendency to believe in Him, or at least to have some sort of inkling of his existence. This would have to be something that doesn't depend on arguments. After all most of the people in the world, for one reason or another, don't pay much attention to philosophers or philosophical arguments.
>
> (Plantinga 2017)

Notice the critical conditional in Plantinga's thinking: *If* theism is true, *then* we know God exists. If the antecedent of this conditional is true, then one would have some basis for thinking that theistic belief is the result of a God-given innate tendency. But what if the antecedent of this conditional is *false*? Well, in that case, God does not exist, nor is there any God-given innate tendency to believe in Him. The consequent of Plantinga's critical conditional would thus be false. How then would one explain the existence of theistic belief? If theism is false, then explanations proffered by thinkers like Freud and Marx are probably correct, concedes Plantinga; that is, theistic belief is the result of wish fulfilment or cognitive dysfunction (Plantinga 2000, pp. 186–188). In Plantinga's RE, the issue of whether we have knowledge of God (an *epistemic* concern) cannot legitimately be separated from whether God exists (an *ontological* or *metaphysical* concern), a point that he makes clear (Plantinga 2000, pp. 190–191). A reflective theist who is

concerned about whether theistic belief constitutes knowledge and who is presented with Plantinga's RE as a response to this concern is brought back, in a circular fashion, to the initial motivating concern. As Anthony Kenny explains,

> [T]he question whether basic (i.e., non-inferential or non-reflective) belief in God has warrant (i.e., is knowledge) cannot be settled independently of the question whether there is a God or not. Someone who wishes to convince another to believe in God cannot produce this conviction by showing that such a belief would be warranted; for the belief is only warranted if the mind is working properly, and she does not know what it is for the mind to work properly unless she knows whether there is a God or not. The doubting believer in God cannot reassure himself that his belief is warranted; for only if there is a God is his belief warranted, and that is what he was beginning to doubt.   (Kenny 1992, p. 71)

In his discussion of the *Fitrat Allah*, Parrott says nothing to address this sort of worry that a reflective Muslim should be aware of. At best, then, his case can be seen as a defence of a conditional claim: *If God exists, then we have knowledge of God (through the Fitrat Allah).*

I turn now to a second problem affecting Parrott's case for thinking that we have non-reflective knowledge of God. From a reflective Muslim's second-order perspective on the Islamic religion, one open to a broader evidential domain than what is confined to the parameters of Islamic doctrine, there is counterevidence against Parrott's position. The claim that we all have an instinctual knowledge of God seems obviously incompatible with various facts about the religious diversity of the world, in particular, the fact that there are plenty of people who do not hold theistic belief. Consider, for instance, the adherents of Buddhism, a non-theistic religion, who numbered approximately 500 million in 2010 (Pew Research Center 2012). Buddhists do not believe in anything like the theistic God of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. One might object here and say that this fact doesn't present a real threat to the view that Islam is the primordial religion of humanity from which, throughout history, various deviations of different degrees have taken place. The trouble with this reply is that our current anthropological evidence does not lend itself in support of this rejoinder. According to the hypothesis of 'primitive monotheism' (*Urmonotheismus*), suggested by thinkers like Andrew Lang and Wilhelm Schmidt, non-monotheistic world religions and belief systems are degraded remnants of a monotheistic *Urreligion*; this *Urreligion* consists of belief in an eternal, creator, omniscient, and beneficent God (Eliade 1984, p. 24). One problem with evaluating this hypothesis is that we do not have the means to fully assess its historical credibility, being limited, for instance, by documentation that does not extend beyond the Palaeolithic age (Eliade 1984, p. 25). Another difficulty with the hypothesis of primitive monotheism is that other competing hypotheses are available to account for the origin and development of religion,

such as those that take an evolutionary approach to religious history. In these theories, monotheism emerges at the *end* of a long line of religious evolution, preceded by, for example, belief in animism and polytheism (Boraks 1988, p. 9).

The believing Muslim can, of course, explain away such counterevidence by way of a first-order hermeneutical exercise that absorbs it into an Islamic framework. He or she may argue that Buddhists, despite claiming not to believe in God, know in their 'heart of hearts' that God exists. Or perhaps Buddhists and other non-theists have their knowledge of God suppressed because of sinful influences. Moreover, ancient animists and polytheists were perversely associating others with the worship of the one true God, despite knowing full well that God alone should be worshipped. And so on. For a reflective Muslim looking at Islam from a second-order perspective, however, such explanations, apart from begging the question, would seem implausible or, at the very least, in need of significant evidence from methods of inquiry that operate independently of theological assumptions embedded in the Islamic religion. Such a Muslim would most likely concur with Terence Penelhum's remarks about the inadequacy of first-order theological explanations to allay second-order concerns regarding the hypothesis of primitive monotheism:

> To show that belief in God is a universal endowment and its apparent absence is the result of its sinful suppression, it is necessary to show both that the welter of polytheistic religious beliefs and practices in the world are in fact perversions of a prior awareness of one God and that the developments that have made so many people disinclined to believe in God today are the result of sin or unwillingness to admit one's faults and not merely the result of rational inclination to rest content with scientific explanations. Although there are theological reasons to interpret the phenomena in this way, the evidence is clearly not in favour of this interpretation in the majority of cases. Certainly the onus of proof for such an uncharitable and counterintuitive judgment lies squarely with those who make it.
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> (Penelhum 1995, p. 105)

For the reflective Muslim, then, the fundamental problem with Parrott's case for thinking that we have non-reflective knowledge of God is that it lacks *independent* supporting evidence.

5.2.2 Cosmological and Teleological Considerations

The second branch of Parrot's case for the claim that we have knowledge of God's existence highlights a reflective route available through cosmological and teleological considerations. The cosmological considerations are presented through an endorsement of the Kalam Cosmological Argument (KCA) that has been

vigorously defended in recent times by William Lane Craig (e.g. Craig 2002). Here is the articulation of this argument that Parrott discusses:

1. Everything in the universe that has a beginning must have a cause.
2. The universe began to exist.
3. Therefore the beginning of the existence of the universe must have been caused by something.
4. The only such cause must be an uncaused cause, or God (Parrott 2017, p. 16).

'This line of thinking', says Parrott, 'is acceptable to the mind and it finds validation in human intuition and experience. It sufficiently answers the question of why anything exists in the first place' (Parrott 2017, p. 16). Nevertheless, he notes that criticisms of this argument exist. One criticism is that premise (2) in the KCA is questionable; perhaps the regress of causes in the universe is endless. In response, Parrott argues that negating premise (2) is counter-intuitive and contrary to scientific evidence offered by the Big Bang theory (Parrott 2017, p. 18). But, he says, even if we grant that the regress of causes in the universe is endless, this does not obviate the need for a cause beyond space and time to produce and sustain the universe (Parrott 2017, p. 18). In support of this point, Parrott refers to the Leibnizian version of the Cosmological Argument. Specifically, he notes a key point in Leibniz' defence of it, viz., that an explanation of every given state of the world by a preceding state would not offer a satisfactory explanation of the world as a whole (Parrott 2017, pp. 18–19). Given this, Parrott concludes: 'The existence of the universe itself, regardless of its finite or infinite nature, must have had a Creator to set the chain of causes in motion' (Parrott 2017, p. 19).

Parrott's presentation of teleological considerations hinges on the claim that we can clearly see teleology in several parts of the universe from which it is only logical to conclude that the universe itself exists for a purpose (Parrott 2017, p. 19). Connecting this recognition of teleology to what the Qur'an states, Parrott writes that the Islamic Scripture 'persistently draws attention to signs (āyāt) in nature that demonstrate the grand design and power of the Creator' (Parrott 2017, p. 20). These signs of God can be seen in everything and at every level. They include celestial bodies, nature, various aspects of human experience, etc. (Parrott 2017, p. 22). Careful consideration of the signs of God will make it clear that they constitute strong evidence of His existence: 'Highlighting the signs of God's work in nature is the primary and most powerful rational method of confirming the existence of the Creator' (Parrott 2017, p. 22). As further supporting evidence of teleology, Parrott refers to modern scientific discoveries pertaining to the 'fine-tuning' of the universe. That is, the laws of nature are configured with astonishing precision of the kind required for life to exist (Parrott 2017, p. 26). Such fine-tuning provides a basis for the so-called Fine-Tuning Argument (FTA), which basically claims that, given the evidence of fine-tuning, '[the existence of a

life-permitting universe] strongly supports [the theistic hypothesis] over [the naturalistic single-universe hypothesis]' (Collins 2009, p. 205). Indeed, for Parrott, the FTA is so compelling that it cannot be reasonably rejected: '[T]he abundant evidence in nature [of fine-tuning] and the plausible, rational argument for theism it produces cannot honestly be denied' (Parrott 2017, p. 23).

From the perspective of the reflective Muslim, Parrott's case for thinking that we have reflective knowledge of God also fails. In objecting to his case, I will limit my criticism to one basic problem centred on the project of natural theology. 'Natural theology', as Scott MacDonald explains,

> aims at establishing truths or acquiring knowledge about God (or divine matters generally) using only our natural cognitive resources. The phrase 'our natural cognitive resources' identifies both the methods and data for natural theology: it relies on standard techniques of reasoning and facts or truths in principle available to all human beings just in virtue of their possessing reason and sense perception.   (MacDonald 1998)

Parrott's cosmological and teleological considerations are mainly expressed with reference to the KCA and FTA, both of which regularly feature in contemporary discussions of natural theology in the Philosophy of Religion (e.g. Peterson et Al. 2013, pp. 86–89, 94–97). I will now argue that a reflective Muslim can reasonably reject these natural theological arguments on the grounds that the data they are based on are insufficient to establish that we have *knowledge* of *God's* existence.[9] Suppose that the reflective Muslim accepts the KCA and FTA as good arguments. This would be insufficient to show him or her that we have knowledge of God. Typically, Cosmological and Teleological Arguments do not aim to establish anything further than the existence of some 'first cause' or 'intelligent designer'. One must leap over quite a substantial logical gap to infer, from the existence of a 'first cause' or 'intelligent designer', the existence of God as understood in Islam. Consider two of the most important identifying attributes or names of God in the Islamic tradition: *Ar-Rahman* (The Most Beneficent) and *Ar-Raheem* (The Most Merciful). Nothing about the existence of a first cause or intelligent designer implies that it has these attributes. Despite defending the KCA as a good argument, William Lane Craig acknowledges the limited nature of its conclusion:

> The kalām cosmological argument leads us to a personal Creator of the universe, but as to whether this Creator is omniscient, good, perfect, and so forth, we shall not inquire. These questions are logically posterior to the question of His existence.   (Craig 1979, pp. 152–153)

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[9] See Aijaz 2014, pp. 201–204 for additional critical considerations regarding these arguments.

A similar limitation affects Collins' FTA. The core of his argument is just that the existence of a life-permitting universe due to its fine-tuning *strongly supports* theism over the naturalistic single-universe hypothesis; it is not a deductive argument aimed at establishing that the evidence of fine-tuning *entails* theism. Collins acknowledges this limitation in his argument, noting, for example, that the fine-tuning of the universe can be explained by the rival non-theistic hypothesis of 'axiarchism', according to which goodness or ethical 'requiredness' has a direct power to bring about concrete reality (Collins 2009, p. 278).[10]

The data provided by cosmological and teleological considerations in Parrott's case are insufficient, then, for thinking that we have knowledge of God. This problem of insufficiency is amplified by the fact that Parrott does not discuss other sorts of data relevant to a consideration of God's existence from the standpoint of our natural cognitive resources, in particular, data that seem to go *against* the existence of God. The fact that anything at all exists and that our world appears to exhibit teleology in some respects is certainly data that can prompt a reflective Muslim to take the idea of God's existence seriously. But he or she may be troubled by other data that raise real questions about whether God exists, most obviously facts about the existence, magnitude, and distribution of pain and suffering in the world. From within the perspective of Islamic theism, of course, facts about pain and suffering may be accommodated into its theological land-scape without too much trouble. It may be said that God is testing us, punishing sinners, etc. But this move is irrelevant to the second-order dialectical context in which the reflective Muslim finds himself or herself. In this context, the question that the reflective Muslim is interested in is whether, using our natural cognitive resources (which include facts about pain and suffering), we can, with rational confidence, infer the existence of God.[11] For the reflective Muslim, a more expanded appraisal of data relevant to considering God's existence may sustain or even increase doubts about claims regarding knowledge of God. As Kierkegaard

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[10] There are other arguments in the Islamic tradition for God's existence that appear to me to fare better in dealing with this particular problem (i.e. the problem of establishing the existence of *God*, as opposed to a mere first cause or intelligent designer of the universe). Avicenna's famous argument from contingency, the 'Proof of the Sincere' (Ar. *burhān al-ṣiddīqīn*), is one such argument. In it, Avicenna seeks to establish the reality of a 'Necessarily Existent' (Ar. *wājib al-wujūd*). From this conclusion, he subsequently attempts to extract many of the important attributes of God as understood in Islam. For further discussion of Avicenna's argument, including this important aspect of it, see Zarepour 2022. For criticisms of the argument, particularly of the sort I've provided of the KCA and FTA and their limited conclusions, see Adamson 2016, esp. pp. 128–132. Further consideration of this issue is beyond the scope of this chapter.

[11] The importance of this dialectical point, particularly when dealing with data pertaining to evil, is well made by Hume in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. If one was *antecedently* convinced of the existence of a very good, powerful, and wise being, *then* one may reasonably interpret evil within the framework of Divine Providence. If, however, one is 'not antecedently convinced of a supreme intelligence, benevolent, and powerful, *but is left to gather such a belief from the appearances of things; this entirely alters the case, nor will he ever find any reason for such a conclusion*' (Coleman 2007, p. 79; emphasis mine).

says, one may 'contemplate the order of nature in the hope of finding God, and . . . see omnipotence and wisdom' but 'also see much else that disturbs [one's] mind and excites anxiety' (Stewart 2017 p. 259). In thinking about various arguments of natural theology *and* 'natural atheology'—the enterprise of showing that 'belief in God is demonstrably irrational or unreasonable' (Plantinga 1978, pp. 2–3)—the reflective Muslim may find himself or herself agreeing with Kierkegaard's conclusion after contemplating nature: 'The sum of all this is an objective uncertainty' (Stewart 2017, p. 259).

It remains open to Parrott, or a defender of his position, to argue that claims about knowledge of God are justified from a second-order perspective *even after expanding the scope of the relevant data to include potential counterevidence, such as facts about pain and suffering.* This is a very bold claim that requires further explanation and argumentation. Since Parrott doesn't take up any serious discussion or defence of it in his article, I will not embark on an assessment of it here. I will note, however, that even Richard Swinburne, perhaps the foremost proponent of natural theology in our times, does not attempt to defend such a bold claim. In his classic work *The Existence of God*, Swinburne argues that, putting aside the evidence of religious experience, various pieces of evidence relevant to assessing the probability of theism (including cosmological and teleological considerations, as well as considerations regarding evil) show that 'it is something like as probable as not that theism is true' (Swinburne 2004, p. 341). Once we add the evidence of religious experience to the data, he says, the scales are tipped in favour of theism to make it more probable than not (Swinburne 2004, pp. 341–342). But this is not to say that we have certain knowledge regarding God's existence, as Swinburne himself makes clear in the introduction to his book:

> I shall . . . argue that, although reason can reach a fairly well-justified conclusion about the existence of God, it can reach only a probable conclusion, not an indubitable one. For this reason, there is abundant room for faith in the practice of religion. . . .   (Swinburne 2004, p. 2)

As it stands, then, Parrott's appeal to cosmological and teleological considerations, and in particular his use of the KCA and FTA, does not suffice to show the reflective Muslim that we have knowledge of God.

5.3 Concluding Remarks

Parrott's case for thinking that we have knowledge of God's existence is exemplary of many attempts in Islamic apologetics to defend epistemic certainty about religious matters. It is, however, a case that can be reasonably rejected by a reflective Muslim, as I have argued. The failure of Parrott's case offers some

basis for thinking that claims about knowledge of God are, for a reflective Muslim, open to reasonable doubt. If this is correct, then, by implication, the 'faith is knowledge' view is rationally indefensible for such a Muslim *in the dialectical (second-order) context of inquiry in which he or she reflects on whether we have knowledge of God*. A reflective Muslim's rejection of the 'faith as knowledge' view need not be taken as a rejection of faith itself but only one *interpretation* of it, provided there are other ways of understanding faith in Islam that do not require it to be anchored in religious knowledge. I think there are (see, for example, Aijaz 2023). What these other interpretations of Islamic faith are and whether they can be shown to be rationally defensible from the perspective of the reflective Muslim are important issues but investigating them is beyond the scope of the present chapter.[12]

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A5.1 Reply to Imran Aijaz

Jonathan L. Kvanvig

Aijaz resists the idea that faith is knowledge, especially the idea that faith is incompatible with doubt, in contrast with the common Islamic view that faith is a kind of knowledge involving certainty. The view is thus a mixture of doctrinal, epistemological, and psychological elements. On this view, faith has as its object the central theological claims of a given religion—the doctrinal element. The epistemological element, of course, is knowledge, and the psychological element is the kind of certainty incompatible with any hint of doubt.

Aijaz's rejection of this view focuses on the psychological and epistemological aspects of it, leaving aside the doctrinal element. Regarding the epistemological and psychological aspects of the common view, two aspects stand out. First is the view itself, and second is a stance that treats these features as an essential, core aspect of the religious outlook in question. As I see it, it is the second issue that is the crucial one, for scepticism about natural theology and other attempts to defend the idea of religious certainties has been centuries in the making, even among those with identifiable religious commitments.

I note that Aijaz devotes critical attention to the view itself, concluding that it is unsustainable, but doesn't address the latter issue directly. We get indirect information about it from the characterization of a reflective Muslim, describable in terms of a practising Muslim taking second-order attitudes towards the view in question.

First, though, is the critical discussion of the natural theology being used in support of the common view. Here I note a focus on the notion of entailment in rejecting the natural theology in question. As one example, Aijaz rejects the argument from fine-tuning considerations, noting that these grounds don't entail the conclusion drawn from them. Then an epistemological conclusion is drawn from this fact: 'The data provided by . . . teleological considerations . . . are insufficient, then, for thinking that we have knowledge of God'.

This conclusion is unwarranted by the lack of entailment. As Bill Alston used to say, failure to notice that nearly all of our knowledge is grounded in nonentailing information is failing to 'truck in reality'. Beliefs arising from our senses aren't guaranteed to be true, and expanding our store of beliefs by deduction doesn't guarantee anything either, unless we have guarantees of truth for the premises. The history of epistemology over the past couple centuries involves a drift away

from the infallibilist ideas that look for such guarantees. Fallibilists about knowledge are included in this drift, and from this perspective, our knowledge can be extensive even if lacking guarantees of truth.

I doubt any of this is news to Aijaz, but the issue deserves careful treatment in order to give the common view the fairest hearing we can and to find a proper epistemic grounding for the second-order stance under discussion. On the latter point, I note that the reflective Muslim discussed by Aijaz is committed to denying both an infallibilist version of the common view as well as any replacement fallibist version of it. Aijaz thinks of this reflective Muslim as sceptical, neither being certain nor thinking of oneself as having the knowledge described. Such a sceptical point of view might arise in the way any ordinary scepticism does, by insisting on guarantees of truth and noting their absence. But Aijaz also characterizes the reflection Muslim as lacking belief and instead engaging in the religious practices and community on the basis of non-doxastic attitudes and commitments.

There are many stops that could be made in moving away from the common view before getting to this position, and one might wonder whether less radical rejections of the common view might be justified. For example, many hold that knowledge doesn't requires psychological certainty, and others hold that religion is one arena where knowledge can't be found but full belief can be both present and warranted. Still others hold that full belief might lack epistemic credentials but retains positive normative status of some other sort. The sceptical Muslim characterized by Aijaz is a more radical rejection of the common view than any of these, and even if we'd like more information about why such a radical stance is being adopted, the position provides a good test case regarding rejections of the common view, for if it is a defensible alternative to the common view, that result would provide an extremely strong basis for resistance of that view.

In addition to the negative features noted about knowledge, certainty, and belief, Aijaz's sceptical Muslim insists on being neither an atheist nor an agnostic. A standard way of thinking about these positions treats the categories of theism, atheism, and agnosticism as exhaustive of logical space, and if this position is correct, the attitude of the sceptical Muslim will be incoherent. But perhaps the category scheme just noted is better rejected. Perhaps agnosticism is the view that one neither believes nor disbelieves, and takes *only* or *at most* the cognitive attitude of withholding. Viewed in this way, we can see in Aijaz's characterization of the reflective Muslim a way to avoid being an agnostic, for lacking the cognitive attitude of belief doesn't imply that one takes no cognitive attitude at all other than withholding. I'm not sure what cognitive attitude or attitudes Aijaz's wishes to attribute to a reflective Muslim, though he does mention the notion of a live option from William James, and others have claimed that a person might accept a claim without believing it.

The latter option, of relying on a cognitive attitude other than belief, gets complicated once one tries to say what this attitude is. For example, the idea of

replacing belief with acceptance is fraught with pitfalls. Some identify acceptance in dispositional terms, as an inclination to act as if a given claim is true. If so, however, acceptance need not be a mental state at all, since dispositions to act don't always involve mentation. Moreover, the variety of other accounts that imply that it is a mental state might lead one to question whether there is a mental state that all are aiming to characterize.

An alternative is suggested by the appeal to the idea of a live option. Instead of believing the doctrinal elements in question, perhaps the sceptical Muslim merely believes that the claims have features that make them live options: perhaps being relevant to how one lives and behaves, perhaps having some probability of being true, etc.

A further possibility substitutes affective states such as hope for the doxastic state of belief, holding that even though some degree of belief might be needed, full belief isn't, at least when a strong hope can be found.

Based on what I know of other discussions by Aijaz, I suspect that the sceptical Muslim envisioned is something in the territory of this third option. On it, belief isn't part of the picture, though the affective elements that are present join forces with some cognitive attitude or other to make the religious outlook a live option, as well as explaining how and why engaging in the religious life of the community something that makes sense.

In any case, I'd like to hear more about the specifics of being a sceptical Muslim, since the characterizations that are present don't by themselves rule out what would be called in Christian circles 'just going through the motions'. We know that the faith of the reflective Muslim isn't the common view involving certain knowledge and isn't doxastic either. That leaves open a variety of options in terms of other cognitive states as well as non-cognitive states and attitudes compatible with treating the truth of a religion as a live option. I look forward to learning more about what is involved in the sceptical stance of a reflective Muslim that resists what I think of as overwrought apologetic stances on faith.

A5.2 Reply to Imran Aijaz

Nehama Verbin

In his 'Islamic Faith and Knowledge of God', Aijaz provides a strong argument against the 'faith is knowledge' view of faith, in Islam. Employing the second order perspective of the reflective Muslim, his argument consists of two components: the first argues against the supposition that we have non-reflective knowledge of God, a God-given impulse to seek Him or a 'heart based' intuition of His existence; the second argues against natural theology's ability to provide certain knowledge that the theistic God exists.

I am highly sympathetic to Aijaz's argument, both to his rejection of the 'faith is knowledge' account in general, as well as to the specific features of his critique. Agreeing whole-heartedly with the various components of his critique, I would like to join forces with him by reflecting on two non-Muslim thinkers, whose reservations, despite their non-Muslim outlook, may be relevant to his discussion: Kierkegaard, whom Aijaz approvingly mentions in his paper, and Simone Weil.

For both Kierkegaard and Weil, there is a great gap between our natural openness towards something whose significance goes beyond our final earthly limited lives, even when we immediately experience its presence, and name it 'God', and 'faith'. For each of them, although in different ways, 'faith' goes beyond the immediate; it goes beyond what is natural, and beyond what the world acknowledges as transcendent; moreover, in various ways, it goes against it. Kierkegaard's and Weil's emphases on divine hiddenness and inwardness, Kierkegaard's use of the notions of 'paradox', 'absurd', and 'offence', and Weil's emphasis of the diametrical difference between 'gravity' and 'grace', her conception of 'afflictions', and the significance of the 'void' emphasize that. Owing to that, for both Kierkegaard and Weil there may be more truth in paganism or in atheism than in some forms of so-called 'faith'.

In both the pseudonymous and the non-pseudonymous works, Kierkegaard insists that God is never *directly* present to us; as Aijaz points out, Kierkegaard emphasizes the ambiguity of our experience and the difficulty to ground faith on its basis:

> The works from which I want to demonstrate his [God's] existence do not immediately and directly exist, not at all. Or are the wisdom in nature and the goodness or wisdom in Governance right in front of our noses? Do we not

encounter the most terrible spiritual trials here, and is it ever possible to be finished with all these trials?...I still do not demonstrate God's existence from such an order of things...   (PF, p. 42)[13]

Kierkegaard emphasizes that there is no *direct* transition into faith from any observable objective fact or thesis; seeing God, believing, always involves a *subjective leap*, an *inward* act of will:

Nature is certainly the work of God, but only the work is *directly* present, not God. With regard to the individual human being, is this not acting like an illusive author, who nowhere sets forth his result in block letters or provides it beforehand in a preface? And why is God illusive? Precisely because he is truth and in being illusive seeks to keep a person from untruth. The observer does not glide *directly* to the result but on his own must concern himself with finding it and thereby break the *direct* relation. But this break is the actual breakthrough of inwardness, an act of self-activity, the first designation of truth as inwardness.

(CUP, pp. 243–244; my italics)

God is never present to us as a public observable medium-sized object, available for all to see. For Kierkegaard, 'direct recognizability is specifically characteristic of the idol' (PC, p. 136).

Weil goes further than Kierkegaard's Climacus in emphasizing that God is not directly present to us. For Weil, inwardness does not suffice; our inwardness, our subjectivity too is susceptible to produce idols; it does so by means of the imagination. Thus, for Weil, God is hidden both in the universe and in the soul:

God and the supernatural are hidden and formless in the universe. It is well that they should be hidden and nameless in the soul. Otherwise there would be a risk of having something imaginary under the name of God...

(Weil 1999, p. 56).

We have no natural openness to the transcendent, no *direct* experience of God, no *immediate* knowledge of Him. Faith is going beyond what is natural. As Weil puts it: 'We have to believe in a God who is like the true God in everything, except that

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[13] The following abbreviations of Kierkegaard's works are used within the text:

PF: S. Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*. Eds. and trans. H. V. Hong and E. H. Hong. Princeton University Press, 1985.

PC: S. Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*. Eds. and trans. H. V. Hong and E. H. Hong. Princeton University Press, 1991.

CUP: S. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Eds. and trans. H. V. Hong and E. H. Hong. Princeton University Press, 1992.

he does not exist, since we have not reached the point where God exists' (Weil 1999, p. 115).

God does not appear to us immediately and directly in His revelation too. God's revelation is ambiguous. There is nothing self-evident about it. Kierkegaard emphasizes that Christ walks incognito on earth (PC, pp. 127–133). His divinity is hidden in his humanity. It is not an objective given, like the color of his hair, his weight or height. One cannot perceive it simply by looking.[14]

Moreover, referring to Jesus, Kierkegaard emphasizes and re-emphasizes that 'he is and wants to be the sign of offense and the object of faith' (PC, p. 23). Commenting on the meaning of 'offense' in Kierkegaard, Turchin states: 'The category of offense denotes a reaction of disgust or a feeling of insult in the one who is offended. Its use throughout Kierkegaard's corpus relates to Christ and Christianity as causes of offense' (Turchin 2016, p. 7). Indeed, faith, for Kierkegaard, involves going through 'offence', or as Kierkegaard puts it, particularly in his pseudonymous works, it involves a paradox, an absurdity.[15] Faith involves acting unwisely, going against prudence. Kierkegaard states: 'The possibility of offense lies in the contradiction that the remedy seems infinitely worse than the sickness' (PC, p. 110). He emphasizes that what Jesus offers is wholly alien to what the world values, to what we naturally desire and hope for:

> But the inviter was indeed this divine compassion—and therefore he was sacrificed, and therefore even those who suffered fled from him; they understood (and humanly speaking, very correctly) that when it comes to most human misery one is better helped by remaining what one is then by being helped by him.
>
> (PC, p. 60)

The provocation inherent in being a Christian: conceptual, ethical and existential, is a radical one. It lies at the heart of what it is to be a Christian, for Kierkegaard. There is nothing direct, immediate or natural about it nor does it rest on an immediate, natural or direct recognition or perception of God or some abstract transcendent being. It is a 'martyrdom of the understanding' (CUP, p. 234), which disrupts our lives, promising us suffering and sorrow, providing no consolations.

Weil too warns us against a religiosity that places us comfortably in the world; she warns us against our egos' tendency to invent idols that provide us with false consolations, to fill in the void, which we find hard to bear:

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[14] Kierkegaard construes the transition into discipleship in terms of *contemporaneity* with Christ, emphasizing that contemporaneity is not to be understood historically. Contemporaneity with Christ involves seeing-in or through the ambiguity, through his humanity, through his suffering and lowliness. Seeing through the ambiguity is relating subjectively—not objectively to Christ.

[15] 'Paradox' and 'absurd' have received a great deal of attention in the secondary literature on Kierkegaard, mostly with regard to epistemological questions concerning the relation between faith and reason.

We must leave on one side the beliefs which fill up voids and sweeten what is bitter. The belief in immortality. The belief in the utility of sin: *etiam peccata*. The belief in the providential ordering of events—in short the 'consolations' which are ordinarily sought in religion.   (Weil 1999, p. 13)

We must beware of those false consolations, or idols that fill in the void; the void is necessary for God to enter, according to Weil. It is owing to the risk of escaping the void that Weil sees some forms of atheism as preferable to some forms of religiosity:

Religion in so far as it is a source of consolation is a hindrance to true faith: in this sense atheism is a purification. I have to be atheistic with the part of myself which is not made for God. Among those men in whom the supernatural part has not been awakened, the atheists are right and the believers wrong.

(Weil 1999, p. 115)

Thus, for both Kierkegaard and Weil, 'There are two atheisms of which one is a purification of the notion of God' (Weil 1999, p. 114).

The quiet space for the supernatural to enter, to which Weil points out, and the divine hiddenness, which Kierkegaard emphasizes, create a gap between the natural and the supernatural. Whether there is a supernatural that can fill in the void is a further question to which I have no answer. Perhaps having an answer is unnecessary. Weil states: 'A method of purification: to pray to God, not only in secret ... but with the thought that God does not exist' (Weil 1999, p. 20).

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6

Jewish Faith and the King's Four Sons

Nehama Verbin

6.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to elucidate the 'grammar' of 'faith' in Judaism. I shall argue that 'faith' in Judaism is a 'family resemblance' concept, which cannot be brought to light by reducing it to belief-in, belief-that, to both, or to any other single specific manifestation.

The chapter has three parts. I begin, in the first part, with a critique of one influential account of 'faith' in Judaism, which reduces it to propositional belief in some core 'principles', or which argues for their non-dispensable role within the life of committed Jewish believers. In the second part, I focus on the most prevalent alternative to it, which construes 'faith' as trust. Following the Wittgensteinian dictum, 'Don't think, but look! (PI, §66), I focus on some of faith's under-discussed manifestations, namely those in which religious protest and doubt are expressed by paradigmatic believers and grant them their philosophical place within the complexity of *religious* responses to life and its challenges, demonstrating the limited role of faith as trust in the Jewish tradition. In the third part, relying on a brief passage from tractate *semachot*, and on the *mishnaic* concept of 'controversy for the sake of heaven', I argue that 'faith' in Judaism shows itself in diverse ways, which cannot be reduced to a single manifestation. I argue that the very multiplicity of faith responses has priority over any specific single manifestation. *Together* they provide a wholesome account of the richness of human life and the ways in which one can fully live one's life with God. Thus, the diverse visions of faith, in Judaism, have a normative significance. 'Faith' in Judaism is a 'family resemblance' concept both descriptively and, for some, normatively too.

6.2 Faith without Belief

The *Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion* entry on 'faith' begins as follows:

> The Hebrew term *emunah*, derived from a root meaning 'firm' or 'steadfast,' denotes, in a religious context, unwavering trust and confidence in God rather

than assent to theological propositions.... Over time, however, and in response to a variety of cultural influences, a more self-conscious awareness of faith as belief in the truth of certain ideas and propositions developed.... Moses Maimonides, in his commentary on the Mishnah (*San.* 11.1), enumerated thirteen principles (*iqqarim*) of faith, which were subsequently reformulated in the form of a creed....[1]

This characterization of 'faith' in Judaism is problematic both historically and conceptually. I shall begin with the latter explication of faith and then turn, in the second section, to the former.

The emphasis on propositional belief in philosophical accounts of 'faith' is a prevalent one. The existence of creeds and their use in liturgy is often cited to support it. In *The Principles of Judaism*, for example, Lebens attempts to identify the fundamental doctrinal principles 'necessary for making sense of commitment to Judaism' (Lebens, 2020, p. 275). Lebens mentions the following three principles: (1) faith that there is a God who created the universe; (2) faith that in Sinai, God gave an endorsement to a religious tradition that would evolve among the nation of Israel, which would come to view the Pentateuch as a sacred written constitution, never to be amended; (3) faith in God's being a good and powerful source of providential care and in His messianic promise (Lebens, 2020, pp. 274–275). Relying on Howard-Snyder's definition of faith, Lebens maintains that faith that *p* involves four ingredients, among which is a positive cognitive attitude toward *p* (Lebens, 2020, p. 276). Faith in Judaism, in other words, involves having a cognitive positive attitude toward these principles, according to him.

Lebens, like the author of the *Oxford Dictionary* entry, appeals to and relies upon the medieval formulations of the principles of faith, for identifying the specific fundamentals and for his argument concerning their role.[2] Among the various formulations are those of Maimonides, the great codifier of the Law and author of the *Guide of the Perplexed*. Maimonides's Thirteen Principles of the Jewish faith have a special status among the various principles. They were later formulated in the form of a creed and are often recited at the end of the morning prayer. It is, however, doubtful that Maimonides himself can be understood as

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[1] 'Faith', *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion* accessed 4 April 2022. The definition proceeds to mention faith as 'an expression of Jewish historical experience', faith as 'conduct' and existential faith, too. Although it gestures at different ways in which Jewish 'faith' shows itself, it seems to presuppose that trust is the original meaning of 'faith' and that together with its later use as 'propositional belief', the two senses play the primary role in the meaning of 'faith', in Judaism.
[2] Rabbi Saadya Gaon's formulation of the Ten Principles precedes Maimonides's formulation of the Thirteen Principles. The formulation appears in one of his early works, in his commentary on the Song of David (Ben-Shamai, 2015, pp. 94–95). It does not appear in his seminal theological work *Emunot Vedeot*. Its very absence provides us with a prima facie reason for doubting that his Ten Principles were meant to function as the central dogmas to which each and every Jew must assent.

having propositional faith, or a 'positive cognitive attitude' towards his own Thirteen Principles.[3]

The Principles, whether broadly or narrowly formulated, presuppose a relation between God and what is not God. Creation presupposes a relation between God and the world; revelation presupposes a relation between God and humanity; and providence presupposes a relation between God and individual human beings. Maimonides, however, explicitly denies that there is a relation between God and what is not God.[4]

Maimonides's denial of a relation between God and the created world is formulated in the context of his discussion of predication, in the *Guide of the Perplexed*. Being concerned with the question whether we can *describe* God as relating to something created by Him, he relays the semantic issue to the metaphysical one (I/52, 117). It is in this context that Maimonides makes a strong metaphysical claim, namely, that there is no relation between God and the world; he insists that such a relation cannot be meaningfully applied to God:

> There is, in truth, no relation in any respect between Him and any of His creatures.... How then could there subsist a relation between Him, may He be exalted, and any of the things created by Him, given the immense difference between them with regard to the true reality of their existence, than which there is no greater difference? (I/52, p. 118)

Maimonides explicates God's metaphysical transcendence in terms of God's incorporeality:

> There is no relation between God, may He be exalted, and time and place; and this is quite clear. For time is an accident attached to motion, when the notion of priority and posteriority is considered in the latter.... Motion, on the other hand, is one of the things attached to bodies, whereas God, may He be exalted, is not a body. Accordingly there is no relation between Him and time, and in the same way there is no relation between Him and place. (I/52, p. 117)

Both creation and revelation are rendered problematic. Indeed, epistemological transcendence naturally follows from Maimonides's denial of a relation between God and 'any of His creatures'. Maimonides explicitly states that God's nature cannot be known by human beings:

> all men, those of the past and those of the future, affirm clearly that God, may He be exalted, cannot be apprehended by the intellects, and that none but He

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[3] For an influential sceptical reading of the *Guide's* conclusions, see Pines 1979.
[4] The following discussion of Maimonides relies heavily on Verbin 2020.

Himself can apprehend what He is, and that apprehension of Him consists in the inability to attain the ultimate term in apprehending Him.   (I/59, p. 139)

Maimonides's convictions concerning God's metaphysical and epistemological transcendence shape his views of religious language. Maimonides insists that we cannot apply any predicate to God, as He is in Himself, including willing, knowing and existing. He insists that everything that is predicated of God is done so in a purely equivocal manner; he emphasizes that this applies to 'existence' too (I/56, p. 131).

The difficulty with utterances, e.g., 'God created the world', for Maimonides, is not their falsity, but their nonsensicality. Maimonides states:

[I]t is impossible to represent oneself that a relation subsists between the intellect and color although, according to our school both of them are comprised by the same 'existence'. How then can a relation be represented between Him and what is other than He when there is no notion comprising in any respect both of the two, inasmuch as existence is, in our opinion, affirmed of Him, may He be exalted, and of what is other than He merely by way of absolute equivocation.

(I/52, pp. 117–118)

Maimonides, here, points to our inability to apply colour terms to the concept of the intellect due to the fact that there is no relation between them. An attempt to do so clearly results in nonsense; indeed, an utterance, such as, 'David's intellect is red' is nonsense.[5] By analogy, it would be impossible to apply any concept whatsoever to the divine intellect, since no relation could subsist between them. An utterance attempting to describe the divine intellect would be nonsense in an even stricter sense than 'David's intellect is red.' Thus, Lebens' proposals to understand religious utterances as illuminating falsehood for dealing with *apophaticism* helps neither with Maimonides nor with the early Wittgenstein (Lebens, 2020, pp. 17–28).

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[5] Whether such utterances have a truth value or whether they are strictly speaking nonsense remains controversial (see Magidor 2013). While Carnap, Russell, and Ryle have argued that category clashes produce nonsense, Quine has famously argued that the meaninglessness view is ill motivated and wrong. See Russell and Whitehead 1910–1913; Ryle 1949; Carnap 1959; Quine 1960. I interpret Maimonides as asserting that there is such a thing as a category clash and as committed to the view that utterances that contain a category clash are nonsense. Maimonides's comments on the meaning of negative predication, in which he emphasizes that the negation is not an ordinary one but rather, denying a thing 'something that cannot fittingly exist in it' as we say of a wall that it is 'not endowed with sight' (I, 58, p. 136), supports such an interpretation; his succeeding comments on that matter, in which he emphasizes that 'we are unable to predicate of it any attributes except in terms whose meaning is not completely understood' (I, 58, p. 137) provides further support. Whether we take Maimonides to believe that our God talk is nonsense or that it is flawed but not nonsensical, we cannot take his Thirteen Principles as straight forwardly commanding belief. For an illuminating account of some of the complications and the different ways of engaging with them, see Putnam 1997.

It, thus, seems to follow that if we conceive of utterances *about* God (whether biblical, post biblical, or Maimonidean) as propositions, that purport to say something *about* God, to describe Him, His will, or His actions, to the extent that they are truly *about* God, they must be judged meaningless. Given the mis-relation between God and the world, and given the fact that whatever meaning and/or definition such attributes or actions can come to possess will be contaminated by their mundane origin and context, this seems inevitable. Thus, Maimonides's insistence that names are used equivocally in utterances about God is his insisting that, devoid of their ordinary meaning, the seeming names, attributes or actions do not come to possess a new one. Maimonides does not merely maintain that utterances about God somehow miss the mark; he renders all our God talk, either non-propositional or meaningless.[6] This austere Maimonidean view concerning religious language is modified neither by his comments about attributes of action nor by his comments on negative predication.[7,8]

If we take seriously Maimonides's insistence on God's absolute transcendence, then we cannot take his Thirteen Principles at face-value, as commanding belief, or a 'positive cognitive attitude', nor can we take their reciting as an expression of propositional faith in them. It is either inappropriate to have a 'positive cognitive attitude' towards them, since they are flawed, or impossible, since they are strictly speaking, meaningless. Thus, Jewish faith as a propositional attitude, or as involving a 'positive cognitive attitude' is not entailed, either by the very existence of creeds, or by their use in liturgy, not even for those who had formulated them.[9]

I do not wish to argue that faith, in Judaism, never shows itself as propositional belief or as a 'positive cognitive attitude' towards certain utterances. My brief reflection on Maimonides is directed at demonstrating that, (1) it takes more than the uttering of the creeds to argue for faith as propositional belief and (2) faith as propositional belief is less central and less significant than it is believed to be by various philosophers.

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[6] The former position, namely, that utterances about God somehow miss the mark is presented by e.g. Seeskin 2000; the latter, namely that our God talk, for Maimonides, is non-propositional and poetic is presented by Lorberbaum 2011.

[7] Maimonides, as is well known, speaks out of both sides of his mouth. Together with his absolute conception of God's transcendence, we find a modified conception of divine transcendence in terms of an intellect overflowing to the world. I do not wish to resolve the tension, here, but to argue that it is far from obvious that Maimonides's Thirteen Principles were meant to be used as dogmas.

[8] Propositional faith is a step in the ladder that, from a Maimonidean perspective, we are to climb over. For Maimonides, the next step in the ladder consists of love as a content-less apprehension, a mystical state of contemplation of the divine name.

[9] Lebens is of course aware of the difficulties within the *Guide* that render his account problematic but does not engage with them. In the context of his discussion of make-believe, he explicitly points out to those doctrines that Maimonides considers false but, nevertheless, embraces for practical considerations. The difficulty however, goes beyond falsity into 'nonsense'.

6.3 Faith without Trust

The second main contender does not fare better. Faith as trust is neither more fundamental from an historical perspective nor is it more fundamental from a conceptual one. It is not the case that biblical use of the root *amn* 'denotes, in a religious context, unwavering trust and confidence in God rather than assent to theological propositions'. In the context of intersubjective relationships, either among people or between God and human beings this root sometimes denotes propositional belief, e.g., in Genesis 42:20 'But you must bring your youngest brother to me, so that your *words may be verified* . . . .'[10] What is translated as 'verified' literally states 'believed'; it employs the root *amn*.[11] In some contexts, expressions of doubt and mistrust, including mistrust directed at God, are preceded or succeeded by 'faith', in a manner that seems to suggest that faith does not exclude mistrust and doubt. Abraham's famous expression of faith, in Genesis 15:6 is an example of that; it involves uncertainty and doubt: 'Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness' is immediately succeeded by God's promise that Abraham would inherit the land. Abraham, however, requests a proof or guarantee for God's trustworthiness: 'Sovereign LORD, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?' (Genesis 15:8). It appears that the divine promise was not enough, for Abraham. In other words, it is hard to see this exchange of which 'Abram believed the Lord' is a constituent, as expressing 'unwavering trust and confidence in God'.

Expressions of protest, doubt, and mistrust abound in Jewish sources, from the bible to Elie Wiesel. I have elsewhere discussed the philosophical significance of many of them for our understanding of faith. I will not rehearse my arguments here. In what follows, I shall briefly mention three narratives of protest and mistrust, and comment on their role in the Jewish liturgy.

The first narrative is that of Job. Expressions of Job's protest and his mistrust of God are hard to miss. The following bitter protest expresses Job's mistrust of God's moral perfection; Job is seriously contemplating the possibility that God enjoys harming him:

> Do not declare me guilty, but tell me what charges you have against me. Does it please you to oppress me, to spurn the work of your hands, while you smile on the plans of the wicked?   (Job 10:2–3)

Job experiences God as an abuser.[12] He exclaims: 'know that God has wronged me and drawn his net around me. Though I cry, "Violence!" I get no response; though I call for help, there is no justice' (Job 19: 6–7); and:

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[10] Unless otherwise indicated, all biblical quotes are from the New International Version.

[11] The Hebrew is ואת אחיכם הקטן תביאו אלי ויאמנו דבריכם ולא תמותו. It is clear that the root *amn* is used propositionally, as the object of what is trusted, or rather, believed.

[12] For more on Job's abusive God see Verbin 2010.

I cry out to you, God, but you do not answer; I stand up but you merely look
at me. You turn on me ruthlessly; with the might of your hand you attack me...
I know you will bring me down to death, the place appointed for all the living.

(Job 30: 20–23)

The book of Job's ending too, does not undo the validity of Job's protest. After
admonishing Job for calling Him to task, God Himself is described as legitimizing
Job's protest, rebuking Job's friends with the words: 'You have not spoken of me
rightly as my servant Job has' and repeating this rebuke twice (Job 42:7–8).[13]

The book of Job was read privately by the High Priest on the Eve of Yom
Kippur, the Day of Judgement, a day in which it is believed that God signs and
seals the destiny of all in righteousness and justice, for the coming year.[14]
Although the book itself is not read by the community on Yom Kippur, its themes
of doubt, mistrust, and protest against divine injustice are used in various ways by
the community, in the Yom Kippur liturgy.

The medieval piyyut Ele Ezckerah (These shall I recall), is recited by the
community in Yom Kippur during the mussaf prayer.[15] The piyyut recalls the
horrendous fate of the Ten Martyrs, the ten sages of the Mishnaic period who
were put to death by the Romans, placing them together in a single scene. The
piyyut emphasizes in its very beginning that the Roman minister is enacting God's
decrees. Rabbi Ishmael ascends to heaven and hears behind the curtain that it
is God's will that they be executed: 'accept it upon yourselves righteous and
beloved ones, for I have heard from behind the partition that you have been
destined for this'.

The executions are described in great detail; they exhibit unusual cruelty and
cause horrendous suffering. The execution of Rabbi Shimon, for example is
described with the following words:

The serpent ordered that lots be cast, and the lot fell upon Rabban Shimon. He
hastened to shed [Rabban Shimon's] blood as if he were an ox, and when his head
was severed, [Rabbi Yishmael] took it and wailed over him in a bitter, shofar-like
voice: 'Woe is the tongue that hastened to teach words of beauty—how could it
now lick the dust...'

Other descriptions of exceptional cruelty follow after.

Bitter protest against the blunt injustice done to the ten righteous ones is
explicitly voiced; it is placed in the mouths of the angels:

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[13] My translation. For more on the book of Job's ending, see Verbin 2010, ch. 5 and Verbin forthcoming.
[14] See tractate Yoma 18b.
[15] The piyyut is recited in Yom Kippur by the Ashkenazi communities; Sephardi communities recite it during Tisha be Av.

The celestial Seraphim cried out bitterly, 'Is this the Torah and this its reward—O God Who cloaks Himself in light as with a garment?' . . . A voice from Heaven responded, 'If I hear another sound, I will transform the universe to water, I will turn the earth to astonishing emptiness—this is a decree from My Presence; accept it' . . . .

The divine response to the angles' protest 'Is this the Torah and this its reward', resembles the divine response to Job. It stresses God's power. Such a divine response can silence the speaker or speakers; it cannot, however, silence the content of their protest. Divine injustice is not annulled when the victims and those that side with them are annulled. The divine response, together with the angels' complaint is, I believe, part of the very protest that this *piyyut* voices, which is explicit and poignant.

The last narrative is the book of Jonah, which is read as the *haftarah* of the *minchah* prayer of Yom Kippur. The book of Jonah appears to be a book of mercy and forgiveness; it is, also, however, a book of defiance and disobedience, in which divine justice is challenged. The book's very beginning expresses defiance and disobedience:

The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: 'Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.' But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the LORD.   (Jonah 1: 1–3)

Jonah disobeys God's command; instead of embarking towards Ninveh, to fulfil the divine mission, he attempts to flee from God. There is no escape, however. Jonah is swallowed by a fish and spends three days in its belly. He prays to God from the belly of the fish pleading for salvation: 'What I have vowed I will make good. I will say, "Salvation comes from the LORD." And the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land' (Jonah 2: 9–10). After Jonah is released, he adheres to God's second call. Jonah's obedience to God's second call, however, his readiness to go to Ninveh after God releases him from the fish's belly does not seem to express trust, love or commitment to God. There is no mention of an inner transformation. It appears that God has scared Jonah into acquiescing:

Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: 'Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.' Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh.   (Jonah 3: 1–3)

In such circumstances, it is difficult to conceive of Jonah's obedience as manifesting his steadfast trust or commitment to God.

The dissonance between Jonah and God is expressed in Jonah's response to the divine forgiveness of the people of Ninveh:

> But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. He prayed to the LORD, 'Isn't this what I said, LORD, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. Now, LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.'   (Jonah 4: 1–3)

If we assume that Jonah is worthy of his prophetic mission then Jonah's anger cannot be understood as revolving around his own status and/or reputation vis-à-vis the people of Ninveh; rather, it has to be understood as moral anger, revolving around the moral issue of justice versus mercy. His protest may be understood as reflecting moral anger at what he perceives as a lack of divine justice; God refrained from punishing the wicked, wavering their due punishment after their repentance. Thus, while Job's moral protest focuses on the discrepancy between the righteous and their *unhappy* fate, a discrepancy that is graphically represented in the *piyyut Ele Ezckerah* too, Jonah's protest seems to focus on the discrepancy between the wicked and their *happy* fate. In order to take seriously Jonah's moral anger, it may suffice to consider the acts of wickedness foretold earlier in the liturgy, during the midday *piyyutim*, including the *piyyut Ele Ezckerah*. Is foregoing punishment for serious wrongdoing (after the wrongdoer's repentance) morally permissible? Is it justifiable? Does it not violate the principles of justice? Reciting the book of Jonah in Yom Kippur is engaging the whole community with these questions, legitimizing doubt about the very existence of divine justice.

Jonah's despondent reaction to God's forbearance of sin in a way that lets the wicked escape their due punishment receives no response from God. The divine answer, the divine lesson, conveyed to Jonah by God's drying out the *kikayon*, does not engage with the content of Jonah's moral protest. It is another means, like the storm and the ordeal in the fish's belly, to silence him into acquiescing. It is similar to the divine response to Job and to the angels' complaint, 'Is this the Torah and this its reward?!' Jonah, like Job, does not retract his moral protest; he does not respond. The book ends with his silence. Thus, despite the emphasis on repentance and forgiveness, despite the emphasis on divine mercy, or perhaps, owing to the emphasis on divine mercy, the book of Jonah too raises the question of divine justice, as it pertains to the fate of the repenting wicked.

We have seen that a significant component of Yom Kippur liturgy employs narratives that question divine justice in a variety of manners, protesting to and against God, distrusting Him and disobeying Him. How are we to understand the use of narratives of protest, doubt and disobedience in the holiest day of the Jewish calendar, whose main themes are divine justice, and human repentance?

I have elsewhere argued for the centrality of the experience of the absurd within the life of faith, emphasizing the manners in which faith sometimes does not provide a way out from the absurd but rather pushes the believer further into it. Yom Kippur liturgy seems to exemplify that, incorporating horrendous narratives of injustice within its liturgy. These narratives reveal the limited role and the limited significance of 'faith' as trust. Acknowledging the absurd in one's life in general and in one's life with God in particular, the Yom Kippur liturgy places protest and mistrust at the heart of its most profound expressions of faith, at the heart of its liturgy, at the heart of one's life with God, emphasizing that faith is not a synonym to trust. Granting protest and mistrust a place of honour in its liturgy, it does not merely tolerate them but celebrates them with awe, granting them a normative status.

If both 'propositional faith' and 'faith as trust' have a limited role then how are we to understand the meaning of 'faith' in Judaism?

6.4 The King's Four Sons

In tractate *Semachot*, Rabbi Akiva states:

> The king has four sons: One is silent when afflicted; one strikes when afflicted; one pleads [for mercy] when afflicted and one asks his father 'afflict me further'. Abraham is silent when afflicted.... Job strikes when afflicted....Hezekiah pleads [for mercy] when afflicted...David told his father afflict me further...
>
> (*Semachot* 8, *Halacha* 11)

The metaphor of God as a divine King is a prevalent one, as is the metaphor of Israel as God's child. Rabbi Akiva does not focus on what the king's sons *believe* about their divine father; he does not emphasize propositional faith; rather, he focuses on their different manners of *living* with Him and relating to Him. It seems natural to understand the sons' different manners of relating and responding to their divine father as manifesting the nature of their faith.

For all four sons, God is not hidden. All four sons trace their afflictions back to God, viewing their divine father as their origin. Each of them, however, responds differently to his afflictions. Each of them, in his own *individuality*, forms a different relationship with his divine father. Rabbi Akiva portrays Abraham as the silent son. He emphasizes that Abraham does not contest the divine command to sacrifice Isaac; Abraham does not point to the tension between the divine promise to multiply his seed and the command to sacrifice Isaac. Instead, Abraham rises early in the morning to fulfil the divine command. As such, he represents the sufferer who carries his burden quietly. Rabbi Akiva naturally points to Job as an example of the believer, who 'strikes' when afflicted, who

protests and calls God to task. Hezekiah pleads that the divine verdict concerning his impending death be undone. When hearing about it he turns his face to the wall and pleads to God: 'Please, Lord, remember now that I have walked before You faithfully' (2 Kings 20: 2–3). The fourth response that Rabbi Akiva mentions, 'afflict me further', is ascribed to David; he relates it to David's recognition of his sins, and to his wish for repentance; Rabbi Akiva quotes Psalm 51:4 for supporting his characterization of David: 'Abundantly cleanse me from my iniquity, and from my sin purify me' (Psalm 51:4).

This brief passage points to a multiplicity of faith responses, to different ways in which believers, or to be more precise, the King's own sons, respond to hardship. Faith may show itself in rejecting one's burden in protest as Job had done, or through pleading that it is removed as Hezekiah had done. Faith may show itself in silently and obediently accepting one's burden as manifesting God's will, as Abraham had done, or through viewing it as atonement for one's sins, as David had done.

The two, presumably, problematic responses to hardship, which reject it, in protest or pleading, are framed within the two seemingly faithful ones, ascribed to two paradigms of uncontested significance within the Jewish tradition: Abraham and David. Abraham is considered the father of the nation. His faith after the Akedah is celebrated as exemplary. David is understood as an exemplary figure too, one of the greatest of the Jewish nation from whose dynasty the future messiah is to come; in Jewish exegesis he is portrayed as exemplifying the power of repentance, compassion and humility. Considering Hezekiah's pleading and, furthermore, Job's protest together with Abraham's and David's responses is granting them the same status as Abraham and David, presenting them as exemplary believers like them. In other words, no single response has priority over another in this passage. No one is deemed a better son to His father than any other. They are a family, and each has his rightful place within it, in Rabbi Akiva's view.[16]

While Rabbi Akiva focuses on four sons, there may be other sons too, as well as nephews, nieces and grandchildren, who may exhibit intricate similarities and differences to each other. There is plenty of space for growth within this family. Thus, to borrow Wittgensteinian terminology, I maintain that this brief passage expresses the 'grammar' of 'faith' in Judaism. In revealing the essential plurality of faith responses, it provides a perspicuous representation for it, elucidating 'faith' through it; it shows that 'faith' in Judaism, is a 'family resemblance' concept.

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[16]   Rabbi Akiva himself has a normative status in the Jewish tradition. He is a paradigmatic believer, one of the ten righteous ones who were put to death by the Romans, expressing exceptional devotion to God during his execution. The readers of this passage may wonder about Rabbi Akiva's own relation to the four sons that he mentions, and consider him as a fifth son to the divine King.

As with 'game' and 'number', we extend our concept of 'faith' as in spinning a thread:

> we twist fiber on fiber. And the strength of the thread does not reside in the fact that some one fiber runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibers.   (PI §67)

It is in the context of a religious way of life, of a whole practice with its various features: narratives, liturgy, art, religious institutions, etc. that the different family members, the different paradigms, play their part and are recognized to be what they are. Blurry boundaries and the *difficulty* to determine who does and who does not belong to the family are part of the very practice and its 'grammar'. They cannot be banished out of existence by defining faith as trust. The inclusion of the son who strikes back, and the emphasis on his significance for the family, as we have seen in the previous section, in Job, Jonah, and in various narratives of protest that play a central part in the liturgy, reveals that the criteria for exclusion are and must remain vague. For Rabbi Akiva, one may argue, they are not for us to formulate.

Thus, I take Rabbi Akiva's point in the passage to be both descriptive and normative. It is not merely the case that faith shows itself in different manners. In placing the different sons on a par with one another, refusing to condemn one and embrace the other, Rabbi Akiva is expressing a stronger *normative* claim, which celebrates the multiplicity and diversity of responses and relationships viewing it as constitutive of what faith is and of what it ought to be. In other words, the multiplicity and diversity are unsurpassable and everlasting features of 'faith', of the community's life with God, for him: faith, in Judaism is and ought to be diverse in its manifestations; it involves and ought to involve a legion of responses, which do not have a shared essence.

The importance of individuality, diversity, and difference as everlasting features of the faithful's life with God is emphasized in the famous concept of 'controversy for the sake of heaven':

> Every controversy for the sake of heaven will endure and one which is not for the sake of heaven will not endure. Which is for the sake of heaven? This is the controversy between Hillel and Shamai; and which is not for the sake of heaven? This is the controversy of Korach and his associates.   (Avot 5, 17)

Uniformity is not a religious ideal. Multiplicity and diversity in-and-of-themselves do not require mending; they are not to be tolerated but to be appreciated and celebrated. Like the controversy between Hillel and Shamai, it seems that the multiplicity of faith responses among the king's sons, in Rabbi Akiva's vision too, will endure. The very diversity of faith responses constitutes the family as a family, for him.

I argued that 'faith', in Judaism is shaped by the *various* manners in which believers respond to their divine father and by the *different* relationships that such responses shape; the role of 'beliefs, principles of *faith*, or *dogmas*' is secondary. Focusing on the *multiplicity* of responses and relationships, I argued that 'faith' in Judaism, is a 'family resemblance' concept. The diverse manners in which it shows itself are constitutive of its very meaning; no single fibre runs through the whole.

The rabbis maintain that showing love and friendship towards one another is a constitutive feature of a 'controversy for the sake of heaven':

> Although Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel are in disagreement on the questions of (marital and personal status), Beit Shammai did not, nevertheless, abstain from marrying women of the families of Beit Hillel, nor did Beit Hillel refrain from marrying those of Beit Shammai. This is to teach you that they showed love and friendship towards one another, thus putting into practice the Scriptural text, 'Love ye truth and peace'. (Zechariah, 8:16)
>
> (Babylonian Talmud, Yevamoth 14b)

By extension, one may argue that without love and friendship, the diverse responses of the king's sons too, cannot be considered faith-responses. The absence of a black ship within this family, the sons refraining from condemning each other as misbehaving, their persistent vision of one another as belonging to the same family, their peace, are necessary for their controversy, disagreement and diversity to endure as a faithful one, 'for the sake of heaven'. Bearing in mind that the King's family may indeed be a very great one, I should like to propose that the same is true not merely of 'faith' in Judaism but of 'faith' in its diverse expressions, Jewish and non-Jewish alike.

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A6.1 Reply to Nehama Verbin

Imran Aijaz

In her splendid discussion of faith in Judaism, Nehama Verbin presents a laudable defence of understanding faith as a 'family resemblance' concept that does not necessarily require belief-in, belief-that, or any other specific manifest-ation (p. 116). My reply to her will be two-fold. I will begin with some remarks about why I find her proposal appealing. After this, I will offer a bit of friendly pushback against some of her arguments, mainly in the spirit of wanting the defence of her proposal strengthened by incorporating responses to some potential objections.

First, then, some remarks about the attractiveness of Verbin's proposal. As someone from an Islamic background, I am confident in saying that her account of faith would strike many Muslims, even those who do not consider themselves orthodox or traditionalist, as radical. For, on Verbin's view, one can have faith without any kind of cognitive attitude (e.g. belief) or trust (indeed, even amidst *mistrust*). Such a view stands in stark contrast to the standard Islamic view of faith ('*īmān*), according to which it is a positive response to (propositional) knowledge of God and is marked by key features, perhaps the core of which is trusting God. I call this view the 'faith as knowledge' view. Consider, for instance, Encik Md. Asham bin Ahmad's elaboration of it:

> When we Muslims talk about faith or belief, we mean that which is reflected by the term iman, namely 'true belief', belief which is sanctioned by knowledge and certainty. Islam is a conscious and willing submission, [sic] therefore, it can not [sic] be founded upon doubt, since doubt is antithetical to knowledge.
>
> (Ahmad 2006)

On this account, the Muslim is someone who responds positively to knowledge of God through an act of faith. Knowledge of God is a precondition of faith and, indeed, of even faith's antonym, *kufr*, often translated unhelpfully as 'unbelief' or 'disbelief', a state of 'refusal' or 'rebellion'. All people, on this view of faith, know that God exists, even if some of them do not respond appropriately to this knowledge. On the 'faith as knowledge' view, the person of faith has a positive cognitive attitude of knowledge (and, therefore, belief) that certain religious propositions are true. In the famous 'Hadith of Gabriel', a *ḥadīth* (report of a

saying or action attributed to the Prophet Mohammed) in which the Angel Gabriel asks the Prophet Mohammed to explain faith (*'īmān*), the Prophet replies that it consists of '[affirming] your faith in Allah, in His angels, in His Books, in His Apostles, in the Day of Judgment, and…your faith in the Divine Decree about good and evil' (Sahih Muslim, Book 1, Hadith 1). In the Islamic tradition, these religious doctrines are well-known as the 'six articles of faith'. Muslim thinkers who defend the 'faith as knowledge' view further maintain, as its corollaries, two additional points: (1) doubt or uncertainty about fundamental religious propositions (e.g. the existence of God) is incompatible with faith and (2) mistrust in God, or some approximation of it, is also incompatible with faith (see, e.g. Zarabozo 1994).

Now, my assessment of the 'faith is knowledge' view in Islam is that it cannot plausibly be defended with respect to claims about religious knowledge (see my chapter in the present volume) and that it is too austere as a model of faith, excluding, among others, those Muslims who have genuine doubts about Islam or even less-than-certain religious beliefs (see Aijaz 2023). It is here that I find Verbin's proposal appealing since it offers a framework of religious inclusion for those Muslims who struggle with their religious convictions (see Chouhoud 2016). Of course, since Verbin's discussion of faith is heavily based on Jewish sources, there is an important question about the compatibility of her arguments with an Islamic framework. I will leave the attempt to address this question for some other time. For now, I want to briefly consider, in light of my very limited knowledge of Judaism, how one might criticize some of Verbin's arguments. As noted earlier, my aim in offering these criticisms is to consider how Verbin's case might be strengthened, perhaps even in a way that lends itself to a defence of Islamic faith as a family-resemblance concept.

Verbin's argument against including propositional belief in a model of Jewish faith hinges critically on Maimonides' views about religious matters, particularly his denial of a relation between God and the created world. Here, I have two concerns.

My first concern is about interpreting Maimonides, who, as Verbin notes, 'speaks out of both sides of his mouth' (p. 120). While Maimonides does indeed deny any relation between God and the created world, he also maintains, as Verbin observes, that we can talk about God by mentioning His action (i.e. the effects of God's activity) since this kind of attribute is 'far from contact with the essence of the thing to which it relates' (Hyman et al. 2010, p. 366). Moreover, Maimonides' theory of negative predication, which Verbin mentions, does *appear* to allow for limited God talk. By reason, we know, for instance, that God is not a body, says Maimonides (ibid., p. 368). To deny God's corporeality sounds like denying a proposition ('It is not the case that God has a body'), even if the negation here is taken to emphasize a point about category mistakes (i.e., physicality is not applicable to God). While acknowledging these features of

Maimonides' views about religious matters, Verbin nevertheless endorses an interpretation of Maimonides where all God-talk is either non-propositional or meaningless (p. 120). As a non-expert on Maimonidean interpretation, I will not contest this point, but will just observe that this view appears to be at odds with other aspects of Maimonides' philosophy of Jewish religion. I wonder, for example, how then to understand Maimonides' famous Parable of the King's Palace (*GP*, 3.54). In this parable, Maimonides characterizes those farthest away from the king, outside of the city, as 'all human individuals *who have no doctrinal belief, neither one based on speculation nor one that accepts the authority of tradition*' (ibid., italics mine). The jurists, while closer to the king, are also criticized because, although they have 'true opinions,' they 'do not engage in speculation concerning the fundamental principles of religion and *make no inquiry whatever regarding the rectification of belief*' (ibid., italics mine). My understanding of the Parable of the King's Palace is that Maimonides gives some importance to propositional belief in religious matters. Again, however, I am simply sharing observations as an outsider and am not committing myself to argue for this point.

My second concern with Verbin's use of Maimonides to argue against including propositional belief in a model of Jewish faith is that one can, of course, reject Maimonides' views about certain religious matters. Even if Verbin's interpretation of Maimonides is correct, there are other relevant voices that speak on the matter. In Judaism, Gersonides, for example, took issue with Maimonides' extreme apophaticism, as did non-Jewish thinkers, such as Aquinas (see Hyman et al. 2010, pp. 389–396, 473). I wonder to what extent Maimonides can bear the full brunt of defending the idea of faith without propositional belief in Judaism, given such dissenting voices.

One other niggling worry I have about Verbin's defence of faith as a 'family resemblance' concept is that the appeal to *Pirkei Avot* 5:17 and the notion of 'controversy for the sake of heaven' does suggest *some* constraints on what constitutes a faith response: 'And which is the controversy that is not for the sake of Heaven? Such was the controversy of Korah and all his congregation.' If Korah is guilty of controversy *not* for the sake of Heaven because he was an *ideologue*, or *blinded by envy or ambition*, or some such thing, this calls into question Verbin's insistence that faith in Judaism 'involves and ought to involve a legion of responses, *which do not have a shared essence*' (p. 127; emphasis mine). One might contest this and say that faith requires, at the very least, a non-Korah-type disposition, one where love and friendship are needed, as Verbin suggests (p. 128).

The friendly pushback I've offered here doesn't threaten the general thrust of Verbin's defence of Jewish faith as a 'family resemblance' concept. Even if there is a shared essence to all faith responses, one that perhaps includes *some* cognitive content and affective elements, there can still be a wide range of genuine faith responses that include religious doubt, struggles with religious commitment, etc.

Verbin's discussion offers valuable insights into how this can occur within Judaism. Muslims would do well to take it seriously, given that it is situated within a 'sister religion' of Islam.

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A6.2 Reply to Nehama Verbin

Jonathan L. Kvanvig

Verbin's initial motivation is to avoid both doxastically doctrinal and trustbased accounts of faith. Discussion of the former centres on Maimonides and his thirteen principles of faith, arguing that a view of faith in terms of propositional faith regarding such principles isn't Maimonides's view, and should be rejected. Regarding trust-based accounts, Verbin focuses on narratives of protest in Job and Jonah, as well as in a component of the Yom Kippur liturgy. These narratives of protest are used as examples where both mistrust and doubt are on display, in spite of being expressions of faith.

I join Verbin in rejecting these accounts of faith, and so will not devote my time here to the arguments against these views. Instead, I'll focus on the positive account given, which appeals to the Wittgensteinian notion of family resemblance and an approach to life 'for the sake of heaven'.

Begin with the Wittgensteinian idea of family resemblance terms. Since Wittgenstein isn't trying to give a theory of anything, we treat the ideas presented as suggestive only. One aspect here, that of vagueness of boundaries, is important for any adequate understanding of language, but not distinctive of the idea of family resemblance. The motivation for precisification of language for certain kinds of theoretical purposes is widespread, and affects not only theoretical investigations of games, Wittgenstein's favorite example of a family resemblance term, but also weather systems, geographic areas, boundaries between persons and non-persons, health concerns raised by obesity and other human conditions, etc. It is also, of course, a central element in the sorites paradox, but the range of issues it affects is much wider than the paradox alone. So, vagueness by itself probably isn't what Wittgenstein was after when remarking that some parts of language are best understood in terms of the idea of family resemblances.

Instead, the central idea of the family resemblance claim seems to be something anti-Platonic, involving a rejection of the idea that there is some *essential* nature to be found. This idea can be distorted or obscured by the myopic focus on the meanings of terms that dominated metaphilosophy in the first half of the twentieth century, but once we move past the idea that philosophy's contribution to human understanding must be semantic in character, we don't have to put everything into the language of a theory of meaning and are free to talk about

things themselves and their natures. Doing so doesn't undermine the family resemblance idea, as is evident when we use one of Wittgenstein's favourite examples, that of a game. A game is not supposed to be characterizable in terms of some set of conditions that are individually necessary and jointly sufficient. If so characterizable, the thing in question would have an essential nature, taking each necessary feature as essential, and their joint instantiation as giving us the essence itself.

Such claims about the lack of an essential nature have to be developed carefully, however. First, note that the claim isn't just that there is no essence to be found, but rather that no essential features are present, either. The former could be sustained if we found a number of informative and individually necessary conditions but no combination of which were sufficient. If the idea of essential features is embraced, however, we'd get a position attractive to those who look for explications and partial reductions when theorizing about the relationships between language and the world, and I think those approaches are not what Wittgenstein was after, and I take Verbin to agree on this point.

Moreover, when it comes to essential features, the necessary conditions idea being challenged has to be a substantive claim, for it is easy to trivialize careless statements about no necessary conditions existing. For example, self-identity is essential to everything, whether or not it has an essence, but it is not an informative necessary condition. One can't refute the Wittgensteinian idea by noting that games aren't people.

Even so, the question of what Wittgenstein is really after is a vexed one, and suggestions found in the literature vary considerably. Such variability shouldn't surprise, since the late Wittgenstein is anti-theory, and a suggestive remark will always leave a wide variety of ways to develop it, some of which might even be defensible!

One way to get something close to this anti-Platonist idea is to note the distinction between artifacts and natural kinds. For this distinction gives one way of explaining how some things have no intrinsic and essential nature. Artifacts are, quite generally, functional items, and it is generally acknowledged that functional items can't be defined in terms of intrinsic characteristics. Tables, for example, are things to be identified in terms of the interests and purposes for which they were made, or perhaps the uses to which a given object is put, rather than what in terms of what it is made of or what geometric configurations it might involve.

Natural kinds, however, seem to be capable of categorizing on the basis of intrinsic features, and perhaps there is a defensible route from such intrinsic features to substantive and informative essential properties. For one would expect that any substantive essential property, as opposed to trivial essential properties about identity and difference, would need to be, or likely to be, an intrinsic feature of the thing in question.

If we apply this idea to the topic of faith, viewing faith itself in function terms, we can get a rather modest way of explaining the anti-essentialism involved in the Wittgensteinian notion of family resemblance. Such an account won't satisfy late Wittgenstein scholars, I expect, even though it encodes one anti-Platonic feature that he seemed to be after. I expect as well that Verbin will want something more than this functional account, and that leads me to wonder whether Verbin is after something stronger when characterizing faith in terms of family resemblance and, if so, what specifically needs to be added.

The second item I note in Verbin's discussion is the idea of controversies 'for the sake of heaven'. Here again we find a connection with a functional approach to faith, for whenever we find a functional item, there is a teleological dimension to it. So, on the Deweyan approach I defend, faith involves dispositions to act in service of an ideal, and the degree of faith that is present is a function of the strength of this disposition for resisting behaviour that is aimed in a different direction. I notice affinities here with Verbin's emphasis on controversies for the sake of heaven, for this idea is also obviously teleological. Engaging in an activity for the sake of heaven is naturally described in terms of the pursuit of an idea, and when this ideal is pursued, the faith displayed can be religiously valuable, while pursuing controversies for some other purpose cannot. We've all encountered people who participate in controversies with the apparent aim of scoring points, achieving notoriety, ego-preservation, and other—let us say—ignoble motives. Perhaps this way of living doesn't involve faith at all, but if it does, it clearly isn't saving faith, the kind of faith that makes for religious community.

This emphasis on controversies for the sake of heaven plays two roles in Verbin's account. The first is the teleological dimension just noted, a feature that might be in tension with a Wittgensteinian anti-essentialism, if this dimension is a necessary feature of faith. More interesting to my mind at least, however, is the second role this idea plays in the discussion of the responses of the four sons of the king. Not only are the differences and diversity of response tolerated, they are embraced, described in the category of things that 'will endure' rather than disappear. In contrast with most discussions of both intramural and extramural religious disagreement, Verbin's account doesn't advert merely to the language of respect and tolerance. These aspects are involved in the account Verbin gives us, but they pale in comparison with the loftier aspect of finding enduring value in the controversies themselves when they exist in service of an ideal worth pursuing.

PART III

SCIENCE AND RELIGION (BUDDHISM, CHRISTIANITY, AND HINDUISM)

7

Science, Reason, and Buddhism

Graham Priest

7.1 Introduction

The origins of Buddhism are relatively easy to date, since it starts with the thought of the historical Buddha, c. fifth century BCE. The origins of science are much harder to date. Of course, people have been investigating the natural world and proposing theories about how it works since the same date, if not earlier. Call this science if you want. But modern science, starting around the seventeenth century, is a rather different kind of beast. The use of systematic experimentation (not just observation), on the one hand, and the application of mathematics, on the other, have combined to deliver an understanding of the world (though a fallible and corrigible one) of a depth unthinkable before. Moreover, the application of modern science has delivered a wealth of technological applications that could only have appeared as magical to previous generations: flying, talking to people on the other side of the world, curing hitherto deadly illnesses, and so on.

Unsurprisingly, the Ancient does not always sit easily with the Modern. Science has often shown us that past views are wrong. There are then obvious questions about how Buddhist views, most of which developed before the Scientific Revolution, fare with respect to what science has shown us about the world, and about how Buddhists should react if there is a conflict. This chapter discusses the matter.

But let me start with a warning. Buddhism has been developing for some two and a half thousand years now in various parts of Asia, and continues to develop as it moves into the West. In the process, many different forms of Buddhism have emerged. There is an enormous variety among these. The oldest extant form of Buddhism, Theravāda, to be found now in parts of South East Asia, is significantly different from the tantric Buddhisms of Tibet and Japan. These, again, are very different from Japanese Zen Buddhism.[1] And of course, there can be a world of difference between what Buddhist philosophers have made of matters and the views of the Buddhist-in-the-street, for whom Buddhist thought is often mixed

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[1] On the different forms of Buddhism, see Mitchell 2002. For a brief description of the development of Buddhist thought in India and China, see Priest 2014, pp. xxiii–xxvii.

with aspects of popular culture. It therefore makes little sense to claim to be presenting *the* Buddhist view on some topic. What follows is perforce my perspective. I will return to the matter at the end of my contribution.

7.2 Buddhism and Theism

Uncontentiously, Buddhist thought begins with the teachings of the historical Buddha, Siddhārta Gautama. ('Buddha' is an honorific, meaning *awakened* or *enlightened*.) The Buddha flourished in North East India some time in the sixth or fifth centuries BCE. More precise dates are conjectural. It developed against the background of the orthodox Hindu thought of the time, and famously made a break with it in two important regards.[2]

First of all, in Hinduism, there is a godhead, *Brahman*. Hinduism is commonly held to be some form of polytheism; and in popular culture, it certainly is. But, strictly, the gods in the Hindu pantheon are all aspects of, or avatars of aspects of, Brahman. Secondly, each individual has a self, *ātman*.[3] Indeed, in some sense, *ātman* and *Brahman* are one, though a full realization of this fact may only come with enlightenment (*mokṣa*). Buddhism rejected both of these claims.

We will return to *anātman* (no self) in due course; but for the moment let us stay with god. Buddhism does not endorse the existence of a god. True, in some Buddhist cosmologies and popular cultures, there are held to be 'deities' of a certain kind, which live in some celestial realm. But like all sentient creatures, they will die and be reborn in other realms. They are nothing like transcendental godheads of Hinduism or the Middle Eastern religions.

This is significant, since if there is no god, there can be no such thing as what is revealed by god. To put it in Christian terms, though there can be a natural theology (what you can figure out with your intellect), there can be no revealed theology (what you can know only because god has told you). Hence Buddhism is, of necessity, dependent on its views standing on their own feet, as it were.

The point was stressed by the Buddha himself. Thus, in the *Kālāma Sūtra* we find him saying:[4]

> Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing; nor upon tradition; nor upon rumor; nor upon what is in a scripture; nor upon surmise; nor upon an axiom; nor upon specious reasoning; nor upon a bias towards a notion that has been pondered over; nor upon another's seeming ability; nor upon the

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[2] For an introduction to Hinduism, see Koller 2018, ch. 2.

[3] Indian Buddhists texts are written in two languages, the vernacular Pāli and the scholarly Sanskrit. I will generally use the Sanskrit terms.

[4] *Aṅguttarra Nikaya*, 3.65. Translation from Buddha Dharma Education Association nd.

consideration, 'The monk is our teacher.' Kalamas, when you yourselves know: 'These things are good; these things are not blamable; these things are praised by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to benefit and happiness,' enter on and abide in them.

You have to make your own mind up; though of course, as the *sūtra* says, it is sensible to be guided by experts, the wise.

But who are the wise? Different people have wisdom about different things. A chess grand master has expertise about chess, but maybe not about cooking. A master chef has expertise about cooking, but maybe not about chess.

Who are the experts when it comes to the natural world? In contemporary society they are scientists. Why so? How do you know that grand masters have expertise in chess? Because if you play them, they will beat you every time. The proof of the pudding is, as the English saying goes, in the eating. Now, modern technology is based on modern science, and this makes possible the most amazing things: sending people to the moon, developing a vaccine for Covid-19 in a remarkably short period of time, designing computers that can translate between Chinese and English and so on. The proof of the scientific wisdom is in its results.

It is unsurprising, then, to find many contemporary Buddhists saying that if Buddhist views conflict with science, it is the Buddhist views that have to give way. For example, the (current) Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, says:[5]

> If science proves some belief of Buddhism wrong, then Buddhism will have to change. In my view, science and Buddhism share a search for the truth and for understanding reality. By learning from science about aspects of reality where its understanding may be more advanced, I believe that Buddhism enriches its own worldview.

Another well known contemporary Buddhist, the late Thich Nhat Hanh, puts the humility here in this way:[6]

> Nonattachment to Views: *Aware of the suffering created by attachment to views and wrong perceptions*, we are determined to avoid being narrowminded and bound to present views. We shall learn and practice nonattachment from views in order to be open to others' insights and experiences. We are aware that the knowledge we presently possess is not changeless, absolute truth. Truth is found in life, and we will observe life within and around us in every moment, ready to learn throughout our lives.

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[5] Tenzin Gyatso 2005.   [6] Edelglass 2009, p. 422. Italics original.

Such an attitude is not possible if one believes that certain views have been revealed as true by an almighty god. If science conflicts with them, it is the science that must go—as we have seen with episodes in Christianity, both historical (with the reaction of the Church to Galileo and Darwin) and contemporary (with fundamentalist Christians in the US and the Theory of Evolution). Of course, it is always possible, as many Christians do, to reinterpret passages in the Christian Bible—as metaphors, or in some other way. But what you can't do is say that God just got it wrong.

7.3 *Anitya*

Having said that, it is remarkable the extent to which a Buddhist perspective on the natural world is compatible with—indeed, verified by—contemporary science. It is a standard Buddhist view that there are three marks of reality: impermanence (*anitya*), unsatisfactoriness (*duḥkha*), and lack of self (*anātman*). As the *Dhammapada* puts it (vv 277–279):[7]

> 'All conditioned things are impermanent'—when one sees this with wisdom, one turns away from suffering. This is the path to purification.
>
> 'All conditioned things are unsatisfactory'—when one sees this with wisdom, one turns away from suffering. This is the path to purification.
>
> 'All things are not-self'—when one sees this with wisdom, one turns away from suffering. This is the path to purification.

Let us leave *duḥkha* for the present (I will come back to it in due course), and consider the other two, starting with *anitya*: everything in the causal flux (that is, every object with which the natural and social sciences concern themselves) is impermanent. Things come into existence when causes and conditions are ripe, maintain themselves for a time, and then go out of existence when causes and conditions so determine.

The claim that reality is thus was presumably made as a simple generalization of what was observe. However, science has given us much deeper reasons for supposing it to be true. Thus, it has now given us theories of evolution in biology and physics. We know that the habitat of the Earth and other planets has evolved, that geological features appear and disappear, that species appear, evolve, and disappear. We know that all the physical configurations in the cosmos (galaxies, stars, planets, etc.), came into existence at certain times, and are in a process of constant change. Quantum mechanics tells us that fundamental particles

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[7] Buddharakkhita 1985, p. 65.

themselves come into, and go out of existence. Indeed, contemporary science tells us that the whole cosmos itself came into existence about 13.8 billion years ago in the 'Big Bang'. Moreover, the third law of thermodynamics tells us that entropy tends to a maximum. In other words, every ordered structure, be it a planet, a painting, or a person, will eventually lose its structure and disintegrate. Perhaps the cosmos itself will go out of existence in the mirror image of the Big Bang, the Big Crunch; or maybe it will expand indefinitely until its density is as near zero as makes no difference, which is as good as going out of existence since there will effectively be nothing there.

7.4 *Anātman*

Let us turn to *anātman*. We noted in §2 that Buddhism made two major breaks from Hinduism. *Anātman* was the second of these. It is important to understand what this means, however, since the word 'self' can be used in many ways. *Anātman* does not mean that there are no people. There is a very clear sense in which Buddhism holds there to be people. Their existence might be conventional in a certain sense, but that they do have such an existence is clear.

When Buddhists deny the existence of a self, what they are denying is that people have a part which is constant, exists all the time the person exists, and indeed defines the person as that very person. The closest analogue in Western thought is the soul.

If a person has no self, what, then, are they? The standard analogue is a chariot, but let us update this a bit, and consider a car. A car is an object composed of parts. The parts came together in a factory at some time; they interact with each other, and with the environment. Some parts wear out and are replaced. In the end, the parts no longer function together (remember the third law of thermodynamics), and the car goes out of existence. Crucially, any part of the car can be replaced while the car remains the same car. You still own the same car if you replace the clutch, or the tyres. Even the registration plates can change if you move state. Now, you are the same as the car. Your parts are not electrical and mechanical, as are those of a car. They are psycho-biological. But the general picture is exactly the same.

Buddhist philosophers did not make the claim of *anātman* as a generalization from experience. Indeed, it is highly counter-intuitive. We are all inclined to think that there is an essential *me*. They made it on the basis of philosophical arguments, such as those given by Vasubandhu (fl. 4th–5th c. CE) in Chapter 9 of his *Abhidharmakośa-Bhāṣya*.[8]

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[8] See Duerlinger 2003, pp. 71–110. For discussion, see Priest 2019.

However, the picture sits very comfortably with modern sciences, such as anatomy, chemistry, psychology. A doctor who professed to find a soul in someone's body, in the way that they can find a gall bladder or spleen, would not last very long in the profession. The physical parts of a person's body are changing all the time. Every morning after breakfast, the physical constitution of your body changes. According to some estimates, all the matter in your body changes within ten years.[9]

It is perhaps more plausible that a self could be located, not in the physical body, but in consciousness—whatever relationship this bears to the physical body. And indeed, we do seem to have a sense of *me*ness—a centre of consciousness, if you like. The self cannot reside in consciousness, however, simply because consciousness is lost when a person is knocked out or anaesthetized. Though unconscious, the person remains the same person. So at best the self could be only the *potential* for a certain kind of consciousness. However, many modern cognitive scientists argue that even when one is conscious, there is, in fact, no 'centre of consciousness'. That there is such a thing an illusion. Dennett puts matters as follows:[10]

> There is no single, definitive 'stream of consciousness,' because there is no central Headquarters, no Cartesian Theater where 'it all comes together' for the perusal of a Central Meaner. Instead of such a single stream (however wide), there are multiple channels in which specialized circuits try, in parallel pandemoniums, to do their various things, creating Multiple Drafts [GP: of a narrative of the self] as they go. Most of these fragmentary drafts of 'narrative' play short-lived roles in the modulation of current activity but some get promoted to further functional roles, in swift succession, by the activity of a virtual machine in the brain. The seriality of this machine…is not a 'hard-wired' design feature, but rather the upshot of a coalition of these specialists.

In Buddhist terms, consciousness is a flux of transient and interconnected mental states, occurring in series or in parallel. Early Buddhist philosophy (Abhidharma) had a sophisticated taxonomy of such mental states and their inter-relationships.[11] Modern cognitive/neuro-science may tell a more sophisticated story. But that is what one should expect in the development of any area of empirical enquiry.

Unsurprisingly, then, a number of neuro-scientists and Buddhists (not that these categories are exclusive) have come to realize that many projects concerning the understanding of the mind may be profitably pursued drawing on both areas

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[9] See e.g. Opfer 2021.
[10] Dennett 1993, pp. 253–254. The book reviews the evidence and mounts the case for the view. See, especially, Part II of the book. See also Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1991.
[11] See Ronkin 2018.

of expertise.[12] One of these concerns meditation. Meditation practices of various kinds have always been important to Buddhism. These practices are held to bring about changes in a person's consciousness, both short-term and long-term. There is certainly anecdotal evidence for such a claim. The work of neuro-scientists and psychologists has allowed many claims about meditation to begin to be tested scientifically.[13]

Let me end this section by noting that in Madhyamaka Buddhism, and all the other schools of Buddhism influenced by this, the view that a person does not have a self is generalized to the claim that *all* things lack self. What this means is that all things lack an intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*): things are what they are only in virtue of the relationships they bear to other things. That is, they are empty (*śūnyā*). A good case can be made for the claim that modern science also vindicates this view, though a discussion of this is beyond what is possible here.

7.5 Logic

Let us go back to the *Kālāma Sūtra* and change tack a little. The Buddha advises us not to be taken in by specious reasoning. But what sorts of reasoning are specious? The study of correct/incorrect reasoning is, of course, the field of logic.

In the West, logical orthodoxy has subscribed to two important principles: the Principle of Excluded Middle (PEM: every statement is *either* true or false), and the Principle of Non-Contradiction (PNC: no statement is *both* true and false). Thus, every statement (as long as it is not ambiguous in some way or other) is either true or false, but not both.[14]

Now, in Buddhist thought, there is a principle called the *catuṣkoṭi*—four points. This is to the effect that every statement is either true (and true only), false (and false only), both true and false, or neither true nor false. The origins of the *catuṣkoṭi* in Indian thought are somewhat murky. But the framework was certainly in place by the time of the Buddha. This is clear because it is on display in a number of *sūtra*s. For example, in the *Aggivacchagotta Sutta*, the Buddha's interlocutor, Vaccha, is interested in what happens to an enlightened person after they die. (What happens before death is clear, since we have the Buddha himself to show us.) The dialogue goes as follows:[15]

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[12] Such is the aim, for example, of the Mind and Life Institute, set up by Francisco Varela and the Dalai Lama in 1991, which has been functioning very successfully since then, https://www.mindandlife.org.

[13] For a survey of some of the work in this area and its results, see Van Dam et al. 2018. See also Davidson and Lutz 2008.

[14] Thus, the person usually taken to be the founder of logic in the West, Aristotle, defends both principles in his *Metaphysics*—though oddly enough, he seems to reject the PEM in the somewhat notorious Chapter 9 of *De Interpretation*.

[15] Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi 1995, p. 591. A *Thatāgata* is someone who has achieved enlightenment.

'How is it, Master Gotama, does Master Gotama hold the view: "After death a Thatāgata exists: only this is true, anything else is wrong"?'

'Vaccha, I do not hold the view: "After death a Thatāgata exists: only this is true, anything else is wrong."'

'How then, does Master Gotama hold the view: "After death a Thatāgata does not exist: only this is true, anything else is wrong"?'

'Vaccha, I do not hold the view: "After death a Thatāgata does not exist: only this is true, anything else is wrong."'

'How is it, Master Gotama, does Master Gotama hold the view: "After death a Thatāgata both exists and does not exist: only this is true, anything else is wrong"?'

'Vaccha, I do not hold the view: "After death a Thatāgata both exists and does not exist: only this is true, anything else is wrong."'

'How then, does Master Gotama hold the view: "After death a Thatāgata neither exists nor does not exist: only this is true, anything else is wrong"?'

'Vaccha, I do not hold the view: "After death a Thatāgata neither exists nor does not exist: only this is true, anything else is wrong."'

The four possibilities put to the Buddha are exactly those of the *catuṣkoṭi*, and the framework is not challenged by the Buddha. He does not say 'Don't be silly, Vaccha; it makes no sense for a *Thatāgata* neither to exist nor not exist, or both to exist and not exist.'[16]

Clearly, the *catuṣkoṭi* flies in the face of the PEM and PNC—so much so that Western commentators on the *catuṣkoṭi* have struggled to make sense of it.[17] However, modern mathematical logic has show exactly how to do so. In the second half of the twentieth century, many logics, usually called 'non-classical' logics, were developed, with all the rigour that the mathematical techniques first applied to logic around the turn of the twentieth century provide. These logics take on board the possibility that statements may be neither true nor false and/or both true and false. (Logics of the first kind are now called *paracomplete*; logics of the second, *paraconsistent*.) Indeed, one very standard logic called *First Degree Entailment* (don't ask) is based on the four possibilities of the *catuṣkoṭi*. The four semantic values, t (true only), f (false only), b (both), and n (neither), are standardly depicted in a diagram mathematicians call a Hasse diagram, which looks like this:

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[16] Though the observant will note that the Buddha refuses to endorse any of the four possibilities. 'Why?' is an important question and the matter was to have significant ramifications in later Buddhist thought (see Priest 2018), but this is not relevant here.

[17] See Priest 2018, 2.4.

$$b \overset{\nearrow \quad t \quad \nwarrow}{\underset{\nwarrow \quad f \quad \nearrow}{}} n$$
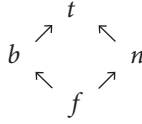
The four points of the *catuṣkoṭi* are manifest.[18]

Of course, the tools of modern logic were not on the agenda of Buddhists—or Aristotle—over 2000 years ago, any more than were the tools of contemporary neuro-science. But there is no reason why a Buddhist need reject them—quite the contrary. As both the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh point out, Buddhism is about understanding the world in which we live, and it would be silly to suppose that we have learned nothing about such matters in the last 2,000 years.

7.6 Rebirth

And now it's time to address the elephant in the room: rebirth, the view that when people die, they are reborn.

Rebirth is an orthodox part of Indo-Tibetan Buddhism. It is also a central feature of some Chinese Buddhisms, such as Pure Land (*Jingtu Zong*, 净土宗), but it is somewhat out of kilter with the more this-worldly tenor of Chinese philosophy, and plays no real role in *Chan* (禪, Jap: *Zen*), where the emphasis is entirely on the present. Though I know of no Zen texts where rebirth is rejected—other than as part of rejecting all views. Perhaps piety made this impossible.

Anyway, scientifically credible evidence for rebirth is, to put it mildly, scant.[19] It does not have to be like this. There could be many cases of the following kind. A person remembers doing something in a previous birth which nobody else knew about, and which is subsequently verified. For example, they might remember hiding a box in a certain place, which could then be found. True, the lack of evidence does not show that rebirth is false, but it is foolish to believe an empirical view for which credible evidence is wanting. As Hume put it, a wise person apportions their beliefs according to the evidence.[20]

The natural thought at this point is that rebirth is an inessential cultural accretion to Buddhism, simply taken over from orthodox Indian thought circa the fifth century BCE. New religious and philosophical views reject aspects of the ambient orthodoxy, but they always take over others.

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[18] Further on all these matters, see Priest 2018, ch. 2. See also Garfield (2019).

[19] Though some people claim to find some. See e.g. Stevenson 1997. For a critique of evidence of this kind, see Edwards 1996.

[20] *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, sec. 10, pt. 1.

And it is clear that there are such accretions to Buddhist thought. Many Buddhist texts refer to Mt Sumeru, a large strangely shaped mountain at the centre of the Earth. Few would now hold this to be other than an outdated bit of geography/cosmology. More importantly, as a religion, traditional Buddhism has been just a patriarchal as the other major world religions. All the Dalai Lamas have been men; all temple heads in Japan have been men. Some Buddhist texts claim that women cannot achieve enlightenment. (Women have to be reborn as men first.) And according to tradition, the Buddha himself refused to have women in his sangha (religious community). He relented when some of his followers pressed him on the matter but, even then, women had to be under the direct authority of some man.

Yet Buddhism itself provides no reason for this misogyny. Quite the contrary. We find the Buddha himself saying this. In the *Vāseṭṭha Sutta*, where the Buddha rejects the caste system, he says:[21]

> While in [various animal] births are differences, each having their own distinctive marks, among humanity such differences of species—no such marks are found. Neither in hair, nor in the head, not in the ears or eyes, neither found in mouth or nose, not in lips or brows. Neither in neck, nor shoulders found, not in belly or the back, neither in buttocks nor the breast, not in groin or sexual parts. Neither in hands nor in the feet, not in fingers or the nails, neither in knees nor in the thighs, not in their 'colour', not in sound, here is no distinctive mark as in the many other sorts of birth. In human bodies as they are, such differences cannot be found: the only human differences are those in names alone.

The human condition and the way to change it are the same for all, regardless of caste and gender. The patriarchy of traditional Buddhism, then, is simply an unfortunate cultural accretion. And it is disappearing as Buddhism moves into the West, where patriarchy is no longer acceptable—at least to the kind of person to which Buddhism tends to appeal.

One may naturally take the view in rebirth to be a similar cultural accretion, taken over from the ambient social culture. Notably, there are hardly any canonical texts which make a case for the truth of rebirth.[22]

Another aspect of orthodox Hindu thought taken over by Buddhism is that of *karma*. 'Karma' literally means *action*. And the doctrine of *karma* means that actions have consequences. This is a perfectly obvious part of common-sense (and clinical) psychology. If you go round being kind to people, people are more likely to be kind to you. If you go around being nasty to people, people are more likely to

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[21] Suttacentral 2011.
[22] The only one I know is a defence of rebirth by Dharmakīrti some 1,000 years after the Buddha. For an analysis of his argument, see Hayes 1993.

be nasty to you. And if you make a practice of being kind/nasty, you will turn yourself into a kind/nasty person. As Aristotle pointed out, we train ourselves into our virtues and vices.[23] Moreover, there is evidence to the effect that being kind makes people happier in themselves.[24] *Karma* is therefore perfectly acceptable to a scientifically informed Buddhism.[25]

For Buddhists who believe in rebirth, however, one's *karma* determines the kind of rebirth one will have. Good *karma* means a fortunate rebirth: as a person who is able to do those things conducive to achieving enlightenment. Bad *karma* means a rebirth as a person who cannot do so (through poverty, disease, etc.), or even as an animal. Clearly, if one rejects rebirth, one must reject this aspect of *karma* too.

7.7 *Duḥkha* and *Upekṣā*

There is, however, a very obvious objection to the claim that the coherence of Buddhism does not require rebirth. To see what this is, we must return to the second mark of reality, *duḥkha*. The earliest teachings of the Buddha are recorded in *sūtras* such as the *Dharmachakrapravartana Sūtra* and are known as the Four Noble Truths. The first of these is precisely that *duḥkha* is a characteristic of the human condition.[26]

The standard translation of the word *duḥkha* is *suffering*, but its resonances are much wider than this. It connotes: suffering, pain, discontent, unsatisfactoriness, unhappiness, sorrow, affliction, anxiety, dissatisfaction, discomfort, anguish, stress, misery, frustration. All creatures experience illness, death, loss of possessions, body parts, loved ones, and so on, giving rise to unhappiness. The view is not to the effect that life is unremittingly miserable. Things certainly happen that make us happy; but they do not go on forever (*anitya*), and there will always be other events which cause unhappiness: illness and old age is a feature of every person's life (if they are lucky enough to live that long). And even the good things come with an edge. When they cease, we experience unhappiness. Moreover, at the back of one's mind there is often the insecurity of the loss of a good thing. (Think of jealousy in love, and rivalry at work.) What's more, when we get what we want, we often do not find it fulfilling, as we thought it would. As for *anitya*, all this is a clear generalization from what we experience of the world.

Because of the First Noble Truth, Buddhism is sometimes thought of as a pessimistic view. It is certainly a realistic view, which urges you not to put your

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[23] *Nicomachean Ethics*, bk 2, ch. 1.   [24] See e.g. Cutler and Banerjee 2018.
[25] And given that people are changing ('being reborn') constantly, this makes it possible to 'demythologize' the notions of karma of rebirth as about this life, if one is so inclined. See, further, Garfield 2022, pp. 174–179.
[26] Further on the Four Noble Truths, see Carpenter 2014, ch. 1 and Siderits 2007, ch. 2.

head in the sand. But it is the very opposite of a pessimistic view. For the other three Noble Truths, tell us that you can do something to get rid of *duḥkha*—or at least minimize it. In particular, the Fourth Noble Truth (the Eightfold Noble Path), specifies a number of practices conducive to achieving this end, that is, attaining *nirvāṇa*—the extinction of *duḥkha*. These include having the right beliefs, intention and determination, living morally, practising mindfulness.

Buddhism takes as a given that people don't like *duḥkha*, and that one should therefore act to get rid of it—both one's own and that of others: compassion (*karuṇā*) has always been integral to Buddhist ethics. That *duḥkha* is a bad thing is, I think, true, but not as obvious as one might think. However let us not go into this here.[27] The point is that, thus far, Buddhism is about eliminating a negative. And if matters are left at that, there is a very obvious way to achieve this: commit suicide. And it is an act of compassion to go around killing others. That is absurd.

It is here that rebirth is relevant. If there is rebirth, such acts are pointless. Someone who dies is going to be reborn and go through the whole thing again, and again, and again, till eventually they do what is necessary to attain *nirvāṇa*. There is no shortcut to undertaking the discipline and practices of the Fourth Noble Truth.

If one does not subscribe to rebirth, this reply is not available. The Buddhist goal, then, cannot simply be about the elimination of a negative; it must also be the accentuation of a positive. And indeed, the Buddhist tradition is quite explicit about what this is. *Duḥkha* has a flip-side. In Sanskrit, this is *upekṣā* (Pāli: *upekkha*). Again, this is a difficult word to translate, but the closest translation is something like *peace of mind*.[28] This is equanimity in the face of the slings and arrows of (sometimes not so) outrageous fortune that life launches towards us. One Buddhist thinker describes it this way:[29]

> The real meaning of upekkha is equanimity, not indifference in the sense of unconcern for others. As a spiritual virtue, upekkha means equanimity in the face of the fluctuations of worldly fortune. It is evenness of mind, unshakeable freedom of mind, a state of inner equipoise that cannot be upset by gain and loss, honor and dishonor, praise and blame, pleasure and pain. Upekkha is freedom from all points of self-reference; it is indifference only to the demands of the ego-self with its craving for pleasure and position, not to the well-being of one's fellow human beings. True equanimity is the pinnacle of the four social attitudes that the Buddhist texts call the 'divine abodes': boundless

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[27] It is discussed in Priest 2017.

[28] One can find a notion in the same ball park in Hellenistic philosophies, such as Stoicism and Epicurianism. In Greek it was called *ataraxia*; in Latin it was called *tranqullitas*. See Irwin 1989, chs 8, 9.

[29] Bodhi 1998.

loving-kindness, compassion, altruistic joy, and equanimity. The last does not
override and negate the preceding three, but perfects and consummates them.

Peace of mind is a good in itself, as one knows when one experiences it. But it is
not just a good in itself. The other good things in life, like the joys of music one
loves, the beauty of a sunset, the happiness one gets from helping others, are all
greater if one is not disturbed by troubled thoughts and emotions. Buddhism, as
Jay Garfield once said to me, does not free you *from* life, but *for* life.

Let me say a final word about the attainment of *nirvāṇa*—enlightenment. If
there is no rebirth, this implies that people—maybe most people—will never
realize this—even if they practise appropriately. However, this does not deprive
Buddhist practice of a point. Ideals may not be achievable, but it is still the case
that the closer one can get to them the better. *Duḥkha* is bad, and *upekṣā* is good.
The less there is of the former, and the more there is of the latter, the better.[30]
(I note that as far as I know, there are no texts where the Buddha is reported as
saying that all people *will* achieve enlightenment.[31])

7.8 Conclusion: Against Essentialism

It cannot be denied that there are those who would contest what I have said about
rebirth. There are certainly Buddhists who claim that without an endorsement of
rebirth a view is not *real* Buddhism.[32] And we may agree that traditionally most
Buddhists—including the Buddha—have endorsed rebirth. That, however, hardly
settles the matter (even according to the Buddha's own words).

As I noted in the introduction to this piece, Buddhism has moved through
different cultures, morphing in the process each time it does so. It is now moving
into the West, where new forms are developing—sometimes referred to as
'Buddhist Modernisms'. Such developments render unavoidable the question of
the relationship between Buddhism and science, including the question of
whether rebirth is essential to Buddhism.[33]

However, it seems to me, the shape-shifting history of Buddhism, makes
essentialist questions of this kind misplaced. Buddhism is what it was, is, and
will be. The emphasis on change in Buddhist philosophy, should make this point
easy to grasp! If, indeed, all things are without self, that is, essence—as articulated

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[30] See, further, Garfield 2022, pp. 113–115.
[31] In those forms of Buddhism where Buddha Nature plays an important role, it is standardly held
that all people are *already* enlightened—though they may not realize this. But even here, I know of no
text which claims that all people *will* (as opposed to *can*) realize it.
[32] See e.g. Thurman and Bachelor nd, Bodhi 2005.
[33] On these matters, see Lopez 2008, McMahan 2008, Thompson 2020. See also the discussion of
Modernism vs Traditionalism in Garfield 2022, p. 182 ff.

most systematically by Madhyamaka—then this is true of Buddhism itself. If you want a label for the relationship between the different Buddhisms in the causal sequence of its development, perhaps the Wittgensteinian one of *family resemblance* best fits the bill.[34] In this chapter I have presented a certain picture of Buddhism and its relationship to science—and as I have argued, a coherent one. The question of whether this is *real* Buddhism, strikes me as having no real sense.[35]

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[34] E.g., *Philosophical Investigations*, §67.
[35] For their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this essay, I am very grateful to Amber Carpenter, Jay Garfield, and Yujin Nagasawa.

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A7.1 Reply to Graham Priest

Monima Chadha

I am mostly in agreement with Priest's conclusion that Buddhism's relationship with science is coherent. I appreciate how he discusses important tenets of Buddhism to argue for his view. There is no God, no self, and everything is impermanent. The role of logic and reasoning in Buddhism is also rightly emphasized. Priest also tackles, in his words, 'the elephant in the room': the doctrine of rebirth. Rather than simply bracketing or reinterpreting the doctrines of *karma* and rebirth as most naturalists tend to do or dismissing *karma* and rebirth as inessential to Buddhism as some rationalists do, Priest addresses it explicitly. My response to Priest will concentrate on his response to the apparent incoherence between science and the doctrine of rebirth. The essence of karma is 'as you sow, so shall you reap'. This much is shared with common sense and findings in clinical psychology, says Priest. Rebirth is not essential to it. From this, Priest concludes that '*Karma* is therefore perfectly acceptable to a scientifically informed Buddhism' (p. XX). If I understand correctly, Priest's response is to reject rebirth as an unfortunate cultural accretion. I agree with Priest that *karma* and rebirth are cultural accretions, and that rebirth is not essential to *karma*. Naturalizing and secularizing Buddhism is a good strategy, and it has worked wonders for bringing Buddhism to the West and the popularity it enjoys. And as Priest notes early in the piece, contemporary teachers and the Dalai Lama himself interpret the Buddhist commitment to 'nonattachment to views' as an openness to the enriching Buddhist views by learning from science and experience more generally.

Naturalized *karma* (*sans* rebirth) eradicates troubling metaphysical assumptions. My question is: Does this naturalization come at a cost? I argue that other Buddhist doctrines must be jettisoned together with rebirth. It is up to naturalists to decide whether they want to pay this price. Priest is sensitive to the issue that rejecting rebirth makes Buddhism vulnerable to the so-called suicide argument. The worry is that Buddhism seems to be about eliminating suffering. This is merely a negative ideal. An obvious way to eliminate individual suffering is committing suicide. Moving further to the Mahāyāna perspective that emphasizes the elimination of suffering of all living beings does not refute the suicide argument but makes its consequences more extreme. The compassionate Bodhisattva aims at eliminating the suffering of all beings, allowing for the suicide argument to be transformed into an argument for universal homicide. Priest

responds to the concern by appeal to notion of *upekṣā* (*upekkha* in Pāli), best translated as peace of mind or equanimity which is added as a positive goal of Buddhist practice. The idea is that we no longer think of Buddhism as being merely about eliminating a negative. This is a promising reply to an important objection faced by the naturalist. It deserves serious consideration.

Priest considers that peace of mind, his preferred translation of *upekṣā*, is a good in itself and adds to the enjoyment of other joys in life like the beauty of a sunset or the happiness one gets from helping others. *Upekṣā* is not positive in this sense, it is best characterized as a neutral state. To see why, let's look closely at Bodhi's (1998) explication of the notion of *upekṣā* quoted by Priest. 'It is evenness of mind, unshakeable freedom of mind, a state of inner equipoise that cannot be upset by gain and loss, honor and dishonor, praise and blame, pleasure and pain.' *Upekṣā* is one of the sublime abidings (*brahmavihāras*): loving kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*). Heim (2017) explains that equanimity is different from the first three in that it emphasizes pulling back from the happiness and pleasure taken in the forms of love developed in the first three. Happiness and pleasure are considered as dangers because they are associated with desires for beings (such as 'may they be happy') and because the practices loving kindness, compassion, and sympathetic joy have proximity to aversion and attraction and retain a solid connection to joy. Even though the Buddhist thinkers do not mention this, equanimity as an ideal is also a cultural accretion. The positive ideal of *upekṣā* is very close to the ideal of *Sthitaprajña* first explicated in the Bhagavadgītā (2.54–2.58). *Sthitaprajña* (literally stable wisdom) is used to describe the state of sage who has realized the highest wisdom. The sage described in these passages in the Bhagavadgītā is freed from desire, fear, and anger, his mind is not disturbed by pain or pleasure and feels neither attraction nor desire. Equanimity is best thought of as an 'unwavering' state of mind that is not moved by pleasure or pain, a neutral state. I think it is a stretch to describe it as a positive ideal.

There is another problem with introducing *upekṣā* or equanimity or peace of mind as a positive ideal. It does not sit well with other Buddhist ideals. The Bodhisattva is not someone who is unmoved by the pain of others; rather, he is someone who suffers the suffering of others. Vasubandhu explains:

> There is a certain category of persons [Bodhisattvas], who, indifferent to what concerns them personally, are happy through the well-being of others, and are unhappy through the suffering of others. For them, to be useful to others is to be useful to themselves . . . an excellent person, through his personal suffering, looks out for the well-being and destruction of suffering of others, for he suffers the suffering of others. (trans. Pruden, 1988, p. 481)

So, I think, Priest's suggestion that Buddhism does not just promote the negative elimination of suffering, but also promotes the accentuation of the positive *upekṣā*

as a means to avoid the absurd consequences of the suicide argument, does not succeed. Be that as it may, I am not suggesting that we need to reintroduce rebirth to save Buddhism from this absurd consequence, only that introducing *upekṣā* is not a good solution.

Another worry that Priest highlights is that if there is no rebirth, this implies that most people will never realize *nirvāṇa* (enlightenment) even if they practise appropriately. It seems there is not much point in spending time on strenuous and time-consuming observances required to make progress on the Buddhist Path. Priest's response is to say that even though ideals may not be achievable, the closer one can get to them the better. '*Duḥkha* is bad, and *upekṣā* is good. The less there is of the former, and the more there is of the latter, the better' (p. 15). I have raised doubts about the goodness of *upekṣa*, but let's put that aside for now. I want to close by raising a different concern. Priest writes that *upekṣā* is the flip-side of *duḥkha* (p. 14). This does not seem right. *Duḥkha* in Buddhism is to be under-stood as the existential fact of suffering, one's own and others. *Upekṣā* on the other hand is a state of an individual mind, cultivating an attitude towards pain and pleasure. The opposite of *upekṣā* is ordinary indifference, but it is also threatened by attraction and aversion as its distant enemies (Buddhaghosa, *Visuddhimagga*, p. 319). So, I have two further questions for Priest. First, can we make sense of an individual mind in Buddhism? We can think of mind as a flux of transient and interconnected mental states, occurring in series or in parallel. But there are many parallel series and many interconnections with other minds in the interconnected web of mental states. If I understand the Buddhist view of mind correctly, it is very hard to draw sharp boundaries between individual minds and individual mental states. Second, it seems that cultivating *upekṣā* will mean that one's mind will not be perturbed by pain, blame, or dishonour. That is to say, there will continue to be objectively bad things, painful occurrences, and events, but one who has cultivated *upekṣā* will not be perturbed by it. Is that good enough for eliminating or reducing suffering?

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A7.2 Reply to Graham Priest

Helen De Cruz

Graham Priest examines the relationship between Buddhism, science, and reason. Priest's central claim is that 'it is remarkable, the extent to which a Buddhist perspective on the natural world is compatible with—indeed, verified by—contemporary science'. This is indeed remarkable, given how much older Buddhism is than modern science. Buddhism has its roots in the fifth century BCE in the teachings of the historical Buddha; modern science began in the early seventeenth century. In this respect, Buddhism seems to be an outlier among the world religions. Think of, for instance, Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism, which all make claims about the origins and antiquity of the universe, the shape of the universe, or the origins of species. While we should not necessarily read these accounts in literalist terms, there are at least surface-level conflicts between them and the scientific consensus.

What makes Buddhism so different? Priest attributes its remarkable compatibility with science to the fact that Buddhism enjoys relative epistemic independence and flexibility with respect to its holy texts (notably, the Pali canon), especially when compared to many other religious traditions. Both Hinduism and Christianity have *natural theology*, explorations of religious ideas based on reason and experience, as well as *revealed theology*, which takes divine revelations in holy texts such as the Vedas and the Bible as its starting point. While we can find the Buddhist equivalent of natural theology, there is no Buddhist equivalent of revealed theology, according to Priest. We can see many examples of dialogue between science and Buddhism, exemplified by the tireless efforts of the fourteenth Dalai Lama. These include the *Science and Philosophy in the Indian Buddhist Classics* series, a four-volume series conceived and compiled by the Dalai Lama (e.g. Jinpa 2017). Moreover, so Priest argues, we can see an easy compatibility between core Buddhist notions such as *anātman* (the no-self thesis) and modern neuroscience.

Priest follows a line of argument we frequently see in modern Buddhism. As Donald Lopez Jr (2008) has pointed out, modern Buddhists since the nineteenth century have commonly portrayed Buddhism as particularly harmonious with science. They did this as a response to colonialist attitudes. To counter the racism and superiority complex of the western colonizers, Buddhists drew a favourable contrast between their religious views to those of Christians (where the

relationship between science and religion was and is indeed often less harmonious). However, it's important to note that it is not the case that we have a static set of Buddhist concepts that were frozen in time since the historical Buddha that by an almost magical coincidence aligned so well with science. Rather, Buddhism, like other religions, has been profoundly shaped by modernity and other historical processes, notably in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In that respect, it is interesting to note that Buddhism is still wedded to the notion of rebirth, a view Priest admits we have little empirical evidence for. Priest sees rebirth as an instance of cultural accreditation, where Buddhists took over ideas from the ambient social culture rather than as a deep structural element of their religion. In his view, a scientifically minded Buddhist can—indeed should—reject rebirth, as well as the aspects of karma that involve this notion.

It is perhaps too hasty to reject rebirth due to a perceived lack of empirical evidence. We might say that the notion of rebirth is *ascientific,* rather than *unscientific*, i.e. it's not so much incompatible with scientific facts and theories. Rather, science has nothing to say about this matter. This may point to a fundamental limitation of the scope of science (Hossenfelder 2022).

As Priest shows, Buddhists can be flexible in their commitments in the face of science. However, as the following historical example shows, there are limits to this flexibility, which indicates that perhaps the relationship between Buddhism and science is less harmonious than modern Buddhists want to admit. Take as just one example the reception of evolutionary theory by modern Buddhists in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Japan and China (see De Smedt and De Cruz 2021, for review). These Buddhist authors did not first learn about evolutionary theory through the work of its architects, Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace, but rather through later works that further drew out the implications of Darwin's work by Herbert Spencer, Thomas Huxley, Pyotr Kropotkin, and others.

The first evolutionary work to appear in Chinese translation was a compilation by Yan Fu (*On Natural Evolution* (*Tianyan Lun*, 1898)) which incorporated excerpts by Herbert Spencer and Thomas Huxley. The work emphasized the struggle for existence and the competitive elements of evolution, drawing close parallels between social Darwinism and biological evolution (Ritzinger 2013). Buddhists at the time (as now) had no problem with common descent and macro-evolution. They were not wedded to selves or souls, or to a radical distinction between humans and other creatures, as Christians are. After all, through rebirth, the boundaries between humans and other living things are fluid and there is no Buddhist equivalent of the Christian notion of the soul. However, these Buddhist authors objected to the mechanism through which evolution occurred. The survival of the fittest, and the competition between strong and weak members of the same species, as well as predator–prey dynamics as principal drivers of evolution, did not appeal to them. It ran counter to the centrality of compassion in Buddhism as well as their aim to end suffering. In

particular, the struggle for survival seemed incompatible with the Buddhist striving to not cling to an illusion of the self or worldly possessions.

In order to reduce this perceived incompatibility between science and Buddhism, the Chinese Buddhist Taixu (1890–1947) and the Japanese Nishiren Buddhist Honda Nisshō (1867–1931) looked for scientific views that were more congenial to Buddhism. They found a plausible candidate in the evolutionary views of the anarchist thinker Pyotr Kropotkin (1842–1921), who stressed mutual aid and cooperation. In his *Mutual Aid* (1902[1989]) Kropotkin anticipated later theorists such as E.O. Wilson by arguing that mutual aid and sociability are fundamental aspects of evolution. Kropotkin argued that cooperation is a driving force in the evolutionary process, and that we can explain compassion as the result of an evolved disposition. It turns out that these early modern Buddhists were on excellent grounds to follow this strain in early Darwinian theory, as there is now a sizeable body of work in evolutionary biology that shows the importance of cooperation and mutual aid in evolution. At the time, however, Kropotkin's was a minority position. At the turn of previous century, evolutionary theory was suffused with social Darwinism, eugenics, and other views that would later be discredited but that, at the time, were still very much part of the scientific mainstream.

What can we take away from this historical example? Priest is right in arguing that modern Buddhism shows a remarkable compatibility with science. Because of its epistemic flexibility and its lack of attachment to holy texts, Buddhism can nimbly adapt to the latest scientific insights. Some of its core concepts, such as *anātman*, can be easily wedded to scientific theories. However, the historical reception of evolutionary theory by modern Buddhists in Japan and China indicates that frictions between Buddhism and (at the time mainstream) science are possible, and that Buddhists, like their Christian, Muslim, and Hindu counterparts, can engage with science in a proactive way that doesn't always follow the scientific mainstream. This is an ongoing process of careful negotiation that requires creativity and respect for science.

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8

The Relationship between Science and Christianity

Understanding the Conflict Thesis in Lay Christians

Helen De Cruz

8.1 The Conflict between Science and Religion: An Academic Discussion?

How should we conceive of the relationship between science and religion? We often think of this as a theoretical question, pondered in the dispassionate halls of academia. However, the way in which we conceptualize this relationship in the public sphere also impacts the working lives of scientists, as well as the lived experience of laypeople and the concrete decisions they make.

Sometimes this has implications for matters of life and death. Take the relationship between Christianity and vaccine hesitancy in the US. In 2021, most high-income countries enjoyed a small rebound in life expectancy following the Covid-19 pandemic decline in 2020, thanks to vaccination. The United States was an exception; it saw a further decline by 0.4 years. In spite of the widespread availability of free Covid-19 vaccines, the US fell behind in its vaccination rates compared to many other industrialized nations. A closer look at the data reveals that the drop in 2021 was caused by vaccine hesitancy of mainly non-Hispanic White Americans (Masters et al. 2022). Sociological research shows that Evangelical Christianity strongly correlates with vaccine hesitancy: White Evangelical Christians were most vaccine-resistant of any religious group in the US. Moreover, they proved highly resistant to pro-vaccine communications: appealing to in-group values or pro-science messaging did not increase their intent to get vaccinated (Bokemper et al. 2021).

My aim in this chapter is to put the spotlight on the following questions: how do lay Christians understand the relationship between science and religion, and what can this tell us about the relationship between science and Christianity in a more academic setting? My focus will be on lay Christians in the US, in particular

White Evangelicals.[1] I will argue that American lay Christians, as well as American laypeople more generally, view the relationship between science and religion as one of *conflict*. By contrast, conflict is a minority view in the academic literature on science and religion, where most authors defend a harmonious relationship (such as independence, dialogue, and integration). This disconnect between the academic literature and public perception should lead us to reflect on the social role of the science and religion debate.

This chapter is structured as follows. Section 8.2 situates the conflict thesis in the literature on science and religion and examines its historical context. Section 8.3 looks at the conflict thesis among lay Christians, focusing on recent social psychological and sociological studies that show a complex and multi-layered picture. On the one hand, Christians do not experience a cognitive conflict between religious and scientific explanations, and frequently combine the two. On the other hand, some Christians (particularly in the US) have a negative attitude about science, specifically about hot-button topics such as evolutionary biology and climate science. In Section 8.4, I argue that people's attitudes to science are motivated by two kinds of concerns: epistemic concerns relating to truth, and social concerns relating to wanting to belong to a community by aligning one's beliefs to that of the community. These two kinds of concerns influence how lay White Evangelicals respond to scientific information. I discuss how political polarization and its alignment with Evangelical Christianity has resulted in the foregrounding of the conflict thesis. I then take the Deweyan stance that scientific literacy is an important good: it helps people to be informed citizens and is a key element for healthy democratic societies. I supplement this Deweyan proposal with recent insights on epistemic injustice and epistemic rights, notably by Lani Watson (2021), to show that US White Evangelicals are victims of a systematic violation of their epistemic rights. In the final section, I look at broader ramifications for the debate on religion and science.

8.2 Situating the Conflict Thesis

8.2.1 Conflict, Independence, Dialogue, and Integration

Ian Barbour (2000) famously argued that there are four ways in which science and religion can relate: conflict, independence, dialogue, and integration. While there are other classifications and further refinements and modifications to this basic

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[1] In older sociological literature, Black and White Protestants were lumped together, and the distinction between mainline and Evangelical Protestants was often blurred. However, more fine-grained analyses have since revealed that White Evangelicals are a distinct group in terms of political affiliation, values and other sociologically relevant categories (see Evans 2011 and Kobes Du Mez 2020 for more discussion on this).

scheme, Barbour's view still remains highly influential. For this reason, I will situate the conflict thesis by briefly reviewing it.

The *conflict thesis* holds that science and religion are in perpetual and necessary conflict. Jerry Coyne (2015, p. xi) sees this conflict as epistemological: 'faith may be a gift in religion, but in science it's poison, for faith is no way to find truth'. John Evans (2011), by contrast, sees the conflict as primarily moral: religious people oppose what they see as the moral agenda of scientists. The *independence model* states that science and religion explore separate domains that ask distinct questions. If each remains on its own turf, science and religion can coexist harmoniously. An example is Stephen Jay Gould's (2001) NOMA, or Non-Overlapping Magisteria, where science works on the domain of facts, and religion is concerned with values. Alister McGrath has defended a Partially Overlapping Magisteria (POMA) model where science and religion each draw on several different methodologies and approaches (e.g. McGrath and Collicutt McGrath 2007, p. 41). These methods and approaches have been shaped through historical factors. McGrath favours a pluralistic approach to knowing: there is not one single truth, but rather, different disciplines can shed light on the same problem. Hence it is beneficial for scientists and theologians to be in dialogue with each other. McGrath's POMA leads us to the third kind of model, *dialogue.* Dialogue envisages that although science and religion represent distinct ways of approaching the world, they can still learn from each other through debate and discussion. For example, Wentzel van Huyssteen (1998) argues that similarities in presuppositions, methods, and concepts make a fruitful and mutually beneficial dialogue between science and religion possible. Finally, the *integration model*, favoured by Barbour himself and by many authors influenced by him, envisages some form of unification of science and religion, in methods (such as natural theology), epistemology, and in metaphysical assumptions. For example, Robert John Russell (2006) takes the findings of quantum mechanics, in particular, the Copenhagen interpretation, as the basis for an ontological indeterminism. Using this, he formulates a model of divine action that is non-interventionist: God can directly act in the indeterminacy of the quantum level to influence or determine the outcome of some events.

Even a brief and cursory glance at contemporary work by Christian theologians, scientists, and philosophers of religion shows that dialogue and integration are their favoured models. Many of the major authors in the field, such as Celia Deane-Drummond, Sarah Coakley, and Peter Harrison, have elaborated on how such dialogue or integration can be achieved. Major collaborative endeavours in science and religion also favour dialogue or integration. For example, the John Templeton Foundation, a major funder in philosophy and theology in the US and globally, often funds projects on the interface of science and religion that emphasize a harmonious relationship. To give a recent example of such a project, the Science Engaged Theology project at Saint Andrews University aims to treat

'puzzles' at the intersection of theology and science. The project's lead investigators Joanna Leidenhag and John Perry draw on John Wesley's proposal that it is advantageous to incorporate multiple sources to gain theological truths. They regard 'science as an authentic theological source—alongside scripture, tradition, and reason'.[2] Finally, consider personal testimonies of working Christian scientists, such as the cell biologist Kenneth Miller (1999) and physician-geneticist Francis Collins (2006) who argue that there is no conflict whatsoever between their personal faith and the work they do as scientists.

In sum, the conflict thesis is a minority view among scientists, philosophers, and theologians who work on the interface of science and religion. The overwhelming consensus is that the conflict thesis is wrong, with the exception of a few dissenting voices such as Gregory Dawes (2016) and Hans Madueme (2021). This is a striking contrast with how laypeople conceive of the relationship between science and religion, as we will see in Section 8.3.

8.2.2 The Conflict Thesis in a Christian Context

Two books are commonly cited as the originators of the conflict thesis: John William Draper's *History of the Conflict between Religion and Science* (1874) and Andrew Dickson White's *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom* (1897). Both sketch historical overviews of conflict between Christianity and science. However, they are often cited without proper context: Draper and White weren't atheists or fundamentalists. Rather, they were liberal Protestants who hoped to salvage Christianity from what they considered as theological ballast that did not cohere with science. Their work was appropriated by twentieth-century sceptics and atheists who used their arguments about the incompatibility of traditional theological views with science to argue for secularization (Ungureanu 2019). The conflict thesis thus did not grow out of a debate between atheists and believers, but rather, out of discussions between co-religionist Christians with differing opinions on what the relationship between science and religion could be.

The origins of the conflict thesis predate the nineteenth century; we can find clear roots in the early modern period (seventeenth to eighteenth century) when European Christian Church leaders and theologians experienced an identity crisis. A series of seismic events had shattered the medieval Christian consensus model that combined a strict social division of labour between Church, nobility, and peasantry with a Christian–Aristotelian worldview. Centuries of inter-Christian religious warfare tore Western Europe apart. This shattered Christianity's

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[2] https://set.wp.st-andrews.ac.uk/about/what-is-science-engaged-theology/.

authority as a single unified moral and spiritual block. The aftermath of the Great Plague and its resulting social mobility, as well as the democratization of knowledge through the printing press, further undermined the medieval sociopolitical order of which Christianity was an inextricable part. A host of scientific findings, specifically in geology and palaeontology (e.g. fossil shark teeth found on mountains), seemed incompatible with inerrantist readings of the Bible and questioned its authority. This challenge was further enhanced by hermeneutical and historical approaches to scripture itself. Moreover, colonialism and intercontinental trade made Europeans more aware of the wide range of religious beliefs across cultures.

These societal and epistemological changes led to a shift in the concept of 'religion'. For Aquinas and other medieval authors, religion was a theological virtue, primarily associated with inner devotion and prayer. In Renaissance philosophy, we see a gradual shift of religion toward an inner disposition, as in Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499) who equated 'Christian religion' with a disposition to live one's life oriented towards truth and goodness. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there was a further shift from religion as inner disposition and virtue towards something more external that could be studied comparatively, namely a set of beliefs and practices (Smith 1998). Only at this point in time could 'religion' be compared to 'science', a term that also only gained its current meaning in the nineteenth century. Science used to mean intellectual virtue in the middle ages, but slowly gained the meaning of a set of disciplines concerned with the experimental study of the natural world in the nineteenth century (Harrison 2015).

These new conceptualizations allowed Church leaders and laypeople to compare religion and science as two bodies of ideas which made (at least prima facie) conflicting claims. Within the Anglican Church, two groups, Modernists and Traditionalists, were concerned with falling church attendance and influence in the United Kingdom (Bowler 2001). The Modernists believed that the tide could be stemmed if Christianity were purged of 'unnecessary' dogmas and if faith was made compatible with science. Traditionalists feared that a Christian theology devoid of concepts such as original sin and the Fall would not be worth the name.

For example, take the idea of the Fall. In most Christian theological traditions, the Fall is the cause of original sin, the tendency of humans to inevitably do wrong. Sin is why we need divine grace and salvation. However, there is no fixed, orthodox theological position on what the Fall is. Does it require a literal biblical reading of a single human ancestral pair that disobeyed God by eating from the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil? The modern theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher (1830) argued against such a picture of the Fall in his dogmatic theology, but he did so mainly on theological rather than empirical grounds (Pedersen 2020). Later modern theologians such as the Anglican Frederic Tennant (1902) rejected the Fall due to its lack of compatibility with evolutionary theory. Tennant believed that human evolution and deep time made the case for a

historical Fall untenable. He saw the origin of sin in our evolved animal nature. Sin is a mismatch between our moral nature as human beings and our 'inherited psychical constitution' which did not make a 'corresponding or adaptive change, no evolutionary progress' to the same extent as our moral faculties (Tennant 1902, p. 102). Like other modern theologians, Tennant perceived a conflict between *interpretations* of religious concepts and science, but not between Christian faith and science. Schleiermacher and Tennant were both Christian clerics, they were not people who were bent on destroying Christianity. The conflict thesis was an intra-Christian discussion.

The conflict thesis was also an important motivator for American fundamentalists, who became active in US Protestant churches in the early twentieth century. The conflict between fundamentalism and modernism in the US is exemplified in the Scopes 'Monkey' trial in 1925 and other high-profile court cases on the teaching of creationism vs evolution in public schools, such as *Kitzmiller vs Dover* (2005). As Bowler (2007, p. 179) has demonstrated, the popular imagination surrounding the Scopes trial has obscured its actual history. Contrary to what we might now think, there is 'no evidence that the early fundamentalists were united in taking up a literal interpretation of the Bible in general and of Genesis in particular'. Indeed, fundamentalists were well aware that many parts of the Bible should be read metaphorically. For example, they did not, and still largely do not, take literally such claims as the pillars of the Earth, ancient theories on reproduction (where only male seed has biologically inheritable material), and the firmament surrounding the Earth. Rather, in the early twentieth century, their focus was on the perceived bad moral consequences of evolutionary theory. For example, William Jennings Bryan, who defended the fundamentalist position at the Scopes trial, argued that teaching children evolution would be a menace to morality. Only in the 1950s (when the term 'creationism' became more common) did fundamentalists shift their focus to biblical literalism. While fundamentalism and Evangelical Christianity were distinct movements, the line is presently blurred, due to the influence of fundamentalism within Evangelical churches.[3]

In the late nineteenth to early twentieth century, Darwinism was *not* the evolutionary theory as we understand it today. Early adopters of Darwin's theory, such as Thomas Huxley and Ernst Haeckel, saw evolution as progressive and teleological. Many were proponents of social Darwinism and eugenics, keen on harnessing the tools of evolution for what they perceived as the betterment of

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[3] To complicate matters further, creationists are often presented as a unified block, and, for instance, Intelligent Design as a repackaged creationism. However, different creationist movements are distinct, compete with each other, and have differing opinions on the age of the earth, which parts of science to reject, etc. Moreover, although White Evangelicals share sociological characteristics, they are also a diverse group. Evangelicalism is more a marketplace of ideas than a well-defined movement. For a detailed analysis of these movements, see Huskinson 2020.

society. However, a series of disruptive events during the twentieth century, especially the economic depression, the rise of fascism and Nazism, and the two world wars dented this idea of secular progress and hence the prospects of a science-inspired modernist theology. In the wake of World War 2, neo-orthodox authors such as C.S. Lewis (1952) argued that theologians or lay Christians should not readily buy into the secular progressivist picture and into modern science. These neo-orthodox authors were initially not interested in science and weren't looking for an alternative scientific view of creation. Modern theologians, on their part, found it hard to make a connection with Darwinism post-modern synthesis. At this point (1950s–1970s), evolutionary theory had been stripped of its earlier teleology and progressivism. While it is still possible to combine Christian theology and evolution (as the work of authors such as Miller 1999 and Deane-Drummond 2009, exemplifies), it is not as straightforward as it was for an earlier author such as Tennant (see De Smedt and De Cruz 2020, for an overview).

In the decades that followed the Scopes trial, the fundamentalist aversion for evolutionary theory broadened out into a more stringent biblical literalism. Fundamentalism in the US did not dwindle away, as the popular imagination holds, but instead rebranded itself. It merged with Evangelicalism, with a strong focus on conservative values, masculinity, and white nationalism. This mix gained a steady suit of followers among non-denominational White Christians over the next decades up until today (Kobes Du Mez 2020). The 1960s saw the rise of Young Earth and Old Earth creationism, and later Intelligent Design, as ways to promote the teaching of Christianity (in some form) in public schools (Huskinson 2020). In order to adopt a Young Earth or Old Earth creationist view, proponents had to reject many mainstream scientific ideas. As a direct consequence, US Christians, notably in Evangelical denominations, became more hostile to mainstream science, as we will explore in the next section.

In this short overview, I have provided some context for the conflict thesis and its origins. Though we tend to think of prominent atheists such as Jerry Coyne, Richard Dawkins, and Sam Harris as exemplars of the conflict thesis, it originates in a long-standing deep disagreement between different theological factions *within* Christian churches.

8.3 How Christian Laypeople View the Relationship between Religion and Science

In their everyday lives, people effortlessly combine religious and scientific explanations. This fact struck anthropologists such as Edward Evans-Pritchard (1937/1965) who studied Azande witchcraft beliefs. Evans-Pritchard noted that the Azande (who live in Central Africa) were well aware that termites are the physical cause for the collapse of a wooden house. Nevertheless, they still appealed to

supernatural explanations (witchcraft) to explain why *that* particular house collapsed at *that* particular moment when a certain person was within its walls. Cross-cultural anthropological research has since revealed that people in a wide range of cultural settings use both religious and non-religious explanations, and combinations of these. They don't see these as conflicting but as complementary (Legare et al. 2012). Someone who recovers from advanced cancer might regard this as a miracle, *and also* as a direct result of the skill of her physicians. Religious people live in a world suffused with science. Many of our everyday actions, such as switching on your computer, boarding a plane, and getting a health checkup require some minimal degree of trust in science.

Some research has focused on how scientists perceive the relationship between science and religion. Elaine Ecklund (e.g. 2010) surveyed scientists in the United States and found that they are less religious than the general population, and show a higher attrition of religion. However, the majority of scientists in her sample think science and religion are compatible.

For the lay public at large, surveying attitudes on science and religion has been difficult. Some studies (e.g. McPhetres and Zuckerman 2018) have found a negative relationship, where higher trust in science yields lower religiosity, and vice versa but others have found no such effect (see e.g. Evans 2011). A lot depends on how the questions are asked and their overall framing. Moreover, as Jonathan Hill (2014) has demonstrated, there's a gap between lay and professional understanding of science and religion. For example, when US participants are asked a single question, namely whether God created humans in their present form, as much as 40 per cent of participants agrees, but when they get a complete list of the Young Earth creationist package deal (such as: Adam and Eve were historical figures who are ancestors of all of humanity, the Earth was created in six 24-hour periods, biological evolution is false), agreement drops to 8 per cent. To make an analogy with political views, though many people identify with political parties, they rarely hold well-defined internally consistent political positions that neatly overlap with those of the party they vote for (see e.g. Kinder and Kalmoe 2017). In many cases, the elites within political or lobby groups hold more polarized positions than the public. We also see this in the creationist movement. Evangelicals reject evolutionary theory, but they do not fund creationist organizations. As Huskinson (2020) has demonstrated, fewer and bigger organizations such as *Answers in Genesis* are competing for dwindling resources, with average White Evangelicals (and other religious people in the US) preferring to put their charitable donations into helping the poor or people in war-torn areas over funding creationist theme parks and museums. Many religious people do not hold a coherent detailed view of divine action. This allows them to selectively take from science what is useful (its many applications, including air travel, most of medicine, cell phone technology) while rejecting specific hot-button issues such as evolutionary theory and climate science.

McPhetres and Zuckerman (2018) found that religious believers in the US have lower interest in science and lower knowledge of science as gauged by science questionnaires. The effect remains even when taking away contested items on the surveys, keeping only such items as 'An electron is smaller than an atom, T/F.' In a follow-up study, McPhetres et al. (2021) sought to replicate their findings with a more global sample, but findings did not replicate in many other countries, including Sweden, South Africa, and Brazil. Similarly, while studies of US participants show a negative correlation between analytic thinking and religiosity, this does not generalize across countries (Gervais et al. 2018).

The perception of conflict between science and religion results in stereotype threat among American Christians. Kimberley Rios (2021, Rios et al. 2015) investigated possible causes for the robust finding that scientists show lower religious beliefs compared to the general US demographic. They found that a perceived conflict between science and Christianity led to stereotype threat, that is, when Christians are primed to think about their identity, they do worse on science surveys. This effect is particularly strong for Christians who believe that science is incompatible with their faith.

Also important is the relationship between political conservatism and White Evangelical Christianity. The latter have been a reliable voting block for Republican candidates for many decades (Kobes Du Mez 2020). Religious conservatives in the US distrust science more than the general population, as documented by Gordon Gauchat (2012). In 1974, US conservatives had, relatively speaking, the highest level of trust in science compared to liberals and independents, but this plummeted in the decades that followed, leading to the lowest level in 2012. What is more, conservatism and religiosity correlate strongly. Gauchat (2012) found that when teasing these two factors apart, church attendance (an excellent measure for religiosity) predicts distrust in science independently from conservatism. White Evangelical Christians compared to other religious denominations (e.g. mainline protestants, Jews, Muslims) show a lower acceptance of evolutionary theory, climate science, and recently also the science involved in the development of Covid-19 vaccines (see e.g. Pew Forum 2015, 2021). The public debate in the US on science and religion has been shaped by Evangelical leaders. As Michael Evans (2016) points out, the American public debate is currently dominated by a vocal conservative Christian minority, sidelining more moderate voices.[4] Overall, this polarization by prominent voices gives the impression that science and religion are on a hostile footing.

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[4] We can see a similar tendency in other debates, for example, the opinion on abortion by prominent Roman Catholics such as judges on the Supreme Court is out of step with American Roman Catholics, the majority of whom support legal abortion in all or most cases (Pew Forum 2020).

8.4 The Problem of Scientific Literacy among Evangelical Christians: A Problem of Epistemic Justice?

When laypeople decide to trust or reject scientific testimony, such as the efficacy and safety of vaccines or the reality of climate change, they cannot check the veracity of these reports for themselves. Instead, they rely on cues of speaker or message reliability. According to Neil Levy (2019, 2022), people are mainly led by epistemic considerations when deciding to trust science. We look for cues of benevolence (is the testifier favourably disposed towards us?) and competence (is the testifier knowledgeable about what she's saying?). In this view, White Evangelicals are unlucky, because political polarization has made scientists appear less benevolent towards them. The politicization of scientific issues and the vocal public discourse mean that they cannot defer to trustworthy sources (mainstream science). So, instead they turn to merchants of doubt, such as climate denialists. Moreover, because of their low trust in scientists, they are also more vulnerable to pseudoscience, as the recent uptake of anti-vax discourse among Evangelicals indicates. Other authors (e.g. Evans 2011) disagree with this epistemic picture. They see the conflict as not epistemic but as moral. In John Evans' view, lay Christians in the US think that scientists have a moral agenda that runs counter to Christian conservative values.

I have argued (De Cruz 2020) that laypeople mediate their acceptance of scientific testimony through both epistemic and non-epistemic factors. People want to avoid false beliefs and hold true beliefs when gauging scientific testimony, but they are *also* guided by non-epistemic factors, such as moral and social considerations. For example, people want to be seen as team-players and as reasonable, dependable collaborators. For this reason, they'll sometimes defer to what the group they belong to says against their better judgement. When information is opaque and hard to check for oneself as well as ideologically polarized, factors such as belonging to a group can win out over epistemic factors. Moreover, laypeople who are (per definition) not experts do not have very clear and well-fleshed out positions on a range of issues, which also explains why their answers on questionnaires will differ depending on the framing of the questions in any given poll. A respondent who might pick 'theistic evolution' when available could revert to 'creationism' when presented with a binary choice between creationism and evolution to explain the evolution of species (Catto et al. 2019).

Because of the wide chasm between laypeople and experts, we might think that the lay Christians are inevitably influenced by whoever happens to be the loudest voice in their community. In the US this has led to a lower scientific literacy among White Evangelicals. However, the pragmatist philosopher John Dewey (1927) argued that it is important for people, regardless of their background, to have a reasonable degree of scientific literacy. Dewey defended this position against political commentator Walter Lippmann (1922), who argued that because

of the widening chasm in knowledge between experts and the general public, decision making needs to be delegated to elites and technocrats. By contrast, Dewey (1927) thought the general public needs a democratic say that is informed by science, and the only way to accomplish this is by educating the citizenry, through accessible journalism, the public education system, and other outreach efforts by scientists. Moreover, Dewey thought that scientific literacy is an important good that allows people to realize their full potential (Flowers and De Cruz 2020).

Because Evangelicals have embraced (for historical reasons explained in detail in Kobes Du Mez 2020) an image of strident masculinity and nationalism, it may seem strange to consider them as victims. Think of the images of White Christian families posing with semi-automatic rifles in front of their Christmas tree, defending Christmas—hardly an image of oppression. Nevertheless, the lack of scientific literacy among White Evangelicals constitutes a violation of their epistemic rights. Being advantaged in many respects (e.g. political representation, economic power) does not preclude disadvantages in other areas. I draw on Lani Watson's (2021, p. 3) definition of epistemic rights, as 'a complex entitlement that provides justification for the performance and prohibition of actions and omissions concerning epistemic goods', such as forming true beliefs, being guarded from false beliefs, and gaining understanding of how science works. We have these rights by virtue of being epistemic agents. Epistemic rights violations are a form of epistemic injustice, which occurs when someone is wronged, specifically in their capacity as a knower. We need access to epistemic goods to make sound decisions, both in our personal lives (e.g. getting vaccinated against deadly diseases, climate-based decisions on transportation choices or dietary choices), and as citizens electing representatives and thus indirectly influencing policies that have a large impact on us all. If we suppose, as Levy (2022) does, that scientific literacy is partly a matter of epistemic luck, it would seem that scientifically accurate information is at least partly due to being part of the right demographic, namely being well-educated, well-off, politically progressive or liberal. This is a problem: people of all political persuasions and demographics have epistemic rights, and therefore ought to have access to good scientific information.

One might object that White Evangelicals aren't subject to epistemic rights violations because this sort of information is widely available. A wide range of educational websites and programmes give basic facts, for example, about evolution and diseases. However, distrust makes access to these sources difficult. This is a result of an increasing political polarization where the religious right, in concert with conservative politicians, have promoted an anti-science discourse. As I argued (De Cruz 2020), the solutions to low partisan trust in science are to improve scientific literacy already at the level of K-12 education, to enlist benevolent testifiers (e.g. people who self-identify as Evangelical Christians, and who are supportive of science), and to improve the epistemic landscape by actively

countering disinformation and science denialism. This could bring less hostility towards science, and thus temper the conflict view of the relationship between science and religion.

8.5 Why the Views of Laypeople Matter

In this chapter I have shown a striking disconnect between the views of laypeople on the one hand and professional philosophers and theologians who work on the relationship between science and religion on the other. Academics tend to think that science and religion are not in conflict (even if they are not religious themselves, see Ecklund 2010), but lay Christians in the US perceive this relationship as one of conflict. It is important to note that this American context cannot be extrapolated globally, as the public's views on the relationship between science and religion differ between countries. At the same time, US media have a large influence on the rest of the world, and US organizations that promulgate creationist and other anti-scientific ideas are also globally active (see Huskinson 2020). American creationist ideas (including Young Earth, Old Earth, and Intelligent Design) are an export product, which is gaining a foothold in several European and in Asian countries (such as South Korea), not only among Christians but even among, for instance, Muslims in Turkey (see Blancke et al. 2014). For this reason, the American context should not be underestimated due to its global influence.

What does this mean concretely for philosophers and theologians who work on the interface between science of religion? It means that careful research showing that religion and science are not in conflict (historically, conceptually, metaphysically, epistemically) is valuable work. Many of us (I suspect many readers of this chapter) are already doing this. But more can be done to try to address the disconnect between lay and academic views more directly, for example, by acquainting lay Christians with the history of science and religion, and to improve basic science literacy. Outreach efforts such as Biologos[5] already make an effort, but more can be done because benevolent testifiers cannot by themselves compensate for a sullied epistemic landscape. As we have seen, the current general distrust of science by White Evangelicals is due to historical reasons and the present media favouring conservative Christian voices while sidelining more moderate ones. Since scientific literacy is key for a citizenry to help decide future courses of action, with existential threats such as pandemics and especially climate change hanging over us, we urgently need to improve the epistemic landscape.

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[5] The Biologos Foundation is a Christian outreach and advocacy group that seeks to acquaint Christians with biological evolution.

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A8.1 Reply to Helen De Cruz

Monima Chadha

I learnt a lot from reading De Cruz's piece on the relationship between science and Christianity. De Cruz is right to say that more can be done and needs to be done to try to address the disconnect between lay and academic views on the perceived conflict between science and Christianity and to improve basic science literacy. De Cruz has a recommendation for those of us working at the interface of theology and philosophy: It is important for us to do careful research showing that religion and science are not in conflict (historically, conceptually, metaphysically, epistemically). I agree with De Cruz that improving science literacy among the general population is a good thing and must be promoted and encouraged. Her careful argument has convinced me that historically the disagreement between biblical doctrines and the early evolutionary theory was a matter of debate within the Christian tradition. Many theologians within the Church were impressed by the science and were rightly worried by the inconsistency between evolutionary theory and biblical doctrine of the Fall. This still seems to me well short of making the general claim of that religion and science were not in conflict historically. Of course, De Cruz is not making such a general claim; she rather urges philosophers to do careful research to establish that there is no conflict along any of the dimensions she notes. Though I agree with De Cruz that this would be a good thing, I am not sure whether we can argue for a general claim that there is no conflict between science and religion in good faith. My hesitation springs from thinking about the nature and concept of religion.

Since the nineteenth century we have settled on a general, perhaps even universally agreed upon, concept of science. We have come to understand the practice of science as guided by a methodological naturalism. Science concerns itself with delineating principles and laws that explain the natural world. Methodological naturalism is an essential constraint on science; it follows from reasonable evidential requirements to test scientific claims. In the realm of religion there is no unifying such methodological or evidential requirement or even any agreement about what counts as a religion.

De Cruz mentions that since the nineteenth century we have come to think of religion not so much as theological virtue associated with inner devotion and prayer, but rather as a set of beliefs and practices. But since then, the concept of

religion has evolved in many different directions, to the point that it threatens incoherence. Wilfrid Cantwell Smith, for example, recommends dropping the concept of religion because before modernity, 'there is no such entity [as religion and]...the use of a plural, or with an article, is false' (1962, pp. 326, 194; cf. 144). Masuzawa (2005) critiques the very idea of 'world religions' as an ideological invention of modern European thought. Smith also contends that

> [n]either religion in general nor any one of the religions...is in itself an intelligible entity, a valid object of inquiry or of concern either for the scholar or for the [person] of faith.   (1962, p. 12)

Paul Griffiths goes further to suggest that discussion about the concept religion

> rapidly suggests the conclusion that hardly anyone has any idea what they are talking about—or, perhaps more accurately, that there are so many different ideas in play about what religion is that conversations in which the term figures significantly make the difficulties in communication at the Tower of Babel seem minor and easily dealt with. These difficulties are apparent, too, in the academic study of religion, and they go far toward an explanation of why the discipline has no coherent or widely shared understanding of its central topic.
>
> (2000, p. 30)

There is, however, another more conciliatory approach discussed in the literature which suggests we conceive of the concept of religion in the anti-essentialist vein following Wittgenstein's notion of 'family resemblances' (Wittgenstein 1953 [2009], §68). When we consider the variety of instances described with the concept of religion, we see multiple features that form a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing. The instances falling under the concept of religion lack a single defining property but instead have a family resemblance to each other in that each one resembles some of the others in different ways. Consider, for example, the five religion-making characteristics offered in Kevin Schilbrack's entry on the concept of religion in the *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*:

A. belief in superempirical beings or powers,
B. ethical norms,
C. worship rituals,
D. participation believed to bestow benefits on participants, and
E. those who participate in this form of life see themselves as a distinct community. (Schilbrack 2022)

Using the notion of family resemblances, we might suggest that anything that possesses one or more of these characteristics qualifies as a religion. Furthermore,

none of these characteristics are essential, as the concept evolves over time, some or all of these characteristics may be replaced by different characteristics and the concept of religion might be very different from its original use. Timothy Williamson calls this 'the dynamic quality of family resemblance concepts' (1994, p. 86). Also, it is important to emphasize that the concept of religion has fuzzy boundaries, there will some social institutions that will be best placed in grey areas, for example some indigenous religions. Some might complain that such a concept is too vague to be useful, but I think that the concept of religion is perhaps best thought of as a dynamic family resemblance concept which is fuzzy and evolves over time.

If this way of thinking about what we might mean by religion is on the right track, how are we to follow De Cruz's recommendation? Recall, De Cruz recommends we do 'careful research showing that religion and science are not in conflict (historically, conceptually, metaphysically, epistemically) is valuable work' (p. 14). The dynamic family resemblance nature of the concept of religion would entail that the general no conflict thesis needs to be handled with care. We can at most hope to show that there is no conflict between a specific scientific claim and a specific claim of a particular religion, such as the doctrine of impermanence in Buddhism is compatible and indeed verified by scientific claims such as the third law of thermodynamics which tells us that entropy tends to a maximum. In other words, every ordered structure, be it a planet, a painting, or a person, will eventually lose its structure and disintegrate (see Priest, Part III, Chapter 7, this volume). De Cruz's own case study is concerned of the doctrine of evolution and the biblical doctrine of Fall is another case in point. I have a lot of confidence that careful case studies which focus on specific claims will show that science and religion are largely consistent, and perhaps can even be integrated with each other—as indeed scientists like Francis Bacon, Newton, Boyle, Kepler, Galileo tried to do.

I am not so sanguine that there will not be pressure points where conflicts cannot be explained away. This will become evident when we think of characteristic A (belief in superempirical beings or powers) which is a common, though not essential, feature of world religions. The basic metaphysical differences between a religious (superempirical/supernatural) and a scientific explanation of world and human life will remain. There is no known way that the story of creation of human life according to Genesis can be made consistent with evolutionary theory, unless we construe the story metaphorically. The most that the intellectual efforts with their historical details can demonstrate is that there is room for the existence of God (or another superempirical power like *karma*) for explanation of some arenas of the human social world which are beyond the purview of science. There are going to be many domains in which the best strategy is to acknowledge that specific religious claims and scientific claims will be in conflict and cannot be massaged to cohere.

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A8.2 Reply to Helen De Cruz

Graham Priest

Helen De Cruz' interesting and insightful chapter concerns Christians' attitude towards science. She holds that lay Christians see a conflict between their religion and science, though the general non-lay attitude is that there is no such conflict. Moreover, the lack of scientific literacy amongst Christian lay people 'constitutes a violation of their epistemic rights' (p. 171). The chapter raises a number of important questions. In what follows I will comment briefly on three of them.

A8.2.1 Christian Lay Attitudes

When she is being careful, De Cruz is clear that the attitude she describes pertains to Christians in the US, and specifically to (white) US evangelical Christians. And I think that she is absolutely right in this matter, as witnessed by the large creationist movement in the US—though it must be said that the attitude is a curiously one-eyed one: I know of no significant criticism by evangelicals of the science which informs the weaponry that many buy, the pharmaceutical drugs that many of them take, the phones that most of them use, the space technology that allows these to function, and so on.

However, De Cruz' words often suggest a more general claim about Christians. (For example, merely consider the title of her chapter.) She does warn that the attitude she is discussing may not generalize to other Christians, but I think this point needs to be underlined. Evangelical Christians number about 630 *million*, about 100 million of which live in the US. There are some 2.4 *billion* Christians in the world, the largest single group of which comprises Catholics, of which there are about 1.2 billion. I am not a Christian, but I have many friends who are Christians—in Europe, Asia, and Australasia, and some of them are evangelicals. However, I know none who have the attitude described by De Cruz. Indeed, they regard creationism as a somewhat batty view. I realize that this evidence is entirely impressionistic, and hard empirical data, which I have neither the time nor the skills to investigate, may tell a different story. However, for better or for worse, this is my sense of the matter.

A8.2.2 Non-Lay Attitudes

I have no real knowledge of the academic literature on which De Cruz draws here, and I take her word that matters are as she says. However, even if contemporary non-lay people see no conflict between Christianity and science, the Christian Church has a long history of antagonism to science.

Perhaps this is not so much in the findings of science contradicting the *Bible*. After all, there is much in the *Bible* that virtually no Christians have believed for hundreds of years—for example that one should not eat pork or shellfish (Leviticus 11: 7–8, Deuteronomy 14: 8, Leviticus 9–12); that rebellious sons should be stoned to death (Deuteronomy 21: 18–21); similarly, a man *and* a betrothed virgin he rapes (Deuteronomy 22: 23–24). Of course, if those who wrote the *Bible* were divinely inspired, one cannot say that these things were simple mistakes: some story must be told about why they were fine at the time, but are no longer so now. More relevantly here, as De Cruz notes, most contemporary Christian theologians are more than comfortable with the idea that certain passages in the *Bible* are not literally true, but should be interpreted metaphorically (that the world was created in six days, and that everyone is descended from one man and the product of his rib, etc.).

However, as De Cruz again notes, the Church has a long history of resisting scientific advances, especially about the place of humankind in the cosmos. In the European Middle Ages, humankind was held to be at the centre of the cosmos, both literally and metaphorically. The literal view was destroyed by the Copernican Revolution which showed that the Earth was not the centre of the cosmos. Indeed, the cosmos had no centre, being infinite in all directions. The Church responded by showing Galileo the thumb-screws. A couple of hundred years later the Darwinian revolution knocked humankind out of its metaphorical central place. Biologically, there was nothing special about the human race: it was just one of many species of animal, all produced by the same biological process—which, for all we know, has occurred in countless places throughout the cosmos. Darwin and Huxley were vehemently attacked, and their views rejected, by many Christians in positions of religious power. The echo of this attack is still to be heard amongst evangelical Christians in the US.

The Church cannot therefore claim innocence in anti-scientific views. Though most Christian churches now accept these scientific advances, I think it is fair to say that they came to this position unwillingly. The empirical success of science, and the technology which it made possible, ultimately made reasoned resistance unsustainable.

A8.2.3 Epistemic Rights

Let us turn finally to the claim that the lack of scientific literacy among Christian lay people constitutes a violation of their epistemic rights. Again, I think this is

very much a claim about evangelical Christians in the US. In most countries, scientific literacy is part of a general education.

Where such scientific illiteracy does obtain, should one account this a 'violation of epistemic rights'? The notion of a moral right is a vexed one. What, exactly, is it in virtue of which such a right exists? The answer, unlike that in the case of a legal right, is far from clear. And one might well wonder whether there are specifically *epistemic* rights. Do you have a right to know something simply because I know to be true? However, these issues are too big to go into here. And it can certainly be agreed that ignorance is not a good thing—whether this be about science or anything else. Moreover, it is undoubtedly the case that, absent some very specific conditions, generating ignorance by lying or deceit is morally culpable.

But assume that some story about epistemic rights is correct, evangelical Christians in the US are having these rights violated. A more pointed question in this case is who it is that is doing the violating. The nearest De Cruz gives us to an answer is that 'the religious right, in concert with conservative politicians, have promoted an anti-science discourse' (p. 171). That, I am sure, is true. But the odd thing about this is that these people are themselves Christians (at least, given the US, I assume that most of the politicians in question are Christians). Hence, it would seem that one bunch of Christians is violating the rights of another bunch. So this seems like a Christian own-goal. Even more strangely, you cannot violate your own rights, so it makes no sense to suppose that the violators are violating themselves. What is one to say about their debased situation?

I leave this for De Cruz to answer. Perhaps a more pressing question is this. Since violation is presumably not a good thing, what is to be done about this? The obvious answer is to stop the anti-science promotion. But how to do this? The answer may depend on why it is that the people concerned engage in the behaviour. Are they doing this deliberately and cynically, or are they themselves benighted? Probably some are one and some are the other. In the first case one must take the possibility of gain—either financial or political or both—out of the action; though how one might best go about doing this is far from clear. The second case is tougher in many ways, for the people in question now largely have control of the education system in those places where this is happening. So we face the old conundrum of how one educates the educators.

I have no magic solution to these problems, and I doubt that anyone else has. However, I take this to be the most important issue exposed by De Cruz' chapter.

9

Hinduism and Science

Monima Chadha

9.1 Introduction

Religion and Science are thought of as antagonists in the post-Renaissance Western tradition. But a brief look at the history and evolution of Hinduism shows that it needn't necessarily be so. I think it is the many voices of monism, dualism, pluralism, and even scepticism in the Vedic corpus that encouraged a larger intellectual environment in which faith and reason were partners rather than opponents. This environment was further strengthened by the pedagogical strategy and the commentary tradition in ancient Hindu schools that is responsible for incubation and subsequent flourishing of scientific enterprises. To support my hypothesis, I begin with a brief history of Hinduism to lay the groundwork for my hypothesis and proceed to support my hypothesis with some examples of scientific enterprises in ancient Hinduism.

The historical origins of Hinduism and its evolution suggest that it is best to think of Hinduism as a family of dynamic and polycentric religious and philosophical traditions that invoke the authority of the Vedas. The polycentrism is manifested in every facet of Hinduism: there is no one book, no one God, no pope as ultimate arbiter. Although the Vedas stand out as the most revered texts, they are one among a galaxy of Hindu 'cannons', such as the Purāṇas, the great epics Ramāyana and Mahābhārata, the Bhagvad Gitā, the poems and plays of Kālidasa and many others. Furthermore, the Vedas are regarded as *apauruṣeya* (not borne out of human agency), but by the same token they are not the word of any God either. Rather they are supposed to have been directly revealed to Vedic sages and thus are called *śruti* (what is revealed or heard), in contrast to other texts, which are called *smṛti* (what is remembered). There are many Vedic sages, referred to as *śrutas* (those who have heard), who interpreted the so-called revelations each in their own way. Thus, we find a variety of doctrines in the Vedas that do not necessarily form what we might call a systematic philosophy or religious doctrine.

The early Vedic attitude is best characterized as pluralism and is neatly expressed in the creation hymn which considers monotheism, naturalism, and scepticism as possible answers to the question: How did all this begin?

There was neither non-existence nor existence then; there was neither the realm of space nor the sky which is beyond. What stirred? Where? In whose protection? Was there water, bottomless deep? There was neither death nor immortality then. There was no distinguishing sign of night nor of day. That one breathed, windless, by its own impulse. Other than that there was nothing beyond. . . . Who really knows? Who will here proclaim it? Whence was it produced? Whence is this creation? The gods came afterwards, with the creation of the universe. Who then knows whence it has arisen? Whence this creation has arisen – perhaps it formed itself, or perhaps it did not – the one who looks down on it, in the highest heaven, only he knows – or perhaps he does not know.

(Ṛgveda, 10.129; trans. O'Flaherty 1981, pp. 25–26)

The very last statement in this quote suggests that the Vedic sages were aware of their own cognitive limitations, and even point to the limitations of divine beings. No one can expect to know everything; some big questions like that of the creation of the universe will be inexplicable. The best attitude here is that of epistemic humility, that is being aware of one's cognitive limitations and working to counteract them. This attitude led to tolerance and acceptance of a wide variety of doctrine, religious and otherwise, among the ancient Indians. Passages from the Vedas like these served as starting point for fierce debates among the various Hindu philosophical schools. Monotheism was an important theme in the Upaniṣads (the last Section of the Vedas) and was emphasized by the followers of the Advaita Vedānta tradition which argues for an eternal conscious *Brahman,* the ultimate unifying and integrating principle of the universe. But this monotheistic tendency was balanced by strong voices of atheism, pluralism, and scepticism within the Hindu philosophical schools. Some, for example Sāṅkhya and Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā, argued against a *Brahman*-centred reformulation of the Hindu world view since it conflicted with their central belief that the Vedas are the ultimate authority. The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika tradition rallied against the monism to defend a plurality of ultimately real substances (e.g. self (*ātman*), water, earth, etc.) with their distinct qualities and modes of existence. The famous sceptic Śrīharṣa offered refutation arguments (*khaṇḍana-yukti*) that the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika thesis about the plurality of substances is inconclusive. Although Śrīharṣa's arguments were primarily aimed at Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika doctrines, he goes further to claim that refutation-arguments have universal application and can be equally applied against the monists. Das (2021) suggests that on at least one way of reading Śrīharṣa's project is just to illustrate the instability of reason: for any argument the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika philosopher may offer for their favourite ontological and epistemological categories, there is a refutation-argument that defeats it. The deliverances of reason alone cannot decisively establish any thesis; faith alone can take us to the truth. Or so argued, the famous sceptic Śrīharṣa in what has also been read as to call to reinstate the authority of the Vedic scriptures.

The Hindu philosophical schools thus were perpetually engaged in reinterpreting the Vedas and defending their interpretation of the doctrine against fellow Hindus and other heterodox traditions like Buddhism, Jainism, and the Cārvākas (the materialists) in ancient India. In promoting the values of scepticism and epistemic humility, the Vedas set the stage for a multiplicity of intellectual enterprises in ancient India, including some basic sciences. We could compare this with the motto of Oxford University '*Dominus illuminatio mea*' [The Lord is my Light] which does not restrict the scope, extent, or activity of academic research carried out by members of the Oxford community to religion or religious studies. Since there is no one Vedic doctrine with a settled interpretation, acknowledging the authority of the Vedas does not amount to a substantial or methodological constraint on the intellectual enterprises pursued by the Hindu intellectual traditions. The infamous Ṛgvedic saying '*Ékaṃ sád víprā bahudhá vadantī* (Truth is one but is described in many ways by the learned)' (1.164.46) was the source of pluralism. This indicates that the Vedas encouraged pluralism in doctrine and method.

9.2 Faith and Reason

The pedagogical model and the commentarial tradition inspired by it in the ancient Hindu schools (gurukuls) and institutions of higher learning Nalanda and Taxila (in the Indian subcontinent), dating back to the fifth century BC is another facet that deserves attention in this context. Although the Hindu philosophical traditions claim to offer nothing more than an interpretation and defence of the doctrines in the Vedas, the pedagogical model encouraged and promoted independent thinking and innovation. More importantly, it offered a unique combination of faith and reason in the quest for knowledge. Instructive in this regard is to look at a reconstruction of how the discussion would proceed in an ancient gurukul. Since the early Hindu traditions were oral traditions, the guru (teacher) in the gurukul (ancient Hindu school), would recite a text consisting of a series of terse *sūtras*. The *sūtra* texts were intentionally terse and compact because they had to be memorized before they were understood. Once memorized the students would discuss the possible interpretations of the proposed theses and their defence. Neither the interpretation nor the arguments in defence were settled once and for all. There is evidence to believe that notable commentaries from student-philosophers earlier in the tradition were also discussed as were the objections from the opponents.

The available texts and the commentaries bear testimony to this method of instruction (see Jha 1984). It will be useful to clarify this with an example. *Nyāyasūtra*, 1.1.10. illustrates the pedagogical model in action in ancient Hindu schools. Gautama, the founder of the earliest Brahminical school, the Nyāya,

composed the famous *Nyāyasūtra*, 1.1.10.: 'Desire, aversion, volition, pleasure, pain, and cognition are characteristics of the self' (trans. Jha 1984, p. 110). This *sūtra* is interpreted as the proof for the existence of the self. In his commentary, Vātsyāyana (third century AD) explains that desire is indicative of the self in the sense that desire for an object perceived now is possible on account of the same agent having perceived the object on an earlier occasion and having experienced pleasure by coming into contact with it. Desire would not be possible without a single agent that cognizes and recognizes the object; and, this single persisting agent is the self (Chadha 2013). Taber (2012) calls this the argument from memory, according to which the volitional, affective, and cognitive states imply a 'connector', a single self that ties past and present mental states together. The memory argument focuses on diachronic unity of experiences to establish a self. In a later commentary on this *sūtra*, Uddyotakara (fifth century AD) strengthens Vātsyāyana's argument for the self further by appeal to multi-modal experiences and synchronic unity of experiences. For example, instead of separate features, we experience multi-modal integrated objects like seeing a red tomato (not seeing red, round, fruity, etc.). It is clear that Uddyotakara has access to Vātsyāyana's interpretations and Buddhist objections, his commentary is sensitive to and builds upon the earlier elaborations and objections raised by the opponents against the proof of self. This discussion highlights that there is plenty of room to introduce innovative arguments and ideas within the parameters of the thesis *(sūtra)* at issue. And it offers a unique way of combining the element of faith (insofar as the students in a gurukul or the authors of the text and the commentaries did not question the truth of *sūtra*) and the crucial role for reason and argument in the formulation of the doctrines of various Hindu philosophical schools. This gives us insight into the concordance of faith and reason, which is a distinctive feature of the ancient Indian intellectual traditions. In ancient India, rational philosophical debate on religious and social matters was a given from the Vedic times, especially after the rise of heterodox traditions, Buddhism and Jainism, about the fifth century BCE. These philosophical debates spilled over to the political domain with the advent of Kauṭilya in the fourth century BCE, who authored the ancient Indian political treatise, the *Arthaśāstra*. All this was combined with epistemic humility in that the interpretations of the *sūtra* texts and arguments in support could always be improvised in the light of objections from opponents.

9.3 Science without Scientific Revolution

In the West, the so-called scientific revolution was made possible by the rejection of Divine order. Unlike the West, there was no need to break away from religious tradition to mark the beginning of science in ancient India. The authority of the Vedas or any Hindu philosophical tradition that sprung from them was constantly

challenged from within and without. Since the Vedic schools always had to battle with criticism from contemporaries who challenged their interpretation and defence of the thesis and there were always sceptical voices around the question, the method of reason and the authority of the Vedic scriptures, faith, reason, and science mostly existed, even flourished together in harmony. I think it is the pluralism and the partnership between faith and reason in the Vedic times that is responsible for incubation and subsequent flourishing of scientific enterprises. To support my hypothesis, I offer some examples of scientific enterprises in ancient Hinduism. These examples show that although the early Hindu sciences were motivated by the importance of Vedic testimony and rituals, reason and argument formed the basis of the systematic study of worldly and cosmic phenomena of interest. Most importantly, there was linguistics that emerged because of the importance of the testimony of the Vedas. The ancient Hindus, like all other ancient civilizations, were limited in the means available for empirical investigation. Thus, other sciences that did emerge were limited to abstract sciences, for example mathematics, geometry, and logic or sciences that concerned phenomena that can be observed with the naked eye, for example medicine and astronomy.

9.4 Faith without Reason

Before we delve into the examples, it is important to consider an objection to my hypothesis. All scientific enterprises, much like philosophical enterprises, in ancient Hinduism claim allegiance to the Veda. Sometimes this is done without good reason. For example, the ancient Hindu text on medicine *Caraka-saṃhitā* (CS, 30.21) contains a passage which explicitly states that when questioned about the authority of his subject, the physician should answer that he is devoted to the *Atharvaveda* because that Veda prescribes rituals and prayers to enhance and prolong life, and this is the purpose of medicine too (Wujastyk 2003). The passage suggests that allegiance to the Veda is a requirement for ascribing authority to the scientist and the science. Even though there are no real historical connections between the *Atharvaveda* and the *Caraka-saṃhitā*, the latter explicitly advises the physician to appeal to the rituals and prayers in the *Atharvaveda* without which the doctors' word (and the recommendations of the science of medicine) are likely to be dismissed as unauthoritative by his patients and audience. This is not an isolated example, there are plenty of instances where an explanation of phenomena arrived at by empirical methodology and reasoning is very likely to be traced back or at least motivated by an authoritative text of the Vedas. This has led some contemporary Indian philosophers and historians of science, notably, Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya (2014 [1977]) and Ramakrishna Bhattacharya (2005) to conclude that the accommodation of superstition from the Vedas was a significant impediment for the development of scientific enterprises in ancient India. Bhattacharya

writes that the appeal to the authority of the Hindu cannon 'did much harm to the cause of science by accommodating superstition in it.... [T]he fact remains that the willing or unwilling acceptance of such utterly unscientific notions proved detrimental to the further development of science and scientific spirit in India' (2005, p. 54).

There is another aspect of the *Caraka-saṃhitā* that needs to be brought into focus here. The text is full of praise for gods, cows, brahmanas, preceptors, elders, adepts, and teachers (CS, 1.8.18 and passim), people are warned not to speak against the brahmanas, nor to raise a stick against the cow (CS, 1.18.25). Nevertheless, beef is found to be recommended as the diet of the patients suffering from the loss of flesh due to disorder caused by an excess of *vāyu* (probably rhinitis which causes nasal blockage, irregular fever, dry cough, fatigue), and cases of excessive appetite due to hard manual labour (CS, 1.27.79–80). This is only one of the many instances in which the flesh of cows, and of buffaloes, horses, goats, and even of elephants, are prescribed (CS, 6.1.183). There is an obvious inconsistency here, and the texts did not leave it at that. Indeed, in places it is quite clear that the authors of these ancient texts are not shy to question the most central theses of the Vedas. Chattopadhyaya explains that the *Caraka Saṃhitā* quite explicitly raises and clarifies the view of the ancient physicians on questions of consistency. The question is: What brings about cure? Is it the intrinsic efficacy of the drugs (herbs) administered to the patient or the unseen hangovers of actions performed in past lives? The text says that 'the action of a substance is determined exclusively by the substance itself and it is not influenced by anything else' (Chattopadhyaya 1982, p. 154). The stress on the importance of naturalist causation makes its abundantly clear that the texts prescribe observation and reasoning as the methods to be used for the practice of the science of medicine. In contrast, neither the unseen force of *karma* nor any accident of nature has anything to do with the cure. The *Caraka Saṃhitā* declares that chance successes do not enhance the prestige of medicine when it says that 'any success attained without reasoning is as good as sheer accidental success' (Chattopadhyaya 1982, p. 201). The naturalist attitude is defended clearly, there is no room left for *karma* to reward the *dharmic* (righteous) person with good health. So, although the authors of the *Caraka-saṃhitā* pay the required lip service to the authority of the Vedas, when it comes to matters of science, they do not hesitate to rebut the doctrine of *karma*, which is among the tops in the list of the important Vedic Hindu beliefs.

There is certainly some truth to the concern that the need to pay lip service to the orthodoxy is unnecessary and can be detrimental for the growth of the sciences. Bhattacharya discusses what is perhaps the worst example in the ancient Indian tradition. Āryabhaṭa proposed a geokinetic hypothesis in the Āryabhaṭīya, against the orthodox geostatic view. But his commentators misinterpreted his writings and even tampered with the text of the Āryabhaṭīya to make it consistent

with the orthodox Vedic view (Bhattacharya 1990). It is a well-known fact that commentators often depart from the original text in many ways, which might sometimes be detrimental for the intended meaning of the original author. The time lag and the resultant lack of historical sense of the terms in the original text as well as the personal philosophical affiliation of the commentator are factors that may lead to distortion. So, Bhattacharya is right to warn us to handle the commentaries in their context and with care. Commentators are fallible. But as the same time, there is a need to underscore that the commentary tradition in ancient India was not merely exegetical. It was a living dynamic tradition kept alive by interpretation and reinterpretation in view of the challenges raised by the opponents and new contextual development of ideas. Ganeri says: 'within the genre of commentary many different sorts of philosophy are possible. There is much more to commentary than merely exegesis; it can also stand for a creative act of philosophy built around the text, a rejuvenation of the ancient in the present' (2011, p. 115). Scientific enterprises in the ancient Hindu tradition are not a break from and rejection of the past, rather ancient Hindu intellectuals view the past as something to engage and develop further in a rich multitude of ways. The past continually informs the present through rigorous scrutiny and revision across different levels of philosophical and scientific analysis. Despite some shortcomings, the commentarial tradition is what kept the Hindu intellectual traditions in ancient India alive, and this larger intellectual environment led to the growth of scientific enterprises within the fold of Hinduism. Or so I will argue using some examples.

9.4.1 Example 1: Logic and the Science of Reason

Given the plural interpretations of Vedic doctrines, and its detractors, the role of argument and the rules of reasoning became increasingly important. The Nyāya philosophers took it upon themselves to formalize the procedures for properly conducting debates, the nature of good argument, and the analysis of perception, inference, and testimony as sources of knowledge. The rules of reasoning have universal application and so they apply to the Vedas themselves. *Nyāyasutra* 2.1.57 raises a fundamental sceptical worry about the legitimacy and the epistemic value of the Vedas, in the mouth of the customary hypothetical opponent: 'That [the testimony of the Vedas] cannot be regarded as an instrument of knowledge because they suffer from the following epistemological defects: falsity, inconsistency, and repetition.' The following *Nyāyasūtras* 2.1.58–68 defend the Vedas against each of the charges. The defence ends with *Nyāyasūtra* 2.1.68 claiming that '[t]he epistemic authority of that [the Vedas] is based upon the epistemic credentials of the expert [sage]—just like the authority of the medical scriptures'. The later commentators add that expertise in the subject matter needs to be

accompanied by sincerity and benevolent intentions. The example of the medical scriptures is intriguing, especially in light of the fact that the medical scriptures referred to by the Nyāya philosophers are those in the *Caraka Saṃhitā* that rely on observation (experimentation) and reasoning. Be that as it may, the important point to gloss from this discussion is that the Nyāya philosophers do not see any obvious discontinuity between faith in the Vedic testimony and reason.

Logic was established as an independent discipline in its own right by the Nyāya philosophers. Although the earliest known example of the canonical Indian syllogism is found in the *Caraka-saṃhitā,* the *Nyāyasūtra* (NS, 1.1.32–39) formalizes the syllogism by clearly listing and naming each of its five parts.

Canonical Syllogism (Analogical)

PROPOSITION:	The soul is eternal
REASON:	because of being un-produced.
EXAMPLE:	Space is unproduced and it is eternal.
APPLICATION:	And just as space is unproduced, so is the soul.
CONCLUSION:	Therefore, the soul is eternal

(Gillon 2022)

This example illustrates an analogical inference, later commentators on *Nyāyasūtras* elaborate on the discussion by adding examples of different kinds of inferences, and also deficiencies in inferences and fallacious reasons. Logic too had its detractors in ancient India. On at least one way of reading Śrīharṣa's sceptical project is just to illustrate the instability of reason: for any argument the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika philosopher may offer for their favourite ontological and epistemological categories, there is a refutation-argument that defeats it (Das 2021). The deliverances of reason are never immune to rational defeat and can only constitute inconclusive evidence. Rational inquiry by itself, for Śrīharṣa, is futile.

9.4.2 Example 2: The Science of Language

Given the emphasis on the testimony of the Vedas as a source of knowledge, the science of language was the first to appear. It was first formalized by Pāṇini in about the fourth century BCE. Since the Vedas were orally transmitted, the science of language was of supreme importance. In the Vedas, language was generally approached within a ritual perspective. The earliest reference to the origin of language, in the *Ṛgveda* portrays sages who 'fashioned language with their thought, filtering it like parched grain through a sieve', and who 'traced the course of language through ritual' (10.71.2–3). The origins of Sanskrit, the language of the Vedas, was the subject of serious speculation long before it was written down

towards the end of the Vedic period. Analysis of language started in Ṛgvedic times with the introduction of *Padapāṭha*, a word-for-word analysis of the sentences of the Vedic hymns. This was important because the rituals involved recitation of Vedic hymns and mantras, the officiating Brahmins needed to know the precise form of the words along with their accents and modes of recitation. The analysis was deep and went beyond the separation of words to separating out the roots, stems, suffixes, and prefixes. In addition, there was the *Prātiśākhya* tradition which concerned itself phonology rather than morphology. The most important contribution of this tradition was the analysis of the sounds of language into vowels, consonants, semi-vowels, stops, dentals, velars, nasals, etc. Both these Vedic works served as precursors to the science of language because they shared the goal of providing explicit and general rules for linguistic regularities. However, insofar as they were confined to analysing the hymns and mantras in the Vedic texts, they do not qualify as scientific enterprises in and of themselves.

It was Pāṇini (*c.* 350 BC) who transformed the Vedic study of language into a science. He went beyond the *Prātiśākhya* study of phonology to dealing with all levels of structure and included morphology, syntax, and semantics. Furthermore, the object of study was Sanskrit, a creative and unbounded language in the modern Chomskyan sense of the word, rather than the finite corpus of the mantras in the Vedic texts. As Kiparsky puts it: 'By dealing with all levels of structure and not being bound to a particular corpus of text, Pāṇini's grammar attains an incomparably greater depth of analysis, and does justice to the unbounded nature of language' (1993, pp. 2918–2923). Although Pāṇini was inspired by the works concerned with the analysis of Vedic texts, Pāṇini's grammar and rules for Vedic Sanskrit texts 'are haphazard and incomplete while his rules for the spoken language are almost perfect, if not in syntax, at least in phonology and morphology' (Staal 2003, p. 356).The scientific character of Pāṇini's grammar is not only revealed by its high degree of formalization, but also because of the importance he places on empirical description and accounting for the native speakers' use of Sanskrit, the *locus classicus* of which is the laconic expression *lokatah* 'on account of (the usage) of the people'.

Pāṇini's major work, the *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, presented a complete, self-contained system of rules of grammar. However, in the interests of brevity, Pāṇini omitted the principles that determine how the rules are to be applied. The principles for the application of the rules was the major subject of the massive commentarial tradition that followed. The most important work was Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya* (literally, great commentary) on the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* which incorporates Kātyāyana's *Vārttika* (commentary). These commentaries, as was common in the ancient Indian tradition, went well beyond clarifying the original texts and added their reinterpretations and reconstructions of the rules and arguments. They also made an attempt to answer the objections raised by contemporary critics. Pāṇini's grammar had its critics then and now. Since Sanskrit was revered as the language

brought into existence by the Vedic sages, it was claimed that the structure of Sanskrit is extraordinarily clear and the rules are transparent. Pāṇini did not have to do much. This is not the case, the continuous recitation of Vedic utterances (*saṃhitā*) made it particularly difficult to detach the words of Vedic utterances from each other, dissolving the conjunctions (*saṃdhi*) between them, and breaking the influence of the word accent in as far as it goes beyond word boundaries. As Brough reminds us:

> It is customary to add ... the deprecatory remark that Pāṇini was, of course, aided in his analysis by the extraordinary clarity of the structure of the Sanskrit language; but we are apt to overlook the possibility that this structure might not have seemed so clear and obvious to us if Pāṇini had not analyzed it for us.
>
> (1951, p. 27)

9.4.3 Example 3: Mathematics and Geometry

In his paper 'Zero: An Eternal Enigma', Parthasarathi Mukhopadhyay (2019) talks about the genesis of zero. Many experts concerned with the history of the conceptual as well as etymological evolution of the concept of zero trace it back to the word *śūnya* of Indian antiquity. Mukhopadhyay's fascinating work concludes that the philosophical concept of *śūnya* and the Sanskrit words akin to it eventually pave the way for the evolution of the corresponding mathematical concept of zero. He traces the concept of *śūnya* back to two sources, both concerned with language. The first is the *Piṅgalacchandaḥsūtra*, the rules of prosody for both Vedic and classical *chanda* given by Piṅgala, arguably some time during second century BCE. As far as our present evidence stands, Piṅgala introduced a binary representation system that needed the concept of zero, which he termed *śūnya* (Plofker et al. 2017). The second source is Pāṇini's use of his grammatical or linguistic 'zero', viz. *lopa*, that was used as a marker of an empty (*śūnya*) or non-occupied space or position (Staal 2010). His relevant basic *sūtra* is *adarśanam lopaḥ*, found in the Aṣṭādhyāyī (I.1.60) which means 'non-appearance is *lopa*', a concept which can be rendered by the modern term 'zeroing'. It is unclear whether Pāṇini borrowed from Piṅgala's positional mathematics or whether it was Pāṇini's grammar which inspired the great mathematical invention. Whatever symbol for this concept might have been used by ancient Hindu linguists is not known to us but it seems clear that they were familiar with the mathematical concept of zero (*śūnya*). There is thus plenty of evidence to think that sophisticated and abstract mathematics was pursued by ancient Hindus.

As with the science of language, the science of heavenly bodies (*jyotiṣavedāṅga*) was important to the ancient Hindus because the rituals and the sacrifices prescribed in the Vedas were to be performed in a specific order, at fixed times,

and especially designed altars. The sizes, shapes, and direction of the sites and altars were of utmost importance. A sacrificer had to adhere to the prescriptions of order, time, and place, without which he would stand to lose the merit to be attained through the specific ritual he was performing. The specific requirements for the construction of sacrificial altars and the need to fix the order and dates were the catalysts for the development of mathematics, geometry, and astronomy.

In the earliest times there is evidence of the formulation of some abstract mathematical equations to enable calculations required for designing sacrificial altars. The evidence of these is found in the *Śulbasūtras* (in the *Brāhmaņas*, a part of Vedas) which contained the practical instructions for the preparation of the sites of rituals. But their content was not restricted to practical geometry like the measurement of land, they also contain theoretical aspects. The practical requirement was simply to draw altars in various shapes with a given area. But the authors of the *Śulbasūtras* went beyond these practical requirements and developed theoretical mathematics to come up with transformations of geometric figures without changing their areas (Hayashi 2003).

9.4.4 Example 4: The Science of Heavenly Bodies

The solar and the lunar eclipses are the most conspicuous of the phenomena in the sky. They were the centre of attention of the Vedic sages, but the earliest explanations of these eclipses were offered in the Puranic myths which evoked demons and snakes, specifically *Rāhu*. These explanations were called into doubt by the Indian astronomers Āryabhaṭa (476 CE) and Brahmagupta (598 CE) but the clearest refutation of these legends is found in the works of Lalla (748 CE). Lalla was a student in Āryabhaṭa's school and thus was familiar with his geokineticism. He followed many of the rules formulated in Brahmagupta's to offer perhaps the most decisive refutation of the myths in his magnum opus *Śiṣyadhīvṛddhidatantra*. Lalla questions the Puranic legend by pointing to various inconsistencies. But his arguments are clearly based on empirical observations, as is evident in the refutation. An excerpt from the text illustrates this point:

If the *Rāhu* has a body or is a disc, or a head or is a planet in the sky, and if it is always moving, why should it swallow (the Moon) only at a distance of six signs (from the Sun)?

If you are of the opinion that an artful demon is always the cause of an eclipse by swallowing (the Sun or Moon), then how is it that the eclipse can be determined by means of calculation?

Moreover, why is there not an eclipse on a day other than the day of New or Full Moon?

> If a lunar eclipse takes place on the western horizon and is caused by *Rāhu*, then why does the Sun's disc appear to be swallowed by the second *Rāhu* of the same speed.
>
> If the opponents say that it is a snake that causes an eclipse by its head and its tail, then why does it not cover half of the circle between its head and tail.
>
> An eclipse cannot be caused by *Rāhu* because the sides of the discs of the Sun and the Moon, which are first to be eclipsed are not the same; nor are the portions eclipsed the same; and nor even are the durations the same.
>
> In a solar eclipse, people at different parts (of the earth) see different portions of the Sun eclipsed. Some do not see the eclipse at all. Knowing all this, who can maintain that an eclipse is caused by *Rāhu*?
>
> Because of the great authority of *Brahmā*, at the time of the eclipse the sun is nearer *Rāhu*. So in the Vedas, *Smṛti* and *Saṃhitā*, it has come to be known that *Rāhu* is the cause of the eclipses.   (Verses 21–27)

Everything in the text above points to a scientific explanation of the eclipses by reason and observation, except of course in the last verse where Lalla reconciles his explanation with why the authors of the Puranas might have thought of eclipses being caused by demon *Rahu*. More lip service, perhaps. But I think it is done in the spirit of reconciliation of the scientific hypothesis backed by observation and reason with the myth of *Rāhu* rather than in the spirit of antagonism. The reasoning clearly explains why the *Rāhu* might have thought to be compelling but is in the last analysis untenable.

9.5 Conclusion

The examples offered above support my hypothesis that serious scientific enterprises in linguistics, mathematics, and astronomy flourished hand-in-hand with Vedic studies. There was no obvious antagonism between the two. There are no tales of scientists being persecuted because of their empirical methods or results that contradicted the myths and tales in the Hindu cannons. They were allowed to set up their schools and were revered as sages and teachers. This is evident from the fact that the commentarial tradition that developed the theories of the pioneers like Pāṇini was inspired by his insights, but the commentators would not hesitate to point out the shortcomings of their scientific discoveries and suggest novel interpretations. This would sometimes lead to misinterpretation of the original texts, but that was the price that had to be paid to keep the tradition alive and relevant over centuries. This completes my argument in favour of the hypothesis that Hinduism contributed to science by promoting the values of pluralism, scepticism and epistemic humility, and by providing the larger

philosophical environment in which faith and reason were seen as partners rather than competitors in the advancement of intellectual enterprises.

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A9.1 Reply to Monima Chadha

Helen De Cruz

Hindu scholars and philosophers have contributed to a variety of scientific disciplines, many of which have an enduring global influence. Monima Chadha's chapter provides a comprehensive overview of this. Indian arithmetic not only gave the world the decimal system and the Hindu-Arabic numerals, but also the concept of zero and its many mathematical possibilities. Moreover, Indian authors pioneered the field of descriptive linguistics as a science, particularly in the systematic work of Pāṇini (*c.* 4th c. BCE) and his contemporaries. Ancient Indian sciences spanned a broad range, including cartography, astronomy, and various branches of medicine, including ayurvedic medicine, which is practised up to this day. Chadha's paper contributes to the growing body of literature that shows that modern science is not a western invention, but that it has always been a global phenomenon which has had many contributors from outside Europe and the western world (see also e.g. Poskett 2022).

Chadha argues that the various religious and philosophical traditions that we denote as 'Hinduism' did not oppose the development of early science, mathematics, and logic, but rather, encouraged them and helped them thrive. The contrast with science and Christianity in the west is striking. Although some devout Christians have played an active role in the development of scientific ideas, the scientific revolution in Europe 'was made possible by the rejection of Divine order', as Chadha puts it. This conflict narrative has been contested by scholars working on Christianity and science. For example, science historian Peter Harrison (2007) argues that the Christian doctrine of original sin made modern science possible, because belief in a historical Fall emphasizes our fallibility and thus stresses the need for empirical testing of our ideas. Still, the conflict view remains a dominant narrative among westerners (see my paper (Chapter 8) in this volume). Chadha argues that scientists on the Indian subcontinent, unlike those in early modern Europe, did not need to emancipate from the various Hindu philosophical and religious schools of thought, because the latter traditions already held within them key virtues of scientific practice.

Chadha's reading of Hinduism and ancient science as harmonious fits within a broader tradition. It is important to highlight the broader sociopolitical context under which it arose, which might give rise to some caveats to Chadha's picture

(which I otherwise agree with). As Meena Nanda (2010, p. 280) writes, many modern Indians and Hindus in the diaspora commonly believe that 'the ancient Hindu tradition has the right answers to the kind of questions that modern natural sciences have asked, or will ask in the future'. They see Hinduism as intrinsically harmonious with science, and they believe the Vedas prefigure major and cutting-edge scientific discoveries.

We can situate the origins of this integration narrative in the British colonial period (1757–1947), when Hindu scholars and scientists sought to break free from colonial rule. As a result of colonization, Hindus encountered western science and technology. British colonial rulers held that Hindus were incapable of scientific thought. This was one of the many ways in which they intellectually justified their violent and oppressive colonial regime, which devastated the local economy, increased poverty, and reduced life expectation (Sullivan and Hickel 2023). The British colonizers held that westerners brought modern technology and science to the Indian subcontinent and that Indians should be grateful for these bounties. Never mind that the British also stole local technologies and inventions (e.g. the cotton industry) that they then made inaccessible for Indians through unfair trading agreements. Never mind that the British relied on ancient Indian mathematical and linguistic concepts and tools in their 'western' science. Local intellectuals pushed back against this distorted narrative by promoting a counter-narrative: Hinduism is more in line with science than Christianity (see Brown 2012).

From the late nineteenth century onward, the Indian subcontinent saw various revivalist movements that reaffirmed the cultural value of Hinduism. These proposed the notion of a *Vedic science*: the Vedas and other ancient texts already prefigure later scientific findings (e.g. Vivekananda 1904). We can get a flavour of this in Swami Vivekananda's (1863–1902) influential address to the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago in 1893 (see Nanda 2020 for discussion). Vivekananda contrasted Hinduism favourably to Christianity, arguing that Hindus (unlike Christians) do not rely on dogmas and do not persecute dissenters through an inquisition. Rather, Hinduism prefigures in its empiricist attitude the modern scientific method.

This account of complete harmony between Hinduism and modern science is not one that Chadha herself endorses. Nevertheless, the positive view she outlines fits in a broader integration narrative of Hinduism and science. Accounts of the relationship between religion and science are both descriptive and aspirational: they seek to illuminate how religion and science relate, within a specific tradition or set of traditions, but they also want to tell us something about ourselves. How do we see ourselves with respect to the religious traditions we grew up in? Do we embrace or reject them, and how do we square this with our acceptance (or rejection) of modern science? How do we position ourselves with respect to people with different religious beliefs?

When we look in a bit more detail, we can discern a more complicated relationship than the integration narrative that Hindu scholars advance, just like a more detailed look brings out complications in any other tradition. For example, the attitudes of Hindu scholars in their first encounter with evolutionary theory spanned a range of responses, going from wholehearted acceptance to staunch rejection. Many views were somewhere in between (Brown 2012). To give but one example, Mahendrahal Sircar (1833–1904), who was one of the first Hindu authors to examine evolutionary theory and its implications for Hindu religious beliefs, proposed a form of evolutionary theism. While he accepted common descent, he rejected the mechanism of natural selection, because of its lack of teleology (Chakraborty 2001).

The aspirational component in theorizing on religion and science is not unique to Hinduism. Since Ian Barbour's influential work, Christian authors in the field of religion and science are anxious to stress how harmonious various Christian views are with science, ranging from cosmology and evolution, to quantum mechanics. In this way, they seek to counter the conflict narrative which still reigns in the imagination of their co-religionists. As many authors in religion and science who work on Christianity are (former) scientists (e.g. Alister McGrath, Arthur Peacocke), it is understandable that they wish to emphasize how Christian religious views are harmonious with science.

Given the complex relationship of religion and science in Hinduism, Christianity, and other traditions, can we ever state: 'Christianity is (largely) in conflict with science' or 'Hinduism is (largely) in harmony with science'? Such sweeping claims are difficult to evaluate because of the multi-faceted nature of both religion and science. In Hinduism, this is explicitly so because of the diversity in the *āstika* schools (e.g. *Nyāya, Sāṅkhya*) and their differing attitudes to how we acquire knowledge. We might do best to look at a finer grain, at individual disciplines such as mathematics or linguistics, as Chadha has done, or even at a still finer grain, at individual scientific findings, and see how these relate to specific religious views. For example, we might ask whether the Vedānta concept of *ātman* (the self) is compatible with contemporary neuroscientific conceptions of the self (Deshmukh 2022). Such a fine-grained analysis can give us a rich picture that can help us get a better grasp of what it means for religion and science to be in harmony or in conflict.

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A9.2 Reply to Monima Chadha

Graham Priest

In her thoughtful and knowledgeable 'Hinduism and Science', Monima Chadha discusses the relation between Hinduism and science. She holds that there is a tension between Christianity and science, at least post-Renaissance, but there is not such a tension in Hinduism. She explains this by noting the more pluralistic nature of Hinduism. I think that Chadha is right about many things, though the relationships between science and the religions is a bit more nuanced than she suggests. Let me explain why.

A9.2.1 The Tension between Science and Christianity

Chadha is absolutely right that there has been a tension between science and Christianity since the so-called scientific revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. True, most Christian theologians in the last hundred years have made their peace with science, but the history of the matter speaks for itself. (See, further, the discussion of the matter in my comments on De Cruz.)

One has to be slightly careful here, though. It is not exactly accurate to say that the revolution was made possible by 'the rejection of Divine order' (p. 5). Galileo, Newton, Bacon, Boyle, were all Christians, as were all the leading European scientists for the next two hundred years (as far as I am aware)—including Darwin. It might then be fairer to say that the tension was between religious orthodoxy and science. Or perhaps better: between those in positions of orthodox Christian power and science. To what extent this was driven by these people wishing to preserve their religious views or by wishing to preserve their power (or both), I leave for historians to argue about.

Notwithstanding any of this, the scientific revolution, and its consequences for the next couple of hundred years, were clearly a European phenomenon. Hence during that period science did flourish in a Christian culture.

A9.2.2 Hinduism and Science

Chadha claims that Hinduism is more pluralistic than Christianity, that science flourished under Hinduism, and that the tolerance of science in India is at least partly explained by the more pluralistic and tolerant nature of Hinduism.

To consider these claims, I think it helps start by putting matters in a more general context. It is true that, at least since the early Middle Ages, Europe was largely mono-religious. True, there were many Christian sects, and at times the relationships between them were highly antagonistic and vicious. Sometimes the conflict was driven by dogma, sometimes by power; sometimes both. But all were Christians.

By contrast, in the last two thousand years, the Indian subcontinent has accommodated multiple religious: Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Islam, Sikhism, and—it should not be forgotten, Christianity. Some of these religions (such as Hinduism and Buddhism) have a number of things in common. Some of them (such as Hinduism and Islam) have much less in common. Often, the coexistence of religions was peaceful; sometimes (and increasingly at present), it has not been so. At any rate, there is clearly a greater pluralism here than in Europe.

Turing to Hinduism itself, this has canonical and authoritative texts—the *Vedas* and *Upanishads*, just as Christianity has the *Bible*. Chadha notes that there has always been a plurality of different interpretations of the Hindu canonical texts. The same, of course, is true of the *Bible*. Whether there is more flexibility in the Hindu texts than the *Bible*, I leave for scholars to debate. It is certainly true, as far as I know, that power struggles of a kind that have characterized the relationships between Christian groups have been largely absent between Hindu groups. So we do seem to have greater tolerance here.

And as Chadha nicely demonstrates, scientific endeavours did flourish under Hinduism: mathematics, astronomy, linguistics, and, we might add, medicine. It should be noted, though, that these examples are all from a period before the scientific revolution in Europe, when, of course, there were similar advances taking place in Europe. It is much harder to give examples of scientific developments in India after this period, when, of course, the scientific revolution was producing major novelties in Europe. And as noted, this was occurring in a Christian society, one where most scientists were themselves Christians. It is therefore hard to attribute the difference between Christianity and Hinduism in their attitudes to science to the religions themselves. It is perhaps more plausible to put it down to the nature of the power structures of the two religions.

A9.2.3 The Scientific Revolution

Anyway, all this raises an obvious question. Why did the scientific revolution occur in Europe? Given what Chadha says, the ground for it had been laid in India, and there was nothing religious preventing it from occurring there. For the same reasons, it would appear that it could have happened in China, which had made many advances in, among other things, mathematics, astronomy, technology, and medicine in the period in question. Ditto in the Islamic world, which was

arguably the most advanced culture in science and mathematics in the early Middle Ages.

The scientific revolution was produced by two novelties, one theoretical and one practical. The theoretical one was the use of mathematics in a novel way. As Galileo said, the book of nature is written in the language of mathematics. The practical one was the use of experimentation, as opposed to simple observation. With this, nature can be 'tortured to reveal its secrets', as Francis Bacon is sometimes—infelicitously—quoted as saying. But why did these ideas appear when and where they did?

That, of course, is a question that has been the occasion of much scholarly debate, and this is hardly the place to take a deep dive into it. For my part, I doubt that there is a simple explanation of the matter. Historical developments of this kind are invariably the result of a complex combination of circumstances, and many things were happening in Europe at the time in question which could have been conducive to producing the scientific changes. Capitalism was hitting its strides—at least in the form of merchant capitalism. Profit could be made from new ideas. Because of exploration and incipient imperialism, Europe was starting to get a sense of the whole world, its geography and natural science, in a way that no civilization had done before. The long-distance travel itself put new demands on technology. The printing press had recently been invented, and that made it easier to disseminate new ideas in a timely fashion. This in turn made it possible to form novel scientific communities, such as the Royal Society in London. And of course, one should never underestimate pure happenstance: the appearance of characters with the quirky ideas of a Galileo or a Newton: the 'butterfly effect' of the history of ideas.

Maybe one should throw some religious factors into the mix as well. Another thing that was taking place in Europe about the same time was, of course, the Reformation, when Christian thinkers such as Luther and Calvin were challenging the authority and some of the dogmas of the Catholic Church. Maybe this contributed to the critical scientific spirit of the times. But if, as Chadha says, a preparedness to take on orthodoxy was a feature of other cultures at the time—notably that of India, where the scientific revolution did not occur—it is hard to see this as playing a dominant role in the matter.

At any rate, perhaps understanding what role, if any, religion played in the scientific revolution is the biggest challenge posed by Chadha's Hindu perspective.

THE FOUNDATION OF MORALITY (CHRISTIANITY, HINDUISM, AND ISLAM)

10

Incarnational Ethics

Mark C. Murphy

10.1 Introduction

One of the well-worked-over issues in moral philosophy concerns the relationship between God and morality. 'God' in such discussions typically refers to the being who is the common object of worship by Abrahamic monotheists—perhaps an absolutely perfect being, or at the very least a being of overwhelmingly great power and knowledge, whose agency is unimaginably beyond ours in terms of its excellence, and who is the source of all else that is. Philosophers have asked in what way this being should enter into the explanation of morality—of the existence, authority, and content of the moral norms that govern us human beings—and about how belief in such a being should make a difference to what we believe about the moral order.[1]

One might pursue further such questions about the relationship between God and morality by moving one of two directions. One could broaden one's view and ask what difference it would make if one affirmed a conception of the divine other than that of Abrahamic monotheism. Or one could narrow one's focus and ask what further difference affirming one specific Abrahamic view in its particularity should make to our understanding of morality.[2] It is the second of these paths that I will follow in this chapter, specifically with respect to Christian theism. The claims about God made by Christianity that most fundamentally distinguish it from other Abrahamic religions are that God is triune (that is, that God is tripersonal) and that God became incarnate (that is, that one of these three divine persons, the Second Person, became human). There have been some attempts to argue that we should take the fact of God's being triune in itself to have implications for our moral theory—either about the nature of the human good, or about ideals of human relationships.[3] But my focus here will be on the Incarnation, and the difference that doctrine should make to Christian moral theorizing.

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[1] See, among many examples, Mavrodes 1986 and Layman 2002; for an argument that God couldn't make any such difference, see Heathwood 2012. I discuss these issues in Murphy 2011.

[2] The relevance of thickening one's conception of theism in considering such issues is a theme in Anne Jeffrey's work; see Jeffrey 2019 and Jeffrey 2021.

[3] For some examples of these views, see Moltmann 1993 and Volf 1998; for trenchant criticism of such proposals, see Tanner 2010, pp. 207–246.

I have two argumentative objectives. One of these is methodological: to articulate some desiderata that Christians should endorse for moral theory, desiderata that arise from the doctrine of the Incarnation itself. The other is substantive: to exhibit how one might argue in favour of a specific approach to morality, the natural law approach, on the basis of these incarnational desiderata.

10.2 The Chalcedonian Definition, the Chalcedonian Analysis, and the Chalcedonian Slogan

The understanding of the Incarnation articulated at the Council of Chalcedon (451) is called the 'Chalcedonian Definition'. Here is a crucial passage.

> We all with one voice teach the confession of one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ: the same perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity, the same truly God and truly man, of a rational soul and a body . . . like us in all respects except for sin . . . one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only-begotten, acknowledged in two natures which undergo no confusion, no change, no division, no separation; at no point was the difference between the natures taken away through the union, but rather the property of both natures is preserved and comes together into a single person and a single subsistent being; he is not parted or divided into two persons, but is one and the same only-begotten Son, God, Word, Lord Jesus Christ.   (Tanner 1990, p. 86)

I take the Chalcedonian Definition to be authoritative for the Christian understanding of the Incarnation. This is a widely shared view among Christian denominations, and while there is some disagreement about how decisive we should take this authority to be, I take it for granted for the purposes of the arguments to come.

For reasons that will become clear later, I want to distinguish two claims that are made in the Definition in order to think about the relationship between them. I will call one of these 'the Chalcedonian Analysis', and the other 'the Chalcedonian Slogan'. The Chalcedonian Analysis is that Jesus Christ is a 'single person and single subsistent being' who has two complete natures, such that Christ is 'perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity'. The Chalcedonian Slogan, a riff on Hebrews 4:15, is that Christ is 'like us in all respects except for sin' (Tanner 1990, p. 86); 'us' in Hebrews 4:15 and the Slogan refers to, I take it, all human beings who are not also divine.

It is possible that the Slogan is saying no more than what the Analysis says, but I don't think so. The verse of Hebrews on which the Slogan is a riff is making a particular point about the concrete character of Christ's earthly existence—that it involved temptation in ways that our lives involve temptation, though without sin.

Christ's being tempted in every way that we are may be *explained*, in part, by Christ's having a fully human nature: to have a fully human nature involves being susceptible, in certain ways and in certain circumstances, to temptation. But Christ's being actually thus tempted must involve at least further facts about Christ's mental states and the environment that Christ inhabited while among us.

Christ's satisfying the Analysis—being a Person who fully has a divine nature and who fully has a human nature—is not, all by itself, what constitutes Christ's satisfying the Slogan—being someone who is like the rest of us humans in all ways save those that are due to sin. But what more is needed is *set* by Christ's having that human nature: it just has to also be true that Christ existed in conditions that are standard for human beings. Humans have a set of natural surroundings, including social surroundings, the standardness of which is an aspect of our kind (Thompson 2012, p. 204). Our 'natural habitats' are pretty wide-ranging compared to many other creatures', and how a human develops can be in some ways quite different in distinct cultures and times. But it is characteristically sufficient, without further ado, for one human to be like the rest of humans in the way that Christ is like the rest of us to have a human nature and to live in these standard human ways.

This is not the claim that Christ's having a human nature and existing in a characteristic human environment *metaphysically necessitates* Christ's being like us in all respects in the sense relevant to the Slogan. God could, I suppose, do something to make Christ not like us in all respects but sin even given these conditions—perhaps God could miraculously supply nutrition and hydration to Christ without Christ's ever having to eat or drink, and could miraculously do whatever exactly it is that sleep does for us such that Christ would not have to ever sleep in order to function properly as a human. That would be a *big* difference in Christ's existence, and we would be justified in saying that Christ's life's not including having to eat, drink, or sleep would be a significant departure from Christ's being like us in all respects except for sin. But I propose that something like the following is the right stance to take: that having a human nature, along with existing and coming to maturity in the way characteristic of beings who have such natures, *defeasibly necessitates*[4] Christ's being like us in all relevant ways.

Although the Chalcedonian Analysis and the Chalcedonian Slogan are distinct, there is a very tight relationship between them. The Chalcedonian Analysis sets the conditions that would have to be satisfied for the Chalcedonian Slogan to be true. And the existing of a being of the sort described by the Chalcedonian Analysis—both divine and human—in the conditions standard for beings of one

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[4] That is to say: it is necessary that *being human* and *existing in that human environment* makes Christ like us, given the other standard background conditions. It is not necessary *tout court*, for God could alter Christ's situation so that those standard background conditions fail to obtain. For more on defeasible necessitation, see Murphy 2011, pp. 41–42.

of those kinds—human—is defeasibly sufficient for that being's counting as, in spite of that being's divinity, 'like us in all respects except for sin'.

Any philosophical theory, on any topic, that is to be defensible within a Christian framework needs to be compatible with the truth of the Chalcedonian Analysis, the truth of the Chalcedonian Slogan, and the presence of the relevant relationship between them. So whatever the subject of one's inquiry, such views need to fit the fact that Christ is fully divine and fully human, and is like us in all ways but sin, and that Christ's being like us in all ways but sin is due to Christ's having a human nature and existing in a condition standard for beings with that nature. That is the first of the two desiderata of which I will make use below, in thinking about the way that the doctrine of the Incarnation governs Christian moral theory.

The other desideratum of which I will make use appeals to another feature of the Incarnation: its astonishing character, the fact it properly occasions amazement. There are multiple ways in which Christians should take the Incarnation to be astonishing. It is astonishing that the outcome of God's becoming incarnate is that there is *a single being with two natures*, and it is also astonishing that one of these natures is *our* nature, so that God is in community with us in a radically new way. But these do not exhaust the ways in which the Incarnation is astonishing. It is also that there is an enormous *gap* between the features exhibited by a being in virtue of that being's divinity and the features exhibited by a being in virtue of that being's humanity. In characterizing the features of the three divine Persons, the Athanasian Creed asserts that each divine Person is 'uncreated', 'incomprehensible', 'eternal', 'almighty'; we humans are, by contrast, created, comprehensible, time-limited, and have a relatively puny set of powers, all of which are had only in virtue of divine assistance. There being such an incredible gap is essential to the Incarnation's being an act of divine *humility*, as Scripture testifies to its being (Philippians 2:6–8; for discussion see Murphy 2021, ch. 11).

From a Christian point of view, there are reasons from the Incarnation for doubting a view or theory that entails that the gap between divinity and humanity is less than we might have thought, or is less than some other otherwise eligible theory proposes it to be. The less powerful God is, or less knowledgeable God is, the less humbling is the divine action whereby God became incarnate by taking on a human nature. The more limited our theories take God to be, the more like humanity divinity turns out to be, and the less marvellous the Incarnation becomes. So from an incarnational perspective there are reasons to favour theories that treat God as less limited.

I have proposed here two features that make a philosophical theory better than some other theory from the point of view of an orthodox Christian understanding of the Incarnation. The first is that it fits better with the thesis that Christ is like us in all ways but sin, and that Christ's having a human nature and existing in conditions characteristic of beings with that nature is sufficient for Christ's being

like us in all ways but sin. The second is that it fits better with the presupposition of the marvel of the Incarnation that there is an absurd gap between the features a being exhibits in virtue of having a divine nature and the features a being exhibits in virtue of having a human nature.

10.3 Normative Features and the Chalcedonian Definition

There has been a great deal of first-rate recent work in philosophical Christology, focusing on what is involved in the Second Person's coming to have a human nature. The philosophical task of explaining the coherence of this position presupposes the seriousness with which we are supposed to take the claim that 'the one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ . . . is like us in all respects except for sin'. There is to be no watering down of this claim on the side of the Son's remaining God upon assuming a human nature. But there equally is to be no watering down of the humanity assumed. Thus what Cross calls the Fundamental Problem of Christology:

> [T]he fundamental problem specific to the [Chalcedonian two-natures] doctrine is this: how is it that one and the same thing could be both divine (and thus, on the face of it, necessary, and necessarily omniscient, omnipotent, eternal, immutable, impassible, and impeccable) and human (and thus, on the face of it, have complements of all these properties)?   (Cross 2008, p. 453)

The features of Christ that have been the focus of these recent philosophical treatments are *non*-normative features—features involving existence, knowledge, power, change, spatiality, temporality, and so forth. In order for Christ to be like us in all ways, Christ must have a human sort of existence, a human knowledge and human range of powers, must undergo change in the way that humans do, occupy a particular space and time as humans do, and so on. For Christ to be divine, Christ must have a divine sort of existence, a divine knowledge and divine range of powers, must not undergo change in the way that humans do, must not be limited spatially and temporally, and so on. These features generate the relevant puzzles, as it looks like a being could not have both the divine and human 'versions' of non-normative features like existence, power, knowledge, etc.[5]

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[5] My claim that the focus has been on non-normative features is accurate even when we take into account *impeccability*. For though impeccability and peccability involve a normative status, what is treated as the locus of the problem of impeccability is a contrast between the possibility of acting certain ways (due to Christ's being free) and the impossibility of Christ's acting certain ways. That this impossibility is itself explained by appeal to normative facts has been of no interest in treatments of the problem.

It is surprising, though, that there has been so little attention paid to Christ's *normative* features. Here is what I mean. There are certain states of affairs that constitute my well-being, and their obtaining makes me better-off, and their failure to obtain can make me worse-off. There are some states of affairs the obtaining of which are good, and I am to be motivated in favour of their obtaining. It is right, as in *required*, for me to perform some actions, and wrong for me to perform others. While there can be circumstantial differences among us with respect to how well-being is realized, what goods and bads one is to be motivated toward or against, and what actions it is morally right or morally wrong for one to perform, that humans exhibit these normative features is a central feature of human life.

In order for Christ to be like us in all respects but sin, Christ must exhibit the normative features that the rest of us exhibit. It is not just that Christ, being human, must *have a body*; it is also that *that body's being healthy is good for Christ* and *that body's being damaged is bad for Christ*. It is not just that it is possible for Christ to perform an action that leads to his death. It is also that *it can be morally right for Christ to perform an action that leads to his death*; and, though he would never, could never do so, *Christ's blaspheming to avoid death is wrong*. (These are act-types and states of affairs being referred to, here; the normative states of affairs involving them obtain even if those act-types (e.g. *Christ blaspheming to avoid death*) are never instanced.) These must be true of Christ, for we must say that Christ is like us in all ways but sin, and some of these ways are best characterized in normative terms, in terms of what is good or bad for us, or what we should or should not aim at, and what we should do or refrain from doing.

10.4 One Normative Feature We Exhibit: We Are Under the Moral Law

Here is one normative feature that human beings exhibit: we are under the moral law.

These norms of the moral law can be 'apprehended by rational persons as at once required and enabling' (MacIntyre 1994, p. 177); the moral law stands, that is, to each of us as an *enabler* and as a *boundary*. The moral law is a set of enabling rules, rules that facilitate our pursuit of the good both individually and in common, and we will miss part of the point of adherence to its norms if we do not see that our good is realized in and through such adherence. But focusing on the enabling character of the moral law to the exclusion of recognizing the boundary-setting character of the moral law is a mistake. Some comparisons: the rules of logic enable people to reason individually and communally to get at the good of truth; but that does not mean that the rules of logic do not set boundaries for our reasoning. And the rules of just legal systems enable their

subjects to act better on the reasons that apply to them (Raz 1994, p. 198); but that does not mean that the rules of just legal systems do not set boundaries for those who are subject to them. It is irrelevant that for super-virtuous people, the moral law is not *experienced as* constraining, that they do not *feel* the boundaries as boundaries. Again, rules of logic, for those whose dispositions of inference are in line with them, may not be experienced as constraints and may not be felt as boundaries; and the laws of just legal systems may not be experienced as constraints by those who eminently exhibit the virtues of ruling and being ruled (Aristotle, *Politics*, 1331a12–15). But rules of logic set boundaries to thought and rules of legal systems set boundaries to action. For there to be boundaries to action is, among other things, for otherwise possibly performed actions to be out-of-bounds, unavailable to proper deliberation, defective, failures, and so forth. *Being bound by a law* is not a feature of one's attitude towards a norm but a feature of the relationship between that norm and one's own possibilities of action.

10.5 Incarnational Desiderata for Theories of the Moral Law

It follows that if Christ is like us in all ways but sin, then Christ is under the moral law.

Christians should take it to be crucial for any theory of morality that it be Christologically adequate. For it to be Christologically adequate, it needs to be compatible with, and to properly accommodate, the fact that Christ is like us in all respects except for sin. In light of the reflections of the previous section, it needs to be compatible with, and to properly accommodate, the fact that Christ is under the moral law. For we—all of us nondivine human beings—are under the moral law, and Christ is like us.

This sounds trivial to me. Any Christian who would deny this would be courting heresy—a sort of moral Docetism according to which Christ *might appear* to be like us, morally speaking, but really isn't.[6] But one does hear people saying things, sometimes, which edge up to this sort of moral Docetism.

Here's an example.

The living of a perfect human life by God himself forms a far more perfect offering for us to offer to God than a perfect life lived by an ordinary human. For the ordinary human has an obligation to God to live a worthwhile life, and so some of the perfection of his life would be owed anyway. An incarnate God does

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[6] Docetism is the heresy that holds that while Jesus Christ might have appeared to be human like us, he in fact was not: though fully divine, he was not human.

> not owe it to any benefactor to live any particular kind of life, and so the whole of
> the perfection of that life would be available to others to use as their offering.
>
> (Swinburne 1988, p. 28)

I say this is *edging up to* moral Docetism because one might read this as simply the claim that there is just one little old obligation—the obligation of gratitude that we ordinary humans have towards God in virtue of God's bringing us into existence—which would not be had by Christ, because Christ's becoming incarnate is not Christ's coming into existence. But the argument doesn't actually get going unless one takes it that while the rest of us owe everything to God, Christ does not owe God anything. And that looks like an affirmation that Christ is not like us in all ways but sin. Christ must be, like the rest of us, under the moral law.

So one way a theory of moral law can be more or less incarnationally adequate is in terms of whether, and how, it holds that Christ is under the moral law just like the rest of us are. Here is a second way in which a theory of the moral law can be more or less Christologically adequate. As noted above, it is important that we preserve a gap between what holds of a being in virtue of its having a divine nature and what holds of a being in virtue of its having a human nature. There is no reason why this desideratum would be relevant only when considering non-normative features (knowledge, power, mode of existence) and not when considering normative features. Just as it would count against a theory of God's knowledge that it makes God seem less knowing, and so the epistemic gap between God and us is less than we might otherwise have thought or less than it would be on some other theory, it should count against a normative theory if it generates the result that the normative features exhibited by a being qua divine are too much like the normative features exhibited by a being qua human. (This is, of course, *ceteris paribus*; even if a theory meets this desideratum in spades, there may be reasons against affirming that theory that outweigh that theory's gap-endorsing virtue.)

A theory would fulfil this Christological desideratum comparatively well by holding that, say, a divine being as such is not under the moral law while holding that a human being is, qua human, under the moral law. But it is not hard to find views that deny this. The standard assumption undergirding the argument from evil, endorsed by both typical advocates and critics of that argument, is that God is under a set of moral norms that is not too distant from the moral norms that we humans are under—norms that (*inter alia*) direct us to further, and to prevent setbacks to, the well-being of sentient creatures (Murphy 2017, pp. 104–109). But any moral theory that would endorse this standard assumption would not fare as well on our gap-preserving Christological criterion as would a view on which having a divine nature does not place a being under the moral law though having a human nature does. Just as a greater gap is present between divinity and humanity

if God is as such unlimited in power but we humans are limited, a greater gap is present between divinity and humanity if God's action is not bounded by any moral law but our human action is by nature bounded by the moral law.

10.6 A Natural Law Account of the Moral Law

I am going to spend the rest of this chapter illustrating how a particular theory of the moral law can exhibit its Christological merits by showing how it follows from that theory that Christ is under the moral law in the same way that the rest of us humans are and that such a theory preserves fully the desirable divine–human gap. This will not be an argument for the superiority of this way of understanding the moral law over other ways prominent in Christian moral philosophy and theology; that would require a comparison of such views, on their merits and demerits in the handling of this and other issues. But the discussion that follows aims to establish that it is possible for a moral theory to be Christologically adequate on these incarnational dimensions and to exhibit what a theory has to do to show itself to be adequate in that way.

The view that I will focus on is a *natural law* theory of morality. By a 'natural law theory', I mean a moral theory that affirms the following theses. (1) There are various actions that are by nature right for one to do, or wrong for one to do. To say that these actions are right or wrong 'by nature' is to say that their rightness or wrongness does not result from any person's say-so or from any social convention or practice. (2) What makes such actions right or wrong by nature is the way that they relate to various *goods*; these goods make these actions right or wrong. (3) The status of these as goods and the character of the response to these goods as appropriate is also by nature in the sense specified. In particular, the status of human goods as such is due to our natures as humans; for something to be humanly good is fixed by our kind (Murphy 2002). And the particular responses to these goods that count as appropriate is also kind-determined; even if there are some thin rational constraints on action that would hold of all rational beings, the full range of appropriate responsiveness to the good is explained by the particular kind of being that we are.

For example: A natural law account of the wrongness of *lying* would hold that lying's wrongness is not a matter of social practice; its being wrong for us to lie is not due to our being told by someone, some person or our societies, not to lie, and it is not due to our being blamed by others if we lie, and it is not due to there being a social rule that empowers such demanding or blaming. Rather, lying is wrong by nature, for it is wrong because of the way that the act of lying is related to important goods—perhaps the good of knowledge, perhaps the good of excellence in agency, perhaps both—and the role of assertion in human life. For lying involves intending to get another to believe what is false in order to generate a

certain response. Lying is an improper response to the good of knowledge, which is the good of having an accurate take on the world, and the good of excellence in agency, a good that includes choosing and acting in a way that is based on truth rather than illusion. That knowledge and excellence in agency are goods for us is due to the specific kind of being that we are: it is fixed by our human nature, and not (e.g.) by our contingent psychological responses to these goods, that they make us well-off and are thus worth pursuing.

One can raise many questions about the viability of natural law theory. One might ask whether it meets ordinary adequacy conditions for moral theory—e.g. internal coherence, fit with our reflective moral judgements, and fit with other sorts of truths of which we can have natural knowledge. One might also ask, specifically in the Christian context, whether its implications fit with or are at odds with Christian commitments: one could, for example, ask whether the account it offers of the rightness or wrongness of various sorts of action coheres with authoritative Christian teaching about morality. But here I want to ask the limited, specific question of how well natural law theory meets the incarnational desiderata articulated above.

With respect to the criterion that Christ must be like us in all ways but sin (the Chalcedonian Slogan), and that the truth of this is due to Christ's having a fully divine and a fully human nature (the Chalcedonian Analysis), natural law theory performs extraordinarily well. The natural law theorist should say that Christ is under the moral law in the same way that the rest of us are; for after all, Christ is one of us, and what makes Christ one of us is Christ's being human, that is, having a fully human nature, and being human is, on the natural law view, what places one under the moral law.

There is, that is, nothing *extra* that God has to do in order to be like us with respect to the moral law other than to assume a human nature and to enter into a human environment. It just follows from natural law theory's correctness that Christ's having a human nature and having entered our human condition defeasibly entails Christ's being under the moral law, just like the rest of us are. According to the Chalcedonian Analysis, what happens in the Incarnation is that the Son takes on a human nature. If you were to ask a natural law theorist 'What more has to happen for Christ to be morally like us *in addition to* Christ's assuming a human nature and inhabiting a human environment?' the answer you would get would be: 'Nothing.' For on the natural law view I have described, part of what it is to live as a human is to be under the moral law. Thus the natural law theorist offers an elegant explanation of the connection between Christ's sharing our nature and Christ's being under the moral law: God's coming to live as a human includes coming to be under the moral law.

Thus at least one theory of the moral law can meet excellently the first desideratum laid out above: the natural law view is not only compatible with, but entails, that Christ's having a human nature and inhabiting a characteristic

human environment at least defeasibly necessitates Christ's being under the moral law in the same way that the rest of us are.

A natural law view also meets the second desideratum. Consider a moral theory that holds that the moral norms that bind us humans bind every rational being—and thus, as God is rational, God is subject to the moral law just as we are. Such a view would meet the desideratum above that Christ is really like us morally, by being under the moral law that binds all possible rational beings and by sharing our human circumstances of action. But it does so by narrowing the gap between divinity and humanity, a gap that it is desirable in order to preserve astonishing character of the Incarnation. The natural law view is not like that, though. It does *not* hold that the moral norms that bind us bind every rational being.[7] On the contrary, the natural law view holds that what explains the moral norms that we humans are under is the distinctive human nature that all of us possess. The view does not imply or even suggest that there could not be very different rational creatures that are under a very different set of norms of action. *A fortiori* the view does not imply or even suggest that God, who does not as such have a creaturely nature, would be under the moral law that binds us humans, or indeed would be under any moral law at all.

On these dimensions, then, a natural law theory of morality can claim for itself incarnational adequacy: it is a view of the moral law that makes sense of Christ's being like us, morally speaking, and on that view Christ's being like us, morally speaking, is a marvellous act of divine humility, for God as divine is under no such law. To say that a natural law theory of morality can claim for itself incarnational adequacy along these dimensions is of course not to say that the natural law view is the *best* such view along those dimensions or that it exhibits *overall* incarnational adequacy. As acknowledged above, there may be other views that are otherwise eligible for Christian moral theorists that might claim comparable incarnational adequacy along these dimensions. For natural law theorists to claim that its treatment of these issues counts in favour of it over other theories, they would have to show that these other theories do not meet the relevant desiderata as well as natural law theory does. They might argue of some such competitors that these competitors do not allow us to make sense of the claim that Christ is under the moral law. Or they might argue of such competitors that they do not preserve the divinity/humanity gap in an adequately expansive way. That is work for the natural law theorist that remains to be done if it is to deploy its incarnational adequacy along these dimensions as evidence for its superiority over rival views.

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[7] This of course rejects Kant's assertion in the *Groundwork* that 'Unless we want to deny to the concept of morality all truth and all reference to a possible object, we cannot but admit that the moral law is of such widespread significance that it must hold not merely for allmen but for all rational beings generally' (2, 408). This view of Kant's is defended, to put it mildly, extremely thinly, given the weight that it carries in his overall moral theory.

While the sketchy arguments of this chapter cannot, then, support the view that a natural law view is the most incarnationally defensible Christian ethics, these arguments give Christians reason to look favourably on natural law theories of morality. Natural law theories account for Christ's being under the moral law and they explain why Christ's taking on a human nature and living in a standard-issue human environment makes him like us in all respects except for sin, and they suggest that there will be a chasm between the way that divinity is related to morality and the way that humanity is related to morality. And if these arguments have any promise, they provide evidence for the claim that Christological criteria can help us to think better about how Christians should evaluate moral theories.

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A10.1 Reply to Mark C. Murphy

Bakinaz Abdalla

Murphy offers an illuminating discussion of the implications of Incarnational Theology for Christian moral theorizing. The core argument is that the Chalcedonian understanding of the Incarnation raises two desiderata that any incarnationally adequate moral theory ought to satisfy. These lend support to the natural approach to moral law. After sketching the main points, I shall provide my reflection, raising inquiries based on my Islamic background and a relevant insight from the *Guide of the Perplexed*, written by the twelfth-century Jewish philosopher Moses Maimonides.

The Chalcedonian Definition of Incarnation involves two claims: 'the Chalcedonian Analysis' and 'the Chalcedonian Slogan', The former informs that Jesus Christ is a 'single person and single subsistent being' that has two complete natures, whereas the latter informs that Christ is 'like us in all respects except for sin'. Together, the Analysis and Slogan set forth the first desideratum that shapes Murphy's reformulation of a Christian moral theory: Christ's being like us in all ways but sin 'is due to Christ's having a human nature and existing in a condition standard for beings with that nature'. The second desideratum emerges from the gap between the divine and human natures of Christ. Any orthodox moral theory must endorse the astonishing and marvellous features of the gap between these natures.

In addressing the human nature of Christ, Murphy invokes the normative features, arguing that being under moral law is one normative feature that human beings display and which, therefore, must be true of Christ. The human–divine gap can likewise be envisioned, accordingly, by viewing 'the gap between what holds of a being in virtue of its having a divine nature and what holds of a being in virtue of its having a human nature' in terms of the (in)applicability of the normative features. Holding that Christ, qua a divine being, is not bound by a moral law, while holding that human beings are naturally bound by a moral law satisfies the divine–human gap desideratum. The natural law approach, as Murphy explains, adequately meets these incarnational desiderata.

Murphy's discussion includes many interesting points, but given space limitations, I consider one point: Christ's relation to the moral law, particularly, insofar as he is a *sinless* human being. The Chalcedonian Slogan imports two pieces of

information: 'Christ is like us in all respects' and 'except for sin'. As a reader from a non-Christian background, the idea that Christ is free from sin intrigues me with, what I believe are, relevant questions: Was Christ sinless by nature? To formulate it in theological parlance, did Christ have an unfallen human nature such that he had no capacity to sin? Or did Christ have a fallen human nature, that is, the capacity to sin? Depending on the answer, what does it mean for a sinless human being to be bound by moral law, and what does it mean for the law to bind a sinless human being?

On the assumption that Christ had an unfallen nature, the suggestion that Christ was under the 'boundary-setting' aspects of moral law might come across with a curious dimension for a reader from the Islamic background. The idea of sinlessness is not alien to Islam. Muslims believe that the prophet Muhammed was free from sin. However, his sinlessness is perceived within the defining criteria and *flaws* of human nature. The prophet was unexceptionally a human being, having desires, emotions, physical needs, and, above all, propensity to error. This means that infallibility was not inscribed in his nature, but an acquired feature of, one could specify, the consciously and voluntarily accommodating relation he had to the restricting aspects of the law (whatever that means). It is the capacity to sin, i.e. yielding to temptation, not just existing in circumstances that involve temptation, that frames the prophet's relation to the boundary-setting aspect of the law as a viable relationship. This background makes it hard to envision the relation between Christ, assuming the unfallen nature, and the boundary-setting aspect of the law.

To be bound by a law is, according to Murphy, 'a feature of the relationship between that norm and one's own possibilities of action'. One might point out in this regard that the indicated relationship involves two components: the norm and one's possibilities of actions. For this relationship to hold, the two components must be available. However, if Christ turns out to be impeccable by nature, there seem to be no possibilities of actions that would presuppose the boundary-setting aspects of the law with respect to him since these possibilities belong to the province of the fallen human nature. Arguably, the absence of these possibilities from Christ's nature nullifies the indicated relationship.

There is yet another consideration from the perspective of the function of the law. Granting that Christ is bound by the boundary-setting aspects of the law, these aspects would be expected to have an effective function in relation to Christ just as they do in relation to us, otherwise these aspects would lose their defining functional features. That Christ is like us entails, I assume, that he is like us not only in the way he relates to things but also in the way things relate to and impact him. However, on the assumption that Christ had an unfallen human nature, a nature that involves no demand for regulating or restricting boundaries, the law's effective function cannot be imagined with respect to Christ. It is not only that Christ does not experience or feel the boundaries, but his very nature does not

open itself to their function. Hence, what we call law or norm in relation to us is not so in relation to Christ.

A relevant insight can be drawn from *The Guide of the Perplexe*d (1.2) where Maimonides reflects on Adam's fall. Maimonides distinguishes between the realms of moral norms and intelligible truths, evaluating Adam's life before and after the fall in terms of his relation to both realms. As I understand it, Maimonides excludes any effective relationship between Adam and norms/law, while acknowledging their simultaneous presence. Before the fall, Adam was in the ultimate state of perfection, enjoying a fully intellectual life in which he solely contemplated the intelligible truth of all existents. Norms, even the most universally accepted ones, did not enter in the domain of his knowledge. Nor did they set any real boundaries to his intellectual life. Good and bad were present, but Adam had no sense of them as ethical values per se. Thus, he was naked but felt no shame. Only after sinning did Adam gain awareness of norms as such and occupy himself with values. Falling short of perfection came with consequences for Adam's relation to norms: Adam came to be effectively bound by the moral law, a relation that was not available during his sinless life.

It is important to note, however, that Murphy refers only in passing to the impeccability of Christ. Moreover, the suggestion that Christ was 'susceptible, in certain ways and in certain circumstances, to temptation' points to the direction of the fallen human nature. Yet, even if we exclude the unfallen human nature, another inquiry arises: what is the purpose of being bound by the law in the case of Christ? In other words, what ends does this state, that is, being bound by the law, realize in Christ? Consider the normative features that human beings exhibit, and which apply to Christ, qua a human being. These features are defined in terms of what is good and bad for us, what ought to be done or refrained from, and what realizes or hinders the various humanly fixed goods. To be bound by the law is one such normative feature. If I am not mistaken, this feature is not an end in and by itself, but a means to the goods determined by human nature. With this in mind, one wonders about the extent to which moral law can be instrumental with respect to Christ, qua a *sinless* human being.

Allow me to offer an example to explain the point. As a matter of fact, we have varying degrees of deficiencies with respect to excellence in agency, which is a naturally fixed human good. Moral law, with its enabling and boundary setting aspects, furnishes the conditions for redressing deficiencies and realizing this good. In other words, moral law serves as a means in the pursuit of excellence in agency. But does Christ lack excellence in agency? Even if Christ has a fallen human nature, the fact that he is free from sin means that at least one good that humans strive to accomplish is already fulfilled in him, and this entails that, in relation to Christ, *some* aspects of the moral law are purposeless. To clarify, allow me to borrow a theme from medieval Islamic philosophy. Muslim philosophers adopted Aristotle's saying that nature does nothing in vain (e.g. Averroes 1984,

p. 172), and integrated it into a scheme of divine providence in which every constituent of the world and state of affairs fulfils an end. Viewed accordingly, unless it can be explained that every aspect of the moral law fulfils an end with respect to Christ's moral agency, Christ's being bound by some aspect of the moral law would be in vain, a state that God's providence would omit.

Coming from a non-Christian background, it has been both intriguing and challenging for me to respond to such an illuminating moral theory that takes Christ's human–divine nature as its core criteria. Incarnational theology is utterly conceptually remote from Islam. Despite that, what it entails for moral theorizing furnishes much ground for a fruitful dialogue on Christian and Islamic ethics.

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A10.2 Reply to Mark C. Murphy

Jessica Frazier

Christianity attempts a philosophically thought-provoking union of two radically different extremes of ethics: one human nature shaped by the tapestry of formative experiences and ambiguous worldly decision-making . . . and one divine nature existing beyond such concerns in a state of *ontologically* perfect being. To other philosophico-religious traditions, this paradoxical Christian 'double-ideal' can seem inspiring in that it speaks to the way we ourselves have a hint of a double nature in mind and body; it expresses an ideal of an ultimate truth that values and feels compassion with our limited condition; and it highlights the bittersweet truth that higher principles are juxtaposed with fleeting beauties and ambivalent choices. But philosophically, this Christian ideal can seem slightly confused— wanting to have simultaneously two things that cancel each other out, like tea that is both comfortingly hot and refreshingly cold.

Murphy's chapter addresses this core concern. Like Abdalla's, it is 'philosophy of religion' in the sense of seeking to make one's own tradition-specific doctrines rationally coherent. Hence here it seeks to show how an actual *divine* agent could function morally within the world. For some religions the whole problem would be weighted differently; Hindus might not recognize the same kind of absolute evil or the same conception of a universally unwavering moral 'law', while Buddhists might not recognize the same kind of divine nature at all. Jews may be happy to accept that the proposed incarnate nature is internally incoherent and should be abandoned, while Mu'tazilite Muslims may offer a different account of the eternal law and the status of worldly freewill. The jigsaw puzzle of these concerns does important work for 'philosophy' because it provides a 'comparative analysis', mapping 'the eidetic structure of ideas' underlying the ethics of human agency in relation to generalized moral values. In this case, Murphy's inquiry brings out implicit questions that are core to morality:

> Could there be a time-and-space agency, involved in social relations and con-strained by growing up and living in a body, that could be completely free from 'sin', i.e. anything we think morally reprehensible?
>
> What do we think that a 'good' nature would look like in a personality formed by real life, and what do we think that 'pure' or 'absolute' goodness looks like *in the world?*

Is morality a debt we owe, a limit to which we must constrain ourselves, because of our tendency to sin? If so, Jesus would have no such morality. Or is it based on something else – in short, *why* do we feel one ought to follow a moral law?

We will see that Murphy's discussion shows us something important. The impression a Christian-Philosophy outsider may have—that Christianity's union of worldly human agentive morality and timeless divine absolute Goodness is confused—may be borne out in a range of classic problems in the Philosophy of Religion. Debates about the divine attributes are one such area: should God be all-knowing or purely good? And can one be 'purely good' if one knows what it is like to—for instance—take pleasure in torturing others? The issue becomes more pronounced in the case of Jesus' goodness. Do Christians want Jesus to know what it is like to regret his actions, to apologize, to act badly and reform, to speak from experience in advising others about their personal challenges, to be heartbroken and recover, to morally improve? The popular novelist Anne Rice wrote a story about the young Jesus in which he has an erotic dream about a neighbour, and we are left wondering whether this is 'bad', or whether he is 'better' because he was thus tempted yet rose above it. The Problem of Evil is yet another area in which Christianity's double-instinct manifests: . . . is God meant to be a creator of the complex world we are in and of, or an ideal that counterbalances that world? In many respects the creation seems like a vast trolley problem: God could create a suffering-less world devoid of higher-order moral values (no courage, sacrifice, self-improvement and moral understanding), or he could create a world in which billions of children suffer needlessly century after century (although *some* who survive long enough may become sophisticated moral agents). Which should he do? In many ways, Jesus is the living representation of this tension. He represents ideal perfection somehow fitted into a worldly framework: the paradox at the heart of Christianity's laudable moral ambitions.

  Murphy's chapter explores this. He recognizes the 'absurdity' of the ideal and points out that this is, in many ways, the *point*. Certainly, as a rhetorical strategy, the figure of Christ and the narratives illustrating that story ('what would Jesus do?') is one of the most powerful psychological tools for moral reflection in global history. It is all too easy to soften one's ideals in the light of the apparent difficulties of 'real life'. But the ideal of a divine human helps to keep Absolute Good in view.

  But Murphy does more, moulding *morality itself* to the condition of the agent. So goodness *in respect of human nature* must conform to the conditions of that nature: 'the status of human goods as such is due to our nature as humans; for something to be humanly good is fixed by our kind'. This is a bold statement, and it moves in the direction of (i) *contextualism* about the ontological nature of Good, that sees morality as something that *concerns* circumstances and thus must be formed *according* to circumstance and (ii) *relativism* in the ways that goodness

manifests in reflection and agency. This needn't mean, as popular parlance sometimes has it, that morality is 'relative all the way down'. In fact, it might be very constrained within a specific range or conform to a multiform but definite specific *property*—as 'faster' is a property that takes many forms but has a definite meaning. As Murphy puts it, honesty is not a simple 'good'; it is a good because of existential human structures like the importance of knowledge in our reasoning, and of emotions of trust and betrayal. Such values must apply to Christ's human nature. But then features relating to *divine* natures must flow from the other, divine, side of Christ, since 'very different rational creatures . . . are under a very different set of norms of action'.

Yet there may be some curious implications of Murphy's application of this kind of morality to the two-natures model of personhood seen in Christ. As he notes, it works well in regard to the human aspect. Being engaged in complex assessments of compassion and virtue arises naturally from having a human nature, and we intuitively recognize this as a matter of moral fibre. And something else—maybe being the effortless exemplar of goodness—naturally arises from having a divine nature.

But this approaches the incarnation issue in an additive 1+1 way that can seem deeply counter-intuitive. On this model there is a human part with its own nature and rules, and a divine part with its own nature and rules. Putting them together generates an 'incarnational' nature. This makes it seem like the two sides do not relate, intertwine, inform each other, or generate a single psychological personality. This sounds like incarnational schizophrenia: . . . a multiple personality in which neither side really unites. The Chalcedonian Creed would have it that the two natures are not separate but generate 'a single person . . . not parted or divided into two persons'.

In contrast to the additive model, Christianity could be seen as doing something still-more intriguing (although still-more difficult to reconcile rationally or psychologically). It suggests that there is a special 'kind' of nature that arises as a genuinely complex, emergent product of the combination of worldly and divine natures. And there would then be, presumably, an equally complex morality corresponding to it. What would such a nature look like? To feel temptation to lie, to follow one's egoistic desires, relax one's standard and sometimes harm (or let harm come to) others . . . but also to omnisciently see the whole complex of effects this would lead to, feel the suffering and other states of mind that would result from one's actions *from within*, to know which acts will succeed or not . . . but to still act out of a moral impulse. How would we act if we understood all circumstances, saw all phases of a person's life, of the potential satisfaction (or otherwise) of our own desires? Would morality be different if we could at every moment omnipotently change anything, *all things*, but chose not to? Would morality be different if at each moment we could remember the decision to create

all worlds and lives—and were still living that decision beyond time, and also still living their final end, the completion of the universe and the silence beyond?

Murphy raises such questions implicitly, but focuses only on the problem of securing moral law in a Christian incarnational world. Yet we can take off from here, speculating on what ethics would look like precisely at the conjunction of world-embedded *human*, and eternity-embedded *divine* natures. The claim is made that 'There is . . . nothing extra that God has to do in order to be like us with respect to the moral law other than to assume a human nature and to enter into a human environment'. But this seems to ignore the rich and strange possibilities of a divine–human nature. If we abandon the additive model and think seriously about a combined nature, then Jesus' personhood and correspond-ing moral law would be radically, intriguingly, revealingly different from our own. Perhaps what is interesting ethically about Jesus as divinely aware mortal player in the messy game of the world, is precisely what we might learn from imagining his moral world. That leap of the imagination, and the way it expands our own moral reflection, seems to be an inspiration to many believers in divine incarnation globally across traditions.

11

Emotion as Indian Philosophy of Value

Beyond Pleasure and Pain, to *Rasa* in Hindu Ethics

Jessica Frazier

> Just as a king is superior to other men, and the teacher is superior to his disciples, so the Great Emotions are superior to the other emotions.
>
> *Nāṭya Śāstra 7.8*

11.1 Introduction

While there are many themes in classical Sanskrit literatures that bear on ethics,[1] this chapter starts from the perspective of emotions as the anchor for *value*. It looks at one tendency in Indian cultures to see intrinsic value as lying primarily in special states of subjective experience—that is, in the qualitative phenomenological states that range from pure consciousness to impersonal compassion, to ecstatic devotion, and so forth. In many ways, this strategy of grounding ethics in affective phenomenological states as value-bearers is not unusual; the phenomenology of intrinsically pleasant and unpleasant experiential states typically functions as the 'intrinsic value' that grounds naturalistic ethics when it is detached from any 'divine' anchor. We can see this in the classic Benthamite formulation. So unless we want to say that happiness and kindness are good ultimately because God makes it so, then we will likely say happiness is good because it is pleasant, and kindness is good because it cultivates pleasant happiness.

Indeed, if we do not pin value to God or something like a Platonic Good-in-itself, then the only purely 'natural' locus of value may be human feeling. As Bentham observed, all morality seems to be tied to the 'throne' of pleasure and pain.[2] Similarly, Śāntideva, a Buddhist philosopher of the radical Sceptic school of Madhyamaka, similarly held that pain 'is to be prevented' simply 'because of its

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[1] See Perrett 2016 for a good overview of different ethical themes in Hindu literature, including the ethical pluralism towards life goals, the social ethics of dharma, yogic virtues of restraint and non-harm, and the deontological character of ritual injunctions.

[2] See Bentham 2007, p. 1.

quality as pain'.[3] Many philosophers worldwide have seen qualitatively positive and negative emotions as the basis of ethics.

But why do pleasure and pain alone hold the throne? Might a wider-reaching phenomenology of affective states incorporate other value-bearing feelings, leading to other kinds of action? And might some find that the ego and its dictates 'are not an ineluctable condition of my being' (Boruah 2016, p. 144), but can rather be replaced by less ego-centred ways of assessing, desiring, and acting? In a *natural axiology*—an ethical criterion that derives its axiological values from natural factors—philosophizing about ethics depends partly on philosophizing about emotions and their complicated relation to the ego.

In what follows we will consider Hinduism as a culture that, by and large, rejects divine command theories—the idea that Goodness is defined as the following of divine commands—and with those theories also rejects the notion that what is intrinsically good to do is 'inscribed in the heavens and guaranteed by God', as Iris Murdoch (2001, p. 78) put it.[4] Instead many strands approach ethical issues from the perspective of a wider phenomenology of affective states. The ultimate goods may well be states to be sought—but the Hindu sources we look at here see them as ranging beyond mere pain and pleasure. They extend to more complex, generalized, higher order feelings like aesthetic savour, yogic peace, devotional ecstasy, communal concern, or philosophical understanding. This transformation and elevation of selfhood is itself a characteristic concern of Hindu literatures from Vedānta through Yoga, to the tradition of aesthetic theory that will be the focus of this short study.

This chapter suggests that:

a) rather than accord intrinsic value only to the 'simple passions' of pleasure and pain, we should see these as nested within a larger 'moral phenomenology' of other intrinsically value-bearing affective states. For Hindu culture these may include an 'impersonal subjectivity' (Boruah 2016), 'ownerless emotions' (Chakrabarti 2009), the purely self-reflexive consciousness cultivated in classical yoga, or the ecstatic kenosis cultivated in devotional traditions.

b) all such states, according to most Indian traditions, are malleable in ways that may intensify, simplify, or scale-up their scope—potentially altering their intentional object or their acquisitive structure, and diminishing the influence of the ego.

c) altruistic concern for others usually stands as something of immense instrumental value to these phenomenological goals (see Frazier 2021), but does not itself constitute the primary soteriological value.

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[3] *Bodhicāryāvatāra* 8.102, Williams 1998, pp. 105–6: duḥkhatvād eva vāryāṇi niyamas…
[4] Hindu culture includes other ways of thinking about ethics, including *dharma* or natural order in Brahminical culture, and for Mīmāṃsā the brute obligation of ritual action.

Mapped against the usual conceptions of 'religious' ethics, we can see this expanded moral phenomenology as a product of India's historical interest in cultivating special forms of experience. Yogic meditation traditions are but one manifestation of this interest, ecstatic religious practice is another, and Indian attempts to rightly experience the core nature of all things are yet another.

11.2 Naturalism and Egoistic Appetites

Hindu and Buddhist thought might both be seen to share:

   a) a tendency to see ego-diminished states as one key to cultivating ethical life,
   b) an independent interest in the soteriological value of such states.

Buddhism's attempts to derive an anti-egoistic ethics from epistemic and metaphysical scepticism about the existence of a self have been widely discussed in recent literature such as Williams 1998; Pettit 1999; Siderits 2000, 2007; Clayton 2001; Wetlesen 2002; Harris 2011; Westerhoff 2015; Garfield 2021. In contrast, Hindu traditions tend to affirm the metaphysics of the self, and also to affirm the existence of a divine reality. It can be tempting to try to tie Hindu culture's ethics to its belief in a divine reality. But deities rarely give out ethical rules, and some schools are even atheistic, so that many agree that this would be a wrong turn and that Hinduism essentially develops its approach to ethics along naturalist lines. Certainly, schools like Vedānta typically see the divine nature as what English language users would call 'good' in the sense of being intrinsically of value. But this 'goodness' is of a different kind from *moral* goodness which concerns best actions for sentient beings. Hindu theologians have not typically thought in terms of it being *morally virtuous* to align with the divine, or *morally reprehensible* not to. The worldly actions of humans are a matter of the natural world, our social relations, and our own psychology. In theistic literature, deities regularly dispense advice on how to reach the state of liberation or the bliss of devotion. But we are free to listen or not, and to choose various goals as we see fit. As Krishna says at the end of the *Bhagavad Gītā* (BG), 'I have explained to you this knowledge . . . reflect on this deeply, and then do as you wish.'[5]

Within this naturalistic approach, most agree that Hinduism is *pluralistic* about the valid goals of life, and *utilitarian* about the importance of upholding basic shared prerequisites for living. Sanskrit literature's oft-cited four classic goals of pleasure, success, social righteousness, and liberation (*kāma, artha, dharma, mokṣa*) are taken as a sign of ethical relativism (e.g. Ramanujan 1989; Matilal

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[5] Iti te jñānamākhyātam . . . vimṛśryaitadaśeṣeṇa yathecchasi tathā kuru; *Bhagavad Gītā* 18.63.

2002; Heim 2005; Ram-prasad 2007; Long 2018; Lipner 2019). Further, the narrative ethics of the Hindu epics (the *Mahābhārata*, the *Rāmayaṇa*, and other Sanskrit and vernacular long-form stories) depicts *dharma*, or right conduct, as a slippery thing that requires subtle discrimination in each situation, and a complex psychological art of restraint and discernment. The hero who is moral in the sense of benefitting others shares much with the philosopher who can assess cause-and-effect, and the yogi who is able to de-couple from his egoistic passions.[6] But the broader goal here of following one's social duty still seems utilitarian: values of courage, discrimination, restraint, or even yogic non-violence and control (see Perrett and Pettigrove 2015) all function instrumentally to allow the community of individuals to achieve what is needed for life, and each proceed to choose their preferred goal. Thus they are less virtues than consequentialist prerequisites (Frazier 2021, p. 6) for any agency directed at meaningful experience.

This throws us back upon the idea of states of being that are desirable in themselves—in conventional parlance, because they are *good* to undergo. Here we are on the potentially familiar ground of Bentham's theory of pleasure and pain and Plato's image of the person as a chariot led on by wild autonomous appetites that pull us along like unruly horses (Phaedrus 246a–254e)[7] rather, for instance, than Moore's universal sense of Goodness *simpliciter*. But, of course, Plato's view of human taste was more complex than this. He accorded high value to reason which could redirect the chariot of the self towards the Good and produce a transformation of the person itself into something that exists and desires and enjoys differently—a soul that itself is *of the nature* of the Good. Plato introduced into Western philosophical tradition the central distinction between raw appetite, and the realm of curated extraordinary feelings (extolled in texts like the *Symposium*). With this he drove a wedge between appetitive motivations and other possible states able to be cultivated into existence and curated in their precise character. This wedge has maintained a subtle place in Western ethical thinking; in a critique of Bentham for instance, Hare noted that pain and the larger phenomenon of suffering are not the same thing, nor pleasure and the broader, deeper, over-arching state of happiness (Hare 1981, p. 92). The moral is that naturalism relies on the appetites as the site of intrinsic value . . . but the appetites are not as simple as they seem.

11.3 Pleasure, Pain, and Bliss in Indian Thought

Indian traditions of thinking similarly insert a wedge between mere pleasure/pain, and feelings that be cultivated through phenomenological manipulation of one's

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[6] Some have interpreted dharma as a set of deontological duties (Sreekumar 2012).
[7] Hindu philosophy's own version of the chariot metaphor can be found in *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 3.3–4.

experiential state. In what follows, first we give a short genealogical sketch of Hindu notions that life is led by the attraction to pleasurable emotions such as happiness, desire, bliss…and eventually rasa as a higher-order state. We then identify three different 'functions' by which rasa theorists sought to transmute raw emotions into qualitatively new phenomena. It is these more complex, less egoistic states that lie on the other wide of the wedge from mere pleasure and pain.

Happiness and suffering (sukha-dukha) were certainly acknowledged as a major factor in human life from the classical period onwards in India. Suffering-avoidance was a widespread concern. But due to growing scepticism about pleasure's sustainability as a state of mind, pleasure came to be conceived of as *part of* suffering, which was duly reconceived in larger terms as *dissatisfaction*—any affective state (usually appetitive) that inevitably leads to disappointment. Indeed, the equation of pleasure with ultimate dissatisfaction came to pervade many genres of Indian literature, including classical Sanskrit upaniṣads (classical reflections), sūtras (philosophical treatises) and their bhāṣyas (commentaries), gītās (teachings or 'songs') and saṃvādas (debates), and other philosophical styles of discourse. The Nyāya logicians went further, formalizing in logical terms the invariable concomitance of pleasures with eventual pain. They argued that suffering is not contingently linked to pleasure, but is rather essentially embedded in it since dissatisfaction is part of the necessary condition of finitude that accompanies all worldly experience (see Chakrabarti 1983, p. 72 on classical Hindu motivations for liberation). This idea that even pleasant states can be a second-order source of suffering prompted a reframing of all feeling. Pleasure (kāma), intense emotion (rāga), or thirst (tṛṣṇa) signified a negative insatiable, involuntary appetite linked to a pessimistic account of all consciousness, and an agonistic narrative of inner struggle against the inescapable limits of life.

Other, 'higher' kinds of mental states attracted interest, insofar as they were not subject to the same acquisitive, dissatisfying character as pleasure and pain. The *Brhad Aranyaka Upaniṣad* subjects *all* desires to the higher goal of being 'beyond hunger and thirst, sorrow and delusion, old age and death. It is when they come to know this self that Brahmins give up the desire for sons, the desire for wealth, and the desire for worlds…'.[8] The linked pair of happiness and suffering (sukha and duḥkha) became a distinctive trope expressing the nature of embodied life in the world, and one of the factors that limit human agency (e.g. *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 1.1–2[9] and *Mānava Dharma Śāstra* 1.26). The spiritual advice given in the *Bhagavad Gītā* aligns pleasure and suffering with winter and summer,

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[8] *Bṛhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 3.5.1.

[9] brahma-vādino vadanti | kiṃ kāraṇaṃ brahma kutaḥ sma jātā jīvāma kena kya ca saṃpratiṣṭhaḥ | adhiṣṭhatāḥ kena sukhetareṣu vartamahe brahmavido vyavasthām || kālaḥ svabhāvo niyatir yadṛcchā bhūtāni yoniḥ puruṣeti cintyam | saṃyoga eṣāṃ na tu ātmabhāvād ātmāpy anīṣāḥ sukhaduḥkhahetoḥ || *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* (1.1–2).

coming and going, and gain and loss, victory and defeat (2.14, 2.38); all are poles that one should transcend.[10]

In classical Vedāntic literature, the ultimate reality of Brahman, and the state that understanding of it brings, could be used to downplay pleasure and pain: the happiness attained by knowers of Brahman was greater and more sustainable than that associated with finite personal concerns.[11] There is a hint of the Platonic style of ascent-via-desire in some accounts which acknowledge that both desire and desirelessness, and a wide range of other states stand within the gift of the self's phenomenological range. Thus 'whatever world a man, whose being is purified, ponders with his mind, and whatever desires he covets; that very world, those very desires, he wins' (*Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 3.2.10). We are assured that 'what a man turns out to be depends on how he acts and on how he conducts himself. . . . A man turns into something good by good action and into something bad by bad action. And so people say: "A person here consists simply of desire." But "a man who does not desire . . . whose only desire is his self . . . Brahman he is, and to Brahman he goes."' (*Bṛhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 4.4.5–7).

The lesson of texts like these is that we have power over our desires, and alongside them there exist non-desiderative states that transform not only one's motivation, but also one's *self*. This capacity of emotions had significance for Hindu spiritual traditions of self-transformation: emotions became 'techniques of the self', as Foucault would have it. Stoic non-feeling was positively developed as *śānta*, or the peaceful state. But its affective status was often ambiguous: was it a substantive feeling of well-being, or merely an absence of negative affects? Opinion was divided, and similar debates surrounded the Buddhist ultimate goal of *nirvāṇa*. In some accounts *śānta* seemed merely a 'severance from connection with suffering' (*duḥkha-saṃyoga-viyoga*; BG 6.23) in which the passions are calmed. In others it seemed to describe a more substantive affective state with a distinct quality of its own with some infinite or eternal object as its focus; BG 5.21, for instance, speaks of an infinite happiness, a *sukhaṃ akṣayaṃ*.

This second version of 'peace' as a non-acquisitive, non-specific, non-finite yet positive state looks much like a substantive affect: it developed its own separate history in classical Indian thought in connection with the emotion of *ānanda* or bliss. Bliss had a long history arguably rooted in the intense and self-contained

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[10] There was also a 'humours' model of emotion associated with the Sāṃkhya school of thought and its three cosmological dispositions of sattva, rajas, and tamas, or *sattva* 'light/clarity', *rajas* 'heat/energy', and *tamas* 'dark/lethargy', and also a 'subconcious impulses' model attributing attitudinal dispositions to past influences (*saṃskāras* and *kleśas*). Purushottama Bilimoria gives a brief survey of conceptiosn of the emotions in Indian thought, ranging through classical and tantric yoga, Sāṃkhya, Abhidharma Buddhism, Jainism, Ayurveda, Mīmāṃsā, and very briefly, rasa theory in Bilimoria 1995, pp. 67–71.

[11] E.g. *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 6.12.

character of sexual pleasure,[12] but its philosophical ascendency went along with the rise of the concept of Brahman understood as a universal divine reality at the heart of all things.[13] In some sources it was counterposed to the action and anxiety of normal life: 'He who knows that bliss of Brahman, he is never afraid. He does not agonize, thinking: "Why didn't I do the right thing? Why did I do the wrong thing?" A man who knows this frees his self from these two thoughts' and further attains all one's desires.[14] The *Bhagavad Gītā* defined bliss as a 'limitless happiness that the mind achieves when it goes beyond the senses, and this firm state does not vary. Having gained that state, one does not consider any other to be greater.'[15] Over time, this served as one powerful motivator for interest in the divine, which otherwise might be seen to lack a substantive reward. As a theological conception of the divine, Brahman was not linked to a 'heaven' of pleasures, but to a higher state of being. The *Brahma Sūtras*, a classical precis of Vedāntic arguments for a single encompassing foundational reality, devoted eight sutras to arguing that Brahman should rightly be identified as yielding bliss.[16]

Bliss retained a distinctly soteriological implication. But beyond religious literature other notions of selfless emotion such as *bhāva* or *rasa*—enduring emotional moods—emerged as part of the practical sciences of dramaturgy and poetics. The tradition of *Rasa* theory, or reflection on aesthetic emotions, systematically modelled the ontological nature of such states and mapped out ways in which they could be cultivated. While there is not scope in the present chapter to provide a detailed genealogy of *rasa* ideas per se,[17] we will highlight three 'flashpoints' in the tradition's history, each of which introduced some core conception of how lower emotions can be transmuted into higher ones. They variously argued that transitory affective responses can be curated into higher emotions through (a) combination, (b) generalization, and (c) self-reflexivity. This process came to lie at the heart of religious life for a number of schools of Hindu philosophical theology. For some peace, for others, passion, and for still others, awe or wonder were the goals of spiritual life—partly because they corresponded with a correct understanding of reality and its divine foundation.

Echoing the imagery of emergence (in chemical processes and artistic creations) found in non-classical Sāṃkhya and Āyurvedic accounts of selfhood,[18] rasa theory counters philosophy's common focus on simple emotions with an

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[12] See Olivelle 1997 for a detailed history of the early meanings of *ānanda*. We see that it has a direct sense of sexual pleasure in earlier literature and can indeed be used to indicate some reward of sacrifice, and thus a desirable pleasure in a more mundane sense. It is with the gradual growth of *mokṣa* and *Brahman* as prominent late Vedic ideas that *ānanda* becomes aligned with a different kind of endless or self-satisfying enjoyment.

[13] E.g. BU 3.9.28.7, 4.3.32.   [14] *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 2.3.

[15] sukham ātyantikaṃ yat tad buddhigrāhyam atīndriyam vetti yatra na chaivāyaṃ sthitaśch chalati tattvata. yaṃ labdhvā chāparaṃ lābhaṃ manyate, *Bhagavad Gītā* 6.21.

[16] BS 1.1.5–11. See Chakrabarti 2001 for an interesting exploration of approaches to liberation as a positive experiential state (usually equated with bliss).

[17] See the excellent introduction in Pollock 2016.   [18] See Frazier 2022.

account of emergent affects. Accounts by Bharata, Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka, and Bhoja suggest a phenomenology of higher-order states that possess intrinsic value, but are less immediately egoistic than the blunt appetite for pleasure or painlessness.

11.3.1 Intensification and Combination in Bharata

The classical Nāṭya Śāstra or 'dramatic manual' of Bharata (compiled somewhere around *c.* 200 BCE–200 CE) drives a wedge between direct, personal emotional responses on one hand, and 'aesthetic moods' experienced across a wider narrative arc. The celebrated sixth chapter of the manual depicts the latter as something that must be *developed*, through the juxtaposition of complex elements, and the intensification of quotidian feelings that naturally arise. Actually drinking blood in a cremation ground with ghouls, for instance, is one thing—but enjoying the art of macabre horror stories (so popular in our own time) is quite a different experience. So too, someone longing for a beloved is a powerful subjective emotion; but that emotion becomes something of a different order when transmuted into romantic literature expressing, intensifying, and reflecting on that very feeling. Horror becomes the macabre, amazement becomes the fantastic, sexual attraction becomes high romance. The *c.* eighth-century grammarian Daṇḍin describes the intensified version of emotions as an elevation of the original state to the 'supreme grandeur' of sentiment or spectacle.[19]

In addition to intensification, emotions can be combined so that they build upward from the conjunction of subsidiary minor responses into an affective arc. Conjunction (lit. linking together; *saṃyoga*) is depicted as a necessary catalysing causal agency in generating new states, the precise nature of which depends on the specific ingredients and proportions. The basic emotions are considered to be eightfold, comprising four negative (sorrow, anger, fear, and disgust) and four positive (desire, wonder, humour, and heroism) kinds, and a complex range of subsidiary states (e.g. despair, fatigue, intoxication, anxiety, confusion, remembrance, shame, pride, depression, sagacity, etc.). In art, these can be blended in different ways through the course of a scene. These combinations of subsidiary feeling (*vyabhicāribhāva*), with the environment and persons in which they are set (*vibhāva*), and the physical expressions by which we come to share feelings (*anubhāva*) together generate the overarching moods (*sthayibhāvas*).[20] The main emotion manifests slightly different tones particular to each setting or circumstance.[21] This means—importantly—that the higher emotion thereby generated

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[19] See Pollock 2016, p. 65.
[20] Vibhāvānubhāvavyabhicāribhāvasaṃyogād rasaniṣpattiḥ; Nāṭya Śāstra (NŚ) 6.31.
[21] Rasa theory is not India's only poetics; A.K. Ramanujan discusses the approach to context in Tamil poetry (of which he was a master translator) and notes that here too combinations of setting and

can be curated just as a recipe can, and this is indeed the most important creative task of the author. The *Nāṭya Śāstra* offers an analogy or *dṛṣṭānta* for this kind of causation: it is like flavours mixed into a yoghurt base to make a tasty drink that, like all masalas or spice-mixtures, has a new flavour all its own.[22] Thus:

> Just as taste arises from the conjunction of various condiments, spices, and substances, so *rasa* arises from the presentation of various factors and emotions. That is to say, just as physical tastes, that of lassi, for instance, or other such drinks, are produced by substances such as brown sugar plus condiments and spices, so the stable emotion, in the presence of the various factors and emotions, turns into rasa.[23]

In rasa theory's alchemy of emotion, pleasure and pain have no special place above the other states. Heroic vigour or compassion can be as motivating as fear or passion (*vīrya, karuṇā, bhaya*, and *rati*). Further, the process of proportional adjustment might allow us to transform the overall effect into a different dominant mood; minor notes of sorrow or loss can sharpen the dominant feeling of love, transforming it from saccharine romance into poignant passion. Moments of disgust or anger can ultimately drive us to greater heroism, or alternatively to seek detached ascetic peacefulness. The overarching moods exist in a fruitful dialectic with the subsidiary affective responses.[24] We no longer have a polarity of attraction and aversion.

11.3.2 Generalization in Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka

But all emotions remain personal and applied, until they are purified into something more abstract through a process of generalization. The *Nāṭya Śāstra* had implied that once the combinatorial process is complete, a further process of universalization (*sāmānya*; 7.6) is needed to turn the stable mood into an aesthetic value. By distancing the emotion from one's own history and situation, the feeling becomes abstracted and detached from the ego. This idea was subsequently taken up by thinkers who sought to illuminate emotions and motivations not merely *in art*, but also *in the real world*. Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka was a tenth-century aesthetic theorist with a background that made him sensitive to the metaphysical and ethical implications of his ideas. He was a Vedāntic theologian, but he was also a

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interiority build up the mood: there is 'a taxonomy of landscapes, flora and fauna, and of emotions—an ecosystem of which a man's activities and feelings are a part. To describe he exterior landscape is to describe the interior landscape' (Ramanujan 1989, p. 50).

[22] NŚ 6.31.   [23] NŚ 6.280–282, translation from Pollock 2016, pp. 50–51.

[24] See Pollock's examples of discussions about the fruitful combination of rasas in 2016, pp. 161–165.

Mīmāṃsaka[25] linguistic theorist familiar with ideas that meaning is something which naturally arises from the right conjunction of words. He saw meanings as phenomena in which ingredients of one ontological kind (words) can give rise to emergent phenomena of another (intentions, actions, and events). In his aesthetic theory he seems to have applied this to imagination, emotion, and ethical motivations (see Pollock 2016, p. 145).[26]

He emphasized that there are arc-emotions or sustained moods (sthāyibhāvas) that have not yet attained the higher-order value-state of rasa. The key transformative factor, he suggested, is emotion's generalization into a wider ownerless, participatory state of context-free affect. He developed Bharata's brief reference to a sāmānya or general state of emotion in the Nāṭya Śāstra, theorizing that one can apply a generalizing cause to emotion (sādhāranīkaraṇa, or 'commonization' factor as Pollock translates it; 2016, p. 18). The result is an 'ownerless' state (Chakrabarti 2009) of experience that resonates well with Yogic and Buddhist ideas that we are capable of states in which little or no sense of ego is subjectively felt to be present.

So emotions seem to possess potential stages of development. As Ramanujan put it, 'In the realm of feeling, bhāvas (basic feelings) are private, contingent and context-roused sentiments, vibhāvas are determinant causes, anubhāvas the consequent expressions. But rasa is generalized, it is an essence'—and similar ontological progressions are also found in language's generation of meaning from sounds and words (Ramanujan 1989). Our ability to diminish our egos plays a central role here. Such states might be likened to Nietzsche's idea that art effects 'a sense of transformed identity, in which awareness of one's ordinary roles drops away' (Higgins 2007, p. 43). Pollock brings out the way that Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka's theory transferred the structures of generalized ethical language ('one ought') into generalized emotional judgements that may be acted out by another person but that 'are nonetheless meant for you and that you somehow make your own and act upon' (2016, p. 145) The process by which some emotional force crosses from its locus in a character (e.g. Romeo), and inspires an experience and consequent action in the audience, was called bhāvanā. The observation that emotions can leap from person to person, and expand in scope, suggested that—while they need to happen in someone's mind—they need not be anchored to a particular person, situation, or personal goal. King Lear's tragedy moves us, and may even motivate us, but all with a diminished sense that the feeling is 'about' oneself.

Generalization leads to a state of absorption in which, freed from real-world distractions, we are able to fully immerse ourselves in the emotional state and

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[25] Mīmāṃsā was a school exploring injunctive language and certain notions of ritual duty.

[26] Many early, largely secular, rasa theorists rejected this transposition from the aesthetic sphere to the real world because they saw personally embodied and lived emotions as incapable of being generalized. Dhanika expresses this (see Pollock 1998, p. 141).

reach unlimited impersonal heights. Later commentators brought out the bliss-like character of this. As Simhabhupala (fourteenth century) said of the tale of King Rāma, 'the stable emotion that Rāma feels can be experienced by the spectator, and by without the least disruption through improper [over-association], in an experience whose nature Is pure blissful absorption' (Pollock 2016, p. 154). Yet the rasa-theorist and theologian Abhinavagupta emphasized the implication that such experiences can only arise in otherworldly (*alaukika*), non-applied contexts like fiction. If the intentional object is fictional, there is no impetus to actual action to distract our phenomenological development. By contrast, Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka saw the fictional and actual worlds as more continuous, making use of what Boruah calls our 'modal' imagination (Boruah 2016). Fictional events can:

> be the source of profound emotional attachment without giving up their illusory character', and can thus be 'a means of understanding the true ends of man … [and] the same applies to the universe as a whole, which functions in precisely the same way. It consists of a vast elaboration of nothing but names and forms, and yet, thanks to the capacity we derive from it for 'learning, meditating' and so on, it can aid us in reaching the highest end of man.
>
> (from the *Nāṭyaśāstravyākhyā*, trans. Pollock 2016, p. 148)

This is ethics in the sense of a method for detaching from immediate personal concerns, and learning to cultivate wider emotions that are more like the general sense of goodness or objectively approving, outrage or indignation, compassion or non-acquisitive affection. In short we see here emotions that resemble what we mean by general 'values' in everyday English language use.

11.3.3 Self-Reflexivity for Bhoja

A third technique for cultivating 'rasa' emotions through self-reflection was advanced by the celebrated eleventh-century theorist King Bhoja of Paramara. He emphasized the importance of something for which Western traditions of thought have little or no word, but which is usually translated as 'savouring'. Here this describes the unique phenomenological attitude that consists in intentional attention to the qualitative character of an experience. Where Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka drew on the ontology of meaning to develop his theory, Bhoja's account was rooted in his analysis of the phenomenological structure of consciousness. His idea was that our consciousness always already entails some self-reflexive perception of its qualitative content; we not only see the apple and taste its sweetness—we also perceive our perception of the apple, and note our tasting of the flavour. This extra intentionality towards our intentional states is always

there, entailed in the structure of experiencing things. Further, this self-reflexive feature of consciousness is never value-neutral, but always entails a kind of 'enjoyment' of the particular phenomenological state. The implication is that we don't just 'receive' information when we perceive; we actively savour its qualitative content to different degrees, as when we note the red in a rose, or feel the sadness of the fact of our own sadness. Bhoja called this *abhimāna*, and saw *rasa* as what happens when we *wilfully* savour experiences in this way, and with a passionate intensity. The new emotion that we feel has the whole complex situation of experiencing as its object, incorporating the subsidiary feelings[27] and overarching mood.[28] It is 'what enables us to experience the world richly', and also to experience the subsidiary affects and situational components as sublated into a single unity, an 'inherently a quasi-intersubjective phenomenon' that subsists 'between the subject represented and the subject reading' (Pollock 1998, pp. 126, 129).

What is the purpose of cultivating such an experience, for Bhoja? Pollock links his explanation to a prior Sāṃkhya account of 'sense of self' as the realization that all phenomenal experiences happen 'for' a self who is their enjoyer and agent, and the reference point of their structure.[29] Agency is thus reassigned to a self that is not to be assimilated merely to the experiences at hand, but is 'the core nature of personality' per se (Pollock 2016, p. 112). Bhoja did not focus on real-world moral implications, although he generally seems to have seen literary texts as making 'moral arguments' that one should cultivate.[30] But again the implication is that we can act in relation to an understanding of the self as a kind of impersonal universal enjoyer, an experience that takes us into realms of purer, less egoistic values. The tenth-century thinker Abhinavagupta combined the generalization and self-reflexive theories into a single conception of higher emotion that frees the subject from the specificity of their own contingent situation, so that we can savour the bliss that 'is simply one's own awareness', and the universal structures of consciousness are revealed.[31] It thus achieves a soteriological effect, aiding self-elevation, understanding of the values that pertain to the world as a whole, and 'liberation' from the bonds of the ego and one's personal desires.

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[27] Here the term used for the conjunction of circumstances that causes the emergence of rasa is *sāhitya*, rather than *saṃyoga*.

[28] Bhoja's insistence that rasa is continuous with a universally available function of consciousness itself informs his apparent view that rasa can happen in life outside of aesthetic contexts—a view that was unusual in the longstanding debates about the *location* of rasa (whether in the characters, the text, the poet, or the audience).

[29] See Pollock's (2016, p. 112) application of Vacaspatimiśra's commentary to Bhoja.

[30] Pollock 2001 reads his views on the unity of literature, the goals of literary revision, and the nature of a protagonist.

[31] See Pollock 2016, p. 190 for a summary of this view in Abhinavagupta.

11.4 The Moral Value of Higher Emotions

If 'ethics' in the sense of reasons for *altruistic* (or at least co-operative) interpersonal relations is largely advocated through theories of dharma,[32] then here we have explored 'ethics' in the different sense of an axiology of intrinsic value, grounded in affective states. Here, beyond the familiar passions of pleasure/happiness and pain/suffering, there stands a whole treasure-house of affects in which the cruder elements of ego-centric, insensitive, simplistic, and blinkered perspective are pared away. They may still function as 'horses' that pull the chariot of individual agency through life. But they pull in quite a different way from the wild stallions of pleasure and pain against which both Plato and Krishna warned us.

As Bharata points out, such emotions are less like appetites, and more like affective arcs that span diverse circumstances and immediate stimuli, triangulating subsidiary concerns into overarching ones. As Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka shows, they often supersede personal desires and goals because they are linked with our ability to identify with persons beyond ourselves. And as Bhoja suggests, there is a special kind of enjoyment in them—a qualitative character we feel to be of subjective value—that is different from that which attaches to sensory pleasures. The abstract feelings of being in love or in awe, of humour, heroic energy, or even compassion and horror (all being rasas), each carry within them a savouring of the very experience of self-in-the-world. The result is a synthetic, depersonalized emotional value that stands to simple pleasures almost as a Bildungsroman stands to a verbal injunction, or a symphony to a musical phrase, or a chieftain's judgement about the welfare of his community to a child's desire to eat. The developed form is dialectically transformed by complexity, generality, and reflexive awareness of the distinctive quality of the experience itself.

There were extensive debates in aesthetic theory about whether the specific attitudes of aesthetic rasa, achieved through art and according to rasa techniques, can be applied to real, everyday life. Nevertheless, such arc-emotions seem to capture the complex texture of real life better than the donkey-and-carrot model of appetite to which Bentham alluded. Arguably, we are not primarily directed by pleasures and pains, even instrumentally; we often pursue experiences that do not fit well into standard notions of pleasure, such as challenges and changes, the flourishing of family even when it may create inconveniences, the creation of new projects, communal happiness beyond our immediate sphere, and fresh experiences of unknown value. One might imagine the human emotional landscape as a mandala or series of concentric circles with immediate basic responses at the centre, changing most quickly, and the larger arcs of rasa-like mood at the slower moving, more stable, all-encompassing outer rings.

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[32] As I argue in Frazier 2021, pp. 6–9.

But finally, how might such a conception relate to religion, if at all? A systematic approach to the Hindu phenomenology of value states might better have started with close analysis of the *Yoga Sūtras:* they offer one of the earliest and best expressions of India's typical interest in decentring the ego, withdrawing its appetitive tendencies, and curating a different phenomenological 'shape' for consciousness. Further, Yoga is a recognizably soteriological tradition (although soteriology is not its only use). It thus seems to fit the template of 'religious' ethics better than Rasa Theory which has largely secular, śāstric roots. Yet classical Yoga is an essentially stoic tradition sceptical of emotion, whereas Rasa Theory celebrates affective experience, and speaks more directly to issues of worldly motivation.

Perhaps then it is best to grasp the 'immediate and obvious problem' by the horns and acknowledge with William Schweiker that '"ethics" or "moral philosophy" is not indigenous to the world's traditions' (Schweiker 2005, p. 1). This means we must redefine for ourselves what constitutes 'religiosity' in ethics. A major theme in Indian traditions is the cultivation of higher-order, ego-decentred phenomenological states. In this connection Bharata, Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka, and Bhoja offer insights into ways that consciousness can be moulded into experiences of a *different kind/stage of value* from that with which we more routinely engage. India's classical heroes often exemplify such states—from the heroic striving of kings like Arjuna, to the unlimited compassion of the Buddha, to the selfless kenotic passion of devotees like Rādha. Such attitudes can offset egoism and encourage a more communitarian mindset; in this sense they are morally beneficial to others. But this remains merely a side-effect: they have their own intrinsic (often 'spiritual') value for the experiencing subject. Non-harm can be a side-effect of Yogic practice primarily aimed at peaceful absorption in consciousness, and compassion can be a side-effect of the Bodhisattva path primarily aimed at escaping misplaced sense of self (e.g. Clayton 2001; Garfield 2010). So here selfless feelings are a product of our aesthetic response to ever-wider situations, reaching outward to the world as a whole. In this, India reminds us that there are more phenomenological states on heaven and earth than those brief pleasures and pains that punctuate quotidian life 'like the flickers of a fire-fly', as Udayana puts it (Chakrabarti 1983, p. 72). The various transformative religious traditions of Indian history remind us that techniques for achieving higher states lie within our grasp, if only we reach for them.

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A11.1 Reply to Jessica Frazier

Bakinaz Abdalla

Frazier offers an interesting piece on the foundation of ethics in the Indian traditions. The themes discussed by Frazier clearly differ from those recurring in Judeo-Christian traditions, but as I will show, relevant ideas can be located in some Islamic writings. I will start with a sketch of the main points and then offer my response from an Islamic perspective.

Reflecting on Indian cultures, Frazier entertains a vision that regards emotions as the anchor of value. Characteristically, this vision dismisses the divine command theory and views that relate values to a supernatural deity. Instead, it addresses values from the perspective of a wide range of value-bearing phenomenological affective states.

Focusing on the aesthetic tradition of rasa theory, Frazier introduces a scheme of 'moral phenomenology' that situates 'intrinsic values' in more complex affective states than pleasure and pain. This scheme makes a distinction between mere pain and pleasure, on the one hand, and cultivated affective states, on the other, and provides techniques through which emotions are transmuted to 'higher' states unaffected by the 'acquisitive', 'finite', and 'dissatisfying' features of pain and pleasure. Ultimately, these states nurture the ability to transcend personal motives and emotionally identify with others. In that, they diminish egocentric and insensitive personal desires, producing, as a 'side-effect', altruism.

Throughout the discussion, Frazier raises interesting points that invite reflections on relevant Islamic ideas. Of particular interest to me is the naturalism of Hinduism's approach to ethics which, as Frazier points out, reveals separateness from divine and metaphysical foundations. In this approach, 'philosophizing about ethics depends partly on philosophizing about emotions and their complicated relation to the ego'. I would like to roughly suggest models from the Islamic tradition where virtues are addressed, though not as systematically as in the Indian traditions, with reference to emotions. However, in these models the natural and divine essentially merge; emotions and their ethical implications vary depending on their relatedness to the Divine Being.

As known, God, in Islam, is the ultimate sovereign that guides every aspect of human life, including ethics, through a host of rules and prescriptions. While Islamic schools of thought may differ on the extent and manner of God's involvement in ethics, discussions on ethics almost invariably include

considerations of God. However, commitment to the idea of the deity as the foundational ground of norms found various expressions within different intellectual and theological currents, and articulations of virtues and their foundation also took into consideration features of human nature. The innateness of emotions, like fear and love, to human nature, and their amenability to cultivation are recurring features in some ethical discussions in the Islamic tradition.

In a treatise on the essence of love, the prominent Muslim philosopher Avicenna places love at the heart of ontological, ethical, and soteriological considerations. The ethical is the least addressed motif, but its import can readily be delineated. Avicenna explains how love, defined as a natural instinct in human beings towards that which is 'good' and 'appropriate' in itself (Avicenna 2017, p. 10), is transformative in positive ways. Love directed to perfections universal to all humans exemplifies this transformative function. These perfections constitute a category of good that are appropriate in themselves and, therefore, beloved and sought in themselves. Insofar as these perfections are beloved, they function as motives as well as final ends with which human subjects aim to identify (ibid., p. 9).

There exists a positive linear relationship between the the qualities of the beloved object and the experience of love. This relationship explains how love can be effective on an ethical level. As Avicenna states, love varies in degree depending on the value of the object of love; the more benevolent it is, the worthier of love. But this positive relationship extends beyond the intensity of the mode of love. Love's positive outcomes also vary depending on the meritorious qualities of the object of love; the more benevolent it is, the more benevolence it generates in the subject (ibid., p. 10). Love as such is grounded in reason and is independent of materialistic-animalistic desires. Therefore, the more one experiences this form of love, the more transcendent and oriented towards benevolence she is. Among all objects of love, God stands out as the most worthwhile and deserving of love. This is because, from every respect, God is the absolute goodness whose benevolence, overflowing all over the world, forms the basis of all existence. All universal perfections beloved and pursued by human beings overflow from God. The more one apprehends and loves these perfections, and specifically their source (i.e. God), the more inclined she is towards benevolence and virtue. The peak of this rational-emotional state of love transforms one into a transcendent mode of being where she attains perfection of the virtues and emulates deeds characteristic of the intelligible realm and the absolute goodness (ibid., p. 22).

In the same vein, Islamic Sufism expands on the idea of God's love as a state of high spiritual and ethical consequences. However, Sufi theologians develop many of their ethical views with attentiveness to prescribed religious practices and norms, and this allows underlining a close connection between the impact of God's love and religious prescriptions on moral conduct in some of their writings.

Consider, for example, how the prominent Sufi-theologian Abu Ḥamid al-Ghazali, throughout his *iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, specifies the function of religious

practices and norms in disciplining the soul and guiding it to ultimate experiences and states that have interpersonal-ethical and spiritual consequences. Love directed toward God is one such state. Let us explore how and for what purpose this form of love may be developed. For Al-Ghazali, love is an experience that involves consciousness and awareness of the object's qualities. The experience of love causes pleasant effects in the subject and an affection to the beloved (al-Ghazali 2003). In this manner, love propels a subject towards individuals and objects of high values. Primary to all target objects are the self and the conditions conducive to its perfection. Apart from these, some target objects include things and/or individuals loved for the sake of a benefit. Others are things loved for their own sake. Beauty, of which moral virtues are an essential category, exemplifies the latter. However pleasant and conducive to wellbeing, these forms of love are not ultimate states in themselves since they sprout from a higher form of love that exhausts all their constructive functions: God's love. For this reason, the only *true* experience of love one ought to pursue as an ultimate state of being has God as its target object (ibid., p. 217).

Al-Ghazali does not reflect any further (at least in the cited treatise) on the ethical consequences of devoted love of God, but the fact that al-Ghazali places this reflection on love within a chapter focusing on the Science of Conduct (*ʿilm al-muʿamalāt*) invites consideration of its ethical significance. One explanation would consider the traits of exhaustiveness and knowledge respectively qualifying the object and the subject of love. God's exhaustiveness implies that the divine essence is the ground of all that is essentially beautiful, including moral virtues. The subject's love is not a mere blind affection, but a conscious relation grounded in, or perhaps motivated by, knowledge and eagerness to explore and imitate the object's higher qualities. Such love moves the subject to the direction of the beloved, and thus, as an outcome, transforms her into a virtuous being acting in accordance with God's commands as well as beautiful qualities. This suggested explanation aligns with al-Ghazali's view that inner states and outward actions have mutual impacts. Just as good deeds lead to the cultivation of the inner states of the soul, cultivated inner states lead to good deeds (ibid., pp. 4–5).

As seen from the suggested models, deontological systems like Islam can still acknowledge and accommodate emotions and their ethical consequences. However, no matter how emotions are integrated in the discussion of ethical matters, they are hardly assigned a foundational role in promoting values in isolation from the Divine Being. God remains the anchor of values as well as the target of ethically transformative forms of experience.

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A11.2 Reply to Jessica Frazier

Mark C. Murphy

The aim of my initial contribution to this exchange was to give an argument for privileging a certain way of approaching moral matters, *natural law theory*, within the Christian tradition. Natural law theorists, at least of the Thomistic sort dominant within Christian reflection on ethics, will find much that is amenable in *rasa* theory as characterized in Jessica Frazier's illuminating essay. The centrality of emotional responsiveness in the best human life, the refusal to reduce the range of relevant emotional responsiveness to some simplistic hedonistic scheme, the importance of developing and fine-tuning one's emotional responses—these are important themes in Thomas Aquinas's account of the virtues, even if what is often foregrounded is the role of particular action-types and the various norms of action that govern them.

In the remainder of this essay, I will primarily focus on three important points of difference between *rasa* theory and natural law theory, and I am going to offer brief cases in favour of the natural law approach on these matters of difference. These cases are not offered as decisive arguments for the superiority of natural law view or as refutations of *rasa* theory! Rather, the aims are, first, to understand better what the natural law theorists would see as at stake in these disputes and second, to further productive argumentative engagement by offering initial theses for discussion. I will then, in conclusion, briefly discuss what strikes me as one more point of interesting agreement between the views, that they share a common problem about how to relate the ultimate good to mundane matters of interpersonal ethics.

A11.2.1 Rasa Theory's Elevation of Experience over Other Sorts of Activity

Frazier frames the dominant Hindu approach in terms of a choice between something like divine command views and more naturalistic ethical positions.[33]

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[33] p. 229.

This is not too distant from the initial way that I would frame the main choice point within Christian ethics, whether to endorse some form of theological voluntarism[34] or to appeal to a natural law view,[35] a view on which is natural truths about the relevant sorts of beings that fix the truths of ethics.

The immediate divergence between *rasa* theory and natural law theory—both of which present themselves as in a straightforward sense 'naturalistic' theories—concerns the way that the foundations of the ethical are characterized. Frazier's dialectic begins with the notion that if one goes naturalistic, then one is apt to appeal to *states of experience* as the exclusive fundamental bearers of value.[36] Taking this for granted within naturalistic ethics, she then rightly points out that there is no reasonable basis within such a view for focusing simply on pleasure and pain as the sole relevant forms of experience.[37] There is a wide variety of experiential states that are available to humans in principle and which can be cultivated deliberately, and many of these have a greater claim to choiceworthiness (or avoidance-worthiness) than simple pleasure (or pain).[38] And so there would be a sort of arbitrariness, and of a particularly unfortunate sort, in adverting to a crude hedonism within one's naturalistic ethics when one could open the range of values to the fuller range of human experience.

The argument that it is arbitrary to focus on pleasure over other experiential states is a powerful one. The natural law theorist, however, might suggest that the arbitrariness argument provides a basis for expanding further, past experiential states and encompassing other sorts of human activity. While natural law theorists are happy to incorporate various experiential states and their value into their position, their key thought is that what is relevant about experience is that it is a species of the sort of thing that makes for flourishing—that is, *activity*. Experiences are not to be identified with phenomenal states; in experiencing, the agent is not passive, but active. But there are so many other sorts of activities: various sorts of knowing and agency are no more and no less forms of human activity than any sort of experience is, whether it be humble pleasure or more rarefied, cultivated forms of experience. (Thus Nozick's classic experience machine thought experiment, which brings out the extent to which folks value in itself actual contact and other sorts of engagement with the world.[39]) So the first question pressed by the natural law theorist is not 'why experience?' but 'why *only* experience?'

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[34] Murphy 2002b.

[35] Murphy 2002a. It is possible that Frazier would count natural law theory as a view that holds that what is right to do is 'inscribed in the heavens and guaranteed by God'. I am not clear on what it is for an ethical view to be inscribed in the Heavens and guaranteed by God. But in any case, what shouldn't be ignored are the ways in which natural law theory is indeed a naturalistic position.

[36] p. 229.   [37] p. 229.   [38] p. 232.   [39] Nozick 1974, pp. 42–45.

A11.2.2 Rasa Theory's Focus on the Intrinsic Character of Emotions over the Aptness of Those Emotions as Responsiveness to Value

Frazier's characterization of *rasa* theory emphasizes the capacity of the various emotional responses that serve as the foundations of value to be cultivated in various ways—intensified and combined, for example.[40] The ways in which such states of the subject can be cultivated is also a central theme in natural law theory, at least insofar as such a view incorporates an Aristotelian theory of habituation.[41]

What the natural law view would want to ask further questions about concerns what makes certain ways of cultivating emotional states better or worse than other such ways. It is not plain from Frazier's treatment what the story is supposed to be. Is it that the point of cultivating one's experiential/emotional states in one direction rather than another is simply due to the more intrinsically fulfilling experience that one will have on the other side of such cultivation—that the point is to have intrinsically good experiences, and by engaging in such cultivation one will have experiences that are intrinsically better? If so, then this is another point of tension between natural law theory and *rasa* theory. For on the natural law view, the aim is to cultivate experiential, attitudinal, emotional, and agential responses that are *fitting* to their objects. What makes a set of experiential, attitudinal, emotional, and agential responses worth developing is that there are a variety of beings in the world with respect to which it is appropriate for us to respond in certain ways, and our responding in these ways is not a given of our first nature but has to be cultivated as a second nature. So the second question pressed by the natural law theorist is: 'why are these ways of cultivating one's emotional responses better than others?'

A11.2.3 Rasa Theory's Abstraction from Our Specific Human Kind

One of the striking forms of emotional cultivation explored within *rasa* theory involves generalization, a distancing of oneself from one's own history and situation. Taken to its ideal, this involves a 'generalization into a wider ownerless, participatory state of context-free affect'.[42] And combined with the heights of cultivated self-reflexivity subjects can be 'free[d] ... from the specificity of their own contingent situation, so we can savor the bliss that is "simply one's own awareness" and the universal structures of consciousness are revealed'.[43]

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[40] p. 235.   [41] Aquinas 1948, IaIIae 51, 2; IaIIae 52.   [42] p. 237.   [43] p. 239.

No doubt there is something to be gained in attending to things in such a way that our response to them is not distorted by extraneous causal factors. But it seems that this sort of ideal as characterized goes beyond that to the idealization of a sort of 'view from nowhere', an experience of things the actual or appropriate version of which is not fixed by the creaturely kind to which the subject belongs. And that is something that the natural law theorist will treat as a chimera rather than an ideal: what counts as valuable responsiveness is fixed not only by the beings to which we are responding but to the kind of thing that we humans are: there are no 'universal structures of consciousness' sufficient to fix what counts as excellent experience with respect to the objects of the world; instead, what fixes the excellence of response is both the specific character of the subject and that of the object.[44] The third question posed by the natural law theorist to the *rasa* theorist is, then, this: to what extent should one's specific nature as a human continue to govern what counts as well-cultivated affect?

A11.2.4 The Perennial Problem: The Relation between the Response to the Ultimate and the Ordinary Interactions between Folks Which Can Be Better or Worse

Frazier's discussion ends with a fascinating treatment of the question of what the relationship is between the prospect of enjoying heightened, cultivated experience and the existence of, content of, and motivation to carry out one's ordinary interpersonal duties.[45] She confronts squarely the notion that there may be no reason to expect that *rasa* theory's connection to what one might conceive as interpersonal morality will be particularly direct or illuminating; it may be instead that the connections are more tenuous, e.g. that cultivating generalized versions of these emotional states may dispose one less towards selfishness and more towards interpersonal flourishing.[46] Of course, it may be, on the other hand, that this sort of abstracting cultivation makes one in a way more indifferent to all of these sorts of everyday benefit and burden, whether at a personal or group level.

What strikes me most about these reflections is just that this is a problem shared by natural law theory, at least of the theistic sort articulated in the Christian tradition. When Aquinas articulates a conception of the good, it turns out to consist in the beatific vision—the direct vision of God that is available to humans only as a gift and only in the next life.[47] But he articulates a theory of moral virtue and moral law that, while bearing a distinctive theistic Aristotelian stamp, is very much a theory of (among other things) interpersonal morality. It seems to me that Aquinas never really resolves well what the relationship is between the ultimate

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[44] See e.g. Aquinas 1948, IaIIae 54, 3.   [45] p. 240.   [46] pp. 240–241.
[47] Aquinas 1948, IaIIae 3, 8.

good to be gained that is the beatific vision and the various norms of morality by which are bound in ordinary life. This is, I suppose, for both *rasa* theory and Thomistic natural law theory bound to be a deep problem: how to reconcile one's pursuit of the deeply lovable, rare, sublime good with the binding power of the rules of ordinary interpersonal morality.

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12

Morality and Divine Law

Reflections on Islamic Theology and *Falsafah*

Bakinaz Abdalla

12.1 Introduction

Modern scholarship on Islamic ethics focuses on two medieval schools of specu-
lative theology: the *Muʿtazilites* and the *Ashʿarites*. The former promotes the view
that actions have intrinsic moral values and that ethical judgements are accessible
to reason independently of revelation. The *Muʿtaziliets* are hardly interested in
prioritizing reason at the expense of revelation; instead, their ethical framework
eventually emerges with a tendency to accommodate both (Hourani 1985, p. 24).
This framework is typically put into dispute with that of the *Ashʿariets* which
decisively denies the existence of objective moral values and hinges ethical judge-
ments on God's will. For *Ashʿarī* theologians, good and bad in the realm of actions
mean nothing more than obeying and disobeying God's commands and prohib-
itions. With this view, the role of reason in morality is rendered marginal. Another
strand of thought emanates from the *falsafah* tradition (roughly signifying an
amalgam of neo-Platonized Aristotelian theories as adopted and adapted by
medieval Muslim (as well as Jewish) philosophers in discussing purely philosoph-
ical and religion-related questions). Modern scholarship on Islamic ethics has
posited little focus on this tradition, perhaps because *al-falāsifah* (the philo-
sophers) were not preoccupied with analysing the concepts of right and wrong.
Their ethical views are shaped by key Aristotelian premises on virtues, focusing
primarily on character traits and the nature of and means to happiness. For most
scholars, the *falsafah* tradition furnishes an insufficient matrix for 'ethical phil-
osophy in any analytical style' (Hourani 1985, p. 21). Nonetheless, the *falsafah*
tradition is not empty of conceptual analyses that qualify it for a conversation with
theology. This chapter aims to employ theories in the *falsafah* tradition and
Islamic theology to discuss the relationship between morality and the Quran.

Due to space limitation, I focus only on *Ashʿarī* theology, which, as generally
believed, aligns with the spirit of Islam. Roughly evaluated, *Ashʿarī* theologians
stand on one extreme of the spectrum of orthodoxy. *Al-falāsifah* stand on the

other extreme, if not on the verge of heterodoxy (Ibn Taymiyyah 2005, p. 142). The tension between their respective views on the nature of God and the God–world relationship, sources of knowledge, and the nature and epistemic value of revelation are extensively studied in modern scholarship. However, the implications of these views for a systematic account of the foundation of morality in Islam have not received a thorough investigation. This chapter delves into examining the possibility of such an account, lending considerable attention to the conception of revelation which is crucial to any study of Islamic ethics.

For Muslims, the Quran embodies the ultimate revelation from God. It presents a divine law that guides human beings in all mundane and otherworldly affairs. Functionally, the Quran is inseparable from the prophet Mohammad who was entrusted by God to deliver it to mankind. The prophet is not only a trustworthy conveyor of the divine message but also a spiritual, moral, and political leader of high calibre. All that counts as moral is represented in the prophet, and thus following in his footsteps—as the Quran instructs—is a never-failing route to moral living. In a sense, the prophet's moral conduct forms a foundational moral model. But what is the foundation of the extraordinary moral quality of the prophet? More precisely, to what extent and in what way could the Quran have structured his moral conduct?

Arguably, any Muslim thinker keen on stressing the supremacy of God's word—as manifesting in the Quran—in the ethical sphere would find it pressing to confirm a substantial link between the moral conduct of the prophet and the Quran. While it is easy to make positive statements to this effect, the challenge lies in offering a systematic account of that hypothetical link while staying faithful to key theoretical views on the nature of revelation and what counts as moral. An immediate prejudice against *al-falāsifah* would be that their theoretical commitments would be disadvantageous to this objective. In this chapter, I argue that despite appearances, *al-falāsifah* are more capable than *Ash'arī* theologians of providing a systematic account that solidly ties the moral quality of the prophet to the Quran.

I begin by explaining the Islamic perspective on the relation between morality and the Quran and the outstanding quality of the prophet's conduct. After setting the ground for the discussion, I address flaws in Islamic theology that arise from rooted belief in the eternity of the divine word, the Quran, and theistic-ethical subjectivism. Lastly, I explain how *al-falāsifah,* with their emphasis on virtues as the means to a moral and happy life, have the potential to offer the intended account, despite the challenge imposed by their view on the naturalistic foundation of revelation.

Before delving into the discussion, two notes are in order. Firstly, in setting the framework for the discussion, I rely on the Quran. Although the Quran is not a theoretical book, Muslim scholars took it as a ground for ethical discussions, and I here follow this trajectory. Verses cited in this chapter may have different

interpretations, but, due to limited space, I introduce only the explicit, literal, meaning of the Quran to articulate basic Islamic ethical claims. Secondly, I use theological and philosophical sources in a way that might suggest their belonging to uniform groups devoid of internal variations. While a meticulous historian may criticize this use of sources, I excuse it by stressing that the objective of this chapter is not particularly historical and that I ground the discussion in characteristic theories of the traditions in consideration.

12.2 Morality and Divine Law: Basic Islamic Claims

Whether theistic claims qualify for explaining the foundation of morality or not is a subject of philosophical debate. For some philosophers, theism precludes the possibility of sustaining the normativity of morality and puts morality at risk, given that it is not 'obviously true'. Should theism turn out to be false, the foundation of morality would be undermined (Brink 2007). Contrarily, some philosophers argue in favour of grounding morality in a theistic explanation. Moral obligation figures in arguments to this effect as one phenomenon suitably explainable on theistic grounds (Quinn 1990, p. 361). Debatably, obligation presupposes some sort of moral law. A notable conception of moral law[1]—on which this study revolves as the one that represents the ethos of Islam—ascribes what is imperative in the moral sphere to the dictates of a divine lawgiver. This prescriptive-authoritative understanding of moral law echoes in Anscombe's critical study 'Modern Moral Philosophy'. Positing the thesis that the conception of moral obligation should, if possible, be cast off, Anscombe explains that 'moral obligation' and 'ought' would have to be grounded in a legislator of superior power. A legislator as such hardly exists, and thus, it would not be possible to sustain a conception of moral obligation—unless one believes in 'God as a lawgiver' (Anscombe 1958, p. 6).

Abstracted from theoretical concerns, theistic traditions support the rootedness of morality in divine law. In Islam, God, the author of all aspects of reality, is the agent that lays down the foundation of morality (Farahat 2019, p. 2). God implements this by acting as the supreme lawgiver. His law, dictated in the Quran and communicated to mankind via the Prophet Mohammad through numerous episodes of revelation, prescribes what is imperative in both the moral-practical and doctrinal spheres. All that ought to be done or avoided, as well as that which ought to be believed or disbelieved, comes from God in the form of revealed law. Within this framework, moral deserts are merited in virtue of one's adherence to or deviation from divine law:

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[1] Different conceptions of moral law are advanced in philosophical discourse; see Murphy 2011, pp. 14–44.

But whoever comes to Him as a believer having done righteous deeds—for those will be the highest degrees [in position] (20: 75) [. . .] But he who does righteous deeds while he is a believer—he will neither fear injustice nor deprivation. And thus We have sent it down as an Arabic Qur'an and have diversified therein the warnings that perhaps they will avoid [sin] or it would cause them remembrance (20: 111–114) [. . .] And if there should come to you guidance from Me—then whoever follows My guidance will neither go astray [in the world] nor suffer [in the Hereafter] (20: 123).[2]

The foundational role of revealed law to morality is seldom outspokenly contested in the Islamic intellectual tradition—although, as will be discussed below, some philosophical strands seem to suggest otherwise. Similarly, although the compatibility of divine law with what is deemed ethically normative is sometimes debated in both Islamic and secular scholarship, divine law is regarded by Muslims as essential to moral living. That the Islamic science of jurisprudential theory (ʾusūl al-fiqh) contains discussions of judgements, expanding on the Quran as well as prophetic sayings (ʾaḥādīth), under the headings of 'goodness' (ḥusn) and 'ugliness' (qubḥ) bespeaks of the acknowledged nexus between divine law (the Quran) and morality (Abu El Fadl 2017, p. 8).

It is important to clarify two interrelated ontological and epistemological implications.

Firstly, the basic Islamic view regarding the rootedness of morality in divine law does not necessarily entail 'theistic subjectivism,' the view that values are solely subject to God's will (Hourani, 1985, pp.16–17). While the deontological structure of Islamic ethics has occasionally been drawn in support of theistic subjectivism, the Quran, indeed, suggests the existence of objective moral truth, as can be detected from references to God as the superlative embodiment of justice and goodness. Such references indicate that norms like justice and goodness are fundamentally objective, and even have a realist ontological status (Abu El Fadl 2017, p. 10).

Secondly, morality, insofar as it is rooted in revealed divine law, is not exclusively confined to the Quran. Some verses seem to suggest that what is good and bad in the realm of actions can be known independently of Islamic law. For example, references to good and bad deeds of pre-Islamic nations and individuals indicate that humanity understood and had access to certain values before the advent of Islam—and this, from another perspective, presupposes the existence of objective moral truth (al-Attar 2010, pp. 12–14). Furthermore, moral acts and judgements were known via former revealed laws. The Quran was not revealed to revoke these laws, but to endorse them. Its fundamental merit is that it corrects errors that occurred due to people's misconception of and inability to preserve the

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[2] All quotations from the Quran are taken from *Saheeh International Translation*.

pristine law of God. In other words, the Quran was revealed to revive God's law and redirect people to the right path.

Nonetheless, the Quran claims to maintain a superior rank to other laws, primarily, due to its alleged comprehensiveness and flawlessness. Inclusive as it is of explanations of all sorts of things that concern human beings, the Quran purports to sufficiently provide all what man needs in the practical-moral sphere: 'We have revealed to you the Book as an explanation of all things, a guide, a mercy, and good news for those who "fully" submit' (16:89). Additionally, compared to previous laws, the Quran is the purest in content, and the most suitable for universal application:

> We have revealed to you ⌜O Muammad⌝ the Book [i.e., the Quran] in truth, confirming that which preceded it of the Scriptures and a criterion over it. So, judge between them by what Allah has revealed, and do not follow their inclinations away from what has come to you of the truth. (5:48).

Allegedly, then, the Quran stands as the most reliable embodiment of divine law. In this way, it is the completest and the most impeccable foundation for moral living.

Morality pertains not only to one's personal conduct and conduct towards fellow men, but also to conduct towards God (Sherief 1975, p. 16). The latter involves, in addition to practical duties, doctrinal commitments:

> True righteousness is in one who believes in Allah, the Last Day, the angels, the Books, and the prophets and gives wealth in spite of love for it [. . .] Those are the ones who have been true, and it is those who are the righteous (2:177).

The Quran sufficiently prescribes the rules for fulfilling these criteria. In that, it functions as *the* means for someone willing to stick as closely as possible to the requirements of moral relations with fellow humans and with God. In a nutshell, there is a substantial nexus between morality and the Quran. Seen in terms of the concept of duty/obligation (*taklīf*) laying at the heart of Islam, this nexus amounts to a relationship of contingency in which being moral demands adherence to the Quran as divine law.

Let us grant the purported merits of the Quran. It would follow that if there were morally perfect (human) agents, their conduct would be in a close affinity with the Quran. (Some philosophers argue that moral perfection is practically impossible (e.g. Conee 1994). The reference to moral perfection here neither supports nor denies its plausibility, but merely designates it as a possible moral state). In the sight of God and the community of believers, these agents would deserve praise on account of their adherence to the Quran in its capacity as the law of God.

12.2.1 The Moral Quality of the Prophet

Muslims believe that the prophet Mohammad is sinless (*maʿṣūm*). His devotion to God and upright conduct form a paradigmatic model that ought to be emulated by those who believe in 'the retributive aspect of actions' (al-Ṭabarsī (*Makārim al-aḫlāq*), pp. 7–11), as the Quran clearly states: 'There has certainly been for you in the Messenger of Allah an excellent pattern for any one whose hope is in Allah and the Last Day and [who] remembers Allah often' (Q: 33:21). Uprightness characterizes every aspect of the prophet's life, starting from his devotion to God, etiquette with family, neighbours, and the public, attitude to non-Muslims, personal appearance, conversation, preaching, to his expression of compassion, grief, and joy. Overall, his behaviour qualifies him to be set as a model of moral perfection, if so to speak. Correspondingly, the Quran describes the prophet as the paragon of morality, 'and you are truly a man of outstanding morality' (68:4), and so Muslims take it as an indisputable fact that the prophet possessed 'the noblest moral conduct' (al-Asfahānī 1993, p. 15). Blessed with this extraordinary quality, he was entrusted to carry out the honourable mission of guiding mankind to the best moral conduct, as the prophet informs regarding his divinely ordained mission: 'I was commissioned to complement the noblest of morality' (ibid.).

  Suppose we grant that morality is rooted in divine law, particularly the Quran, as explained above. Should (and how) the morality-Quran-nexus be carried over to account for the moral perfection of the prophet? Reasonably, if the Quran holds supreme value in all practical and spiritual matters, the model of perfection it proclaims would be a model that instantiates its ideals and rules in all affairs. A solid nexus between the outstanding moral conduct of the prophet and the Quran is, in fact, affirmed by the prophet's wife, ʿĀʾishah, whose reputation among Muslim scholars as a reliable narrator of *aḥādīth* and *sīrah* (biographical information about the prophet) is unblemished.[3] When ʿĀʾishah was asked to characterize the moral conduct of the prophet, she answered: 'His morality *was* the Quran.' Certainly, ʿĀʾishah's statement is not meant to posit an ontological identity between the moral quality of the prophet and the Quran, but to explain that the prophet was the moral agent he was because his conduct and beliefs were rooted in God's law as embodied in the Quran. To further explain, ʿĀʾishah cites verses that specify fundamental moral norms and rituals regulating the life of those considered by God as successful believers. Following this, she affirms: 'In this manner was the conduct of the prophet' (al-Asfahānī 1993, p. 27). There was, accordingly, a relational property in which the indicated moral quality

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[3] This is particularly true among *Sunī* scholars. *Shiʿī* scholars have a different opinion about ʿĀʾishah. The *Sunī-Shiʿī* disagreement on ʿĀʾishah is not my concern here, and it has no implications for the overall Islamic perspective on the prophet's uprightness.

characterized the prophet while—or perhaps, owing to—adhering to the Quran, in all doctrinal and practical affairs.

Verifying this nexus, however, may turn out to be challenging for some theological and intellectual traditions. Looking into *Ash'arī* theology and the *falsafah* tradition, the following sections examine their ability to satisfactorily account for the moral perfection of the prophet in a way that retains (1) the nexus to the Quran and (2) the concept of duty/obligation, (3) while at the same time remaining faithful to key principles regarding ethics and the nature of revelation in their respective frameworks.

12.3   Reflections on *Ash'arī* Theology

At first blush, *Ash'arī* theology manifests as a suitable candidate for accounting for the prophet's moral perfection in a way that satisfies the criteria specified above. However, some theoretical commitments, in particular the Divine Command Theory (DCT) and the Eternity of the Quran Doctrine (EQD), fly in the face of this enterprise.

The first (DCT) stems from the *Ash'arites's* overall voluntaristic conception of the God–world relationship.[4] For *Ash'arī* theologians, God is the immediate creator of the world and all that it includes. God's agency is both volitional and boundless in terms of power. Although things in the world typically follow a customary course, God's volition does not operate within the constraints of any necessary relations between causes and effects. Everything that exists is determined and comes into being through the absolute power and irrevocable will of God (al-Baqillānī 2000, pp. 16–18. The same view can be found within Maturīdism, see al-Maturīdī 2001, pp. 98, 108–110, 123). The province of divine will extends to morality. Beyond God's will, there is no objective moral truth at which reason could arrive independently of revelation (al-Baqillānī 1998, p. 271; al-Ghazālī 1994, pp. 147–150.).[5] Acts lack intrinsic values; their values are simply the entailment of God's command and prohibition. Killing, for instance, could either be good or bad depending on its relevance to divine law and agreement or disagreement with God's will. Even an inherently morally neutral act like eating is considered good when complying with divine rules and bad when involving transgression. God's will, manifesting itself in the Quran, provides the sole criterion for determining the values of human acts (al-Baqillānī 2000, p. 47).

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[4] Here it should be reminded again that *Ash'arī* theology involved some variations. Recently, it has been argued that some *Ash'arī* theologians espoused a soft natural law theory; see al-Attar 2016, p. 322.
[5] *Ash'arī* theologians tried to augment these views via rational arguments; see Shihadeh 2016, pp. 398–400; Shihadeh 2006, pp. 86–110.

The second (EQD) aligns with the theologians' relentless ambition to magnify the sacred status of the Quran vis-à-vis other scriptures and to deny the possibility of its abrogation. Based on this theory, theologians set out to dispel any doubts about the divine origin of the Quran and deny the prophet's involvement in its authorship (Michot 2008, p. 185). Theologians profess that the Quran is the eternal 'speech' (*kalām*) of God that is composed of commands, prohibitions, and reports. As an essential attribute of God, it has no independent existence of His essence and its existence is eternal, just like the essence of God and other attributes. This conception of the Quran differentiates between 'the meaning' (*maʿnā*) of the speech, on the one hand, and the sequences of sounds and letters in recitation and writing that give 'expression' to the speech (*ʿibarah*), on the other. The former is eternal and immutable, whereas the latter is created by God. Nevertheless, theologians affirm, the expression of God's speech in human language, through the prophet's recitation and as compiled in scripture, exactly corresponds to the eternal meaning (al-Baqillānī 2000, pp. 90–95; al-Ghazālī 1994, pp. 117–121; al-Ashʿarī 2009, p. 431).

Should a theologian stay faithful to DCT and EQD her account of the moral perfection of the prophet would face challenges, as addressed in the following points.

12.3.1 Meaningless Praise

When God announces that a subject (S) possesses the quality (P), what sort of relation obtains between S and P? That God's speech is eternal entails that it is unchanging and invariable, such that the 'contrary' of what it conveys is 'impossible' (al-Ghazālī 1994, p. 160). Thus, the relationship between S and P, insofar as they are conceptual components of God's speech, would correspondingly be unchanging and invariable. In other words, this relationship is constantly true; if S exists, then it is true that S possesses P. Moreover, the relationship between S and P obtains in the concrete world—unless one is willing to entertain the notion that the truthfulness of the speech declaring it is not absolute; yet no Ashʿarī theologian would be willing to compromise the truthfulness of God's speech. That God knows and declares the moral perfection of the prophet from eternity (Q 68:4) and that the contrary of God's speech is impossible exclude the possibility of him being in any other moral condition that would render God's knowledge and report false. Arguably, then, the EQD, entails that the prophet's being morally perfect is constant and unchanging.

Support for this inference may be drawn from a note by the eminent Ashʿarī theologian al-Baqillānī regarding the property of prophethood. According to al-Baqillānī, prophethood invariably and unconditionally characterizes God's messengers, such that it transcends limitations of duration and concrete existence.

Even after fulfilling the divinely ordained mission, a messenger retains the status of a prophet, and the attribute of prophethood remains associated with him beyond death. This is even more true with respect to the prophet Mohammad whose prophethood is announced from eternity by the eternal divine speech: 'you are my messenger and prophet'. Since God's speech is eternal and immutable (*qadīm lā yazūl wa lā yataghayyar*), the property of prophethood constantly characterizes Mohammad, primarily as a component of God's speech, then as a concrete individual, and lastly after his death. In this sense, the relationship between prophethood and Mohammad is, as al-Baqillānī states, eternal and unchanging (al-Baqillānī 2000, pp. 60–61). The idea that properties maintain an unqualifiedly fixed relation to some agents regardless of their ontological status may appear ill-formed if it is not backed up with a realist conception of non-existent objects. While this metaphysical conception falls beyond the scope of the present discussion, it is important to note that theologians find merits in some of its formulations.[6] On this ground, they hold that concepts of the mind are not necessarily ontologically tied to concrete objects and that they can exist independently. Consequently, the concrete existence of individuals and events described by God's eternal speech, which is inherently independent of creatures, is not a condition for it to be meaningful and true. Sensibly, God's eternal speech recounts yet-to-exist events and issues commands to be fulfilled by yet-to-exist agents (al-Ghazālī 1994, pp. 139–140).

Based on the EQD, then, an *Ashʿarī* theologian would acknowledge that moral perfection is unconditionally true with respect to the prophet. Simply put, there is no time in which moral perfection is not characteristic of the prophet; it characterizes him throughout his life as well as before his material existence (i.e. as a conceptual component of God's speech) and after his death (perhaps as a characteristic of the soul).

Although the EQD heightens the moral quality of the prophet, it comes with a price. When the Quran states about the prophet that 'you are truly a man of outstanding morality' there is an evident sense of praise. In Islam, where '*taklif*' (obligation) is a central creed, moral agents deserve praise and reward or blame and punishment in virtue of their adherence or deviation from divine law. *Ashʿarī* theologians endorse the link between moral desert and the extent of one's commitment to divine law, while stressing that God is bound by no standards and that He imposed obligation only for the sake of human beings; that is, to allow them to receive reward and praise in return to their deeds (al-Baqillānī 1998, p. 280; al-Ghazālī 1994, pp. 156–160). In this way, obedience and disobedience do not *necessitate* reward and punishment, but serve as explanatory reasons and

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[6] The mainstream view of *Ashʿarī* theologians is that non-existent objects are real in the mind of the perceiver. However, this realism is not absolute. In the mind of the perceiver, the perceived non-existent object accompanies conscious negation of its existence; see Benevich 2018.

'indicative signs' (Frank 1983, p. 214). On this parameter, the Quran's praise of the prophet is indicative of his arguably *self-determined*[7] adherence to God's commands. After all, why else would he be set as a distinctive model worthy of emulation? Yet the EQD downplays the efficacy of praise. If the eternal divine speech reports that 'you are truly a man of outstanding morality', it seems that the prophet had no other option but to be morally perfect. His conduct could not have been different from what God declared from eternity, and any alternative scenario where the prophet could have deviated from divine prescriptions would be inconceivable. To do what one cannot avoid may not be subject to ethical valuation, since the individual is practically unable to omit it. From the perspective of moral desert, the pre-determinist import of the EQD renders the Quran's praise of the prophet superfluous, even if it remains admissible from the perspective of God's unrestricted judgement.

12.3.2 Morality and God's Will/commands: A Not-so-tight Nexus

Apart from the foregoing challenge, a theologian might still find it hard to offer a systematic account of the prophet's moral perfection, one that retains the duty/obligation criterion, unless she abandons central claims. More precisely, a theologian would be compelled to renounce (1) the assumption that the prophet is constantly morally perfect, as entailed by the EQD, if she adheres to (2) the DCT, particularly its core claims (2a) that values are entirely subject to God's will, and (2b) that 'good' and 'bad' signify the acts of an agent exclusively on account of her obedience or disobedience to God's commands and prohibitions (al-Baqillānī 1998, pp. 278–279).

   First, to say that the prophet was morally perfect means, given (2a), that his deeds were good in the sense of aligning with divine will. Assuming that his conduct was constantly good, as per (1), it would follow that he constantly acted in accordance with God's will. In other words, there was never a time when the prophet behaved in a manner inconsistent with God's will. *Ashʿarī* theologians would be unwilling to compromise the steadiness of the prophet's morality and its

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   [7] The Islamic tradition contains debates on the compatibility of pre-deterministic verses in the Quran, which seem to entail a denial of human free will and the idea of moral responsibility (Vasalou 2008). Yet it is important to emphasize that obligation and moral desert come in the Quran with a conspicuous acknowledgement of the ability of self-determination (e.g. Q 18:29). Although *Ashʿarī* theologians hold that God is the creator of human actions, they verify the concepts of obligation and desert by arguing that the actions created by God are 'freely' acquired (*iktisāb*) by human beings (al-Baqillānī 1998, p. 232). The same could be said of the prophet. However, the feasibility of the *Ashʿarī* approach remains questionable. A valid objection to be raised is that the theory of acquisition accords human beings a fanciful mode of free will, for, after all, the ability to acquire an action is, as *Ashʿarī* theologians insist, created by God. This means that, in reality, all human affairs and actions stem from God's creative power.

compatibility with divine will. Yet these optimistic features fail to hold ground in the face of a verse (Quran 8:67) which suggests that in one situation the prophet's conduct did, indeed, conflict with God's will. Muslim scholars deliberate whether the prophet's act in that situation counts as a sin, i.e. voluntary deviation from God's command, or not. Almost unanimously they conclude that it was not. In this connection, the doctrine of infallibility is brought into focus and defended via interpretations aiming to square the prophet's behaviour with God's command in Quran 8:67.[8] Some scholars clear up the charge of sin by arguing that this segment of revelation postdated the debated situation and that it was later revealed to the prophet to edify him regarding God's will. Others consider the prophet's act to be an outcome of an erroneously inferred legal opinion (ʾijtihād) and, on this consideration, they charitably argue that incorrect ʾijtihād, as opposed to incorrect interpretation and application of revelation, does not nullify the prophet's infallibility (Ahmed 2011).

Thanks to these efforts a theologian may succeed in removing the charge of sin. However, the conflict between the prophet's conduct in the situation under consideration and God's will endures. The assumptions that the prophet had not received revelation to guide him on how to act in that situation and the charitable position that puts up with error in ʾijtihād—although they clear away wilful disobedience—do not rectify the disparity between God's will and the prophet's act. Yet this means that a theologian is hard pressed to admit that the prophet's act in that specific situation was not morally good. For, after all, an act is morally good *only* if it accords with God's will. Since the indicated act fell short of that criterion, a theologian will be compelled to compromise (1).

Second, suppose we overlook the foregoing difficulty, a theologian will still find it challenging to defend (1) if she adheres to (2). Again, to say that there was no time in which the prophet was not morally perfect is to say that he constantly acted in concord with God's will. It follows that he constantly adhered to God's commands as dictated in the Quran. But this presupposes that there was no time in which the prophet was not aware of God's will/commands. However, this presupposition is easily defeasible because the Quran was not revealed to the prophet before the age of forty and it was revealed over twenty-three years. Considering the central claim of Ashʿarī theology that values are not accessible to reason independently of revealed law, it is unlikely that the prophet had access to the content of God's will/commands before revelation. Furthermore, the Quran attests to a progression in the prophet's knowledge, evolving from not knowing to knowing the Book through divine instruction and revelation: 'And Allah has

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[8] Muslim scholars define infallibility differently. In one view, infallibility starts with revelation and demands that no sin whatsoever was committed since the first reception of revelation. In another, infallibility presupposes dissociation from major and minor sins since childhood; see al-Rāzī 1986, p. 40.

revealed to you the Book and wisdom and has taught you that which you did not know' (4:113).

Yet let us suppose that the prophet's acts before revelation happened to be in tune with God's will, it is not certain that these acts would be open to specific ethical values. One objection would be that these acts are not act-types that fall within the scheme of obligation. In other words, the before-revelation acts of the prophet were not performed out of duty to God's law per se. Since the DCT (especially 2b) confines the definition of goodness and badness to the scheme of God's commands and prohibitions, and since the acts of the prophet before revelation fall outside this scheme, they may not be amenable to its specific ethical values. But this inference, which can be supported by the tendency of some theologians to suspend ethical judgements on acts 'before revelation' (Eissa 2017), flies in the face of the supposed constant nature of the moral perfection of the prophet, for his before-revelation acts were not moral in the strict *Ash'arī* sense. A theologian would, thus, be compelled to abandon (1)—if she continues to adhere to the DCT as the only explanation of values—or admit inability to account for the constant state of the prophet's moral perfection.

As an alternative, the ground of morality could be redefined in a way that, wholly or partially, countenance reason, without compromising the nexus to God's revealed law. The *falsafah* tradition may furnish one such approach.

12.4 Reflections on *Falsafah*

The *falsafah* tradition places much confidence in the capacity of reason to provide indubitable conclusions in all fields. Revelation, however, is not regarded by *falāsifah* as valueless, especially when it comes to the domain of morality. Its vital role in this domain is made clear in *al-falāsifah's* appraisal of it as a sign of God's providential care for human beings which provides the species with the necessary needs for existence. Having a stable communal life wherein people can peacefully carry out daily transactions and pursue their ultimate end is one such need that involves knowing 'justice' and 'injustice' and 'good' and 'evil' (Avicenna 2005, pp. 364–367). The revealed law tends to this need. Whatever support this account of God's providence carries for morality's nexus to the Quran, *al-falāsifah* were hardly interested in expanding it any further in a way that would entail the inseparability of the moral from God's revealed law. Ethics occupied little scope in the *falsafah* tradition, as compared to metaphysics, epistemology, and human psychology. Yet it is not empty of informative discussions. As expected, *al-falāsifah* show aversion to the DCT, and although they spell little ink on exploring the ontological status of values, their rejection of that theory as nonsensical is clearcut (Averroes 1974, pp. 80–82).

Another feature can be detected in that the key concepts of the Aristotelian version of virtue ethics infiltrate the political writings of *al-falāsifah*—al-Farābī and Averroes will be the focus of this study. The definition of virtue ethics is hardly unanimous in modern scholarship. Commonly, it is described as ethics that is agent-oriented and that focuses on the type of person one should be, instead of the specific actions that ought to be done. In that, it contrasts with deontic theories that stress the rightness or wrongness of actions (Wood 2011, p. 58). In a similar fashion, *al-falāsifah* show more interest in character formation (*ta'dīb*) and moral virtues (*al-faḍā'il al- ḥuluqiyah*) than normative values.[9] Broadly defined, moral virtues are settled habits or states proper to the human soul (*malakāt*). These states function as impulses that promote balanced and adequate responses across different situations. Moral virtues mark the golden mean in character traits. A virtuous person is someone that possesses the habit of choosing the mean between bad extremes, one of which is excessiveness, and the other is defectiveness. Some people are naturally disposed to one or more virtues. Most people need practice and habituation to acquire them (al-Farābī 1968a, p. 36; 1968b, p. 105).

In the *falsafah*'s framework, values like 'good', 'bad', 'useful', and 'harmful' exist by nature, but they qualify actions variably depending on their respective utility or inutility to the fulfilment of different ends (Averroes 1974, p. 81). An action obtains the characterization of good if it contributes to a good end and bad if it obstructs a good end or leads to a bad one. From this, it appears that moral living is not exclusively embedded in the prescriptions of divine law. Slightly marginalizing the concepts of duty and obligation, *al-falāsifah* promote a teleological ethical scheme in which objective ends constitute the compelling and guiding factors. Religion may and may not play a role in this scheme. However, whatever role it plays departs from the strictures of the basic deontological model of Islam. Averroes, for example, states that one should follow any religious tradition or set of practices provided that the chosen tradition be known for its ability to promote beliefs and actions conducive to virtue and happiness.[10] In this context, 'obligation' pertains to choosing 'the best' religion that has the capacity to assess man to attaining perfection and 'the greatest happiness proper to him' (Averroes 1954, pp. 359–360).

Four types of 'virtues' (*faḍā'il*) define human 'perfections' (*kamālāt*): theoretical virtue, cognitive/deliberative virtue, moral virtue, and practical virtue. Among these, theoretical virtue stands out as the one leading to ultimate happiness (al-Farābī 1968b, pp. 105–106; al-Farābī 1995, p. 89; Avicenna 2005, p. 378). The other virtues,

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[9] Interest in virtues was not restricted to *al-falāsifah*. Some Sufi-oriented theologians adopted *al-falsafah's* reflection on virtues and crafted it into the Sufi-mystical discipline; see Sherief 1975. Cf. Shihadeh 2006, pp. 124–127.

[10] However, it is important to stress that *al-falāsifah* did not aim to marginalize Islamic law. Indeed, Averroes contributed a good deal to Islamic jurisprudence (for this point, see Bouhafa 2019); yet this does not justify equating his ethical views with the typical Islamic outlook.

while praiseworthy, are merely preparatory for theoretical virtues 'in the way in which preparations preceding an end are for the sake of the end' (Averroes 1974, p. 5).

Now turning to the prophet. Considering the foregoing framework, could a philosopher account for the prophet's moral perfection in a manner that upholds the connection to the Quran and the concept of obligation? In what follows, I suggest that, despite appearances, the *falsafah* tradition provides an adequate platform for affirmatively addressing this question. I will further develop this suggestion while simultaneously addressing the implications of the naturalistic conception of prophecy.

12.4.1 Virtue: Theory and Practice

Let us assume that a philosopher undertakes to account for the morality of the prophet based on the framework discussed above. She might explain that the prophet owned an extraordinary instinct to act virtuously. As a virtuous agent, he possessed stable states of the soul that drove him to act in a balanced manner across different situations. This implies that his moral excellence was not necessarily bound to the Quran.

Yet a philosopher can legitimately suggest a substantial link between the prophet's moral excellence and the Quran, although she might, for the moment, set aside the idea of duty. It should be noted that the *falsafah* tradition is empty of doctrines like the eternity of the Quran that would require a philosopher to defend a static state of morality with respect to the prophet. As such, a philosopher is licensed to suggest that, with the aid of the Quran, the prophet underwent moral development until reaching the pinnacle of perfection. This suggestion holds even with the assumption that he was endowed with natural moral dispositions before receiving revelation.

To support this suggestion, consider that moral virtues involve epistemic and practical components. Merely having natural dispositions to virtues does not suffice to make a person virtuous, nor is it sufficient to acquire theoretical knowledge of the virtues to be virtuous. The 'end' of possessing or knowing moral virtues is, as Averroes asserts following Aristotle, to 'act' (Averroes 1974, p. 8). To become a virtuously acting agent, one must grasp not only moral virtues as 'intelligible' ends (*maʿqūlāt*) but also the particular 'accidents' (*al-ʿawāriḍ*) accompanying them. The former pertains to the abstract and unchangeable characteristics of virtues, whereas the latter pertains to the varying actions through which virtues are correctly brought into use across different situations, time, place, and communal circumstances (al-Farābī 1995, p. 52).

Take for instance the virtue of charity. It is not sufficient to be inclined towards charity and/or to know its defining features to be truly charitable, but one must

know how to practise it right. This requires being aware of the right thing and amount to give and the right occasions and purposes for giving. Such details, a philosopher could argue, are derived from religion, in precise a religion whose prescriptions are measured with a view to realizing the most benefit to human beings.[11] Islam is one such religion.[12] Relevantly, Islamic law provides a range of practices that may serve as patterns for a multitude of particularized circumstances. Though not exhaustive of all possibilities, it is a sufficiently extensible foundation for virtuous deeds. A philosopher could establish a substantive link between the moral quality of the prophet and the Quran, accordingly: even if the prophet possessed natural disposition to and/or theoretical knowledge of moral virtues, he might have learned how to rightly activate his virtues from the Quran's prescriptions.

The suggested account provides a rationalization for verses that a theologian would find challenging.[13] For example: with reference to the prophet the Quran says: 'And He found you lost and guided [you]' (93:7), and 'And if We had not strengthened you, you would have almost inclined to them a little' (17:74). These verses speak directly to the possibility of a development, be that in character and virtues or beliefs, to which the Quran/revelation might have played an instrumental role.

12.4.2 Deserved Praise

Considering the foregoing account, does the prophet deserve praise according to the Islamic measure? Conceivably, there should be no objection. In the deontological model of Islamic ethics adherence to divine law delineates a key criterion for praise and reward: Any individual (S) deserves praise if S acts in accordance with Islamic prescriptions (P). Since the prophet adhered to divine law, he rightly deserved praise. Yet a question arises. Suppose S acts in accordance with P particularly because P is instrumental in realizing an end (X), does S deserve praise? From one perspective, S's motivation does not conflict with the right to praise. Whether S's acts are from duty or merely in conformity with duty, they are, after all, deemed good on the parameters of divine law. Hence, they are eligible for praise. The prophet should be worthy of praise, either way. It makes no difference whether his adhering to the Quran is instrumental in activating moral virtues, as suggested in the account above, or fulfilling a duty. From another perspective, a

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[11] See, for example, how al-Fārābī (1949, pp. 102–109) elucidates the value of religion in setting the details for virtuous deeds.

[12] See, for example, how Averroes (1954, pp. 258 and 316; 1974, pp. 80–81) emphasizes Islam's role in cultivating virtues and guiding people to happiness.

[13] Responding to this challenge, some theologians interpret the verses in ways that remove any sort of moral and spiritual misguidance from the prophet; see al-Rāzī 1986, p. 137.

stronger reason is needed to justify praise. The instrumentality of P to X is insufficient; no less than acting from duty to divine law per se makes a case for a deserved praise within the Islamic frame.

An additional objection might be raised that S could realize X via other instruments that partially or fully diverge from P. In this case, S's acts could be praiseworthy due to their contribution to a moral virtue, not necessarily because they have a specific relevance to divine law. The *falsafah* tradition, indeed, includes notes on the means to virtues that justify this objection. Importantly, *al-falāsifah* are not particularly inclined to assign an exclusive role to Islamic law in cultivating virtues. Purely rational sources are highly valued. Just as philosophy provides theoretical knowledge of virtues as ends, 'the cognitive faculty' (*al-quwwah al-fikriyyah*) can effectively help an intelligent person to make inferences on how to rightly act across different situations and circumstances, thereby bringing virtues into active use (al-Farābī 1995, pp. 55–58). So, if a philosopher were to view the moral quality of the prophet in terms of virtues, she would be confronted with the possibility that the prophet might have learned and activated the virtues through purely rational means. In this case, the nexus between his outstanding moral quality and revelation—hence, the justification for praise on Islamic grounds, would be questionable.

Indeed, considering the conception of revelation in the *falsafah* tradition (of which al-Farābī is the most notable representative), a philosopher would be compelled to admit that the prophet attained moral perfection prior to receiving revelation. In this conception, prophecy is viewed as a state of human perfection attainable by natural, rather than supernatural, means. To attain this state of perfection, thereby receiving 'revelation' (*waḥy*), one must have acquired intellectual perfection, a condition whose fulfilment dwells on interrelated theoretical and practical requirements (al-Farābī 1968b, p. 115; and 1998, p. 79).[14] The theoretical requirement consists of knowing the immutable principles of existence and the intelligible truths through syllogistic reasoning (al-Farābī 1968b, p. 106). The practical requirement is both preparatory for the theoretical and essential for its continuation; it consists of performing 'voluntary acts' conducive to moral virtues (al-Farābī 1968b, pp. 123–126). This means that moral perfection is a precondition for intellectual perfection which is a requirement for the attainment of revelation. If we take the naturalistic conception of prophecy seriously, divine law (as dictated in the Quran) would be an outcome of the naturalistic-progressive

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[14] The philosophical conception of prophecy is stated clearly by the Jewish philosopher Moses Maimonides (1963), *The Guide of the Perplexed* (II:36). In modern scholarship, there is a debate on whether the lawgiver described by *al-falāsifah* as the culmination of human perfection must be a prophet, in the sense of being divinely inspired, or not. But this debate is not my concern here. For this subject, see Jeffery Macy 1986. Also, this conception of prophecy is not uniform. Philosophers differed in the way they explained how the soul's faculties take roles in revelation and the mechanism of receiving revelation; see Rahman 2008.

process of perfection. Such naturalism further indicates that the content of revelation is not essentially different from the knowledge that the prophet acquired by natural means.[15] In fact, it is an imitation of the theoretical and practical content of philosophy, which precedes religion (al-Farābī 2005, p. 1).

A glaring implication of the naturalistic conception of prophecy is that the Quran assumes a far less essential role in moral living than a conservative Islamic outlook would approve. In the case of the prophet, the Quran virtually played no role in guiding him to the acts that made his perfection possible. By the same token, it could be dispensable for any individual capable of attaining the theoretical and practical requirements of perfection by natural means. A virtuous life, accordingly, is not inherently tied to revealed law; any intellectually autonomous individual can acquire the means to such a life.

A philosopher could overcome this challenge by pairing the prophet's virtuous conduct with a duty-motivated attitude, one that is jointly promoted by virtue and divine law. To explain, consider that the highest state of virtue is not self-sustained, but rather generates a moral duty for the virtuous individual:[16] to cultivate moral virtues in those who are incapable of living an autonomously virtuous life and guide them to happiness. The ultimate happiness, as mentioned above, involves theoretical and moral conditions, and not everyone possesses the necessary aptness and cognitive skills to accomplish them. Here comes the role of the select few who reached the zenith of perfection to usher others to happiness. They carry out this role by enacting laws and instructing people in beliefs suitable for this purpose. One who takes up this role is motivated by a desire to preserve her virtuous character, as virtues 'become null' (bāṭilah) if the person who attained them 'lacks the capacity to instill them in others' (Averroes 1974, pp. 71–72; al-Farābī 1995, p. 91; cf. al-Farābī 1998, pp. 77–78). However, this capacity is rare. While a philosopher may partially or fully possess the theoretical and practical requirements for her own perfection, she may fall short of cultivating the virtues in others.

Certainly, the prophet Mohammad possessed an efficient means to educating and perfecting others: the Quran. Its advantage as a divine law[17] lies in that it guides people to happiness—a function that philosophy performs for only a select

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[15] The naturalistic account of prophecy can be challenged by the Quran's reference to the prophet's illiteracy (e.g. 7:157). Although the prophet's illiteracy is emphasized by theologians, especially that it provides a ground to argue for the miraculous-divine origin of the Quran, some interpreters pointed out to a semantic ambiguity in the verse; see Al-Alusī 2010, V. 9, pp. 404–412.

[16] That virtues generate rules has been suggested by Hursthouse, contrary to the common view that virtue ethics has no rules; see Hursthouse 2001, p. 31.

An interesting application of the virtue-generated duty for the virtuous individual towards others can be found in Maimonides' the Guide of the Perplexed where the political and pedagogical responsibilities carried out by the perfect individual are seen as a type of perfection. It is a form of imitation of God where the perfect individual exercises the attributes of God's providence; see Guide III:53–54.

[17] There is a debate in modern scholarship on whether philosophers believed in the divine origin of the Quran. Averroes is a central figure in this debate. In some of his works, Averroes explicitly points to

class of people—through multiple literary approaches that suit the diverse cognitive and psychological dispositions of the multitude (Averroes 1961, p. 49). When the prophet—who, considering the naturalistic conception of prophecy, would be an accomplished philosopher-lawgiver that obtained theoretical and moral perfections by natural means[18]—delivered the Quran to mankind, he was fulfilling a duty towards mankind that his virtuous character dictated. The prophet could have overlooked this duty and lived an otherwise serene and uncaring life of solitude. The fact that he took up the burden and faithfully responded to the call of virtue-dictated duty, a philosopher could further elucidate, renders him praiseworthy on the highest level of morality.

The duty of guiding others to happiness is not only dictated by reason and virtue but also by God. Indeed, it is a divine command, one that is exclusive to the prophet: 'O Messenger, announce that which has been revealed to you from your Lord' (5:67); and 'Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction' (16:125). The message that the prophet was commissioned to deliver was divine law, the Quran, whose content provides a sure means to happiness.[19] Delivering this message and instructing people in its doctrinal and practical content was the mission on which the prophet's virtuous life revolved. It is a life of full engagement with the Quran in the prophet's capacity as a moral and spiritual instructor, as well as a political leader. In this sense, the Quran *was* the fundamental tool that enabled the prophet to fulfil his virtue-engendered and divinely commanded duty. His praiseworthy moral quality could not have been more closely allied with the Quran.

12.5 Conclusion

This study has aimed to analyse the viability of possible theological and philosophical accounts for the moral quality of the prophet Mohammad, the founder of Islam, in relation to a fundamental Islamic assumption concerning the nexus of morality to the Quran. As observed, the moral excellence of the prophet and his eligibility for praise face challenges within the context of ethical subjectivism in *Ashʿari* theology. In contrast, *al-falāsifah's* understanding of moral virtues as natural ends and the naturalistic conception of revelation provide a suitable

the divine origin of the Quran; see Averroes 1954, pp. 316–317. However, in one of his philosophical works he offers an account of prophecy that seems to relegate the Quran to a man-made law; see Taylor 2018.

[18] Although the prophet Mohammad is not often mentioned by name, there is no reason to believe that *al-falāsifah* would exclude him from the framework of the naturalistic conception of prophecy; see Rahman 2008, p. 58.

[19] Averroes, for example, insists that the Quran is like philosophy in that it directs people to happiness. In the Islamic context, happiness has an essential eschatological dimension; see Averroes 1961, pp. 47–49.

framework to address these challenges. On another note, their theoretical framework is well-suited to accommodate a natural law theory of morality. For *al-falāsifah,* God essentially remains the ground of truth (including moral truth). However, His involvement in the moral sphere is hardly subjective or arbitrary. God's law, no matter how it is revealed to human beings, operates in relation to human nature and towards the benefit and happiness of human beings.

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A12.1 Reply to Bakinaz Abdalla

Jessica Frazier

The Euthypro Dilemma—over whether God determines morality, or morality determines God—is a pervasive problem for Abrahamic monotheistic philosophies. One version of Euthypro arises in the practical question of whether human reason can find morality unaided, or whether it must fundamentally flow from revealed divine law—and this is the core concern of Abdalla's chapter. It brings to mind one of Islamic culture's own provocative literary expressions of the dilemma: in Ibn Tufayl's (d. *c.* 1160) famous twelfth-century theological novel *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*. Allegedly the model for Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe,* Ibn Tufayl's story describes a young castaway who grows up far from language and civilization. Left alone in the course of a shipwreck, he is raised by a gazelle on a desert island. Yet by applying his reason to nature, he comes to realize all the truths of the world, both metaphysical and moral, without any instruction from humans or gods. He achieves a moral perfection that many others believed could only be attained through careful submission to the divine will.

The story of Hayy was inspired by the work of Ibn Sina (Avicenna; d. 1037), the great Islamic thinker; it sought to defend his insights against the anti-rationalist Asharite theology of Al-Ghazali's (d. 1111) earlier work *The Incoherence of the Philosophers.* In turn it inspired the great Aristotelian par excellence Ibn Rushd (Averroes; d. 1198) to promote the value of reason and Aristotelian virtues as part of an Islamic outlook. It was thus deeply embedded in the defence of reason against unthinking submission, and Hayy, like the Prophet in Abdalla's view, demonstrated that—in a religion devoid of doctrines of original sin—human nature has the potential for a fully natural correlation with divine goodness.

Yet Hayy's story remains immensely controversial, not least because of the apparent denial that the Qur'an is necessary for moral goodness. This can be a practical problem for scriptural authority and social morality. But it is also a theological problem, given the central place of the Qur'an in Arabic culture. The Qur'an is more than just a message from God—it is seen as an expression of the timeless and perfect character of the divine nature. It partakes of it, and is our main point of access to that realm. Without it we would be caged within the finite and non-divine world. The Qur'an, then, is the place where divine being breaks through to us, and we are able to access morality in its essentially *divine* nature.

Yet as Abdalla shows, even if the Qur'an *expresses* the same divine truth that we can find through natural human reason, there is still a problem. If moral truth can be found through reason alone, is revelation merely an optional accessory? And if it cannot be found through reason alone, then what did the pre-revelation moral perfection of the Prophet consist of? The chapter juggles this equation in some fruitful ways.

It seems that Abdalla's solution is that the key ingredients of moral personhood can be integrated into a progression – 1. good moral disposition, 2. augmented by 'epistemic, practical and theoretical components' of knowledge that is furnished by scripture, 3. must be expressed in the world as agency exercised to create good action. On this philosopher-friendly account, the role of revelation is to help us understand the 'particular "accidents"' of each circumstance of moral agency 'across different situations, time, place, and communal circumstances'. In a sense, an element of context-sensitivity comes in through this acknowledgement that dispositions alone cannot be the whole story. A good nature must mature into actions that are mediated through knowledge, understanding of practical realities, and context-calculated judgements, in order to really be a case of robust moral goodness.

Here we get an account of a 'naturalistic-progressive' model of moral perfection. Philosophically, it is striking in a number of respects.

a) Moral goodness in people—that is, as possessed by agents in the complex communal circumstances of space and time—is dissected into interlocking components of disposition, understanding, agency. The implication is that moral goodness *in itself* looks very different from moral goodness *in personal action,* and in the latter case it is a multi-part phenomenon.

b) Moral perfection (such as possessed by the Prophet for Muslims) is revealed to have degrees and progressions: one can have a perfect disposition that admits of no greater magnitude in itself, but can amplify by acting in ever greater degrees or more diverse forms of goodness—with the help of the Qur'an. Another way of putting this is that there are concentric circles of duties. For instance, virtue-spreading through moral education is a larger expression of moral perfection than, say, merely fulfilling one's filial duty to honour one's parents.

Divine revelation serves as a kind of timeless manual for navigating *worldly* morality, which involves *worldly* action. This accords well with much of the content of the Qur'an, as well as with the Hadith which augments it with examples from the Prophet's biography, and Shariah hermeneutics which tries to implement divine principles in real situations.

These ideas are intriguing, and I suspect that many classical Hindu authors would have been sympathetic to the overall underlying idea that i. morality must

be mediated into the complex textures of world-embedded action for it to be moral, and ii. some kind of special epistemic process is needed for this.

Yet some of the issues at the core of the Euthypro and Falsafah–Asharite debates remain. If Hayy Ibn Yaqzan's reason can help him to determine the good, then why is it *not* adequate to figure out the practical 'accidents' (as Abdalla puts it) of situation and communal circumstance? Why is it that there are elements *only* revelation can convey? Until revelation has a unique and irreplaceable function in the process, then divine law is merely an optional alternative to reason—or at best a helpful shortcut. But if it does offer something essential, then how could the Prophet have been perfect before the revelation?

In short, if the discovery of reason, and the divine law are not one and the same, then there is always a competition. Across the Abrahamic traditions, it can seem that theists are unable to resolve that competition without choosing either a godless Goodness, or a merely derivatively-good God. The former option produces reasoned autonomous individuals who must follow their own star, while the latter yields automaton-like people whose job is to obey regardless of moral content. On this model they are not really moral agents as usually understood at all.

This unsatisfactory situation created by Abrahamic theism is partly why Hindu deities—to the great confusion and disapproval of some other religions—typically do not go about giving moral commandments. I have been asked 'Do Hindus not care about morality? … Does their *Divinity* not care about morality?' This seems odd since the *Bhagavad Gītā* describes a classic divine teaching about how to care for the world, demonstrating that Hinduism's cultures and its deities do care deeply. But where persons—minds with agency—are concerned, Hinduism often says that the only way to sustain a truly *moral* situation is not to demand that rules be followed, but to *teach*. Thus the Gītā explains how perception and reason, emotions and agency, causation and responsibility works, and in this it expresses a profound faith in the foundational moral importance of reason.

Perhaps the moral of such Euthypro-shaped dilemmas is that when morality is interjected into the world as a *separate* function from creation itself (i.e. through revelation alone), then the created world and our reasoning end up in competition with it. But when morality and revelation flow into existence through the world's own fabric of situations, feelings, minds, and actions, then a real personal Goodness of reflective minds and natures can evolve, and not one dictated merely by the metaphysics of duty to a superior.

A12.2 Reply to Bakinaz Abdalla

Mark C. Murphy

In my initial contribution to this exchange, I offered an argument in favour of natural law theory[20] as the best Christian account of the foundations of ethics. One salient alternative to natural law theory in the Christian tradition—some would say *the* salient alternative—is theological voluntarism, on which the norms of action that bind humans have their authority directly from some act of divine will and not by way of the various natural goods that have their character as goods in virtue of our kind.[21] While the theological voluntarism/natural law divide does not perfectly map onto the *Ashʿarī* theology/*Falsafah* divide that Bakinaz Abdalla describes in her insightful essay, there are definite resemblances between the natural law and *Falsafah* take on ethics and between that of the Christian voluntarists (e.g. John Duns Scotus) and the defenders of *Ashʿarī* theological ethics.

In spite of my siding with Abdalla against voluntarist accounts of ethics, what I aim to do in this short comment is to offer a defence of *Ashʿarī* ethics against Abdalla's criticisms. Why focus on defending *Ashʿarī* ethics, when Abdalla and I are sympathetic to broadly the same sort of antivoluntarist position on ethical matters? The criticisms of *Ashʿarī* ethics that Abdalla offers, were they successful, make trouble for orthodox understandings of Christ within the Christian tradition; so while I am not inclined to endorse voluntarist accounts as acceptable formulations of the foundation of Christian ethics, I cannot reject such views for the sort of reasons that Abdalla puts forward.

There are two such reasons that Abdalla advances, and my aim here is only to highlight what I take to be standard resources that have been deployed within the Christian tradition to begin to deal with these worries. While I cannot speak to whether there are features of *Ashʿarī* theology that preclude making use of these resources, I do not see any obvious obstacle to their doing so and so what I am offering is a line of defence for *Ashʿarī* theological ethics against these challenges.

Abdalla's first line of criticism of *Ashʿarī* theology with respect to moral matters is that it cannot accommodate the Quranic datum that Mohammad was—to put the matter too weakly—morally praiseworthy.[22] Why does it have this result? The

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[20] For an overview, see Murphy 2002a.   [21] For an overview, see Murphy 2002b.
[22] p. 257.

sinlessness of the prophet is declared in the Quran, and the Eternal Quran Doctrine (EQD) holds that the spoken Quran simply gives public expression to this eternal divine content. So:

> When God announces that a subject (S) possesses the quality (P), what sort of relation obtains between S and P? That God's speech is eternal entails that it is unchanging and invariable, such that 'its contrary is impossible'.... That God knows and declares the moral perfection of the prophet from eternity (Q 68:4) and that the contrary of God's speech is impossible exclude the possibility of him being in any other moral condition that would render God's knowledge and report false.[23]

But this is at odds with the notion that Mohammad's life is deserving of praise, for on this view it turns out to be a sheer necessity that Mohammad acted as he did; his complying perfectly with divine law was not 'self-determined,'[24] but was necessary, and from eternity.

But if this is a problem for *Ashʿarī* theology and its characteristic endorsement of the EQD, it will also be a problem for traditional Christian views on the praiseworthiness of Jesus Christ. For any view, not just the EQD, that holds that God knows from eternity the moral status of rational beings requires us to hold that God knows from eternity Christ's perfection as a human. But Christ is supposed to be praiseworthy for the completeness with which he remained at one with Father's will throughout his earthly life. So if the argument that Abdalla raises with respect to EQD and Mohammad's moral praiseworthiness is successful, it will also make trouble for the traditional account of Christ's praiseworthiness.

The argument is vulnerable, though, at several steps. One can also argue that necessity does not entail lack of self-determination; or one can argue that the lack of self-determination does not undermine praise- or blameworthiness; this is a sort of compatibilism about praise and blame, which is now unpopular among theists but perhaps improperly so.[25] But as the argument really amounts to a rejection of all contingency—if we agree that all truths are known eternally by God and that this entails their necessity, then we have modal collapse, the necessity of all truths—it seems that we should want to just reject the thesis that God's knowing something from eternity entails its necessity. Even if the *Ashʿariets* want to say that there is some necessity present, they can say that the necessity entailed is only conditional; it is necessary that, if God has eternal knowledge of S's

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[23] p. 259.   [24] p. 261.

[25] See White 2020 for a defence of theological determinism, which includes a defence of the compatibility of moral praise- and blameworthiness with God's sovereignly determining all that takes places, including the actions of created agents.

having P, then S has P.[26] Neither Mohammad's nor Christ's putative moral praiseworthiness is threatened by that sort of merely conditional necessity.[27]

Abdalla's second line of criticism is that given the Ash'arī way of characterizing moral perfection—perfect alignment with the will of God—Mohammad's non-negotiable moral perfection cannot be sustained. For the Quran contains an expression of the divine will that Mohammad is described as not having been in concordance with. Abdalla notes that there is a tradition of commentary that excuses Mohammad for this departure: holding that it is in some way blameless, or that it serves some divine purpose for that departure to have occurred.[28] Abdalla's rejoinder is that while this might vindicate Mohammad's sinlessness on some conceptions of moral perfection, it does not vindicate his moral perfection given the Ash'arī view that moral perfection is *perfect concord* with the divine will.

Again, Christians may find it hard to accept this as a criticism of accounts of moral perfection that require unity between the creaturely agent's will and the will of God as a constitutive condition of moral perfection. For Christ is portrayed as in some circumstances as having a will that *in some way* diverges from the will of his heavenly Father, as, for example, when by his sensitive appetite he willed the avoidance of death when the Father willed that Christ die the redemptive death that Christ did, in fact, undergo.[29] But Christ is also said to have a will that is perfectly submissive to the Father's will.[30] One might ask, then, whether any of the analytical manoeuvres that Christian theology has employed to explain how Christ's human will, though it diverges in some way from the divine will, was nonetheless perfectly submissive to it could be used to explain how Mohammad's will, even if described in some case as diverging from God's will, was nevertheless perfectly compliant with it.

It is not obvious how one should characterize perfect submission to the divine will. Here is but one relevant distinction which might be of use. Aquinas distinguishes between willing *what God wills* and willing *what God wills that one will*.[31] There may be a sense in which the content of what God wills need not or even should not be willed by some human. Suppose that God wills some human's damnation; it does not follow that any of us humans should, in our circumstances, be willing that human's damnation. The *content* of the divine will may be such

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[26] The classic source is Boethius 2008, V.

[27] There is a general concern about how to fit human responsibility into a world over which God is entirely sovereign. But this is a concern that is common to theists of all stripes and does not arise from some specific orientation to theological ethics.

[28] p. 262.

[29] Luke 22: 41–44. For a deep and instructive account of how the interaction between Christ's divine will and Christ's human will was theorized in medieval theology, see Barnes 2015.

[30] This is from the third Council of Constantinople (681): 'And the two natural wills [of Christ are] not in opposition . . . but his human will . . . [is] in fact subject to his divine and all powerful will' (Tanner 1990, p. 128).

[31] Aquinas 1948, IaIIae 19, 10.

that we are not to will it; it may not be our place to do so, and it may serve divine purposes that our wills not be directed toward just those states of affairs that God wills. What we are to will is not simply what God wills; rather, we are to will what God wills for us to will. On this view, perfect creaturely submission to God includes always willing what God intends, in the concrete circumstances of action, for one to will.

This can be employed to make sense of the notion that Christ's will, though in one sense not willing the death that the Father willed for him, was perfectly in conformity with the Father's will: all aspects of Christ's will were, always, just as the Father willed for them to be. I leave open here whether this, and nearby, manoeuvres are available to rescue the Ashʿarī account of perfection of the will from the difficulty posed by the Quranic verse that Abdalla cites.

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PART V

LIFE AND THE AFTERLIFE (BUDDHISM, HINDUISM, AND JUDAISM)

13

Conventionalizing Rebirth

Buddhist Agnosticism and the Doctrine
of Two Truths

Bronwyn Finnigan

13.1 Introduction

Until modern times, the idea of rebirth was widely accepted and asserted by
Buddhists.[1] The Pāli Canon, which includes some of the earliest recorded teach-
ings of the Buddha, describes a cosmology of five (or six) 'realms' of existence into
which sentient beings are born, die, and are reborn in a continuous cycle; those of
gods, humans, animals, hungry ghosts, and hell beings (see DN8. MN130,
KN10,7). The cycle of rebirth is known as *saṃsāra*.[2] Where or how one is reborn,
as well as some of the auspicious and inauspicious events that occur in that life, are
said to be determined by the laws of karma which relate to the ethical quality of
one's actions, good and bad.

Much Indian Buddhist discourse about rebirth focuses on explaining how it is
consistent with core Buddhist claims, such as the Buddha's teaching of no-self
(*anātman*). While these explanations assume rebirth rather than attempt to prove
it, they nevertheless provide a distinctively Buddhist interpretation. Some argu-
ments are also offered to justify rebirth. Dharmakīrti (seventh century CE) pre-
sents what has come to be known as the standard Buddhist argument for rebirth
against materialism (see PV 1.34–119).[3] Rebirth, Buddhists traditionally assumed,
involves a causal series of immaterial mental events transcending the boundaries
of a single lifetime; there is assumed to be a causal link between a subtle form of
consciousness present at the time of death and the first moment of consciousness
in the next life, and between the volitional mental entities in the present life (e.g.
intentions and reactive attitudes) and the psychophysical elements that constitute
that person in the next life. Dharmakīrti argues that these immaterial mental

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[1] Many thanks to Szymon Bogacz, Roger Jackson, Mark Siderits, and the editors of this volume for
helpful comments on a previous draft of this chapter.

[2] The italicized words in this chapter are in Sanskrit.

[3] For elaboration and discussion of this argument, see Nagatomi 1957, Hayes 1993, Jackson 1993,
2022, and Franco 1997.

events (moments of consciousness and volitions) cannot be sufficiently caused by the body, a material entity, because they are too different in kind to be substantively related as cause and effect. A growing number of contemporary Buddhist philosophers find this argument unpersuasive, however, arguing that it fails to refute reductive physicalism in a way that would convince a modern cognitive scientist or philosopher of mind (Willson 1987; Hayes 1993; Jackson 1993, 2022; Batchelor 1997; Arnold 2012; Thompson 2015). The dominant view amongst these scholars is that the traditional Buddhist view of rebirth is inconsistent with modern science.

If we grant this point, what should the modern Buddhist attitude be towards rebirth?

Some Buddhist scholars affirm the inconsistency, arguing that Buddhism is a radical cultural critique of the scientific viewpoint (Lopez 2012). Others, however, consider science to provide the best evidenced set of theories we currently have about reality, and treat its inconsistency with rebirth as a problem for rebirth. Some scholars respond by rejecting rebirth as an unnecessary cultural relic. Others ignore it or put its discussion into abeyance while engaging other issues. This chapter will investigate whether belief in rebirth, both that there is continuity after death and that it is explained by karma, can be pragmatically justified as *conventionally true* despite being inconsistent with current science.

There is historical precedent of pragmatic arguments for rebirth in early Buddhism. In the *Apaṇṇaka Sutta* (MN60), the Buddha offers an argument for belief in rebirth that anticipates Pascal's wager (Jayatilleke 1962; Jackson 2022). He contends that if one is not in an epistemic position to directly ascertain whether claims about karma and rebirth are true or false, it is better to believe their affirmation rather than their denial because this belief has better consequences, irrespective of its truth or falsity.[4] Modern Buddhist agnostics offer similar pragmatic arguments for rebirth in the face of epistemic uncertainty. Stephen Batchelor (1997) coined the term Buddhist agnosticism to denote an attitude of epistemic uncertainty about rebirth ('The only honest position I can arrive at is: "I actually don't know"'). We might query whether this attitude is warranted for a Buddhist who accepts that rebirth, traditionally construed, is inconsistent with the reductive materialism of current science, for *this* can be known with certainty. Roger Jackson (2022) elaborates, however, that the term applies to 'any thinker who finds the traditional, rational, empirical, or faith-based arguments for rebirth to be problematic but does not reject the idea outright, admitting that—with our present limitations—we simply do not know whether past and future lives are real.' (p. 267). If we take 'present limitations' to refer to the current incompleteness of science, it might warrant some degree of agnosticism. Some philosophers and

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[4] For elaboration and critical assessment of this argument, see Finnigan (2024).

scientists contest the assumed reductive physicalism of science, for instance, arguing that an irreducibly causal conception of consciousness might be consistent with the basic laws of physics if it can be established as a kind of non-physical energy (or physical energy, on some broadened definition of the physical). If these arguments succeed, then rebirth need not be denied for assuming this idea.[5] These arguments have yet to be established by the methods of current science, however. While the probability might be quite low that rebirth will turn out to be consistent with a future completed science, few would be so dogmatic as to assert this with certainty.

Unlike Western agnostics, Buddhist agnostics do not suspend judgement about the object of their agnosticism (rebirth) but offer pragmatic reasons to justify retaining the idea in some practical form. Jackson (2022) endorses Lati Rinpoche's recommendation that even if we judge the truth of rebirth to be unestablished, we should 'behave as if it were true' (p. 267, my italics). Stephen Batchelor similarly remarks that we can, at least, 'try to behave as if there were infinite lifetimes in which [we] would be committed to saving beings'. (Tricycle 1997, my italics). What does it mean to behave as if rebirth were true and is this approach justified?

This chapter will approach this question in dialogue with the Buddhist doctrine of the two truths, conventional and ultimate. It is inspired by Richard Hayes (1998), who characterizes rebirth as a useful fiction; fictional because unestablished by logical proof or empirical observation as real within a scientific framework, but useful nevertheless because, as Jackson (2022) elaborates, it motivates individuals to 'live ethically and compassionately. In that way, they will generate happiness for themselves and others in this life, and if there are future lives they will be happy ones' (p. 267). Mark Siderits influentially characterizes talk of persons as a useful fiction and elaborates its fictional status by appeal to the two truths. On his account, talk of persons is conventionally true, and persons are conventionally real, even though persons do not exist in the Buddhist final ontology and are thus not ultimately real. Siderits also justifies the conventional truth of statements about persons in terms of their utility or pragmatic value; persons are useful fictions. Does rebirth satisfy the same criteria as persons to count as useful fictions in conventionally true beliefs, by Siderits lights? And does thinking in these terms help clarify and justify what it might mean to behave as if rebirth were true? This chapter will defend a conditional yes to both questions. In the process, it will clarify the distinctively Buddhist view of rebirth, provide an

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[5] It might be denied on other grounds, however. Buddhist philosophers offer complex analyses of how karma operates. For some, it operates by merit-generation; good actions generate karmic merit (puṇya) which persists in some form until causes and conditions are suitable for it to effect a good outcome in this life or the next. An argument that established the causal efficacy of consciousness would not necessarily establish the existence and efficacy of merit. Buddhist agnostics tend not to detail which conception of karma they take rebirth to assume. They do assume, however, that there are complex causal links between ethical conduct and consequences, good and bad, in this life or the next. This chapter will focus on this more general assumption about karma.

analysis of how the concept of rebirth might relate to practical outcomes, and address some limitations of this approach.

13.2 Conventional Persons

The distinction between conventional truth and ultimate truth resolves an apparent inconsistency between the Buddha's teaching of no-self and his commitment to karma and rebirth. How is rebirth possible if there is no self to be reborn into another life? How can karma function if there are no agents to experience the karmic consequences of 'their' actions?

While Buddhists debate the meaning and entailments of the Buddha's teaching of no-self, most agree that he is not asserting that no one and nothing exists. At the very least, he is rejecting the idea that there is an eternally existing substance (*me!*) that persists through time and that grounds our diachronic identity in the face of psychological and physical change. According to early Buddhism, when we subject persons to empirical and conceptual analysis, all we find is a dynamic and complex causal system of psychophysical elements. While the Buddha offers several classifications of these elements, the most well-known is that of the five-aggregates (*skandhas*): (1) material bodily elements (*rūpa*), (2) feelings (*vedanā*), (3) discriminative cognitions such as perceptions, thoughts, and recollections (*saṃjñā*), (4) volitional elements such as intentions and reactive attitudes (*saṃskāra*), and (5) events of consciousness (*vijñāna*). This analysis is assumed to be exhaustive; there is nothing else that constitutes a person. All elements in these person-systems depend on causes and conditions for their existence and (so) are impermanent; none have independent and permanent existence. Moreover, the unification of these elements as a 'whole' system is not considered to be a real substance with causal properties.[6] Siderits characterizes this view as a mereological reduction and endorses it as Buddhist Reductionism.[7]

If there are laws of karma, they must concern the psychophysical elements in these causal series. But which elements in these series do they target? The Buddha famously remarked that karma targets intentions,[8] which are volitional elements in the reductive analysis. Siderits (2003) clarifies that the laws of karma are not rules that are decreed or enforced by some cosmic being and obeyed or broken by agents. Rather, they causally describe the way the world works akin to the so-called natural laws of science. Actions caused by good intentions produce good karmic outcomes (that are pleasurable) and actions caused by bad intentions

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[6] Later Abhidharma Buddhist philosophers provided sophisticated arguments in defence of this view, the most prominent being the neither-same-nor-different argument, see Siderits 2013, p. 74.

[7] Siderits' preferred position is more nuanced and takes on board the Madhyamaka critique of a final level of description. I will return to this.

[8] More specifically, 'it is volition . . . that I call *kamma* [P. *karma*, Skt.]' (AN 6.63).

produce bad karmic outcomes (that are painful). 'If we could keep track of enough persons over enough successive lives, we could find out what the laws of karma are in the same way that science discovers what the laws of nature are: our observations would disclose the patterns of regular succession that show causation at work' (p. 9). Rebirth occurs when the set of psychophysical elements that make up a person in this life causes a new set of psychophysical elements to come into existence in the next life. Siderits argues this is similar in kind to what regularly occurs in a single lifetime; the set of psychophysical elements that make up an infant, for instance, are not identical to but are causally related in the right kind of way to the set of psychophysical elements that constitute the adult later in life.

What should we make of talk of persons if all that really exists are complex causal systems of psychophysical elements? Buddhists invoke the distinction between two truths to explain or justify such talk. On Siderits' analysis, the concept of a person conveniently designates a whole causal system of psychophysical elements, past, present, and future. While the elements in this series (at a time) are real, the whole system is not. Statements involving the concept of a person are, at best, conventionally true but ultimately meaningless since there are no persons at the ultimate level of analysis.

13.3 Criterion for Conventional Truth: Common Sense

What explains and justifies a statement as being conventionally true? Siderits offers several accounts in his writings. In (2007) 'a statement is conventionally true if and only if it is acceptable to common sense and consistently leads to successful practice' (p. 56). Kris McDaniels (2019) points out that these conjuncts come apart. The idea that conventional truth is what is acceptable to common sense is central to the Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka of Candrakīrti (Cowherds 2011). On this view, conventional reality is whatever 'the world acknowledges' to be the case without subjecting it to rational or epistemic analysis (Candrakīrti PPMV 18.8, in Cowherds 2011, p. 151). Prāsaṅgikas ascribe this conventional reality a diminished status, judging it to be illusory, mistaken, and bound up with ignorance (Tillemans 2016). Common sense might thus explain why we talk about persons, but it does not thereby justify it if by justification we mean providing good reasons for continuing the practice.

Siderits (2007) allows that rebirth was 'part of the common-sense conception of the world for most Indians for most of the time that Buddhism existed in India' but denies that it is 'part of our common-sense world-view' (p. 10). Does this mean that statements about rebirth were conventionally true in ancient India but not conventionally true for modern Buddhists who accept the modern scientific viewpoint? If so, it seems arbitrary, relativizing truth to beliefs that just happen to be common in some local historical and cultural context. Cultural

contexts can also overlap. A modern Buddhist might both accept a broadly scientific framework and yet believe in rebirth. Does rebirth count as conventionally true *for them*?

Siderits (2007) denies that common sense is arbitrarily tied to *mere* belief in this way. He argues that statements acceptable to common sense are those that 'consistently lead to successful practice' and if they fail this criterion then they are conventionally false. He illustrates the point by reference to traditional flat-earth theory,[9] arguing that while this was once a widespread and common-sense viewpoint, 'the statement that the world is flat was never conventionally true' (p. 57, n. 10) Why? Because desires that are relevantly informed by this belief, such as the desire to reach the edge of the world, consistently fail to be satisfied.[10]

The definition of conventional truth in Siderits (2003) makes explicit this assumed dependence of common sense on successful practice: 'a sentence is said to be conventionally true if and only if it is assertible by the conventions of common sense, where these are understood as standards based on utility' (p. 7). The conventions governing common sense both explain and justify talk about persons: such talk is explained because it is part of our sociolinguistic practices and justified as useful and good because it leads to successful practice. Tillemans (2016) objects that Siderits 'over interprets' Buddhist sources and that this justification of conventional truth in terms of utility is his own philosophical addition (p. 7). If we nevertheless grant 'leading to successful practice' as a pragmatic criterion for what statements *should* be accepted as conventionally true,[11] what does it amount to and can it be satisfied by belief in rebirth?

13.4 Criterion for Conventional Truth: Leading to Successful Practice

What does it mean for a useful fiction to consistently lead to successful practice? Siderits' view is complex, and its various aspects have been contested. It assumes, for instance, that there can be a final ontology that reflects ultimate reality, understood as the objective way things really are, independent of our interests and cognitive limitations. Mādhyamika Buddhists reject this view, reserving the term 'ultimate' for emptiness (*śūnyatā*) which is taken to entail that there are no ultimately real entities and so no privileged ultimate discourse about how things really are. Siderits' preferred position accepts the Madhyamaka

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[9] He also uses the example of fairies (2005, p. 92) and disease caused by demon possession (p. 94).

[10] The claim is not that *all* desires of a flat-earther fail to be realized, merely those that are informed by beliefs that are directly entailed by the belief that the world is flat, such as the belief that 'if you were to sail far enough in the same direction you will reach the edge' (p. 57, n. 10).

[11] In expressing this point in normative terms, I set aside the empirical question of whether Siderits is right to claim that common-sense folk ontology is, in fact, governed by considerations of utility.

critique but treats it as consistent with a broadly reductionist approach to metaphysical explanation.[12] I shall set these issues aside for now and focus on explicating Siderits view on what it means to lead to successful practice. For convenience, I analyse it into the following five aspects.

Unit of utility: Siderits' analysis of Buddhist Reductionism offers a consequentialist justification of conventionally true statements. What are useful fictions useful for? They are useful for minimizing pain or suffering (2003, pp. 37, 58; 2005, p. 113) and maximizing pleasure or welfare impersonally construed (2003, pp. 37, 57; 2005, p. 105). Pleasure and pain, impersonally construed, are psychophysical elements of ultimate reality. Why is this the relevant measure of utility? Because, according to Siderits, Buddhists take it to be ultimately true that pain is bad and to be prevented (2003, pp. 46, 58).

Desire-generation: How does the concept of a person help achieve this outcome? Siderits argues that it motivates 'us' (viz. the present set of psychophysical elements) to take an interest in this unit of utility as it relates to the future, to adopt it as an object of desire, and to choose actions that help bring it about. He appears to grant that 'we' are naturally averse to pain when it arises, a fact evident in the behaviour of small children, but argues that we only anticipate and have an interest in preventing *future* pain when we are socialized into the personhood convention (2003, p. 9). Siderits thus considers the concept of a person to play a crucial role in the process of desire-satisfaction; it converts a natural aversion into an interest in future events. But how does it perform this function?

Aggregation: Siderits analyses the person-concept as having an aggregate function. What we call a person, according to Buddhist Reductionism, is a massively complex causal series of psychophysical elements that are hard to track and perhaps impossible to completely describe. The concept of a person 'lightens our cognitive load' (2013, p. 5) and 'eases communication' (2005, p. 99) by aggregating the entire causal series as a singular whole. In this respect, it functions like the concept of a chariot (2003, p. 40), forest (2007, p. 55), and water (2013, p. 5); unifying certain kinds of particulars when arranged in certain kinds of way. Given that the relevant particulars are causally related, these concepts have a temporal dimension; they relate future states of affairs to the present as parts of the same thing. By relating future psychophysical events to the present as events that will happen 'to me', the person concept facilitates such inferences as: just as 'I' can experience pain now, just so 'I' can experience pain in the future, and just as I don't want to experience pain now, just so I don't want to experience pain in the future.

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[12] Siderits 2019, for instance, defends a contextualist semantics that admits multiple levels of reduced description as grounds for conventionally true claims depending on what counts as explanatory in a given context.

Deliberation and counterfactual reasoning: This is not enough for the person concept to count as a useful fiction. That 'I' desire to prevent pain occurring to 'me' in the future does not yet result in successful practice. For this, the desire must lead to actions that actually produce the desired outcome. It does so by informing deliberations which result in choice of action. Such deliberation involves counterfactual reasoning.

Consider Siderits' (2005) example of flossing one's teeth or getting a flu shot:

> Neither action is particularly pleasant, so the present elements receive no reward for performing them. But if they do not get performed, eventually there will be a great deal of pain that might have been prevented. The best way to prevent that pain turns out to be by getting the elements in a causal series to identify with and appropriate the past and future elements in that series.   (p. 95)

'Socialisation into personhood', Siderits contends, 'involves learning to act on the basis of the outcome of deliberation. And deliberation involves, in the first instance, seeing oneself as an enduring entity having a variety of interests that might be served in various ways' (p. 106). Deliberation also involves counterfactual reasoning about the possible consequences of courses of action, such that if some action were (not) performed then some desired outcome would (not) come to be.

Success: This is *still* not enough for persons to count as useful fictions. It must also be the case that the actions which result from these deliberations, informed by the person concept, actually *succeed* in generating the desired outcome. A fiction that makes no difference to how things are, or that informs desires that cannot be satisfied, is not useful in the relevant sense. The usefulness of fictions in conventionally true statements is justified both in relation to what happens at the ultimate level of description as well as in relation to what is ultimately valuable at this level; namely, minimizing pain and suffering and maximizing pleasure and wellbeing, impersonally construed. It is this relation to ultimate reality that marks the difference between fictions that are conventionally true or false.

Putting all this together, we can generate an account of what it means to *behave as if there were persons*, in a sense that involves conventionally true beliefs. To behave as if there were persons (such as 'me') in the relevant sense is: (1) to believe that 'I' will experience future events such as pain; (2) to desire to promote or prevent these future events occurring 'to me'; (3) to engage in deliberation about how to achieve this desired outcome, which involves counterfactual reasoning about possible consequences of possible actions; and (4) to choose an action that reliably achieves the desired outcome. The beliefs on which this behaviour is conditioned are justified as conventionally true when the choices they inform do in fact produced the desired outcome, describable at the level of ultimate reality. Persons are a 'useful' fiction because although there is, in fact, no 'me' that

experiences (e.g.) the anticipated pain, the action performed does in fact prevent pain, impersonally construed, and so is justified as good by the lights of the ultimate truth.

13.5 Does Belief in Rebirth Count as Conventionally True?

Does the rebirth concept satisfy the same complex criterion to count as a useful fiction that leads to successful practice and thus for belief in rebirth to count as conventionally true? I will defend a conditional yes.

The Buddhist agnostic approach to rebirth aligns with Siderits' *unit of utility*. Jackson claims that to behave as if rebirth were true will 'generate happiness for [yourself] and others' (2022, p. 267). He takes this to align with the Buddha's claim that belief in rebirth will 'lead to your welfare and happiness for a long time' (MN60.4) This can be rendered consistent with Siderits' impersonal construal and interchange of maximizing pleasure and welfare with minimizing pain and suffering.

What about *desire generation*? Does belief in rebirth help convert a natural aversion into a desire for some future outcome? Siderits' explanation depends on *aggregation*; the person concept enables this conversion by aggregating past, present, and future psychophysical elements as one thing (*me!*). If we grant this point, does the rebirth concept have the same aggregate function? It does insofar as it presupposes the concept of a person, i.e. it is a person that is reborn again after death.[13] What it relevantly (but not exhaustively) adds is an extension of the causal series of psychophysical elements that count as me beyond the boundaries of a single lifetime. If the aggregate function of the person concept is what converts a natural aversion to a desire to prevent future states of affairs (as happening *to me*), then it should make no difference how far into the future these states of affairs occur, whether in this life or the next. The rebirth concept is thus consistent with *desire generation*.

The rebirth concept can also have a role in *deliberation and counterfactual reasoning*. When we are deciding what to do, we consider the possible consequences of various courses of action. The Buddhist concept of rebirth presupposes karma, the idea that acting well and badly have corresponding consequences, good and bad, in and for the next life. Buddhist philosophers provide complex analyses of how karma operates but claim that only a Buddha knows its exact mechanics. Buddhist agnostics do not analyse karma but tend to accept the general claim that a good karmic consequence is a good rebirth, meaning a life that involves more pleasure than otherwise,[14] and a bad karmic consequence is a bad rebirth,

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[13] Williams 2000 contests this point but see Siderits 2000, p. 414.
[14] According to Buddhism, all realms of existence involve suffering to some degree, even the blissful heavenly pure lands. Different explanations are offered of this apparent fact, however.

meaning a life that involves more pain and suffering than otherwise. The rebirth concept thus informs expectations about what possibilities might occur in and for the next life if we intentionally act in certain ethical or unethical ways. This gives a deliberative sense to what it means to *behave as if rebirth were true*; it is to give expectations about the possible karmic consequences of our actions weight in our decision-making processes, to treat them as reasons counting in favour or against certain kinds of action.

That leaves *success*. Do actions which result from choices informed by the rebirth concept actually succeed in generating their desired outcome and thereby make an ultimately real difference in the world? And does this difference align with the ultimately true values of minimizing pain and suffering and maximizing pleasure and welfare? I will initially argue no but will conclude that they might.

Buddhist agnostics tend to justify behaving as if rebirth were true by reference to its capacity to 'generate happiness for [oneself] and others *in this life*' (Jackson 2022, p. 267, my italics) According to Lati Rinpoche, for instance, being compassionate and helping others feels good, makes others feel good, and results in others loving and thinking highly of you and being willing to help you in return (see Hayes 1998, p. 79). We are invited to suppose that acting ethically creates a reciprocal and ramifying network of pleasure and wellbeing in this life, irrespective of whether it has consequences for the next. These present-life consequences can align with the *unit of utility*. Insofar as belief in rebirth provides reason for actions that do, in fact, minimize pain and maximize welfare, impersonally construed, it might seem that these beliefs are justified as useful and good by the lights of what counts as ultimately valuable.

It does not thereby count as conventionally true, however. For Siderits, a useful fiction informs desires which are actually satisfied at the level of ultimate reality. Person talk is useful because it motivates me to both desire a certain effect (that pain of a certain kind not occur in future) and to choose actions that actually bring it about (pain of that kind does not occur). In the case of rebirth, the desired effect (that I obtain a good rebirth) is not the same as the effects in the world used to justify its usefulness (happiness for myself and others in this life). While I might very well desire happiness for myself and others in this life, it was not my reason for action (which was to obtain a good rebirth) and so this does not count as a case of desire-satisfaction in the relevant sense. It could thus be argued that the fiction of rebirth does not thereby lead to successful practice in the right kind of way for belief in rebirth to count as conventionally true.

This conclusion would not follow, however, if the action did *in fact* produce the desired effect; good karmic consequences in the next life. From the point of view of current science, it cannot have this outcome since rebirth does not hold at this level of analysis. Buddhist agnostics do not deny rebirth, however. They maintain a position of epistemic uncertainty which, we have suggested, might be warranted by reference to the incompleteness of science. The kind of Buddhist agnostic we

are considering believes that rebirth is inconsistent with current science but maintains that it might nevertheless turn out to be true for all we currently know. If we are willing to grant this position of epistemic uncertainty about rebirth, it provides grounds for a conditional defence of its conventional truth. Desire-satisfaction is a matter of fact, grounded in how things are at the ultimate level of description. If a desire is satisfied, by causing actions that lead to effects that fit the description of what is desired, then it is satisfied irrespective of whether we know it or not. I might not know whether my desire is satisfied that you, the reader of this chapter, agree with my arguments, but if you do agree with my arguments then you do, irrespective of my epistemic position. Similarly, if the desired karmic consequences of an action do, in fact, follow from certain kinds of action, then the rebirth concept can be said to lead to successful practice in the relevant sense to count as a useful fiction in conventionally true beliefs. The Buddhist agnostic allows the *possibility* that actions can cause karmic effects but doesn't know whether they do in fact. Belief in rebirth *might* thus count as conventionally true for a modern Buddhist agnostic but they cannot say for sure.

Putting all this together, to *behave as if rebirth were true* is thus (1) to believe that I will experience the karmic effects of my actions in the next life, (2) to desire to promote or prevent these future events occurring to me, (3) to engage in deliberation about how to achieve this desired outcome, which involves counterfactual reasoning about possible consequences of possible actions, and (4) to choose an action that (a) achieves a desir*able* outcome (justified as good or bad by the lights of the unit of utility), *and* (b) reliably achieves the desir*ed* outcome (the intended karmic effects). The beliefs on which this behaviour is conditioned are justified as conventionally true when the choices they inform do in fact produce the desired outcome, describable at the level of ultimate reality. The Buddhist agnostic is in a position of epistemic uncertainty about whether this desired outcome obtains. But *if* it does obtain then belief in rebirth is a useful fiction that leads to successful practice and so is conventionally true.

13.6 Some Limitations and Closing Remarks

There is much more to say about this analysis of behaving as if rebirth were true. I will close by addressing three potential limitations.

13.6.1 The Deliberative Role of Useful Fictions

This chapter has provided a *deliberative* analysis of what it means to behave as if persons and rebirth were true. By this I mean that it analysed these concepts as having a functional role in deliberation or practical rationality. It did not

exhaustively analyse the functional role of these concepts for deliberation, however. Take the person concept. It could be argued that the fact that 'I' engage in deliberation at all assumes that I am an agent whose choices can make a real difference in the world; it would not make sense to deliberate about (e.g.) whether to floss my teeth to prevent tooth decay if I did not believe that my decision could actually result in an action that prevented tooth decay. Similarly, it would not make sense to deliberate about whether to leave a room if I believed that the only exit is locked.[15] Deliberation seems to presuppose that one is an agent in control of one's actions and with a genuinely open future such that one's choices can have a real causal impact on the world.

Is the person concept therefore a *necessary* assumption of practical rationality? It might seem so. Siderits argues no. This is due to its consequentialist justification. While Siderits allows that deliberation informed by the person concept might effectively get us to perform actions that, in fact, prevent pain and maximize wellbeing, he argues that it is in principle possible that some other concept could be equally, if not more, efficacious (2000, p. 415; 2005, p. 106). The reason why the person concept is a commonplace in so many historical and cultural contexts, in Siderits' view, is because it just so happens to be the most effective strategy for minimizing overall suffering we currently have (2005, p. 113).

The concept of rebirth presupposes karma. As such, it also assumes that we are agents whose choices can make a real difference in the world. Actions produced by good intentions are assumed to lead to good karmic outcomes and actions produced by bad intentions are assumed to lead to bad karmic outcomes in this and the next life. In contrast to the person concept (and closely related possibilities),[16] deliberation need not assume the concepts of karma or rebirth. It is also not obvious that these concepts provide the most effective reasons for choice of *ethical* conduct. While it is hard (but not impossible) to conceive of viable alternatives to the person concept for deliberation, there are plenty of alternative reasons an individual might have to choose to act ethically.

This suggests a potential difference in scope between the usefulness of the person fiction and that of rebirth. Person talk is useful (but not necessary) for all rational beings (that is, all beings with a capacity to choose actions for reasons); we should all use this concept when decision-making insofar as it is the most effective cognitive strategy to achieve our desired outcomes, including those deemed valuable by the ultimate truth. *Rebirth* talk is useful, we might argue, for those rational beings that may not otherwise have sufficient reason to act ethically or who are egoistic and would only be moved by self-interested reasons to perform actions that benefit others.

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[15] This example is taken from Van Inwagen 2002.
[16] Siderits offers Punctualism and Weitgeistism as possibilities and gives reason to think they would be less effective at minimizing overall suffering than the person concept (see 2003, p. 7; 2005, p. 106).

13.6.2 Is This Deliberative Analysis of Rebirth Self-Defeating?

On this deliberative analysis, rebirth contributes self-interested reasons to decision-making; one treats the possible karmic consequences of possible actions *for you* as reasons to choose those actions (or not). These reasons are self-interested because, on Siderits analysis, desire for certain future outcomes results from a process of aggregating future possibilities to the present, via the person concept, as things that will happen to oneself. My reason for acting is not merely that certain outcomes obtain but that they obtain *for me*.

It might be objected that self-interested reasons are self-defeating when related to karmic consequences. Karma tracks intentions. An action chosen for self-interested reasons rather than a genuine concern for others, one might argue, is not a good intention. It might even be selfish and so constitute a bad intention that will have bad karmic consequences. If this is right, then behaving as if rebirth were true might be self-defeating; actions chosen for the reason that they produce good karmic consequences for me do not, in fact, produce those consequences for me precisely because they were chosen for this reason.

To settle this, we need some explanation of what counts as a good intention. Siderits' analysis of utility suggests a possible solution. A good karmic outcome is one that minimizes pain and suffering and maximizes pleasure and wellbeing, the unit of utility. Insofar as my intention is to bring about these effects, it counts as good. While I might also intend for these outcomes to happen 'to me', there are no persons at the ultimate level of analysis and so the difference between whether they are experienced by me or you is meaningless. Self-interested reasons are thus justified as good on consequentialist grounds and are not self-defeating.

13.6.3 Is This Deliberative Analysis of Rebirth Consistent with Buddhist Soteriology?

Self-interested reasons involve a sense of 'I' or 'self'. A central feature of the Buddha's teachings is that the idea of self is a cause of suffering and has bad soteriological effects. The Buddha is reported to have taught that the idea of self conditions craving and attachment and thus suffering when the objects of our attachment (ourselves, most pertinently) inevitably change given the fact of impermanence. The idea of self is also considered to inform actions (of body, speech, and mind) that keep us in *saṃsāra*, the cycle of rebirth. It might be argued that the deliberative analysis of rebirth provided in this chapter is inconsistent with the soteriological framework of Buddhism.

There is a lot to be said about this objection. Here are three brief responses. First, we might defend a developmental approach to Buddhist practice, and argue that behaving as if rebirth were true, in a deliberative sense, is a stage in the path

for the egoistic person who needs reason to act ethically. It is a stage because, if such a person were to regularly choose actions that help others rather than harm, it might lead them to habituate these actions, as dispositional modes of response, and cultivate reactive attitudes such as compassion, which produce the same kinds of ethical conduct but no longer via processes of self-interested reasoning. This would be consistent with a gradual extirpation of the sense of self or 'I' from our psychological processes.[17]

Second, we might defend a deliberative approach to rebirth, but deny that it must be self-interested. Consider a Mahāyāna Buddhist who has taken the bodhisattva vow to remain in the cycle of rebirth in order to relieve the suffering of all sentient beings but who has learnt from Śāntideva to construe this impersonally (see BCA 8.101–103). It is arguable that their reason for acting is that it would prevent pain and promote pleasure, overall and impersonally construed, rather than specifically for themselves.[18] If this is plausible, it appears to contradict Siderits claim that 'we' only anticipate and take an interest in the unit of utility as it relates to the future when we unify it with the present as something that will occur *to me*. There is good reason to contest this empirical claim, or at least restrict its scope of application. But whether a Mahāyāna Buddhist can eschew *all* self-interested reasons and still achieve viable practical outcomes is a matter of considerable debate (see Williams 1998; Cowherds 2015; Finnigan 2018).

Third, and lastly, behaving as if rebirth were true need not only be analysed deliberatively. The concept of rebirth includes, for instance, the idea of being reborn into a different mode of being to that of one's present existence; e.g. as a god or a hell being, a cow or a cockroach. Hayes (1998) suggests that the idea of rebirth can inspire the creative imagining of what it is like to live a different kind of life, which might facilitate an openness to different perspectives and the cultivation of compassion towards others (p. 79).[19] This is not inconsistent with the deliberative analysis, for it can be justified on the same grounds. It is nevertheless distinct and suggests that there is more than one way to cognitively and psychologically analyse what it means to behave as if rebirth were true.

13.7 Conclusion

What should the Buddhist attitude be to rebirth if one accepts its inconsistency with current science? Buddhist agnostics adopt a position of uncertainty about

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[17] Thanks to Mark Siderits for this suggestion. I offer a similar strategy to Dharmakīrti to account for the agency of a Buddha who does not engage conceptuality in the mode of deliberative choice (see Finnigan 2010–2011).

[18] Thanks to Roger Jackson for raising this example and issue.

[19] Sonam Kachru 2021 reads Vasubandhu in a similar spirit.

rebirth but nevertheless recommend 'behaving as if' it were true. This chapter investigated what this might mean and whether it is justified in dialogue with the Buddhist doctrine of the two truths, as analysed by Mark Siderits. To behave as if rebirth were true, it argued, is to treat possible karmic consequences as reasons counting in favour or against certain kinds of action when deliberating about what to do. These reasons need not be decisive. A modern Buddhist might give these possibilities very low credence given the improbability (but not impossibility) that rebirth will turn out to be consistent with a completed science. These reasons might also be unnecessary for motivating the agent to choose to act ethically; the agent might already have sufficient reason to act ethically without needing to consider possible karmic consequences as well. But treating possible karmic consequences as reasons for action might reliably contribute to ethical living by helping motivate agents to choose actions that minimize pain and suffering and promote pleasure and well-being. 'The trick', to modify a remark by Siderits about persons, 'is to recognize that there ultimately is [or might be] no such thing... and yet at the same time recognize that much of the time it can be very useful *to act as if* there were. This balancing act is what the Buddha meant by a middle way.' (2005, p. 94 my italics).

Abbreviations

AN   *Aṅguttara Nikāya* of The Buddha
BCA   *Bodhicaryāvatāra* of Śāntideva
DN   *Dīgha Nikāya* of The Buddha
KN   *Khuddaka Nikāya* of The Buddha
MN   *Majjhima Nikāya* of The Buddha
PV   *Pramāṇavārttika* of Dharmakīrti

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A13.1 Reply to Bronwyn Finnigan

Ankur Barua

Bronwyn Finnigan offers a thoughtful proposal for situating the traditional Buddhist notion of rebirth on the epistemic landscapes of contemporary science. I will begin by sketching her central argument, and then offer some reflections on its conceptual motifs from a certain Vedāntic Hindu perspective.

According to Buddhist understandings of the person, rooted in the Pali Canon and developed in diverse ways through Mahāyāna universes, the notion of a unitary self is a fundamental misconception about the way the world is. The seeming permanence of the 'I' is to be analysed through deconstructive exercises—rational as well as meditative—into a dynamic constellation of interconnected psychophysical processes. So, *re*birth is not the re-embodiment of a spiritual principle such as the *ātman* intimated in the *Upaniṣads*—it is to be understood in terms of a causal continuum between a subtle form of consciousness at death in this lifetime and the first moment of consciousness in the next lifetime. These causal continuities are karmic laws—actions generated by good intentions produce good (that is, pleasurable) results and actions generated by bad intentions produce bad (that is, painful) results.

Finnigan approaches this account from the perspective of contemporary science and notes that a significant number of Buddhist philosophers have claimed that the traditional understanding is not compatible with cognitive science or philosophy of mind. The key question she engages with is whether belief in rebirth, even if it turns out to be inconsistent with contemporary science, can be justified from within a Buddhist universe of belief and practice. She presents a 'Buddhist agnostic' as an individual who claims that we should live out our lives *as if* rebirth is true, even if we are currently not in an epistemic position to conclusively establish this truth. This style of agnosticism, which seeks to offer pragmatic reasons for re-orienting one's worldly existence to the possibility of rebirth, is defended through a development of Mark Siderits' claim that talk of persons is a useful fiction which is conventionally true.

Consider John who is a 'colour fictionalist'—according to him, colours are not intrinsic properties of material objects such as chairs and tables. Yet, he has no objections to his four-year-old niece Amanda declaring, 'the traffic light is now green': such colour talk is useful in navigating busy streets, and he wishes to socialize Amanda into skilfully using these orientational cues. Analogously,

Milepa, a Mahāyāna Buddhist who is a 'soul fictionalist', routinely works with the concept of 'I' because it is frequently employed in various interpersonal milieus, and because it is useful for minimizing suffering and maximizing welfare. There is no personal core which endures across time, and makes claims such as, '*I am healthy today because I ate vegetables in my childhood*', where the 'I' refers to a spiritual substratum underlying distinct temporal phases. Yet, it is expedient to apply the label 'I' to a certain non-personal stream and seek to ensure that *this* stream is regularly characterized not by pain but by pleasure. Thus, Milepa may report his good health to fellow Buddhists in this way, 'Because of the regular consumption of green vegetables by a stream of psychophysical aggregates fifteen years ago, the present stream of psychophysical aggregates is healthy.' That is, the first-person standpoint is to be methodically translated, from the third-person point of view, into a network of causal connections. So, the reason why a certain regimen is followed by Milepa is not to ensure that a person, namely Milepa, will enjoy good health but because disease is—non-personally—bad, irrespective of where it occurs.

The motif of two standpoints of truth that Milepa would be developing was crucial in articulating some spirited responses to Hindu critiques of Buddhist deconstructive analyses of the category of person. To engage with the standard complaint, 'but *who* is trying to minimize pain and *who* is undertaking the Bodhisattva vow?', the answer is that, conventionally speaking, 'Milepa'—who is a causal continuum of psychophysical elements—is setting out on a soteriological pathway, though ultimately from the (non-)perspective of emptiness (*śūnyatā*), this description is couched in the very vocabulary of everyday social life that is to be transcended. Monastic life—with its disciplinary minutiae relating to food, sleep, and so on—is a densely interpersonal milieu where the vocabulary of 'I' is readily employed, but it is precisely from within this milieu that an aspirant begins to comprehend the emptiness of this vocabulary.

According to Finnigan, this analysis can be extended to rebirth which too can be seen as a useful fiction that is conventionally true. Milepa happens to be a Buddhist agnostic who takes the notion of rebirth—that is, karmic causation which operates across lifetimes and shapes future existences—as a regulative principle structuring his everyday actions. By living *as if* rebirth is true, he seeks to perform or abstain from certain types of action, and engages in deliberative reasoning about alternative pathways of action. He finds the notion of rebirth practically efficacious in generating happiness within this lifetime—if one accepts karmic causation between good actions and good consequences, one is likely to be benevolent and compassionate towards others. He is willing to inhabit a position of epistemic uncertainty from which he allows the possibility that good actions in one lifetime have trans-life good consequences, even though he cannot demonstrate that this possibility is realized.

Some aspects of Finnigan's explorations can be reworked from a Vedāntic perspective such as that of Rāmānuja (1017–1137). In this Vaiṣṇava Hindu

theological universe, the conscious subject or immaterial self (*cit*, *jīva*) is onto-logically real and is existentially dependent at all times on its inner controller, the supremely personal Lord. Vidya, who is a contemporary follower of Rāmānuja, can adopt the standpoint of a 'Vedāntic agonistic' about reincarnation across lifetimes and take belief in reincarnation to be justified for pragmatic reasons somewhat parallel to the reasons articulated by Milepa.

In a traditional Vaiṣṇava context, the ascent to the Lord stretches across lifetimes which are connected through karmic causation—in each lifetime, a *jīva* can resume its spiritual pilgrimage of becoming even more unwaveringly oriented to the Lord. The reality of the transmigration of the *jīva* is propounded by scriptural revelation (*śruti*). A devotee may also accept as veridical the testimony of an advanced spiritual practitioner or a guru who claims to have recollected one's previous existences. Vidya considers these scripture-rooted claims to be conceptually problematic and, while she does not completely reject them, she acknowledges that claims about the reincarnation of a non-physical self may turn out to be inconsistent with the findings of the most advanced science of the day. Yet, she claims that to live out one's life *as if* reincarnation is real can promote well-being and minimize suffering. To understand that one's spiritual identity is that of a devotee of the Lord is to begin to see all beings as rooted in and encompassed by the Lord. If one *jīva* sees another *jīva* not as a radically alien entity but as relationally encapsulated in the divine plenum, this vision of incorp-oration is conducive to the conscious cultivation of other-regarding virtues such as compassion, generosity, and so on. Therefore, this understanding of divinity as encompassing every *jīva* can energize less egocentric ways of behaving and a greater willingness to see the world from the perspectives of others. If Vidya's 'I' becomes completely attuned to the Lord, Vidya would discern the Lord's presence everywhere. This purgative discipline of ego-effacement is taken up in this lifetime, and, as a Vedāntic agnostic, Vidya holds that its karmic momentum may continue into a subsequent lifetime, even though she is not certain that this possibility is realized.

This analysis raises a soteriological concern similar to one highlighted by Finnigan vis-à-vis the Buddhist agnostic. If the summum bonum which is com-munion with the Lord is attained through the negation of egocentric dispositions and ways of living, it seems that to engage in deliberative reasoning about the *self's* karmic trajectories is already to move away from the Lord. In a Mahāyāna Buddhist context, we may defuse the related 'paradox of *nirvāṇa*'—namely, to desire *nirvāṇa* is already a desire—by suggesting that while an advanced-stage Bodhisattva apprehends the emptiness of the 'I', desire, and the desired destin-ation, a beginner on the pathway should indeed consciously desire *nirvāṇa*. In her Vaiṣṇava theological context, Vidya may begin by foregrounding karmic conse-quentiality in her interpersonal engagements—for instance, she may reason in this way, 'if *I* am compassionate towards others, then *I* will receive good results'.

However, the steady cultivation of compassion—along with a developing aware-ness that the Lord indwells every *jīva*—will spontaneously lead her to act in this compassionate way without inhabiting an egocentric standpoint.

In short, Milepa and Vidya can develop analogous lines of reasoning for their respective accounts of post-mortem existence. The crucial metaphysical debate across these Hindu and Buddhist milieus, for several millennia of intellectual history, relates to whether there is *in fact* a spiritual self and a cosmic Lord who supervises transmigratory processes.

A13.2 Reply to Bronwyn Finnigan

Olla Solomyak

Finnigan's chapter asks a stimulating question: What would it mean to accept the traditional Buddhist view of rebirth as a *useful fiction*, and how might such an approach be justified—particularly for one who also accepts that the Buddhist view of rebirth is inconsistent with current science?

Finnigan clarifies the distinctively Buddhist understanding of rebirth as being compatible with the denial of an enduring entity that is the self: rebirth is understood in terms of the obtaining of appropriate kinds of *causal connections* between a chain of conscious experiential episodes in one lifetime and a future such chain in another. She then analyses what it might mean to nevertheless relate to rebirth as a useful fiction, by appeal to an analogous account of Siderits' on which our ordinary beliefs about the existence and persistence of *persons* are understood to be 'conventionally' though not 'ultimately' true.

The idea that the concept of rebirth might be *useful* whether or not it is fundamental is an intriguing one. Often, the decision as to whether we should retain a concept in the face of new empirical findings is a pragmatic one. Consider, for example, the concept of *contact*: When we learn from physics that no two objects are in contact in the strict sense of having no empty space between them, do we conclude that nothing is ever *really in contact*? Or do we conclude that contact between ordinary material objects is just not exactly what we thought it was? The question is a semantic one with pragmatic underpinnings: If the concept is useful, we are likely to retain it, and to reconceive the truth-conditions for statements about ordinary objects being in contact to the extent that this is necessary.

The concept of *rebirth*, Finnigan suggests, might be similar: perhaps there is a conventional sense in which rebirth can be said to be real given the *usefulness* of the concept, despite its not being real in a more fundamental or narrowly conceived sense. It is surprising, then, that Finnigan's analysis of rebirth as a useful fiction relies at the end of the day on the possibility that rebirth—understood in terms of the obtaining of the relevant kinds of causal connections—is actually *real*. It is only if the relevant causal connections in fact *obtain* that the concept of rebirth is useful in the relevant sense, in that only then—Finnigan argues—does the deliberation surrounding rebirth-related beliefs result in the desired outcome (namely, greater pleasure and less pain in a relevant future lifetime).

A question arises, then, as to whether there is conceptual space for rebirth to in fact be a useful fiction on Finnigan's suggested analysis. It seems that either (a) rebirth turns out to be real after all—if the relevant causal connections across different 'lifetimes' actually obtain, this is what rebirth (construed in a way compatible with Buddhist no-self teachings) *consists in*—or (b) belief in rebirth does not meet the necessary conditions to count as *useful*, given that rebirth-related deliberation fails to bring about the outcome it is supposed to be useful for bringing about. That is, either the concept (and the associated beliefs) are not useful in the relevant sense, or the belief in rebirth is strictly speaking true! How, then, could belief in rebirth be a useful fiction?

If belief in rebirth is understood to involve belief in *persons* as enduring entities, then belief in rebirth might be seen as conventionally true in the same way as belief in persons is seen as conventionally true on Siderits' account; But then rebirth would only be fictional to the extent that it is assumed to involve *persons*, and only in virtue of the fundamental unreality of persons and not due to some further lack. Rebirth as understood to be *compatible* with the unreality of persons seems either real or not useful according to the demands of the suggested account.

It would be interesting if it turned out that the belief in rebirth—unlike the belief in persons—could only be useful if it were true. But the question arises as to whether there might be an alternative, less demanding, understanding of what it takes for something to be a 'useful fiction' that the belief in rebirth could nevertheless meet, even for a denier (and not just an agnostic) with respect to rebirth as the genuine obtaining of the relevant kinds of causal connections across lifetimes.

In considering the usefulness of the concept of a person, Siderits' account allows that person-related deliberation can successfully bring about the increased pleasure and decreased pain in future conscious episodes that are *appropriately (causally) related* to one's present deliberation. That is, for the concept of a person to count as useful it needn't be the case that *one's own* future pleasure is increased (or future pain decreased); this condition could only obtain if there were in fact persisting *persons* after all. It's thus enough that the outcome affects future experiences that are related to me 'in the right way'.

Perhaps, then, there might be an analogously less demanding condition that is available in the rebirth case as well: Rather than requiring that rebirth-related deliberations succeed in bringing about desired effects in conscious chains of experience that are related to one's present lifetime in the way required by the Buddhist teachings about what rebirth actually consists in, perhaps it could be enough that rebirth-related deliberations bring about increased pleasure and decreased pain in the far-future, via *some kind of causal relationship* between one's present motivations and intentions and the relevant future experiences. This may not be enough to count as *rebirth,* strictly speaking, but could be enough to render belief in rebirth useful, and thus for belief in rebirth to be conventionally true on an account that is at least analogous to Siderits'.

In other words, just as Siderits' account construes the 'desired outcome' of person-related deliberations in a way that doesn't rely on there being genuine persons, could there be a construal of the 'desired outcome' of rebirth-related deliberations which doesn't rely on there being genuine rebirth? It would be interesting to explore the different possible conditions here.

Both possible results of such an investigation could be illuminating. If it turned out that there was a weakened understanding of 'usefulness' on which belief in rebirth could be useful but nevertheless strictly speaking false, the account could appeal to those who are settled on rejecting the traditional Buddhist view of rebirth and not just to Buddhist agnostics. And if it turned out that belief in rebirth could only be useful if it were true, it would be interesting to explore why this should be so, especially in a world full of 'conventional' seemingly-useful notions that don't ultimately reflect the way things are on a more fundamental plane.

The deeper question here seems to be as follows: Is rebirth the *kind of thing* we could be fictionalists, revisionists, or even just reductionists about? And if not, why not (given that we take attitudes along these lines to many other familiar phenomena)? Finnigan's chapter engages with this question in a careful and thought-provoking way, helpfully clarifying the distinctively Buddhist understanding of rebirth and opening the door to much further potential inquiry and discussion.

14

'Liberation in Life'

Advaita Allegories for Defeating Death

Ankur Barua

14.1 Introduction

A recurring theme across significant stretches of classical Indic worldviews is that the quest for truth is concurrent with the temporary alleviation or ultimate transcendence of all worldly suffering (*duḥkha*). More specifically, in various styles of Hindu soteriological systems clustered under categories such as Sāṃkhya-Yoga and Vedānta, human beings are said to remain enmeshed in cycles of death and rebirth (*saṃsāra*) till the emergence of a liberating insight (*vidyā*), which is when their spiritual ignorance (*avidyā*) is dissipated and they overcome the realm of suffering. Each of these systems is composed of multiple motifs encompassing cosmological speculations, logical disputations, mythic narratives, poetic articulations, moral sensibilities, devotional expressions, and spiritual disciplines. In this chapter, we will discuss one specific motif relating to life and the afterlife that lies at the heart of Advaita Vedānta, which was systematized by the exegetical thinker Śaṃkara (*c.* 800 CE). As a first-order approximation, Advaita may be characterized as a form of 'monism' according to which there are no ontological distinctions across reality, so that all finite beings can be viewed as polychromatic threads that are interwoven across one non-finite tapestry. One implication of this claim is that it is not meaningful to speak, from an ontological perspective, of any distinctions between this worldly life and a hereafter in another domain. Perhaps even more startlingly, some Advaita commentaries do not hesitate to draw the logical conclusion that the *after*life is *here and now*, if only an individual can become awakened to the presence of deep divinity at the core of the human person. This chapter will explore some of the conceptual and moral aspects of this claim that individuals who become re-centred in the 'unfallen' self already begin to consciously inhabit the afterlife in and through worldly structures. In particular, it will engage with the charge that such styles of monism generate antinomian behaviour in which an individual claims to have gone beyond good and evil. By focusing on specific strands of the commentarial writings of Śaṃkara, this exploration will suggest some conceptual

and experiential pointers to make sense of the claim that an individual can recover one's spiritual gravity in a delightful lightness of being which is 'liberation in life'.

14.2 The Assonances of Advaita

An intensely debated theme in some western receptions of systems of ancient Hindu cosmology and their contemporary rearticulations is whether they can underpin and animate other-regarding virtues. These exchanges have generated a significant amount of literature which we may situate in the rubric of the relation between the categories of ethics and mysticism (Proudfoot 1976; Whitehill 1987). A primary site of contestation in these intellectual circuits is Advaita—it is commonly charged that all 'ethical' engagement evaporates in its life-worlds which are suffused with the intense radiance of its 'mystical' claim that finite realities are ontologically nondual (*advaita*) with the foundational reality (*Brahman*). A galaxy of intellectuals, poets, monks, and social activists—such as Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902), Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948), Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888–1975), and others—developed different configurations of Hindu modernity by articulating styles of Advaita with real-world orientations. We will outline the conceptual structures of some of their configurations by engaging with three formulations—ADV1, ADV2, and ADV3—of the critique that an Advaita worldview has no resources to generate and sustain this-worldly styles of social engagement.

To begin with, ADV1 embodies what is perhaps the most commonly heard objection.

Premise 1: An ethical form of living presupposes a distinction between self and others.

Premise 2: In Advaita, there is no distinction between self and others.

Conclusion: There is no ethical form of living in Advaita.

According to many contemporary readings of Śaṃkara, Premise 2 reflects a deep misunderstanding of the notion of *advaita* which is, after all, a 'mystical' utterance and not an empirical observation. That is, Advaita is not offering an account of what types of differences exist across entities within spatiotemporal manifolds, but is claiming that all such entities are metaphysically not-other from the immutable foundational reality, *Brahman*. The affirmation that the chairs and the tables in the lecture room are metaphysically *not*-distinct from one another is compossible with the affirmation that they are empirically *distinct*. Thus, Advaita does not deny that there are empirical differences, which are perceptible to sensory

modalities, between my laptop, my coffee mug, and the dog I so wish were sitting next to me. To invoke a Wittgensteinian turn of phrase, Advaita leaves the world as it is when it is viewed from an empirical vantage point. What Advaita crucially affirms, however, is that in the 'mystical' vision of a spiritual virtuoso, the laptop, the coffee mug, and the (fictive) dog are discerned to be metaphysically not-different from *Brahman* (Mahadevan 1977). More concretely, it is *not* the case that in the final vocabulary of the world, I need three distinct ontic categories, namely, laptop, coffee mug, and (fictive) dog. Rather, in compiling an inventory of 'what there is' in the world, I only need the hyper-category that is intimated—almost in a whisper—with the (Sanskrit) name '*Brahman*'. To invoke an allegory that recurs through numerous Advaita texts—from the time of Śaṃkara to our own—just as different clay pots are phenomenally distinct from one another but are substantially not-distinct because they are all constituted of 'clayey' stuff, likewise the multiple entities that populate the spatiotemporal domain are not enumerable as distinct essences because they are all constituted of *Brahman*.

At this stage, we will offer a sketch of some patterns of discursive reasoning through which Advaita commentators gesture towards this transcendental horizon of *Brahman* as the universal foundation of finitude. While Advaita has often been held up as the epitome of 'Oriental irrationalism', its spiritual disciplines are structured and animated, in fact, by logical chains of exegetical reasoning. However, the term 'Advaita' itself is something of a shifting signifier—the style of Advaita expressed in the commentaries of Śaṃkara is different in some crucial respects from their hermeneutic reworkings in the speeches, letters, and writings of Swami Vivekananda, Gandhi, Radhakrishnan, and others. This chapter is not primarily an exegetical elaboration of Advaita but a rational reconstruction of Advaita-shaped motifs to engage with the charge that 'mysticism' and 'morality' are fundamentally opposed in Advaita worldviews. Therefore, in discussing certain aspects of the urtexts of Śaṃkara, we will use the descriptor 'Śaṃkara's Advaita'.

Following the *Upaniṣads* (*c.* 600 BCE), which are part of the exegetical points of departure of Śaṃkara's Advaita, *Brahman* is not *a* category such as substance, quality, action, or relation, but is the raison d'être for any entities at all which are structured with such finite categories. His commentaries contain repeated reminders that *Brahman* is supra-conceptual and cannot be comprehended through or circumscribed by any human descriptions. Like 'the War to end all wars' or 'the Religion to complete all religions', Advaita presents *Brahman* as the hyper-category to sublate all categories. One does not describe *Brahman* but treads nimbly on the *via negativa* with the reiteration from the *Upaniṣads* 'not this, not this' (*neti neti*). Thus, strictly speaking, omni-attributes such as omnipotence and omniscience do not apply to Brahman, for in a Vedāntic echo of the Spinozist dictum that 'every determination is negation', such qualifications are viewed as limitations of the utter ineffability of *Brahman*. To use the Sanskrit

term, *Brahman* is *nirguṇa*—that is, beyond all qualities—so that *Brahman* is the transpersonal absolute which surpasses all personalist categories drawn from everyday human contexts. In the end, *Brahman* is the primordial plenitude of Being which gives being to all finite entities and sustains them in their existence. Regarding *Brahman*, one cannot say *what* it is but—*if* one accepts Vedic revelation (*śabda*)—that it *is*.

Following the *Upaniṣads*, Śaṃkara's Advaita offers a similar analysis for the structure of human subjectivity and its relations with the physical world. The fundamental term here is *ātman* which, in the Advaita understanding, is not the psychophysical ego who is writing or reading this essay but is metaphysically nondual (*advaita*) with the ineffable *Brahman*. Thus, the 'I' who writes essays, drinks coffee, and yearns for the companionate presence of a dog is not, strictly speaking, the auto-luminous *ātman* which is beyond all processes marked with mutability. Rather, this mutable 'I' (*jīva*) is *a* finite locus of cognition, volition, and experience which is irradiated with the indivisible *ātman*'s intrinsic radiance. And yet, worldly being that I am, immersed in this dark vale of delusion about my true identity, I continually perform a superimposition (*adhyāsa*) of my sense of egoity onto the *ātman* beyond all spatiotemporal boundaries. Thus, instead of learning to declare, by gradually overcoming my egocentricity (*ahaṃkāra*), 'All humanity is rooted in the one *ātman*', I proclaim grandiloquently: 'It is *I* who own this laptop', 'It is *I* who relish this coffee', and 'It is *I* who wish to be with *my* dog.' In other words, a fundamental error about what there truly is can suffuse my self-aggrandizing modes of being-in-the-world, just as actions performed in a state of ignorance (*avidyā*) can reinforce my misconception about the fine-grain structure of being. In the end, spiritual wisdom (*vidyā*) lies in the liberating realization (*mokṣa*) that we do not have two distinct ontological categories—*ātman* and *Brahman*—for *ātman* and *Brahman* are co-referential terms. Just as the sense of 'the evening star' and the sense of 'the morning star' are distinct, but these two senses intend the same object, namely, the planet Venus, likewise while the sense of *ātman* is the principle of indivisible consciousness and the sense of *Brahman* is the immutable basis of all entities, both these senses point towards the nondual ineffable reality.

14.3 The Dialectic of Being and the Transvaluation of Ethics

Now at first blush, the declaration that the spatiotemporally bounded 'I' is not *a* finite ego, subject to all the ills of *saṃsāra* such as ignorance, suffering, and death, but is metaphysically not-other (*advaita*) than the immutable *Brahman* sounds like an incredible claim. Advaita commentaries themselves highlight the point that this 'intuitive' realization of deep nonduality in the fabric of reality presupposes pedagogic milieus in which an aspirant cultivates certain ethical virtues, analyses

the significance of scriptural texts, meditates on true reality as devoid of all mutability, and so on. In other words, Advaita soteriology is not simply the gnomic utterance 'I *am* Brahman', abruptly pulled out of thin air in the manner of a rabbit from a magician's hat, for it is embedded in crisscrossing circuits of scriptural exegesis, ethical discipline, spiritual experience, and rational argumentation (Forsthoefel 2002). Of these four deeply interrelated moments in Advaita forms of life, it is the last that we are primarily concerned with in this essay. The notion of nonduality and the associated practice of 'dying before death' are put forward in Advaita commentarial literature through three central forms of structured reasoning—SR1, SR2, and SR3. These forms shape the Advaita spiritual exercises of deconstructing the sense of being *an* independent centre of existential gravity which is disjointed from an*other* such centre. In this and the next section, we will explore how SR1, SR2, and SR3 would respond to the types of critiques offered by ADV1, ADV2, and ADV3. In a nutshell, SR1, SR2, and SR3 query some of the basic presuppositions that structure these critiques.

The first—SR1—is shaped by the presupposition that if x does not exist everlastingly, its existence is of a deficient mode and the honorific status of *Brahman* cannot be ascribed to it.

Reality = the *that* which is not subject to any modification whatsoever.
Premise 3: If x undergoes any change, then x is not Reality.
Premise 4: The empirical world undergoes various types of changes.
Conclusion: Therefore, the empirical world is not Reality.
Premise 5: Whatever is not Reality is metaphysically non-existent.
Conclusion: The empirical world is metaphysically non-existent.

The logical motor of several Advaita arguments—the metaphysical equivalence of 'Reality' (the *that*) and 'immutability' (Ramachandran 1969, p. 5)—recurs through various European worldviews such as Eleaticism, Neoplatonism, Christian Platonism, Spinozism, and so on. For Śaṃkara's Advaita, this equivalence is not simply his subjective preference but is drawn from his exegetical readings of various *Upaniṣads* which repeat that *Brahman* is beyond all worldly transformations. The crucial argumentative link is Premise 5 which points to the vital exegetical-conceptual distinction in Śaṃkara's Advaita between the two standpoints of reality—empirical (*vyāvahārika*) and ultimate (*pāramārthika*) (Ram-Prasad 2001). To return to SR1, what is being denied is any *pāramārthika* distinction between chairs and tables, but this denial is concurrent with an affirmation of numerous *vyāvahārika* distinctions between them. Likewise, it is not the case that 'I' am some kind of a hallucination sleepwalking my way through this essay—my 'degree of reality' is greater than that of a logical contradiction such as the proverbial squared circle. Indeed, I am empirically existent and my spatio-temporal distinctions from the physical surroundings too are empirically existent.

However, because the 'I' is not unequivocally immutable, the 'I' is not Reality in its unsurpassable robustness (Śaṃkara 1983, vol. VIII, p. 666), and therefore it is metaphysically non-existent even though it is not sheer nothingness. To put it somewhat bluntly, Advaita is a Kantian-style affirmation *avant la lettre* of the compossibility of 'empirical realism' and 'transcendental idealism'.

One way to understand SR1 is by invoking the famous Leibnitzian question as to why there is something (at all), such as the laptop on which I am writing this essay, rather than (sheer) nothingness. This laptop is not ontologically as 'flimsy' as an elf in a brown hat in a fairy tale—rather, it is a node in a conventional network of worldly transactions relating to writing articles, giving lectures, sending emails, and so on. Now, if we were to ask *why* the laptop has this measure of (qualified) reality and does not disintegrate into utter nullity, this is because it has a support that is *up*holding its existence. This question—and its answer—belong to empirical discourse (*vyāvahārika*) where distinctions between cognizer and cognized are accepted; however, from the ultimate standpoint (*pāramārthika*), the question itself is ill-formed, since we cannot speak of *a* laptop as ontologically distinct from Reality.

While this two-standpoint distinction may seem to be yet another mystifying idiosyncrasy of Śaṃkara's Advaita, everyday parallels to it may be found in some non-Advaita contexts as well. Consider, for instance, Beatrice whose early childhood is centred around receiving shiny gifts from Santa Claus. Through these exchanges with her 'imaginary friend', she develops certain virtues of empathy, kindness, patience, honesty, and goodwill. At the age of six the penny drops and she realizes that Santa Claus is not *metaphysically* real, though Santa Claus remains *empirically* real for millions of other little children. Indeed, if Beatrice were to grow up to have a daughter whom she names Anamika, she might encourage Anamika too to have Santa Claus as her 'pretend friend'. Or if someone prefers analogies with jargon, consider the possibility that little Mary grows up to be a formidable academic philosopher who has written a PhD dissertation defending colour eliminativism—that is, Mary believes that objects do not have colours as intrinsic properties but colours are our human dispositions to have certain types of experiences. Yet, when Mary receives a bouquet of flowers from her lover, she exclaims spontaneously: 'Such lovely colours these flowers have!' The phenomenological density of Mary's experience is not a mere hallucination, even though—in a philosophically guarded moment—Mary would claim that this density does not have a metaphysically real referent.

The indeterminate status—not simply a hallucination and not robustly Real either—not only of colours but of all finite reality is articulated by SR2.

Reality = the *that* which is metaphysically independent of anything extraneous to itself.

Premise 6: If *x* is metaphysically dependent, then *x* is not Reality.

Premise 7: The empirical world is metaphysically dependent on *Brahman*.

Conclusion: The empirical world is not Reality.

As in the case of SR1, SR2 too is an interplay of rational disputation and scriptural exegesis. For instance, Premise 7 is based not on quotidian perceptual experience (*pratyakṣa*) but on exegeses of Vedic revelation (*śabda*), which is why it would be rejected by, among others, Buddhist philosophers. Thus, because the empirical world is metaphysically dependent on *Brahman*, it is existent and is not utter nothingness but, once again, it is not Reality, because, following Śaṃkara's readings of the *Upaniṣads*, only *that* is Real which is metaphysically independent. It is this metaphysical limbo—neither sheer nothingness nor unqualified plenitude—that Śaṃkara's Advaita marks with the term *māyā*. From this perspective, *māyā* is not a 'thing', however subtle, that is somewhere out there (so the expression 'veil of *māyā*' can be misleading)—*māyā* is simply an expression of our inability to comprehend the empirical world with conceptual dichotomies of being and non-being. The empirical world is both being and non-being and neither being nor non-being. In other words, *māyā* is the mystery of being—only the nondual and eternal *ātman-Brahman* is Reality, and yet we inhabit a mutably divisible world populated by discrete entities whose empirical existence cannot be denied. To illuminate this theme, Advaita commentarial texts often employ the allegory of the serpent and the rope. If I am walking along a road in the evening, I may step back in fright when I think that I am about to step on a serpent, although when I switch on the torchlight, I see that what lies ahead is a coiled rope. Just as the evanescent 'serpent' is not a hallucination but is also not the rope, the Advaita claim is that in the vision of the enlightened sage the entire world has a serpent-like shadowy existence and is not Reality. In the twilight of beings, the world *is* and it is *not*—and yet, in the final word, it *is* insofar as it is established in Reality.

In sum, Śaṃkara's Advaita should not be read as denying the 'externality' of the world with variegated differences because these have some measure of empirical gravity, resilience, and stability. Therefore, a stronger objection could be ADV2.

Premise 8: An ethical form of living presupposes a *metaphysically real* distinction between self and others.

Premise 9: In Advaita, there is no *metaphysically real* distinction between self and others.

Conclusion: There is no ethical form of living in Advaita.

As we have seen, Premise 9 is the lifeblood of Śaṃkara's Advaita. Premise 8 is shaped by the claim that there is a logical entailment between a certain form of metaphysics—namely, realism—and ethics. However, the proponents of various

standpoints on contemporary Anglo-American ethical landscapes—utilitarianism, virtue ethics, deontology, and so on—may or may not themselves defend metaphysical realism. With the caveat that 'realism' is a somewhat slippery signifier, it is arguably the case that David Hume, Immanuel Kant, John Stuart Mill, Derek Parfit, and various other philosophers who developed different styles of ethical theories were not full-blooded realists of the type who argue that each individual is an ontically denumerable core that is distinct from other such cores. Closer to home—that is, to Śaṃkara's Advaita—Buddhist philosophers and spiritual practitioners constructed elaborate ethical systems precisely by rejecting the notion of a metaphysical self (ātman) and metaphysical distinctions between individuals. From Mahāyāna Buddhist perspectives, the ethical purification of karmic moments which are causally connected through dependent origination (pratītya-samutpāda) and the cultivation of superabundant compassion (mahākaruṇā) point the way towards the cessation (nirvāṇa) of the world of suffering. The denial of a substantial basis—whether 'soul' or 'God'—to these causal streams has not prevented Buddhists from fostering virtuous dispositions by eliminating the three defilements (kleśa) of hatred, greed, and delusion.

Here is an analogy which highlights the point that there is no direct entailment between ethical living, on the one hand, and the claim that self and others are metaphysically distinct, on the other hand. Consider Nivedita who has recently received initiation from an Advaita guru in Cardiff and Isabella who was raised as a devout Roman Catholic in Limerick. Both work at Heathrow immigrations and every evening they check whether individuals possess the requisite papers to enter the United Kingdom. Nivedita does not see individuals as different from one another in the ultimate analysis but Isabella views each individual as irreducibly distinct and as made in the image of God. From a quotidian standpoint, however, there is sufficient overlapping consensus between their moral sensibilities, so that notwithstanding the crucial differences in their metaphysical perspectives they know how to play the language game of the Border Agency. Indeed, both Nivedita and Isabella have recently received commendations from their line manager for their patience, integrity, kindness, and hospitality in engaging with foreign nationals.

With respect to this analogy, however, a lingering worry relates to the question of the precise object of other-regarding virtues in an Advaita ethical setting—if 'I' and 'you' are conventional idioms that are applicable sub specie temporis but fall away sub specie aeternitatis, towards whom does an inhabitant of an Advaita milieu generate kindness, benevolence, and nonviolence? To a certain extent, this question echoes similar queries that often emerge in Buddhist contexts: 'If "I" and "you" do not pick out metaphysically distinct entities, precisely who cultivates the virtue of compassion and to whom is this compassion extended?' One answer given in texts such as the Bodhicaryāvatāra of Śāntideva (c. 700 CE) is that the practitioner knows that though the 'I' is not metaphysically real, the deluded 'I'

regards itself as an enduring core, and it is to this centre of misconception that the practitioner compassionately teaches the truth of not-self (Crosby and Skilton 2002, p. 162). Formulated in Advaita terms, one response would be that the practitioner knows that the 'I' (*jīva*) who thinks of oneself as *a* metaphysically discrete self is in a state of fundamental misconception (*avidyā*), and it is to this afflicted 'I' that the practitioner compassionately offers the spiritual therapy of nonduality. Each 'I' is a temporary vortex that forms within a cosmic typhoon, and when a particular 'I' realizes that each vortex is substantially not-distinct from the typhoon, this enlightened vortex may communicate the truth to other vortices. For a concrete textual elaboration, we may turn to an important Advaita manual, the *Vedāntasāra* of Sadānanda (*c.* 1500). We read that a pupil who is scorched by the fiery round of rebirths should run, in the manner that an individual whose head is on fire rushes to a lake, to a guru who is learned in the Vedas and established in the ultimate reality. The guru, through supreme compassion (*parama-kṛpayā*), will lead the pupil along the path of wisdom by giving instructions about how to attain the transcendent reality that underlies empirical diversity (Swami Nikhilananda 1949, pp. 18–20). When such a guru compassionately teaches a certain disciple whose name is Devadatta, the guru does not, of course, regard Devadatta as metaphysically distinct. The guru exercises compassion (*kṛpā*) on the psychophysical individual who has the name-and-form 'Devadatta' and who—the guru knows—is metaphysically nondual with the ineffable *Brahman*.

If we were to claim that this account is somehow incomplete unless the guru and Devadatta are invested with a type of metaphysical haecceity, we would return to Premise 8 which, as we have seen, we have good reasons not to accept. One way to affirm that the 'I' (*jīva*) is empirically real but is not a metaphysical monad is to characterize the 'I' as a useful fiction—it is useful *and* it is a fiction. The ethical domain *is* fictive sub specie aeternitatis, but this domain *is* efficacious sub specie temporis for egocentric individuals whose lives do not yet properly enact the truth that the 'I' is, in its spiritual core, boundless. To return to Beatrice, Santa Claus is a useful fiction—useful because through her conversations with Santa Claus she develops certain interpersonal skills which help her in her adolescent life, but also a fiction because she subsequently understands that Santa Claus is part of a fictive universe. Likewise, the guru is a useful fiction as much as Devadatta is a useful fiction—fiction because neither appears in the inventory of being from the *pāramārthika* standpoint but useful because through these mutable names-and-forms in the *vyāvahārika* world, the dispensing of the liberating medicine called *advaita* becomes possible. In the ultimate analysis, all Advaita commentaries themselves are fictions but these fictions are—such is the Advaita claim rooted in Vedic revelation—useful in catalysing an individual's awakening to deep truth (Indich 1980, p. 56). To turn to Hollywood for a moment, in *The Matrix* (1999), after Neo is awakened by his 'guru' Morpheus, Neo is able to work in and through

the 'useful fiction' of a computer simulation to break on through to the other side. In this manner, Devadatta too will someday become recentred in *Brahman* by working through the *Upaniṣads* in the name-and-form of the 'I' which realizes its metaphysical (but not empirical) nullity.

Before proceeding, here is a comment on what is *not* being argued. While there is no conceptual opposition between 'mysticism' and 'morality', the notion of *advaita* in itself may not generate other-regarding virtues, as can be seen by considering Devadatta in two possible universes, U1 and U2.

U1: Devadatta has no metaphysical grounds to distinguish between *his* concerns and the concerns of his *neighbours*. He reads this absence as the reason why he should remain altruistically engaged in helping his neighbours.

U2: Devadatta has no metaphysical grounds to distinguish between *his* concerns and the concerns of his *neighbours*. He reads this absence as the reason why he should remain calmly indifferent to his neighbours.

In other words, the descriptive statement—the 'I' is not metaphysically real—can support either normative conclusion, that is, U1 or U2, because *not* having a reason to be egoistic is not conceptually equivalent to *having* a reason to be altruistic. As we will see in the next section, the Advaita claim that the 'I' is not substantially real does not overdetermine any particular style of living. In the light of Advaita, some individuals—call them gurus—may take pathway U1 and actively assist world-bound people in various ways, while others may follow pathway U2 and try to avoid entanglement in worldly matters.

14.4 Returning Home to Oneself

We have been considering—in ADV1 and ADV2—distinctions between self and others. We turn in ADV3 to the claim that Advaita generates antinomian forms of action. While ADV2 is a remodulated version of ADV1, ADV3 develops a distinct line of argument.

Premise 10: An ethical form of living presupposes distinctions between good and evil.

Premise 11: In Advaita, there are no distinctions between good and evil.

Conclusion: There is no ethical form of living in Advaita.

In the light of our previous discussion with respect to ADV1 and ADV2, we can see that Śaṃkara's Advaita both accepts Premise 11 from the *pāramārthika* standpoint and rejects Premise 11 from a *vyāvahārika* standpoint (Śaṃkara

1983, vol. X, p. 271; Grimes 1991, p. 18). A failure to pay careful attention to this standpoint-shift, which can be seen across vast stretches of Advaita cosmology, exegesis, and spirituality, has generated many of the misrepresentations of Advaita that persist to this day. The Advaita sage is indeed not circumscribed by any worldly prescriptions and prohibitions, and in this sense has transcended the dichotomy of good and evil. However, it is vital not to misread this axiological transcendence as the claim that the Advaita sage, therefore, has the licence to kill (Danto 1972). This is because if Devadatta has transcended good *as well as* evil, it follows that Devadatta has surpassed *evil* too, and thus Devadatta would not commit atrocities. This transcendence is to be properly understood in this way—the discernment of *advaita* spontaneously structures all his actions so that he does not have to constantly read handbooks or guidebooks about how to live. Since Devadatta is learning not to identify the insular 'I' with the indivisible *ātman*, his actions in the world are increasingly becoming infused with a virtuous non-egocentricity, and thus his patience, compassion, and care towards another 'I' are intuitive expressions of his centredness in the heart of reality. Thus, when Devadatta visits Anamika who is convalescing in a hospital, he does not make pronouncements such as 'I am visiting you because it says at footnote 3 on page 45 in the second appendix of the fifth edition of *How To Live* that this is the done thing.' Just as a concert pianist such as Martha Argerich can be said to rise to a transcendence in the midst of playing Beethoven's Second Piano Concerto, not in the sense that the rules relating to unity, harmony, and balance suddenly do not apply to her but in the sense that she *becomes* those rules, Devadatta too transcends the ethical domain not in the sense that he actively pursues unethical courses of action but in the sense that he *becomes* a living expression of the nonduality that structures and suffuses all finite beings. In other words, the declaration: 'beyond good *and evil*' at the *pāramārthika* standpoint should not be read as the invitation: 'therefore, let us have some *more evil*' (Alston 1959, p. 262).

At a *vyāvahārika* standpoint, however, Premise 11 is false, since Śaṃkara's Advaita, and also various sub-commentaries on the master's texts, speak of four interrelated qualities that the disciple who seeks to know the nature of reality needs to possess—firstly, an ability to discriminate between what is eternal and what is not eternal; secondly, dispassion for an 'I'-centred acquisitive enjoyment of the fruits of action; thirdly, perfection of six practices which are control of the mind, control of the sense organs, repose in which one overcomes agitations, patience and forbearance, faith in scripture as taught by the guru, and focused attention; and fourthly, intense desire for liberation. Thus, in the *vyāvahārika* domain, Devadatta gradually generates a meditative stability in the *ātman* by perfecting the six practices, and it is along this soteriological pathway that he begins to discern the golden thread of being that crisscrosses the self and its others whom he had hitherto egoistically regarded as radically separate. From the

perspective of Śaṃkara's Advaita, the correlation between discernment of *advaita* and ethical purification is indicated in one of the earliest *Upaniṣads*, the 'Great Forest' *Upaniṣad* in these terms: by knowing the nature of *Brahman*, an individual is not tainted by evil action (*pāpa*), and by becoming calm, self-controlled, unperturbed, patient, and focused, they see the *ātman* in themselves and they see all things as the *ātman* (4.4.23). To return to Nivedita at Heathrow, when she engages—with patient devotion and focused care—with the distinctive concerns of each and every tourist, she does not view an individual as a metaphysically independent entity. An Advaita practitioner could argue that altruistic engagement in such interpersonal milieus is possible precisely *because* the 'I' is a useful fiction. After reading books on Śaṃkara's Advaita, Nivedita knows that she should not harbour conscious thoughts such as these: 'If *I* help these people, *I* will get the prize for this month's best employee', '*I* will gain 500 extra virtue points this week', and so on. She is gradually able to see the light of *advaita* shine through the living face of each tourist, and she speaks with them in a self-effacing manner by regarding her own 'I' and the 'I' of the tourist as two social personae that are rooted in the indivisible *ātman*. In other words, it is *not* the case that individuals such as Nivedita would see the whole world as some kind of a blooming, buzzing confusion in a mystical blur—rather, it is the all-encompassing vision of nonduality that enables Nivedita to pay careful, fine-grained, and devoted attention to each and every (interrelated) particular in its very particularity.

Consider a possible world in which Nivedita reaches the spiritual summit where she spontaneously sees *ātman-Brahman* illuminating every individual whom she encounters. This is because she has decisively overcome the delusory association of the discrete 'I' with the boundless *ātman*. To use the precise term in Śaṃkara's Advaita, she now embodies the gravitas of *jīvanmukti* (Fort 1998)—liberation in the embodied state which is marked with a name-and-form (here 'Nivedita'). Not all Vedāntic systems accept the possibility that an individual can be liberated in a this-worldly embodiment, arguing that liberation (*mokṣa*) is only possible with the falling away of the psychophysical complex. For Śaṃkara's Advaita, with the arising of *vidyā* the mistaken identification of the 'I' with the *ātman* ceases; however, until the existential momentum of the operative karma (*prārabdha-karma*) that has generated the 'I' becomes exhausted, the *jīvanmukta* (liberated individual) continues to live in the world without accumulating any further karmic merits or demerits. Thus, the *jīvanmukta* inhabits an intriguing existential modality—on the one hand, the *jīvanmukta* seems to feel hunger, thirst, and pain, but, on the other hand, the *jīvanmukta* has transcended all empirical mutability.

One solution to this conundrum is to argue that the *jīvanmukta* does feel pain but does not appropriate this pain by rooting it in the 'I'. So, while I, enmeshed in ignorance, loudly exclaim every morning: 'It is *I* who am hungry and *I* demand *my* food at once', a *jīvanmukta* patiently observes: 'Hunger has arisen in the psychophysical complex (*jīva*) now, and for the satiation of this hunger breakfast may be

ingested now.' That is, the *jīvanmukta* knows that a temporal condition such as hunger cannot touch the primordial *ātman*, and thus learning to discriminate between what is eternal (*nitya*) and what is not eternal (*anitya*) does not super-impose this hunger on the *ātman* but ascribes it to the (empirically real) psycho-physical complex. While the *jīvanmukta* is sometimes written off as a joyless spoilsport who views the world with such clinical detachment, it is vital to keep in mind that the *ātman* in which the *jīvanmukta* always remains centred is not insular but universal. Thus, when a tourist becomes agitated and shouts at Nivedita at Heathrow, Nivedita's response is not: 'It is *I* who am offended and *I* bear resentment to *you*' but 'In this social environment, anger has been expressed by a particular psychophysical complex and this anger demands careful attention.' Because Nivedita discerns the deep *ātman* in everyone and everyone in the deep *ātman*, her psychic orientation to the world is not 'coldly distancing' but 'warmly inviting'. Indeed, one often encounters mythic narratives where the *jīvanmukta* is presented as the individual who bears no enmity towards anyone, and even wild animals joyfully sit down at their feet. For multiple strands of Advaita, the exemplary *jīvanmukta* is Śaṃkara himself who lived in the world as a teacher, and subsequent teachers have sought to compassionately dispense the liberating medicine of *advaita* to a world suffering because of ignorance. According to the *Vivekacuḍāmaṇi*, sometimes attributed to Śaṃkara, the *jīvanmukta* looks every-where with an eye of equality in the world which is full of elements with merits and demerits (433), and maintains an attitude of equanimity through pleasant and painful experiences (434) (Swami Madhavananda 1921, pp. 190–191). After stating that by disassociating the sense of the 'I' from the *ātman* an individual is freed from all worldly bondage, the guru, with the mind immersed in the ocean of being and bliss, goes around purifying the whole world (*pāvayanvasudhāṃ sarvam*) (577) (Swami Madhavananda 1921, p. 250). In other words, while a certain *jīvanmukta* may indeed live as a hermit in the Himalayas, the concept of *jīvanmukti* itself does not entail a sociopathic chilliness to the world. A traditional *jīvanmukta* offers spiritual wisdom and Nivedita, a contemporary western avatar, strives to makes herself a vast abode where all the birds of the sky can find a nest.

A vital aspect of such a *jīvanmukta*'s existential stability within worldly storms is their serene confidence that they have (already) overcome death, because they know that there is, in truth, no death precisely because there is no birth. Here we sketch SR3, which summarizes our discussion in previous sections. SR3 is the conceptual underpinning of the Advaita claim that the art of living *in* the world is deeply interrelated with the art of dying *to* the world.

Premise 12: If *x* is Real, then *x* is not subject to death.
Premise 13: The *ātman* is Real.
Conclusion: The *ātman* is not subject to death.

More concisely: truly speaking, nobody ever dies. Śaṃkara's Advaita is not denying, of course, that there is death in a *vyāvahārika* sense—hundreds of thousands of Advaita practitioners have died and have been cremated. The claim rather is that the *jīvanmukta* does not become de-centred at the prospect of death because death is seen, from the *pāramārthika* standpoint, to be a conditioned process which is empirically real but not Reality.

14.5 Conclusion

To repeat a point noted earlier, this chapter is not an exegetical exercise but a rational reconstruction of certain themes from Śaṃkara's Advaita. Thus, we have not waded into the vast ocean of *inter*-Vedāntic hermeneutic disputes over whether the *Upaniṣads* point to Reality as transpersonal (*nirguṇa*) or as supremely personal (*saguṇa*), whether the postulation of *māyā* as neither-being-nor-nonbeing is logically coherent, whether the presentation of the *jīvanmukta* as socially engaged is consonant with premodern commentaries, and so on. And, of course, we have not engaged with the most magnificent question as to why an individual should accept the Vedas and not, say, the word of the Buddha (*buddhavacana*) as the perfect revelatory guide in spiritual matters.

Within a focused ambit, we have argued—through ADV1, ADV2, and ADV3— that various strands of Śaṃkara's Advaita can be resourced to generate this-worldly and other-regarding virtuous dispositions. Historically speaking, it is indeed the case that Advaita universes have often been associated with eremitic solitude and ascetic rigour; however, as the ongoing modernist reiterations of Advaita indicate, the relation between 'Advaita' and 'world renunciation' (*saṃnyāsa*) is not analytic. In Gandhi and several other figures whose worldviews are inflected with specific dimensions of Śaṃkara's Advaita, we encounter creative variations on an 'ascetic activism' (Howard 2013) in which the effacement of the egocentric individual is undertaken not in the solitude of the Himalayas but in the heat and dust of the plains. Again, while Śaṃkara's Advaita denies the eligibility of women and the Śūdra social class (*varṇa*) to receive the medicine of nonduality, modernist figures such as Swami Vivekananda occasionally do away with such socio-ritual restrictions (*adhikāra-bheda*) precisely because they are valid only at a *vyāvahārika* standpoint. Indeed, one of the first white western women to receive initiation from a Hindu guru was the Irishwoman Margaret Elizabeth Noble (1867–1911), whom the Swami gave the name 'Nivedita' ('the one who is dedicated (to God)').

Along the way, we have also highlighted the point that the common characterization of Advaita in some Anglophone circles as mindless mysticism is based on the failure to appreciate the crucial point that while from the *pāramārthika* standpoint Advaita indeed speaks of the sublation of the 'mind' (*manas*) and

discursive reasoning, the pathway towards this transcendence is structured at multiple *vyāvahārika* standpoints by logical disputations of the style of SR1, SR2, and SR3. In Advaita worlds, dense dialectic, exegetical elaboration, ethical existence, and ecstatic experience are not mutually opposed to one another but are mutually reinforcing. The Advaita vision presents *Brahman* as the unfragmented power of being infusing all our fragmented beings. To end on an allegorical note, it is not that the wave says to the ocean: 'You are mine' but it is the ocean that says to the wave: 'You are mine'.

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A14.1 Reply to Ankur Barua

Bronwyn Finnigan

Ankur Barua discusses Life and the Afterlife from the perspective of Śaṃkara's Advaita Vedānta (ADV). His chapter quickly pivots to the question of whether it is consistent with morality. Barua's reason for this pivot is that ADV does not admit a meaningful distinction between this life and an afterlife because it is a form of monism which denies *all* ontological distinctions. He nevertheless thinks an explanation is needed of how ADV can admit the possibility of other-regarding virtues since it lacks a distinction between self and other, and how it can avoid licensing antinomian behaviour since it lacks a distinction between good or bad actions and outcomes.

There are two main stages to Barua's explanation. Barua first provides an account of how ADV can admit empirical distinctions. He then uses this account to explain how ADV is consistent with morality. In this short reply, I will consider some points of convergence and divergence with Buddhism.

The key to Barua's explanation lies in the claim that ADV assumes a distinction between two different 'standpoints of reality'; an 'empirical reality' (*vyāvahārika*) and an 'ultimate reality' (*pāramārthika*). This terminological distinction was well known and utilized by Buddhist philosophers prior to Śaṃkara. But Buddhists understood and utilized this distinction in different ways. How does Barua understand it and how might it align (or not) with Buddhist views?

Empirical or conventional reality, according to Barua, consists of spatio-temporally discrete entities, such as tables and chairs, that are perceptible by the sense modalities. Ultimate reality is the 'immutable, foundational reality' (Brahman) that 'gives being to all finite entities and sustains them in their existence'. The spiritual virtuoso or liberated individual (*jīvanmukta*) discerns that empirically real entities are metaphysically non-dual from Brahman. In the case of individual selves, the *jīvanmukta* discerns that deep inside themselves is a 'primordial' Self (*ātman*) which is an 'indivisible consciousness' that is shared by everyone and is nondual with Brahman.

Let's first consider the idea of ātman-Brahman. Śaṃkara's claim that they are identical comes from his reading of the Upaniṣads, which he treats as an authoritative expression of spiritual insight. The Buddha denies that these scriptures should be treated as authoritative. On Śaṃkara's reading of the Upaniṣads, Brahman (and thus the *ātman*, Self) has the property of being 'absolutely

unchanging' and 'metaphysically independent of anything else'. The Buddha argues that his own enlightenment does not reveal any such thing. Instead, he claims to have realized that all things are impermanent and originate in dependence on other things. There is thus no Self (*anātman*), so defined. Barua asks why we should accept the Buddha's word on this rather than the Upaniṣads. While the Buddha does present himself as an authoritative guide (offering an eightfold path to the cessation of suffering or attainment of *nirvāṇa*), he also frequently remarks that, at the end of the day, his disciples should discern the truth for themselves by following his path to completion and thereby attaining spiritual insight (e.g. AN 65.5). His position is reinforced by later Buddhist philosophers who deny scriptural authority as a valid source of knowledge and restrict epistemic means to direct perception and inference grounded in perception (Tillemans 2011).

Barua describes the ultimate reality (Brahman) as 'foundational reality'. He claims that it is the 'reason why there are any entities at all' because it 'gives being to all finite entities and sustains them in their existence'. This suggests that there is a dependence relation between conventionally real things and the ultimate Reality which is, itself, 'utterly ineffable, beyond all qualities'. It is unclear how to conceive of this dependence relation or why one might think it necessary. Consider an Abhidharma Buddhist version of the conventional–ultimate distinction. According to this view, ultimate reality consists of causally related psycho-physical elements (e.g. elements of physical matter, of feeling, of thought, of volition, of consciousness) which are differentiated from one another by defining characteristics or inherent natures (*svabhāva*). Conventional reality, by contrast, involves the unified categorization of these particular elements as constituents of whole objects or as instances of general kinds. This unified categorization involves the use of memory, inference, concepts, and socio-linguistic conventions. Conventional reality might nevertheless be said to depend (in part) on the ultimate but only in the sense that the ultimate helps adjudicate true and false accounts of what is conventionally real. On Siderits (2003) analysis, an object (a kitten, say) is conventionally real if it turns out that actions that assume its conventional existence (e.g. stroking its fur) can bring about desired effects in terms that are measurable at the level of ultimate reality (e.g. a purring sound, a pleasurable feeling). It is not clear how an undifferentiated Brahman could similarly adjudicate competing accounts of conventional reality. Some such adjudication seems necessary if Brahman can be said to sustain the existence of conventionally real things but not conventionally false things. Abhidharma also does not assume that the psycho-physical entities that exist at the ultimate level need a further foundational reality to guarantee their existence. They simply exist, if they do, due to or dependent on the causal efficacy of other ultimately existing things.

Not all Buddhists share this view of the conventional-ultimate distinction, however, and so the differences from Barua's ADV are not always so clear. Madhyamaka Buddhists worry, for instance, whether the Abhidharma view is

consistent with the Buddha's claim that all things depend on other things for their existence. Their worry turns on an interpretation of defining characteristics as an essence that both differentiates ultimately real things and explains (accounts for) their existence (Tillemans 2016). Contemporary Buddhist philosophers often infer from Madhyamaka arguments that the so-called ultimate reality of Abhidharma Buddhism is itself a theoretical construct and so also a version of conventional reality (Cowherds 2011). This might be taken to imply, if there is an ultimate reality, it must be non-conceptual, undifferentiated, ineffable, and non-dual. Some Yogācāra Buddhists have been read to affirm just this implication (but not its identity with Brahman, Gold 2015). Mādhyamikas, however, are more often read as denying any ultimate reality (or as holding the paradoxical view that 'the ultimate truth is that there is no ultimate truth', Garfield and Priest 2003). Of course, Mādhyamikas now face the task of justifying and differentiating versions of conventional reality (which they can't do by appeal to causal effects measurable at the level of ultimate reality). They tend to discharge this burden by claiming that conventional reality is thoroughly mistaken and illusory, with emptiness (*śūnyatā*) the spiritual insight that serves as its counterpoint. There are a lot of issues here.

How does this relate to morality? For Barua, reinstating the distinction between self and other in conventional reality is the means to securing the possibility of other-regarding virtues. Why does ADV not entail antinomian behaviour? Because, Barua argues, it is useful to operate according to the normative practices at the conventional level, which distinguish good and evil actions and outcomes, in order to eventually attain the liberating insight of nonduality (*advaita*). But what about the liberated individual (*jīvanmukta*) who has attained this liberating insight? Why are *they* not licensed to engage in antinomian behaviour? Barua suggests that the realization of *ātman* (that we all share the same primordial Self) entails a realization that there are no metaphysical grounds for self-interest rather than other-regarding virtues (since our primordial Self is the same). He initially admits that this could motivate either altruistic behaviour (extended self-interest) or indifference (removal of any interest). But he later suggests that compassionate concern for others is the living expression of nonduality; a concern, it would seem, only expressible at the level of conventional reality.

What story can the Buddhist who denies the *ātman* tell about morality and other-regarding virtues? Buddhists have a lot to say about this (Finnigan 2022). Śāntideva has a similar argument for altruistic concern to the one Barua offers Śaṃkara, but with an additional move. Śāntideva takes the realization that there is no-self to entail a further realization that there are no metaphysical grounds for self-interest rather than concern for others (BCA 8.101–103; see Williams 1998; Cowherds 2015; Finnigan 2018). But Śāntideva also observes that we have self-interested concern in preventing *our own* suffering. He then argues, since there is no self that could own any sufferings, if there is concern to prevent suffering at all,

this concern should extend to all suffering wherever it occurs. Of course, like with Barua's argument, it is just as possible for indifference to follow as altruistic behaviour (Harris 2011). But like Barua, Śāntideva supposes it motivates compassionate concern. This compassionate concern is not directed towards *suffering*, however; we want to prevent suffering, but we arguably have compassionate concern for those who *are* suffering (see Williams 1998). If this is right then, like ADV, there is reason to think that the compassionate concern of Śāntideva's spiritual virtuoso (the *bodhisattva*) would also only be expressible towards 'others' existing at the level of conventional reality.

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A14.2 Reply to Ankur Barua

Olla Solomyak

Barua explores an understanding of the afterlife rooted in the Advaita Vedānta teaching that there are 'no ontological distinctions across reality'. On this monist conception of reality, the afterlife cannot take place in a metaphysically separate realm, and is thus understood by some to be accessible to living persons here and now, via an awakened and liberated state of mind. In particular, Barua takes up an intriguing question: How can there be room for ethical living for an individual who has reached this liberated state, given that the state is one that involves recognition that there are no genuine distinctions across reality? Does morality not require that there be a distinction to be made between *self* and *other*, or between good and evil action?

Barua responds compellingly to three versions of this challenge, distinguishing between two different *standpoints on reality*: an empirical standpoint, and an ultimate or metaphysical standpoint. From an empirical standpoint, there is a distinction to be drawn between self and other, as well as between good and evil, after all: individual selves and other phenomena of the empirical world might be thought of as useful fictions, not fundamentally real but nevertheless not to be disregarded in ordinary thought and deliberation. And morality, Barua argues, only requires that the relevant distinctions can be drawn from this empirical standpoint, not from the ultimate metaphysical one.

The distinction between these two standpoints is a deeply helpful one, not only for addressing the particular challenges that Barua engages with, but also for clarifying the Advaita worldview more generally speaking. Two questions arise in connection with this distinction, one more general and another relating to Barua's rejection of the claim that the liberated life necessarily comes with a form of antinomianism.

First, one might wonder how exactly the relationship between the two standpoints is to be construed. The empirical world of separately existing persons and material objects is, on the one hand, not ultimately real, and on the other hand, not merely a hallucination. Barua calls this an 'indeterminate status' between reality and unreality, where the empirical world is 'metaphysically dependent' on the ultimate non-dual Reality. How should this kind of metaphysical dependence be understood? In particular, what makes it the case that there is, *in any sense*, such a dependent empirical reality at all?

On this point, Barua explains that 'if we were to ask *why* [an object such as] the laptop has this measure of (qualified) reality and does not disintegrate into utter nullity, this is because it has a support that is *up*holding its existence. This question—and its answer—belong to empirical discourse (*vyāvahārika*) where distinctions between cognizer and cognized are accepted; however, from the ultimate standpoint (*pāramārthika*), the question itself is ill-formed, since we cannot speak of *a* laptop as ontologically distinct from Reality' (p. 312).

This is helpful, but a question remains regarding the relationship between the *whole* of empirical reality and *Brahman*, the fundamental Reality. In one sense, these are one—there is nothing metaphysically *real* over and above *Brahman*. But in another (empirical) sense, there is an empirical world or standpoint, that is different from the ultimate standpoint of Reality. *In virtue of what is there such a standpoint to be inhabited?* What makes it the case that there is, in any sense at all, an empirical world?

Perhaps the language of (metaphysical) *ground* could be helpful for making the question more precise, and ultimately illuminating the issue. If the empirical world is fully *grounded* in *Brahman*—in that it exists (to the extent and in the sense that it does) fully *in virtue of*, and as nothing over and above, *Brahman*, the question which remains is as follows: What *grounds this fact* about the relationship between the empirical world and *Brahman*? What makes it the case that there is such a grounding relationship—i.e. that there is 'something' metaphysically dependent 'in addition' to Brahman, and not nothing further at all? Of course, the Advaita view proclaims that there *really isn't* anything further at all; Yet, *in some sense*, there is, at least, a further standpoint to be adopted—what makes this the case? From the ultimate standpoint, the question may be ill-formed, but intuitively, there is a question that remains here—a question that is not empirical but metaphysical, about the metaphysical *relationship* between empirical and metaphysical reality.

A second question arises in connection with the relationship between the liberated state of the master who attains the afterlife in the here and now and the distinction between good and evil. Barua argues that one who attains this liberated state has, in some sense, transcended both good *and* evil—the distinction between them not being ultimately real. At the same time, Barua explains that one who reaches this transcendent state 'would not commit atrocities' (because he has 'surpassed *evil*'), and that 'his actions in the world are increasingly becoming infused with a virtuous non-egocentricity, and thus his patience, compassion, and care towards another "I" are intuitive expressions of his centerdness in the heart of reality' (p. 317). There seems to be a tension here: on the one hand, the master is to have transcended both good and evil; on the other hand, his or her actions definitively tend towards the *good* (or are, at least, neutral). What is the connection between the liberated state and *goodness* (or *virtue*), such that the 'intuitive centerdness in the heart of reality' expresses itself naturally in good, rather than evil, actions?

There seem to be two directions available for response here. On the one hand, one might consider the possibility that goodness is somehow 'built-in' to the nature of non-dual Reality, and thus to the liberated state. But then the state is not one that truly *transcends* the distinction between good and evil after all; rather, it is a state in which there is simply no *room* for evil, for a reason which would need to be further elucidated. On the other hand, one might attempt to explain what it is that makes the actions of the liberated individual appear 'good' despite her having genuinely transcended *both* good and evil. Is it that they are not motivated externally by the *attempt* to do good rather than evil? Or is it that awareness of non-duality rids one of the selfish motivations that in fact lead to evil action?

Both of these possibilities seem to rely on substantive assumptions about the nature of good and evil. Is doing good spontaneously and from an intuitively-based non-egocentricity not nevertheless good? Or is all evil, by definition, selfishly motivated? More fundamentally, these avenues of response further bring out the question that is at the heart of the issue here: What is the source of the *asymmetry* between good and evil that appears to be essential to the defence of the liberated state as being naturally, or even possibly, a moral one? Is the asymmetry to be found at the level of ultimate Reality, or only on the level of the empirical world? In either case, what is its source?

Barua speaks of the 'correlation between discernment of *advaita* and ethical purification' (p. 318): each naturally leads to the other. This serves to further bring out the asymmetry between good and evil that is implicit in the view. The liberated state does not, after all, seem to be truly *neutral* with respect to the distinction between good and evil; While, as Barua explains, one might choose to disengage from the world rather than acting in what we would consider to be positive ways, acting in ways we would deem evil is not an option—what makes this the case?

This issue ultimately brings us back to the first, more general question about the relationship between the two different standpoints on reality. How, and in what sense, is it specifically *goodness* that arises on the empirical plane (via the actions of the liberated individual) if there is no distinction between good and evil to be drawn from the standpoint of ultimate Reality? This question is a specific form of the more general question raised above: How, and in what sense, does *anything* in particular arise on the empirical plane? Perhaps an exploration of the ways in which the relationship between the two standpoints might be understood could also shed light on the asymmetry between good and evil that seems to be built-in to the notion of a liberated yet *moral* life.

15
The World to Come
A Perspective

Olla Solomyak

15.1 Introduction

Jewish thinkers have held two opposing conceptions of life after death, or what is known in the Jewish tradition as the *World-to-Come* (*Olam Haba*). On the 'intellectualist' conception maintained primarily by Maimonides and Gersonides, the World-to-Come is an immaterial realm that exists in the present, which one enters upon death as a 'pure intellect' in virtue of the knowledge acquired throughout one's life. On the alternative 'supernaturalist' conception defended by Nachmanides, Crescas, and others, the World-to-Come is the future post-Messianic reality of our own physical world, which one enters by being resurrected in a physical body when this time arrives.

At the heart of the debate between these two camps are two fundamental and inter-dependent questions: First, what is the fundamental nature of the *self*, such that this self could survive death and come to exist in the World-to-Come? Second, what is the metaphysical nature of the World-to-Come, such that one could transition from life in this (current) world to life in that alternative realm? In what follows, we'll see that each view faces challenges in answering these questions in a way that makes clear how it is that we can come to exist in the World-to-Come *as ourselves*. As Crescas and others have argued, the intellectualist faces a challenge in explaining how it is *we* who come to exist in the World-to-Come—it is not clear that the pure intellect that survives death on this view is tied to us in the right way to constitute survival of one's *self*. The supernaturalist, on the other hand, struggles to provide an explanation of *how* it is that we come to exist in the World-to-Come as ourselves. The appeal to supernatural Divine intervention takes the place of explanation at junctures in the view where an explanation appears to be unavailable.

After presenting the central commitments of each view and briefly sketching the philosophical challenges they face, I will propose an alternative direction for thinking about these issues that is grounded in and inspired by Hasidic Jewish thought. I will suggest that the Hasidic tradition can be interpreted so as to offer an alternative conception of the World-to-Come—one that integrates certain core

aspects of the two familiar views into a unified metaphysical picture, and may have the resources to resolve the difficulties they face at the same time.

15.2 The World-to-Come: Two Approaches

The intellectualist and supernaturalist approaches to the World-to-Come can be seen as providing distinct sets of answers to four central questions: *When*, *Where*, *How,* and *In Virtue of What.* Attention to each view's answers to these four questions can help elucidate each view as it stands on its own, as well as clarify key points of difference between them. The four questions, then, can be spelled out as follows:

When: When does the Word-to-Come exist and when does one (come to) inhabit it?

Where: Where does the World-to-Come exist and where does one (come to) inhabit it?

How: How does one (come to) inhabit the World-to-Come?

In Virtue of What (IVOW): In virtue of what does one (come to) inhabit the World-to-Come?

On the intellectualist conception, the World-to-Come is an immaterial realm that exists *now*, in some sense alongside the physical world. A person comes to inhabit it immediately after death, as her intellect is severed from her physical body. This intellect (or intellectual soul), holds the knowledge that one has acquired throughout one's life, and it is *in virtue of* this knowledge that she comes to inhabit the World-to-Come. This survival is simply a natural consequence of having acquired knowledge of eternal abstract truths—cognition of these truths is taken to be an immaterial aspect of a person that is eternal by nature, just as the content it grasps. Untethered to a physical body, the intellect continues to enjoy this grasp in an unencumbered state in the eternal realm of the World-to-Come.[1]

The intellectualist's answers to the four questions we've spelled out can thus be summarized as follows:

When: The World-to-Come exists *now*, and one comes to inhabit it immediately upon death.

Where: The World-to-Come is not (in) this physical world; rather it is metaphysically *elsewhere*—an immaterial realm distinct from the physical world we inhabit.

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[1] Defenders of (some form of) intellectualism include Maimonides, Gersonides, and Joseph Albo.

How & IVOW: One comes to inhabit the World-to-Come by virtue of the knowledge one has acquired, via the eternal existence of this very cognitive attainment.

The alternative to the intellectualist view is the supernaturalist conception, which differs from the intellectualist view on all four points above. On the supernaturalist view, the World-to-Come is *this very world*, after the final redemption and resurrection. One comes to inhabit it by supernatural Divine intervention, and in virtue of the Divine service and devotion achieved in this lifetime. Given that the World-to-Come does not yet exist, one does not come to inhabit it immediately after death. Rather, there is an additional realm one enters upon death where one's soul awaits the final redemption, at which point the whole person (soul and body) is resurrected and thereby comes to exist in the redeemed physical world of the future—the supernaturalist's World-to-Come.[2]

The supernaturalist's answers to our four questions can thus be summarized as follows:

When: The World-to-Come exists *not now, but later*, after the final redemption and resurrection.

Where: The World-to-Come exists in (or is constituted by) *this very physical world*.

How & IVOW: One comes to inhabit the World-to-Come via supernatural Divine intervention, and in virtue of the Divine service and devotion achieved in this world.

The two views can thus be seen as standing on opposite poles on a number of points: For the intellectualist, the World-to-Come exists *now* but not *here*, while for the supernaturalist, it exists *here* but not *now*. For the intellectualist, we come to inhabit the World-to-Come due to, and purely in virtue of, the *nature* of the soul and its cognitive attainments, while for the supernaturalist, we come to inhabit the World-to-Come due to a supernaturally based relationship to the Divine.[3]

15.3 Some Difficulties

At the heart of the debate between these two views are two fundamental and inter-dependent questions: First, what is the fundamental nature of the *self*, such that

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[2] Defenders of (some form of) supernaturalism include Nachmanides, Meir Abulafia, and Crescas.
[3] See Segal 2017 for a more comprehensive presentation and comparison, as well as Goldschmidt and Segal 2017 for a more general overview of Jewish conceptions of an afterlife.

this self could survive death and come to exist in the World-to-Come? Second, what is the metaphysical nature of the World-to-Come, such that one could transition from life in this (current) world to life in that alternative realm?

These two questions can be reformulated as inter-dependent *requirements* that a comprehensible view of the World-to-Come should be able to meet: On the one hand, it must conceive of personal identity and the self in such a way that would allow for a person to survive death and come to exist in the World-to-Come. At the same time, it must conceive of the metaphysics of the World-to-Come in such a way that is compatible with this possibility—i.e. such that *we* could come to exist *there*. Together, a view's underlying commitments on these two points should provide ground for an explanation of *how it is that we can come to exist in the World-to-Come as ourselves.*

Both views I've presented face familiar challenges, which can be framed as difficulties in addressing this last question. Specifically, each view is challenged by a different *side* of the requirement that it be *one's own self* that can come to exist *in the World-to-Come*: The intellectualist faces difficulties in explaining how it is *we* who come to exist there; while the supernaturalist is challenged to fully explain how it is that we can come to exist *there*, in the supernaturalist's World-to-Come.

Starting with the intellectualist view, we can ask whether the kind of survival the intellectualist's World-to-Come promises truly constitutes survival of *one's own self*—a kind of survival which we could value and look forward to in a first-personal way. As Crescas and others have argued, it's not clear that the self which survives death and comes to exist in the intellectualist's World-to-Come is a self we can identify as our own. More than this, it is not obviously identifiable as a *self* at all.[4]

On a common way of formulating the view, it is the intellectual *soul* which survives death by virtue of its cognitive attainments. This suggests that what survives is both the *knowledge* one has attained as well as a *consciousness* of that knowledge—a kind of self that is the bearer of one's intellectual attainments. But closer attention to the Maimonidean understanding of the intellectual soul suggests that it is nothing over and above the *content* of one's knowledge; i.e. the grasped facts *themselves*, which survive by nature of their eternal existence. The abstract truths one knows are themselves eternal, and thus continue to exist irrespective of a person's conscious grasp. This, at least on one understanding of the view, is what survival of the intellectual soul consists in.[5]

On this understanding, the kind of survival promised by the intellectualist is a far cry from the kind of survival we could, in a first-personal way, *look forward to*: it is not an individual conscious subject who survives, but only the abstract truths she has succeeded to grasp. But even on the initial, more intuitive interpretation of

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[4] See Crescas 1990 and e.g. Nadler 2001 on both points.   [5] See Nadler 2001.

the view—on which what survives is the *conscious grasp* of the knowledge one has attained in addition to its content—it's not obvious that this is a kind of self we can truly identify with. Eternal contemplation of abstract truths is deeply different from the kind of consciousness we currently enjoy. Even if we can identify this conscious grasp as our own, or as the activity of one of our parts, its survival is not obviously sufficient for continued personal identity; what persists on this view seems to be something *of* or *in* us rather than our *selves*.[6]

The supernaturalist, on the other hand, offers a much 'fuller' existence in the World-to-Come: as in this world, existence in the World-to-Come is of an *embodied soul*. The soul survives death while the body is resurrected, the two coming back together for embodied existence in the World-to-Come.

The underlying view of personal identity here seems, at first glance, much more ordinary than on the intellectualist's view above. The identity of the person who comes to exist in the World-to-Come as *our own* is secured by the fact that it is the very same combination of body and soul which comes to exist there. More generally, *however* we understand our current existence, our existence in the World-to-Come is supposed to be *of the very same kind*. We simply come to exist at a later time in history, as exactly the kind of beings we are now. So on this conception of what existence in the World-to-Come consists in, it's not difficult to identify it as an existence *we ourselves* could enjoy. But difficulties arise on another front: namely, in considering the question of *how it is* that we could in fact come to exist there.

In considering the *transition* we are supposed to undergo in coming to exist in the World-to-Come after a completed life in the current world, a crucial question arises. What is the criterion of bodily-identity that allows the resurrected body to be the very same body one has before death? On the one hand, the supernaturalist takes existence in the World-to-Come to be essentially *embodied*, and as we've just seen, it is the prospect of existing in the very *same* body that allows us to conceive of existence in the future post-Messianic period as *our own*. But it's not obvious what could make the resurrected body identical to the body one has in the current world, given the intervening death and decay. Neither sameness-of-matter nor physical continuity appear to be viable options for conceiving of sameness-of-body here: sameness-of-matter is not necessary or sufficient for persistence of the body even in our current lives, and there is an obvious break in physical continuity between death and resurrection.

A wide range of options have been considered in the attempt to make sense of personal identity in the context of resurrection, including views on which identity doesn't require that one be resurrected in the same body,[7] as well as views that attempt to re-think the persistence conditions of bodies in various ways, or to explain resurrection in terms of sameness-of-matter or variants of physical

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[6] See Segal 2017 for an argument along these lines.   [7] See e.g. Baker 2007.

continuity after all.[8] But these views face challenges, and the lengths to which some go in attempting to provide a coherent metaphysics of resurrection illustrate that the task of explaining resurrection in a way that preserves personal identity is far from straightforward.[9] It appears that if we are to stick to a familiar understanding of personal identity which allows us to easily conceptualize what it would *mean* to exist in the supernaturalist's World-to-Come, it becomes far from obvious how it is possible for us to actually come to exist there.[10]

The supernaturalist will surely appeal to Divine intervention in explaining how resurrection is to occur. But the appeal to Divine intervention can only serve as an explanation of how something that is *physically* impossible or improbable can nevertheless come to be; it cannot suffice as a way out of what appears to be a *conceptual* or *metaphysical* impossibility. The question of how it is that we can come to exist in the supernaturalist's World-to-Come is, at least to come extent, a conceptual one: In what sense can we exist *there*, given the ordinary conception of personal identity that allows us to recognize life in that future world as possible to begin with? There is a conceptual gap in the explanation here, not just a physical impossibility.

The supernaturalist can of course fill in the details of the model in various ways, and my purpose here is not to argue conclusively against this or the intellectualist view. Rather, it is to sketch familiar challenges, and to point out that it's from two different *sides* that difficulties for the two views arise. Unlike the intellectualist, the supernaturalist faces a challenge in fully explaining *how it is* that we can come to exist in the World-to-Come. Given the more familiar understanding of selfhood and personal identity the view seems to presuppose, how are we to come to exist *there*, in the future post-Messianic physical world, if we do not survive in the ordinary physical sense? Resurrection is mysterious not only physically, but also conceptually and metaphysically, and the supernaturalist's appeal to Divine intervention does not suffice as an *explanation* of how it is to be understood.

These challenges may not be insurmountable, or may be seen as simply bringing out the potentially unintuitive commitments of each view. Nevertheless, in what follows, I'd like to explore an alternative: a view of the World-to-Come inspired by Hasidic Jewish thought.

15.4 A Hasidic Alternative

Here I propose an alternative direction for thinking about the nature of the World-to-Come that is grounded in and inspired by Hasidic Jewish sources.

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[8] See e.g. van Inwagen 1978 and Zimmerman 1999, as well as Zimmerman 2012 for an overview of various approaches.

[9] As in e.g. van Inwagen 1978, who suggests that God collects a person's corpse for safekeeping, replacing it on earth with a simulacrum.

[10] See Johnston 2010 for an argument along these lines.

I will suggest that the Hasidic tradition can be interpreted so as to offer an alternative conception of the World-to-Come—one that integrates certain key aspects of the two views presented above into a unified metaphysical picture, and has the resources to resolve some of the difficulties they face at the same time.

The central claim of the alternative proposal is as follows: Existence in the World-to-Come is constituted by the attainment of a distinct *perspective* on this very world; the World-to-Come does not (in an important sense) come *after* this-worldly existence, and it is not metaphysically 'elsewhere'. Rather, it is an atemporal perspective on this very reality—a world that is *already here*, from a perspective we have yet to attain. In what follows, I sketch how this proposal might be developed and consider how it might address the challenges raised above.

15.4.1 Hasidic Metaphysics

To present the alternative proposal in more detail, we'll first need to gain a basic understanding of some central principles of Hasidic metaphysics.

The first central tenet of Hasidic metaphysics that will be essential to the picture I go on to develop is that *fundamentally speaking, there is only God*. Everything else exists, in some important sense, *non-fundamentally*.[11] There are number of different ways in which one might understand this idea. Samuel Lebens has suggested understanding the position as a kind of *idealism*, on which we are fictional characters, or figments of God's imagination.[12] An alternative possibility is to think of everything (other than God) as simply *grounded* in God's will, unity, or existence. There are various ways in which such a grounding-based picture could be understood (some of which might entail or be equivalent to versions of idealism), and I won't try to map out or choose between them here.[13]

For our purposes, I'll speak in terms of *perspectives*—which I understand to be ways of seeing or identifying *reality as a whole*.[14] On the Hasidic picture, the *fundamental* perspective is a perspective from which everything is unified, and there is only (a single, unified) God. Everything 'else' is an expression or manifestation of God's unity—not a separately existing state of affairs.

Importantly for our purposes, this includes space and time. That is, space and time are not fundamentally real on the Hasidic metaphysical picture; they, like the

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[11] See e.g. Rabbi Shneur Zalman Borukhovich of Liadi (1745–1812) (2008, Pt1, Chs 20–21).

[12] See Lebens 2015, 2019, and Goldschmidt and Lebens 2020.

[13] The view can also be compared to those of Spinoza, Schopenhauer, and other monist mystical traditions, though the Hasidic picture differs from these in important ways, e.g., in its emphasis on the possibility of a personal relationship with the Divine.

[14] See Solomyak 2020, ms, where I develop a meta-metaphysical framework for thinking about the relevant notion of a perspective.

rest of the physical world are grounded in (or expressions of) a fundamentally atemporal and non-spatial *completely unified* reality. It is only from a *non-fundamental* perspective that we see ourselves as individual spatio-temporal beings, separate from others and the rest of the world. We might call this the *common-sense*, or *physical-worldly* perspective, from which there are in fact separately existing physical entities extended in space and persisting through time. But from a (more) *fundamental* perspective, the physical world of our everyday experience—including space, time, and our own selves—is seen as grounded in a non-spatial and atemporal reality.[15]

With this brief sketch of the Hasidic metaphysical picture in the background, we can now begin to present an associated alternative conception of the World-to-Come.

15.4.2 The World-to-Come as a Perspective

Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav describes the World-to-Come as the World that *is coming*—a realm that is not metaphysically later or elsewhere, but exists *in some sense*, here and now.[16] Rabbi Tzvi Elimelech Spira of Dinov identifies the World-to-Come as being a 'hidden world' as opposed to the 'revealed world' which we currently inhabit.[17] Rabbi Tzadok Hakohen Rabinowitz of Lublin speaks of the World-to-Come as being a realm that is hidden as well as 'above time'.[18] Rabbi Nachman,[19] Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter[20] and other Hasidic thinkers also describe the World-to-Come as being 'above time', or as having 'no time', and Rabbi Nachman, among others, describes it as a world that will, in the future, be revealed.[21]

In addition, these and other Hasidic sources describe particular times in a person's this-worldly life at which the World-to-Come, and in particular its quality of being 'above time', is in some sense accessed or revealed. These include Shabbat (the weekly Sabbath), which Hasidic sources explicitly describe as being 'like (or an aspect of) the World-to-Come' (*me-ein Olam Haba*);[22] Yom Kippur, which is described as being 'above time';[23] as well as any day on which a person does *teshuva*—repentance, or more literally, *return* to one's source and real purpose in the world.[24]

How might these ideas be understood? In what sense might the World-to-Come be, on the one hand, currently hidden but 'on its way' to being revealed,

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[15] See, e.g., Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav (1772–1810) (*Likutei Moharan* (LM), 1993) and Rabbi Y.A. L. Alter (1847–1905) (*Sfat Emet* 2011).
[16] LM 54.   [17] Spira (1783–1841) (*Bnei Yissaschar* 2017).
[18] Rabinowitz (1823–1900) 2003.   [19] LM II 7;61.   [20] Alter (*Sfat Emet*) 2011.
[21] LM 4;51.   [22] See e.g. Alter 2011 and Spira 2017.
[23] See e.g. Spira 2017 and R. Nachman 1993.   [24] E.g., as in LM 79.

above or beyond time, and nevertheless at some points (and in some sense) *accessible* during one's existence in the world we currently inhabit? Neither the intellectualist's nor the supernaturalist's World-to-Come seems to fully fit these descriptions: the supernaturalist's World-to-Come does not exist yet, while on the intellectualist view, it's not obvious why the World-to-Come should be seen as 'hidden', or on its way to being revealed. Further, on neither view is it obvious why or how the World-to-Come would be in some way accessible at the particular times mentioned above.

No doubt, a range of interpretations is possible, and my work here is not ultimately meant to be exegetical. Nevertheless, I think there is an alternative conception of the World-to-Come that can be seen as arising from—or at the very least, inspired by—these and other Hasidic sources on the backdrop of the more general metaphysical picture I sketched above. The proposal is thus meant to be a possible way in which a Hasidic metaphysics of the World-to-Come might be understood.

The proposal, then, is as follows: The Hasidic thinker's World-to-Come is to be understood as a particular kind of *perspective on this very world,* different, and not (fully) accessible, from our ordinary physical-worldly perspective, but nevertheless not a metaphysically separate realm from the reality we currently inhabit.

As we've seen, the Hasidic metaphysical picture takes the ordinary perspective on the physical world—from which there are multiple distinct physical objects, existing in space and persisting through time—to be a *non-fundamental perspective on reality*. From a more fundamental perspective this multitude of physical objects is seen to be a mere expression of a deeper, and much more unified reality.

It may be, then, that in dying and 'coming to inhabit the World-to-Come', one accesses—or is able to adopt—a perspective that is (at least) *closer* to the fundamental perspective, and from which one sees one's previous physical-worldly perspective as having been non-fundamental (and perhaps, in some sense, illusory). The crux of the proposal, then, is that coming to exist in the World-to-Come is *constituted* by the attainment of this more unified perspective on reality. The World-to-Come *itself* is thus not a 'place', or a metaphysically separate realm, but a different kind of consciousness of, or relationship to, this very world. The self that comes to inhabit the World-to-Come is of the very same kind we currently—*fundamentally*—are, and it comes to inhabit that world by attaining or adopting the perspective in question.

The World-to-Come is thus understood as being 'hidden', 'above time', and nevertheless *on its way to* being, and sometimes in fact partially, revealed: It is a more fundamental perspective on this very world, which we can gain partial access to simply by shifting our perspective. Shabbat, Yom Kippur, and moments of repentance are times which invite this kind of shift in perspective. When one 'steps back' from ordinary life concerns and the rush of everyday life, it is possible to see one's existence—even in this 'current world'—in a different light.

Much remains to be explained here, but we can now say something about how what I'll call the Perspective View of the World-to-Come answers the four questions we started out with: When, Where, How, and In Virtue of What:

When: Not later or *at* a time at all, but (from) an *atemporal* perspective on this very world.

Where: Not elsewhere, but (from) a *non-spatial* perspective on this very world.

How and IVOW: By, and in virtue of, attaining an atemporal and non-spatial—more fundamental, and more unified—perspective on reality.

15.4.3 Survival on the Perspective View

As we did for the other two views, we can now ask about the underlying conception of personal identity and the self that would allow us to survive death and come to exist in the World-to-Come on this view: What does it mean to *survive* here, and how is the self that comes to exist in the World-to-Come to be seen as one's very own?

To answer this question, we'll need to return to the background Hasidic metaphysical picture on which the view arises. On this picture, the self is not seen as fundamentally spatio-temporal or separate from the rest of reality; rather, it is seen as a particular expression of Divine unity, not ultimately separate from other such expressions that manifest themselves as the 'rest of the world'.

Further, all that separates us from the awareness of this reality—an awareness which would, on the perspective view, *constitute* existence in the World-to-Come—is our current adoption of the physical-worldly perspective instead of the more unified perspective of the World-to-Come. So all that is required, metaphysically speaking, to come to inhabit the World-to-Come is a *shift in perspective*, which is a *kind* of change we are already familiar with from our ordinary lives.

Of course, this particular shift in perspective may not be a simple thing to envision, but shifts in perspective are *in general* the kind of thing we assume persons can survive: we often come to see ourselves, our lives, or the world in a new light. Further, even *radical* change in perspective appears to be possible—people sometimes change their conception of reality in very significant ways. Change in perspective is thus a familiar *kind* of change which we typically assume that subjects can undergo, even if the *content* of these changes is sometimes radical and their results are difficult to identify with before they occur. Especially if one changes one's perspective on *one's own life and nature*, we can imagine that while the resulting perspective may be difficult to identify with before the change has

occurred, after the fact, the case is one in which one can be said to now see *one's very own self* in a new light.[25]

While further questions remain, we can now see the *tools* which the perspective view has at its disposal to explain how it is that we can come to exist in the World-to-Come as ourselves: the familiar notion of a shift in perspective on the one hand, and the assumption that the perspective of the World-to-Come is a more fundamentally accurate perspective on the very world we currently inhabit on the other. The idea, very roughly, is that if *all* it takes to come to exist in the World-to-Come is a change in perspective, through which we come to see our lives and our own selves for what they truly are (and were to begin with), a kind of survival is secured: At least in some sense, we cannot fail to survive a change which is constituted by seeing ourselves for what we really are.

The perspective view thus has resources to explain how it is *we* who come to exist in the World-to-Come, and at the same time, needn't appeal to supernatural Divine intervention to explain the process by which this is to occur. That is, unlike the supernaturalist view, the perspective view can take our coming to exist in the World-to-Come to be a 'natural consequence' of our fundamental nature. The perspective view might thus be seen as incorporating some of the central benefits of each of the two classic views: like the intellectualist, it can explain *how* we come to exist in the World-to-Come given the nature that it and we are taken to have; and like the supernaturalist, it allows that the self that comes to exist in the World-to-Come is ultimately of the very same kind as we are now.

A number of concerns might arise here. First, one might worry that the difficulties raised earlier for the intellectualist view apply here as well: If coming to exist in the World-to-Come involves coming to see ourselves as not having the kind of separate existence we assumed we had, can this truly be considered *individual survival*? And even if sense can be made of the notion of *individual* survival here, is the surviving self one we can truly *identify* with? Second, one might wonder about the link between physical death and the adoption of a more fundamental perspective—how is death supposed to bring about the relevant shift?

To address these concerns, it will be helpful to briefly set them aside, and first note another benefit the perspective view may be able to offer. The perspective view has the resources to address another critique that is often brought against the intellectualist view: namely, that the latter fails to acknowledge the role of virtuous action and Divine service in one's attainment of life in the World-to-Come. The Maimonidean view maintains that these activities ultimately bring one to better intellectual understanding, but many take this to be a departure from the depiction of the World of Come in classic Jewish texts: Jewish sources explicitly describe

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[25] See L.A. Paul 2014 on radical shifts in perspective and their connection to personal identity.

attainment of the World-to-Come as being the result of Divine service and devotion to commandments, at least in addition to intellectual understanding.[26]

On the perspective view, Divine service might be more naturally incorporated into the picture of how one comes to exist in the World-to-Come. Shifts in perspective often come about as results of *actions*, not just of new understanding. Divine service and intellectual understanding might thus both contribute to one's attaining something closer to the fundamental perspective even in this world, or at least to making that perspective more readily accessible. The more one can access and identify with the perspective of the World-to-Come during one's this-worldly existence, the more one can identify the future perspective of the World-to-Come as potentially *one's own*.

This piece of the puzzle can begin to address the concerns raised above. The perspective view can allow that, in some sense, the extent to which we are able to *identify* with the future perspective of the World-to-Come is precisely the extent to which we survive; One survives not only by attaining the perspective in question, but also by virtue of the fact that one can currently—at least to some extent—identify it as perspective that she herself could attain.[27] This may depend both on one's conception of one's true nature and relationship to the Divine, and on actions which serve to help make the perspective in question more accessible.

This leaves the question of how *individual* survival is possible here unaddressed. The difficulty is one faced by many mystical traditions, and addressing it properly would take us far beyond the scope of this chapter. Nevertheless, it's crucial to note that Jewish sources take it to be essential that survival in the World-to-Come is the survival of an *individual self*, and not a dissolution of the self into an undifferentiated whole.[28] To accommodate this requirement, one might allow that the perspective of the World-to-Come is not the *most* (or absolutely) fundamental perspective—rather it is a *more* fundamental perspective than that of the physical world. While from an absolutely fundamental perspective, there is only God, there is a perspective from which there are various and particular *expressions* of Divine unity, and it is only from such a perspective that an individual self can survive.[29]

Survival, then, can be considered from multiple different perspectives here, which can also help us say something about the relationship between physical

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[26] See Crescas 1990, as well as Segal 2017.

[27] See Johnston 2010 and Zimmerman 2012 for views on which one's attitudes or ways of identifying oneself can determine whether or not one survives; though on the perspective view, it is only from our *current non-fundamental* perspective that one's survival can be said to depend on the current accessibility of the perspective of the World-to-Come. From the latter perspective, one sees oneself as having 'survived' in any case, and simply as having (always had) a radically different nature.

[28] See e.g. Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (1707–1746) 2009, and R. Nachman in LM 51.

[29] On certain understandings of the Hasidic picture, these two perspectives are ultimately to be revealed as (paradoxically) one and the same (see e.g. LM 51, and Luzzatto 2009 for the kabbalistic roots of this idea). While attempting to understand this claim is beyond our scope here, we can imagine how it might offer another route for making sense of individual survival.

death and attainment of the World-to-Come. It is only from our current temporal (and non-fundamental) perspective that attainment of the World-to-Come is seen as something that happens at some *particular future time*. But from the atemporal perspective of the World-to-Come, death is simply the release of the perception of oneself as a separate spatio-temporal entity. What's 'left behind' after this perception is released is all that was *really* there all along: A deeper awareness of oneself as a mere expression of Divine unity.

No doubt, this leaves a web of questions unaddressed; A full exposition of the view is far beyond our scope here. Nevertheless, we can now see the outline of a Hasidic alternative to the intellectualist and supernaturalist conceptions of the World-to-Come, together with the unique resources such a view may appeal to in addressing a range of familiar challenges. The possibility of seeing the World-to-Come as a *perspective* to be adopted, rather than as a distinct metaphysical realm, opens the door to a radical re-conception of the relationship between life in our current world and existence in the World-to-Come.

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A15.1 Reply to Olla Solomyak

Ankur Barua

Olla Solomyak sketches a sophisticated response to some philosophical puzzles relating to the nature of the afterlife, by way of engaging with two competing Jewish understandings. After highlighting certain conceptual difficulties in each, she offers a rational reconstruction, by developing the idiom of 'perspective' (thus, the title embodies a delicate pun), of a third viewpoint associated with Hasidic Jewish visions. I will begin with an outline of the two conceptions and of her alternative cosmology of the World-to-Come (*Olam Haba*), before reflecting on these visions from the standpoints of some Vedāntic Hindu worldviews.

According to the 'intellectualist' conception, the World-to-Come is a nonphysical domain that is categorically distinct from the spatiotemporal world. This domain (already) exists now, but not right here amidst medium-sized objects such as tables, trees, and taxis. By virtue of the knowledge that the intellect or soul acquires of eternal truths, this nonphysical entity immediately enters the World-to-Come on the dissolution of the physical body at death. The opposing 'supernaturalist' conception envisions the World-to-Come as reconstituted from the spatiotemporal fabrics of our everyday world through divine creative intervention. This domain of the final resurrection does not exist yet, so that death is not succeeded immediately by the World-to-Come—rather, one waits for the redemptive horizon to dawn through divine intervention. By virtue of this-worldly service and devotion to the divine, one enters into a perfected relation with the divine in the afterlife. Solomyak helpfully summarizes these distinctions in this way: 'For the intellectualist, the World-to-Come exists *now* but not *here*, while for the supernaturalist, it exists *here* but not *now*.'

Solomyak argues that both these conceptions face certain challenges with respect to the 'requirements' for a plausible view of the World-to-Come—firstly, an understanding of the *person* who survives death, and, secondly, an account of the *process* through which the person may exist in the post-mortem state. The 'intellectualist' conception is, well, overly intellectualist—the World-to-Come is characterized by an unvarying cognitive grasp of a certain stock of eternal truths such as '$2 + 2 = 4$', but it is not our worldly self, with its richly varied and highly valued conscious life, that survives there. On the 'supernaturalist' conception, the resurrected body is united with the soul, so that the subject-in-this-world and the

subject-in-the-hereafter are the same kind of embodied being. However, notwith-standing the voluminous literature devoted to the problem of how the resurrected body can be identical with the this-worldly body, Solomyak suggests that a conceptual gap remains in the task of explaining the resurrected life in a way that preserves personal identity.

Against this conceptual backdrop, Solomyak sketches a Hasidic alternative—the World-to-Come is an atemporal perspective on our everyday existence in this very world. This perspective is distinct to, and not completely accessible from, our current empirical perspectives, but does not constitute a separate spatial destination that one travels towards. This third viewpoint is shaped by a cardinal principle of Hasidic metaphysics which states that only God exists in the most fundamental sense, and the spatiotemporal world has non-fundamental existence. Therefore, to inhabit the World-to-Come is to move away from our non-fundamental perspectives and attain the transfigured consciousness of a more unified perspective, from which worldly fragmentation is seen to be rooted in indivisible reality.

This Hasidic vision is deeply resonant with the Vedāntic claim that (only) *Brahman*, the divine ground who or which is absolutely indivisible and immut-able, truly exists, and finite beings, which are subject to divisibility and mutability, exist (only) derivatively. This 'derivativeness' has been explicated across Vedāntic universes in two distinct ways, mirroring the two alternatives that Solomyak indicates. Styles of Advaita Vedānta associated with Śaṃkara (*c.* 800 CE) veer towards metaphysical idealism, according to which the empirical world—with its seemingly solid objects such as laptops, chairs, and tables—is a non-substantial 'projection' of the cosmic self (*ātman*, *Brahman*) beyond all qualities and all descriptions. Difference does feel very real, but it is, in the ultimate analysis, shaped by deep misconception. In contrast, according to the styles of Vedānta which are shaped by the motif of devotional relationship (*bhakti*) between devotee and the supremely personal deity (*Brahman*), the empirical world is ontologically real, and enjoys dependent existence through its grounding in the divine being. For instance, in the cosmology of Rāmānuja (1017–1137), the finite self and insentient entities such as chairs and tables are dependently real—they are real insofar as they are not mental projections (or 'hallucinations'), but they are existentially dependent at all times on the unqualified reality of *Brahman*, who is the Lord Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa. For instance, a laptop is what *it* is because of its existential *dependence* on the Lord. Thus, both Śaṃkara and Rāmānuja, in their articulations of the Vedāntic notion of nonduality (*advaita*), would agree with the Hasidic view that the world is an expression of God's fundamental unity—however, the crucial intra-Vedāntic dispute is over what measure or mode of ontic reality the world possesses or receives. For both Śaṃkara and Rāmānuja, the spatiotemporal world is not metaphysically separate from *Brahman*, but they have divergent conceptions of this non-distinction from the divine source.

Now, Solomyak's Hasidic conception is located somewhere midway on this Vedāntic continuum. On the one hand, the perspective view reflects the Advaita notion that the 'I', space, and time are not ontologically real (*sat*) but are conceptual constructions through which we navigate the world. From our common-sense standpoint, which is shaped by deep ignorance (*avidyā*) about the way the world is, we mistakenly regard our own individual selves (*jīva*) as ontologically distinct from one another. From the fundamental standpoint of *Brahman*, however, these quotidian differentiations are non-substantial or epistemically illusory (*māyā*) representations of *Brahman*, which is atemporal and nonspatial. Therefore, liberation (*mokṣa*) from the cycles of reincarnation (*saṃsāra*) is akin to effecting a perspectival shift in which the sage real*izes* that they are, in their spiritual essence, 'always-already' beyond all spatiotemporal limitations. That is, the after*life* of liberation does not arrive *after* this life, but is already here with the arising of enlightening self-knowledge (*jñāna*) and the dissolution of the principle of individuation—this is the state of liberation-in-life (*jīvanmukti*). From a metaphysical perspective, the liberated sage is not *this* or *that* individual but is (nondual with) indivisible reality. To invoke a spectral metaphor, a follower of Śaṃkara does not first distinguish between seven colours—violet, indigo, blue, green, yellow, orange, and red—and then remind herself of the fact that they are all manifestations of the indivisible white light. Rather, she 'always-already' views the indivisible white light as seemingly divided into seven different colours. It is the white root that is ultimately real, and the chromatic routes are departures from reality.

On the other hand, however, the perspective view reflects the emphatic assertion of *bhakti*-based Vedāntic visions that the liberated self retains its individual identity as a loving devotee of *Brahman*, the Lord. For instance, according to Rāmānuja, liberation consists of a self's understanding that it is at all times dependent on, supported by, and controlled by the Lord—he rejects the notion that the self and the Lord are nondual in the sense of constituting an undifferentiated unity. To return to our metaphor, a follower of Rāmānuja too would see the seven colours as multiple manifestations of the one indivisible source of luminosity, but for her these colours have distinct ontic individualities. White light and the seven distinct colours constitute a relational unity. Moreover, Rāmānuja emphasizes the cruciality of performing virtuous (*dharmic*) actions which are suffused with and structured by the attitude of devotional surrender to the Lord. Therefore, liberation is catalysed not simply through a trans-conceptual shift but through the ongoing interplay of meditative reflection on the scriptures, devotional love, and embodied cultivation of virtuous living. In contrast, while for Śaṃkara, certain patterns of Vedic ritual activity (*karma*) play a propaedeutic role in preparing the aspirant for liberation, the sage in *jīvanmukti* has transcended the requirements of all such activity.

Thus, both a follower of Śaṃkara and a follower of Rāmānuja would begin to develop a re-formed perspective on the world as rooted-in-the-divine at all times.

For them, *Brahman* is both mysteriously hidden in the here and now, and progressively accessible to aspirants with clarified insight. That is, *Brahman* is simultaneously transcendent to and immanent in all finite beings.

In the end, Solomyak's Hasidic alternative seems to be somewhat nearer the Advaita end of the conceptual spectrum. In Advaita, it is not meaningful to ask, '*when* did you become liberated?'—liberation is the *a*temporal perspective that deep reality is fundamentally nondual. The attain*ing* of liberation is a more robustly temporal phenomenon in Rāmānuja's cosmology, especially given that Rāmānuja rejects the possibility of *jīvanmukti*. The supreme goal of devotional communion with the Lord cannot be attained in the present state of embodiment— rather, on their spiritual trajectory of purification across multiple rebirths, a devotee will seek to move away from their hankering after worldly objects until their liberation when they will see the Lord as the indivisible centre of the world.

A15.2 Reply to Olla Solomyak

Bronwyn Finnigan

Olla Solomyak discusses Life and the Afterlife from the perspective of Hasidic Judaism. She presents it as an alternative to two dominant Jewish conceptions of the 'World-to-Come', the intellectualist and the supernaturalist, each of which she finds problematic. According to the intellectualist conception, a pure intellect with knowledge of eternal abstract truths enters an immaterial World-to-Come after death. Solomyak argues that this inadequately accounts for how the 'individual self' survives death, since our 'first-personal' sense of ourselves consists of more than an abstract grasp of spiritual truths. This implies a Jewish desideratum for an adequate account of the World-to-Come: (D1) it is the individual self who survives death and exists in this state. According to the 'supernaturalist' conception, the World-to-Come is the physical domain in which we presently exist and into which the individual is physically resurrected at some time after death. The problem with this, for Solomyak, is that it inadequately accounts for *how* physical resurrection occurs. Its defenders insist it requires divine intervention. Solomyak argues that explanatory gaps remain, such as *which* of our physical dimensions are resurrected (surely not our decomposing corpses) and *how* the relevant physical dimensions could possibly be resurrected at some later time. This implies a second Jewish desideratum for an adequate account of the World-to-Come: (D2) it needs to provide a reasonable explanation for *how* the individual self enters this state.

Solomyak's Hasidic alternative promises to meet both desiderata. It does so by distinguishing two perspectives on reality; a 'non-fundamental' perspective of 'common-sense' in which we are spatio-temporally structured individual selves, and a 'fundamental' perspective in which 'we' are viewed as mere 'expressions or manifestations' of a 'single, unified God'. While Solomyak claims that the fundamental perspective 'grounds' the non-fundamental, she does not take a position on what this implies for the status of non-fundamental entities (i.e. whether they are 'fictional characters or figments of God's imagination'). She also admits that she hasn't explained how the individual self 'survives' death or the role of death for realizing the fundamental perspective. She nevertheless thinks this Hasidic account can satisfy D1 and D2. It satisfies D1 because it is the very same individual self that realizes these two perspectives. And it satisfies D2 because, while some account is needed to justify the validity of the two perspectives (not offered here)

and to explain how the fundamental perspective is realized and 'unhidden' (also not offered here), the individual self is not assumed to enter the World-to-Come in any ontologically substantive sense that needs explaining.

How might a Buddhist respond to this proposal? The general explanatory strategy is familiar. Buddhism and other Indic philosophical traditions frequently employ a distinction between two standpoints on reality; one that is non-fundamental and reflects common-sense descriptions of a physical world populated by spatio-temporally distinct entities, and another that is ultimate or fundamental. Buddhist philosophers disagree amongst themselves about how best to characterize the ultimate or fundamental mode of reality. None, however, assume that it consists of a single, unified God that grounds whatever non-fundamentally exists.

Until modern times, the idea of rebirth, or a life after death, was widely accepted and asserted by Buddhists. We might ask whether their idea of rebirth satisfies the Jewish desiderata, D1 and D2. A quick argument against D1 might suggest itself. D1 is the desideratum that the individual self survives death. The Buddha taught that there is no self. So, one might argue, it cannot be the individual self who survives death. But this raises the obvious question: *who* then is reborn after death? A more sophisticated answer is needed that shows how the Buddhist denial of self is consistent with rebirth if the concept of rebirth is to make sense. This answer would also need to satisfy some version of D2. That is, it needs to tell some story about *how* whatever is reborn *can* be reborn.

Buddhist philosophers have a lot to say about these issues, and offer different explanations that turn on different conceptions of the relevant sense of self that the Buddha denied. I will here sketch one early Buddhist position and argue that while it might satisfy a version of D2, it is unlikely to satisfy D1.

The Buddha denied that there is a self (*ātman*). While there is debate about the exact scope of this denial and its implications, most Buddhists understand it to at least reject the existence of a permanent, unchanging and eternally existing substance that persists through time and across lives. Instead, what we call persons, are empirically and conceptually analysed as dynamic and highly complex causal systems of psychophysical elements. The Buddha offers several classifications of these elements. The most well-known is of the five aggregates, according to which persons are analysed to consist of: (1) material bodily elements, (2) elements of feeling, (3) elements of discriminative cognition such as perceptions, thoughts, and recollections, (4) volitional elements such as intentions and reactive attitudes, and (5) events of consciousness. This analysis is assumed to be exhaustive; there is nothing else that constitutes a person other than tokens of these five types of elements. According to the Buddha, all these elements are impermanent and depend on causes and conditions for their existence. Moreover, their unification as a 'whole' system (a persisting person) is not considered to be a real substance with causal properties. Buddhists attribute to the Buddha a

distinction between two standpoints on reality, the conventional and the ultimate, to explain why we nevertheless talk as if there were persisting persons and assume them in our social, linguistic and moral practices (Siderits 2003).

Can this Buddhist analysis of persons satisfy D2? *How* is an individual person reborn? On an early Buddhist view, persons are reborn in the sense that key elements in the causal system of psychophysical elements that we conventionally identify with that person extend beyond the boundaries of their natural death. While the physical elements fall away at death, elements of a subtle form of consciousness have causal effect across this boundary and spark an embryo into sentience. Certain volitional elements also causally transmit into the next life since they are the bearers of the karmic debt accumulated as the result of good and bad actions performed in this life. They causally influence the nature of the persons next mode of existence (i.e. whether they are reborn as a divine being, a human, an animal, a hungry ghost, or a hell denizen) and cause some auspicious or inauspicious events to occur in that life (Jackson 2022). While this might seem mysterious in the sense of being experientially unverifiable (except by the spiritual insight of an enlightened being), the underlying mechanism is thought to be similar in kind to what regularly occurs in a single lifetime; it is held to be akin to the fact that the psychophysical elements of an infant are not identical to, but causally related in the right kind of way to, those of the adult later in life.

What about D1? This is the desideratum that it is the individual self that survives death and exists in the World-to-Come. By 'individual self' Solomyak means a first-personally aware subject of experience; 'me!'. Is it *me* that is reborn in the next life on the Buddhist account? This is complicated. Some Buddhists argue that subjective awareness (on some minimal construal) is constitutive of certain modes of consciousness (Coseru 2012). But there are different views about what this amounts to (Finnigan 2018) as well as about which mode of consciousness has causal effect in the next life (Batchelor 1997; Jackson 2022). If it turns out that subjective awareness *is* constitutive of the kinds of conscious events that *do* have causal effect in the next life, then it might be argued that it is 'the same' subjective awareness both before and after death but only in the sense that those conscious events are causally related in the right kind of way. This account is unlikely to support a sense of ourselves persisting across this boundary, however. On most Buddhist accounts, the experience of a persisting 'me' involves more than just subjective awareness but also inferential and conceptual activities supported by memory. These cognitive supports tend not to feature in accounts of what crosses the boundary of death. We typically do not recall our past lives, for instance, and so are unlikely to recall our present life when reborn into the next. It is also thought to be much more likely that we will be reborn as some kind of animal (or hungry ghost or hell denizen) due to the bad karma generated by our misdeeds in the present life. If this is right, and while there are complex issues around the nature of animal sentience, it is unlikely that the relevant mode of

subjective awareness will possess the rich sense of ourselves that we might hope to continue in our next life.

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PART VI
CONCLUSION

16
Philosophy and Friendship

Kelly James Clark

When I made the mistake of agreeing to write commentary on fourteen chapters that I knew little or nothing about, I had no idea how deep was my folly. I am a trained philosopher of religion, trained by one of the best—Alvin Plantinga. I have been practising my trade for nearly four decades. I'm often asked to speak or write on the philosophy of religion. But I've come to learn that I have really been trained in philosophy of Christianity, by one of the best Christian philosophers—Alvin Plantinga. I've been practising the trade of *Christian* philosophy of religion for nearly four decades. I'm often asked to speak or write on the philosophy of Christianity. It's not just me. The vast majority of philosophy of religion of the past fifty plus years is *philosophy of Christianity*. But I have few regrets. Honestly, given the hostility to religious belief in the academy, it was a relief to work among a community of like-minded scholars towards common goals.

I've learned that I've been missing out.

I learned, first, in China. I went to China first in 1998 and then nearly fifty times thereafter. I typically went to China as part of a delegation of Christian philosophers who robustly defended their beliefs to their Chinese counterparts. Although there was some curiosity, there was also suspicion and even some hostility. But after my third or fourth visit, I determined to work hard on the virtues of sympathetic listening that I commended to my students. Instead of simply arguing for my Christian beliefs, I began learning of their Chinese beliefs.

I devoted a decade of my life to learning about and teaching Chinese thought. While most contemporary philosophers told me, 'the Chinese aren't religious', I learned otherwise from historians, social scientists, believing friends, and the early Chinese texts themselves. I learned that many Chinese are religious but not, historically or typically, Abrahamically religious. For example, trust in a personal God is not at the centre of most early Chinese religious practices, veneration of ancestors is. I learned that there is no revealed, authoritative text; Heaven does not speak (but Heaven does show the Way). And I learned that the Western obsession with belief is not reflected in the early Chinese emphasis on ritual. While the Chinese believe in gods, ancestors, and afterlife, they don't defend or develop their

beliefs in the same way as Anselm, Augustine, or Aquinas.[1] A Chinese philosophy of religion, then, would be quite different from a Christian philosophy of religion.

As part of my Chinese self-education, I spent a summer studying Chinese Buddhism. 'Studying?' More like, I was overwhelmed. As an undergraduate, I had majored in religion and had attained a Religion 101 understanding of Buddhism. It went something like: the Buddha, after a long search for wisdom, perched himself under a tree where he saw an apple fall to the ground and gained Enlightenment (I may be mixing some details with Newton narratives). Like the Buddha, one gains Enlightenment when one realizes that suffering, the fundamental truth of reality, can be overcome by the cessation of desire (the source of suffering). I also recalled: the Buddha was an atheist, karma, the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, and the cycle of birth–death–rebirth. While I saw some of that in Chinese Buddhism, I saw terms and concepts (both Chinese and Sanskrit) that were entirely new to me. I encountered various and diverse Buddhisms that had accommodated to more local religious beliefs like Confucianism and Daoism. I learned that Zen Buddhism's roots are in China (Chan Buddhism), not Japan. And I learned the most influential form of Buddhism (Pure Land) sought the fulfilment of all desire in a Heaven-like afterlife. I learned a *lot* of things that did not fit neatly into either my memory or my religious conceptual space. I was overwhelmed.

Finally, I've been involved in both inter-faith and multi-faith work with Muslims, Christians and Jews for nearly two decades. I have slowly given up trying to find Christian analogues in every Muslim or Jewish belief or practice. The mosque is not the Muslim church. The Quran is not revelation in the way the New Testament is claimed to be. Not everything in the Old Testament (the Hebrew bible) is a reference to Jesus or the Trinity. I set up safe academic spaces where Muslims, Christians, and Jewish scholars could meet together and speak freely of differences. And, if we would but listen, differences there were. And difference is ok, even good.

Bottom line: by its de facto emphasis on Christian theism, Western philosophy of religion is philosophy of Christianity, philosophy of just one religion—Christianity—but there are countless religions around the world. Philosophy of religion, then, needs to expand, de-colonize. We need philosophies of Islam and of Judaism and of Buddhism and of Confucianism. We need philosophies of atheist religions and non-Trinitarian and non-revelational religions. We need philosophies of religious ritual as much as philosophies of religious belief. We can but need not seek similarities. We should also be aware of and sensitive to

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[1] I co-authored *A Spiritual Geography of Chinese Thought* with Justin Winslett, an Oxford-trained Sinologist, a book on early Chinese religion and its implications for Chinese philosophy. See Clark and Winslett 2023.

differences. We need to become better listeners, less pugilistic. We need to understand, not to win.

This book is an attempt to write this wrong, these wrongs.

In the Abrahamic traditions, 'omniscience' means something like 'knowing all true propositions'. However, in debates about an omniscient Buddha, the terms translated 'omniscience' can mean something quite different; indeed, an omniscient Buddha may know nothing at all. Although the most fundamental term translated 'omniscience', *sarvajñanatā,* includes *sarva* (all), and *jñāna* (which can mean knowledge), in various contexts it can be quite restricted. According to Jay Garfield, in 'Indian and Tibetan Buddhist Accounts of the Epistemology of Awakening Indian and Tibetan Buddhist Accounts of the Epistemology of Awakening', 'this cross-cultural exploration might expand our understanding of what omniscience and knowledge itself might be'.

Although I found his essay fascinating, I don't think it expanded our understanding of omniscience—though I did find it enlightening (pun intended) about knowledge. I don't think the reader should come away thinking that the Abrahamic tradition has a defective understanding of omniscience; rather, the reader should come away thinking that translators need to do a better job translating. Omniscience, after all, means something like 'knowing all true propositions', which makes understanding texts that translate the 27 Buddhist Sanskrit terms into the single term 'omniscience' difficult; we need a richer vocabulary in order to understand Buddhism. Garfield's repeated claims—'once again falls short of omniscience', 'omniscience is thin', 'completely omniscient', and 'knows everything in every respect'—imply that he understands omniscience to mean something like 'knows all true propositions' (just as someone must understand the concept of unicorn when calling a horse a unicorn but adding, 'unicorn is thin' or 'falls short of unicorn').

When, in some contexts, knowledge is ascribed to the enlightened Buddha, it means something quite different from 'omniscience'. What does it mean? Some hold, for example, that the Buddha's 'knowledge' is acting spontaneously without intervening beliefs; the Buddha is soteriologically expert without holding any beliefs at all. Others hold that the enlightened Buddha has unmediated awareness of all Reality; again, a belief-free understanding of knowledge (by acquaintance). Understanding these concepts is, I think, better handled with better translations, not trying to shoehorn them into standard Abrahamic or Greek terms (not, for example, trying to shoehorn horse into unicorn). Garfield's essay at one and the same time demonstrates the difficulties of cross-cultural understanding and the value of working hard to understand an entirely different tradition.

In 'Revelation of the Torah: What For?', Aaron Segal generates a puzzle out of a particular view of the Torah which holds that 'its concrete realization is the end for which creation took place'. But if the realization of the Torah is so central to God's purpose, why did God create human creatures incapable of discovering

the wisdom of the Torah on their own (thus frustrating God's purpose in creation). Torah is necessary, on Segal's solution, because God wanted us to love him by doing things simply because God wanted us to do them (not because humans were able to discover all that was their greatest good, including God himself); God, then, might ask humans to honour the sabbath or wear a kippah, items not typically included under or even seen as necessary for our greatest good; God fills in those items, items essential to the human love connection to God, 'by Hand'. Finally, instead of analysing and justifying the Torah piecemeal, Segal takes it as a whole—a deep and wide vision of reality which can be comprehended in full only by a widely varied community of believers, seekers, feelers, perspectives, etc.

While religion is widely understood as binding the community together, Segal takes God's purposes to go beyond binding to understanding reality through the collective and historical comprehension of the Torah, the realization of which is God's purpose in creation. Judgements on Segal's solution will probably vary depending on at least two things: (i) one's belief, along with Segal, that Torah (or any preferred revelation) is the purpose of creation and/or (ii) one's belief that God would be all that concerned about whether or not our garments mix wool with linen, or whether or not we plant our fields with two different grains, the like. Segal's essay raises good questions for all religions of revelation: why would God need to reveal in general and why did God reveal *that* in particular?

Issues concerning revelation are shared across various religions. Rejecting common dictation models of revelation, Hamid Vahid and Mahmoud Morvarid, in 'Revelation and Religious Experience in the Islamic Tradition: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives', explore Islamic views of revelation that are grounded in mystical or religious experience (in which God does not literally speak). Vahid and Morvarid discuss al-Fārābī's and Avicenna's accounts of revelation, *waḥy*, which rely essentially on an Islamified version of Aristotle's Active Intellect, required to turn 'potential intellect into an actual intellect and potential intelligibles into actual intelligibles'. In al-Fārābī's account, the active intellect is God's highest created intellect, Archangel Gabriel, who functions in the transmission of revelation the way the illuminating sun functions in perception. al-Ghazzālī, on the other hand, claims that the heart (properly oriented) is disposed to gain divine knowledge either by learning or by inspiration. Contemporary Islamic scholars are now more inclined towards understanding the reception of divine revelation as involving typical human faculties that process religious or mystical experience. The shift away from a pope-like active intellect towards mystical or religious experience, in turn, raises a new set of hermeneutical questions which are now required to determine the understanding and truth of the revealed text.

Dictation models, appealing as they are, have their problems. Let me speak of the problems within the context of purported Christian revelation. The attraction of dictation models is abundantly clear: God infallibly dictates and the writer

infallibly records; God's infallible word is effectively imparted to future generations with divine authority and without error. God says it, it must be so. Omnipotence could surely cause vocal sounds that are analogous to speaking and so could infallibly 'speak' revelation to a prophet. However, the Christian texts themselves—Old and New Testaments alike—can sound decidedly un-divine. There is, as Segal has already noted, their occasional strangeness, and he has cited one of the least strange of the strange texts—not wearing clothing woven of two kinds of material (Leviticus 19.9). But strangeness abounds: for example, the command to cut off a woman's hand if she grabs her fighting husband's (or his opponent's?) genitals. Or when God relents because Zipporah, Moses' wife, circumcised their son and rubbed the foreskin on his feet. One might think the Moses story is due to (a) transcription error or (b) cultural accommodation. But if God were to go to the trouble to dictate infallibly, why wouldn't Omnipotence likewise superintend the transcription process? And why would Omnipotence allow weird cultural accretions since they seem either unnecessary or distracting? Finally, the texts seem to clearly contain errors. All of the above suggest a more human contribution than divine dictation would seem to allow. I leave it to other revelational traditions to see if these criticisms apply and if responses like Segal's and Vahid and Morvarid's are adequate.

In the interest of full disclosure, I was in graduate school and a Bible study with Jon Kvanvig; we played tennis and ate cheesecake together. I have admired him and his work since. He was and remains the premier philosopher of religion of my cohort in graduate school. So, admittedly not a disinterested bystander, I think very highly of Kvanvig's paper, 'The Virtue of Saving Faith', on non-cognitive saving faith, on faith as a virtue rather than a cognitive state (except that he doesn't cite me enough; ok, not at all). Interestingly, Kvanvig repeatedly (and rightly, I think) extends his more affective and conative understanding of saving faith to other religions.

Reliance on propositions for faith raises the issue of which propositions? I recall some colleagues who got very angry with me when I said I didn't think there was a set of necessary and sufficient propositions that were required for Christian faith. I remember one person shouting, 'What about the Trinity?' I replied that the so-called orthodox doctrine of the Trinity was not developed until hundreds of years after the time of Jesus; surely there were perfectly faithful Christians during that time who lacked any notion of the Trinity. Kvanvig sees this problem: 'We should be careful at this point, however, not to formulate more precise propositional attitudes required for the presence of saving faith. Doing so fails to distinguish between correct theology and saving faith, inclining an entire tradition toward the language of the Athanasian Creed that quite freely damns not only those who disagree about the correct theology but also those lacking sufficient theological sophistication to formulate properly what they think on these matters.'

Let me note one virtue of Kvanvig's paper that is especially effective in multi-faith discussions: while Kvanvig's paper is distinctly Christian, he focuses nearly entirely on *ideas* and not so much on *thinkers*, theological positions or traditions—he could but doesn't mention, for example, Aquinas or Augustine, Thomism or Augustinianism, or Protestant or Catholic. Since most outsiders are not very conversant with Christianity's thinkers, theological positions or traditions, outsider comprehension is diminished in direct proportion to the number of mentions of thinkers, theological positions or traditions. Better, if one wishes to communicate to outsiders, to focus on ideas, shared examples and arguments than to rely heavily on thinkers, theological positions or traditions.

It is fitting that the following article, 'Islamic Faith and Knowledge of God' by Imran Aijaz, is an Islamic exploration of the claim that faith is a kind of knowledge. Muslims widely regard the person of faith as 'the person who responds appropriately to knowledge of God' and the rejector of faith as the 'one who responds inappropriately—by refusing to acknowledge it [knowledge of God]'. Aijaz considers and commends 'the reflective Muslim' who is agnostic about God's existence but who continues to affirm their Muslim identity and continues practising Muslim rituals such as prayer and fasting; this reflective Muslim, he claims, has non-doxastic faith. Aijaz begins his case for non-doxastic faith by critically examining and then rejecting a typical apologetical argument claimed to elevate Islamic faith to knowledge.

Aijaz rejects the claim that Islamic faith is non-inferentially justified belief by noting the argument's circularity—it assumes or takes life only already within pre-existing Islamic belief. He likewise rejects the universality of cognitive faculties that produce 'instinctual' belief in God because of the wide diversity of religions, including non-theistic religions.

I have one qualm with his claim about non-theistic religions. While the Buddha may have been an atheist, probably not many Buddhists have been or are atheists. Indeed, if the cognitive science of religion is correct, atheism should be relatively rare (but not impossible). Humans are inclined, so the cognitive science of religion claims, to belief in gods, even High Gods. So, we find various forms of Buddhism which are either theistic or polytheistic (and countless Buddhist temples to gods). Again, according to the cognitive science of religion, atheism is not impossible but it is cognitively and culturally more difficult than belief in god(s). Contemporary philosophy of religion may need to take better account of work in contemporary cognitive science.[2]

Aijaz goes on to reject the apologetical case for God because of lack of independent supporting evidence. He rejects the apologist's various natural theological arguments—the Kalaam cosmological argument and contemporary

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[2] I have attempted this in my 2019 book *God and the Brain: the Rationality of Belief*. Cognitive science has countless philosophical implications, beyond belief in God, for the philosophy of religion.

teleological arguments—because of the logical gap between their bare conclusions of a first cause or designer and the theologically rich God of Islam (God as The Most Beneficent and The Most Merciful). Neither argument is sufficient to establish knowledge of God (the one God of Islam). Moreover, he claims that Muslim apologists fails to adequately account for counter-evidence to theism, like suffering and apparent disteology.

Given the failure of the Muslim's best case for God, faith as knowledge is simply impossible. Aijaz directly and courageously faces philosophy of a particular religion's biggest problem: the lack of coercive and independent evidence in favour of that religion.

This problem of knowledge is not peculiar to religions. Philosophy's dirtiest secret is its lack of coercive and independent evidence for any philosophical position. After thousands of years of trying, we still lack coercive and independent evidence in favour of the external world, other minds, the past, induction, and the nature of morality. I cannot think of a single successful philosophical argument, with coercive and independent evidence, in favour of a single philosophical view. Are all of our philosophical convictions then matters of faith? Of the faith that is not knowledge?

If it's ok to believe in the past or the external world or other minds without a good propositional argument, then we need to find ways of conceiving of knowledge, or at least rational or justified belief, that are not based on evidence. Anti-evidentialist epistemologies, of course, could and should have ramifications for rational or justified religious belief.

I don't think Aijaz's approach is the same as Kvanvig's but it's hard to tell. I think Kvanvig's essay is a corrective to cognitive approaches to faith that overshadow or ignore the affective and conative side of faith. Aijaz's is more a deconstruction of exaggerated claims to faith as well-established knowledge.

We have explored non-doxastic Christian and Muslim faith. We are now given a paper on Jewish faith, 'Jewish Faith and the King's Four Sons' by Nehama Verbin. Verbin, singing in the same non-cognitive choir, rejects the claim that one can reduce faith in the Jewish tradition to propositional belief in a set of core principles or propositions. Maimonides' Thirteen Principles, Verbin argues, conflict with his claim that God's nature cannot be known by human beings; embracing Maimonidean apophaticism should be game over for faith as a kind of propositional knowledge, at least knowledge about God. She dismisses faith as trust because of any number of Jews, including biblical characters like Abraham and Job, who, in the face of apparent divine cruelty or arbitrariness, distrust, protest, and even disobey God. If not propositional belief or trust, what, then, is faith? Following Wittgenstein, she understands Jewish faith as a family resemblance concept—it involves a plurality of non-overlapping ways of living and believing and being and responding to God the father; there is, on this account, no essence of Jewish faith. She concludes with a single profound sentence that

extends what might seem a tradition-specific insight—that faith in other traditions may be a lot like faith in the Jewish tradition (as she has just propounded it).

What I've said of the philosophy of religion—that it's been de facto philosophy of Christianity for the past half-century—is likewise true of science and religion—it's been de facto science and Christianity for the past half-century. Graham Priest takes an important step, in 'Science, Reason and Buddhism', towards redressing the problem. Priest does us, the uninformed, a favour: he explains how he understands Buddhism (after conceding that, given the countless faces of Buddhism, he can't possibly speak of Buddhism simpliciter and science). Buddhism has one great advantage over Christianity on issues of science and religion: it has no authoritative scripture with which science might conflict. Nonetheless, Buddhists have beliefs but those, Priest claims, are remarkably congruent with contemporary science. He focuses on three—impermanence (*anitya*), unsatisfactoriness (*duhkha*), and lack of self (*anatman*). Let us focus on *anatman* of which Priest claims, 'When Buddhists deny the existence of a self, what they are denying is that people have a part which is constant, exists all the time the person exists, and indeed defines the person as that very person. The closest analogue in Western thought is the soul.' While I liked his discussion very much, and learned a lot, I wonder if science has much to say, one way or the other, about a self or lack thereof. I know it's fashionable, following contemporary Humeans like Dennett, to assert a no-self view. But I think more substantial views of the self are compatible with contemporary science. Moreover, Priest's scientific naturalism is most tested in his fascinating discussion of rebirth.

Helen De Cruz charitably discusses the conflicts between science and contemporary Christian lay believers (unlike their academic counterparts who tend to reject the conflict thesis) in 'The Relationship between Science and Christianity: Understanding the Conflict Thesis in Lay Christians.' Their conflicts are both epistemically understandable and not entirely to their epistemic credit.

Monima Chadha continues the discussion of science and religion in 'Hinduism and Science'. Although Chadha 'defines' Hinduism 'as a family of dynamic and polycentric religious and philosophical traditions that invoke the authority of the Vedas', she goes on to show how remarkably plural such a tradition can be—monotheistic, polytheistic, monistic, atheistic, and sceptical. As such, it is unclear that she can say anything at all about Hinduism (as an essential, eternal system) and science; and she doesn't. She draws just this from the Vedic tradition: intellectual humility. Armed with this insight, she goes on to show how various scientific disciplines developed within the Vedic context.

The difficulty of defining one's tradition, of declaring once and for all the essence of one's religion, has played an important epistemic role so far. Each thinker explicitly demurs from offering a definition of their own religion. Indeed, each tradition has been shown to be so astonishingly plural that the giving of a definition would perforce leave out perfectly good representatives of the tradition.

The attraction of hermeneutics, alluded to by Aijaz, is clear: humans, seeking certainty, want the precise method for finding the truth in the Bible or the Vedas or the Quran. Yet the remarkable pluralism within each tradition belies the claim to hermeneutical mastery. What Chadha sees for her tradition, then, seems relevant, required even, of them all—the need for intellectual humility.

Jessica Frazier, in 'Beyond Pleasure and Pain: "Rasa" Emotions as an Indian Philosophy of Value', seeks a richer natural foundation of ethics in which 'a wider-reaching phenomenology of affective states incorporate other value-bearing feelings', wider-reaching than the utilitarian's pleasure and pain as bearers of intrinsic value and disvalue.

There are many assertions in her paper, assertions more consonant with naturalism than I might have guessed of Hinduism, that I cannot possibly judge: that Indian cultures have a tendency to locate intrinsic value primarily in subjective experience, that Hinduism by and large rejects divine command theories, and 'Within this naturalistic approach, most agree that Hinduism is pluralistic about the valid goals of life, and utilitarian about the importance of upholding basic shared prerequisites for living.' This is a problem in one sense. I am in a better position to judge her claims concerning philosophy of the Hindu religion if I have some understanding of Hinduism and its surrounding culture. If not, then not. But there is also a lesson to learn here. When approaching other traditions, one must be willing to get on board with the author's aims and assumptions. I've heard a lot of philosophy-critics say, in effect, 'But if I were writing the paper, I'd do it entirely differently.' And I typically want to say, 'But you're not writing the paper, so-and-so is. And given so-and-so's aims and assumptions, is so-and-so's paper philosophically valuable?' So, I will give Frazier her major assumptions and cheerfully follow her lead.

Hinduism locates intrinsic value in a richer set of affective states—attained or amplified by the practice of yogic meditation or ecstatic religious practices—that are 'less immediately egoistic than the blunt appetite for pleasure or painlessness'. Through such de-centring practices, one may attain to a state of absorption, of more universal, less egoistic affective states, which, in turn, involve 'sensing Goodness, Injustice, Compassion, Affection'.

I found myself floating above the surface of Frazier's prose. By the end I felt like I needed to go to India, to watch closely, to listen carefully, and to read charitably before I could get a real sense of Hindu ethics as she outlines them. I read her paper more as invitation than argument; she made Hinduism and its higher affective states and its foreign (to me) soteriology attractive. Something I wish me and my fellow Christians would do more in our writings.

And then, guess what? That's exactly what Christian philosopher, Mark Murphy, does in 'Incarnational Ethics', in which he examines how a Christian might understand the ways in which the Incarnation, a typically central Christian belief, might inform Christian moral theory. Murphy affirms the

Chalcedonian conception which he encapsulates in 'The Chalcedonian Analysis', that Jesus Christ is 'perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity' and 'The Chalcedonian Slogan' that Christ is 'like us in all respects except for sin'. Murphy defends a Christological natural law theory, a theory rooted in what is good for us, what makes us well off, given our nature as humans (for example, knowledge is good for us, and so is freely acting in accord with the truth, etc.). One remarkable feature of the Christological model is the centrality of the virtue of humility—modeled by the Omnipotent, the Above-the-Law, becoming human (and so, subject to the Law).

In 'Morality and Divine Law: Reflections on Islamic Theology and *Falsafah*', Bakinaz Abdalla contrasts *falsafa* with *kalam* in their accounts of the moral quality of the Prophet. She focuses on Asharism and addresses two things: the Ashari account of the moral quality of the Prophet, and *falsafa's* account of the same issue. Many Asharis believe both (1) that our actions have no intrinsic moral value (their value is solely determined by divine commands), and (2) that God can change God's commands whenever God wants. As such, Abdalla holds that Asharis deny objective moral values, where 'being objective' seems to mean 'being independent of all subjects including God'. On this construal, the Ashari view is, as she calls it, 'theistic-ethical subjectivism'. Not surprisingly (to me at least), Abdalla argues against this radical theistic voluntarism in favor of a more tempered *falsafa* account. I take it that the Ashari view, taken straight up, holds that something is good simply because God wills it. Yet if God can change God's commands whenever God wants, then it is possible for something that we now take as obviously evil (torturing innocent babies for fun) to become good, simply by virtue of God willing it. This, again it seems to me, willingly embraces the most chilling critique of divine command theories.

According to Abdalla, the temptation to theological voluntarism stems from the Ashari's unqualified commitment to divine omnipotence, holding that for any *x*, if God wills *x*, *x* is good (and God, being omnipotent can will or could have willed any *x*). God, on this view, is not, cannot be, constrained in any way whatsoever. But what is a good-making property for power seems a bad-making property for goodness. Reconciling omnipotence with divine goodness lies at the heart of any solution to the Euthyphro problem. For what it's worth, the Ashari commitment to divine power makes their views difficult for many contemporary thinkers to embrace.

Abdalla notes apparent contradictions between Ashari voluntarism and other theological doctrines, such as God's truthfulness and divine immutability, on the one hand, and belief in the eternity of the Quran, on the other. How can God speak truth or be immutable or hold the moral standard of the Quran in God's mind *and* be able to change His mind? Finally, it renders the Quran questionable as the standard of the moral perfection of the Prophet (if God can change His mind about the moral standards revealed in the Quran). Her 'theologian'

(aka Ashari), she kindly understates, has a difficult time accounting for the steadfast perfection of the Prophet.

The virtue-theoretic approach of the *falsafah*, on the other hand, adequately 'account[s] for the Prophet's moral perfection in a way that maintains the nexus to the Quran and the concept of obligation'. Let's suppose she is successful in connecting virtue theory to the Quran and to a concept of evaluation. What should the virtue theorist say of the Prophet's (indeed any person's) moral perfection? Here Abdalla is not so clear. She writes, for example, that 'Natural dispositions do not make a virtuous person. Nor is it sufficient to acquire theoretical knowledge of the virtues to be virtuous.... To become a virtuously acting agent, one must grasp not only moral virtues as "intelligible" ends (*maʿqūlāt*) but also the particular "accidents" (*al-ʿawāriḍ*) accompanying them.' If the Prophet (like every other human being) is not virtuous due to his natural dispositions, then the Prophet must, as Abdalla writes, *become* virtuous. An easy inference suggests itself: the Prophet was not perfect before he became virtuous (cultivated virtuous dispositions) through practice, practice, practice. The Prophet's growth in virtue (which assumes the Prophet's early imperfection) would make easy sense of Quranic passages that Abdalla cites: 'For example: with reference to the prophet the Quran says: "And He found you lost and guided [you]" (93:7), and "And if We had not strengthened you, you would have almost inclined to them a little" (17:74). These verses speak directly to the possibility of a development, be that in character and virtues or beliefs, to which the Quran/revelation was instrumental.' While these verses assume divine assistance and the essentiality of the Quran, they don't conduce to a robust conception of the Prophet's perfection.

In sum, Abdalla's essay is an admirable exploration at the nexus of an enormous number of theological and moral assertions that resist easy explication. The genius of the Islamic tradition is its various ways of accounting for all of one's theological and moral commitments. Of course, as Abdalla has shown, not all of the alleged solutions are both successful and satisfying.

In 'The World to Come: A Perspective', Olla Solomyak offers a Hasidic Jewish solution to the problem of the world to come that is monistic. According to Solomyak's Hasidism, there is just God, 'Everything "else" [including space and time] is an expression or manifestation of God's unity—not a separately existing state of affairs.' On this view, there is, then, no World-to-Come; the One reality is Now. Although from our current perspective, we might consider ourselves independent and awaiting the future World-to-Come, when we fully inhabit the World-to-Come we will see things aright, from the most fundamental perspective of the Eternally Timeless One. So, from the fundamental perspective, the World-to-Come is atemporal and non-spatial. Solomyak then seeks to understand how, according to her theistic, monistic Hasidic understanding of Reality, one could be a self in This-World and in the World-to-Come.

Bronwyn Finnigan, in 'Conventionalising rebirth: Buddhist agnosticism and the doctrine of two truths', echoes Priest's concerns about Buddhism's doctrine of rebirth. While Buddhism is attractive to some Western scholars, some of its central doctrines comport less well with Western scholars' naturalistic and scientistic narratives. But can, should, a Buddhist in good conscience treat the doctrine of rebirth as nothing more than a useful fiction? What if a Buddhist were to grant, as many do, the claim that rebirth is inconsistent with modern science? Finnigan asks if rebirth might be a conventional 'truth' on par with the accepted, conventional understanding of *karma* and persons; after all, *karma* seems to assign praise and blame (and reward and punishment) to persistent persons (even though Buddhism's no-self ontology is inconsistent with the possibility of persistent persons). After critically canvassing various contemporary understandings of conventional truth, Finnigan defends belief in persons as conventional truth, as useful fiction. He then provisionally extends his account to rebirth.

Which made me wonder: How can a person believe what they know is untrue? I suspect that nearly every Buddhists believes in persistent persons (persons); I suspect this because I think we are cognitively hard-wired to believe in persons. I think we continue to believe in persons in just the same way we continue to believe that grass is green even after learning the modern science of colour vision. I suspect that only the most esoteric of believers can find themselves believing in no-self (or that grass is really made of colourless particles that reflect green light waves which impinge on rods and cones ...). And I suspect that the naturalistic-scientistic Buddhist cannot really come to believe, even as-if, in rebirth. They'll just think it false, even if they also believe that if it were true, it would be practically useful. Believing as-if, Finnigan claims, requires believing sufficient to engage emotions and deliberations. Can the contemporary naturalistic-scientist Buddhist get that much by way of belief? So, to conclude, I wonder how Buddhist beliefs comport not just with, say, physics, but also with contemporary cognitive science.[3]

In '"Liberation in Life": Advaita Allegories for Defeating Death', Ankur Barua explores Advaita's monism which countenances 'no ontological distinctions across reality', and so renders meaningless any distinction between this life and the afterlife.

Barua claims that *Brahman* (Ultimate Reality) is *Nirguṇa* (beyond all qualities). And he reports that the *Upanishads* repeat the *via negative*: *Brahman* is 'not this,

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[3] What Buddhists actually believe is explored in a study of Hindu, Christian and Buddhist attitudes toward death. The article assumed this: 'Buddhist philosophers argue that the illusion of a persisting self underlies our fear of death. Once we recognize that there is no self that persists across the lifespan, fear of death should be alleviated, since its very foundation has been undermined.' They predicted that Christians, who believed in a soul that survives death, would fear death more than Buddhists who believe that no self persists into the afterlife. However, the study found that Buddhist monastics had much greater fear of death than participants in the other religions. See Nichols, Strohminger, Rai, and Garfield 2018.

not this' *(neti neti)*. In their attempts to grasp Ultimate Reality, thinkers in all of the great religions appeal in the end to the *via negativa*. Suppose *negativa* is the best *via* for thinking about ultimate reality. Does the *via negativa* give us reason to think that Ultimate Reality, then, is the same in all of the great religions? Some Christians claim that Christians don't worship the same God as Muslims, Muslims reject Hindu polytheism, and so on and so on. But if they all assert that God is unknowable—do they all wind up in precisely the same ontological place? If not, why not? How could they know? Does interfaith dialogue reach, in the end, the highest common denominator?

There is more to be said about each and every chapter. I learned an enormous amount, more than I dare admit. Each paper creatively grapples with deeply philosophical problems, most not on the philosophy of Christianity radar. But that radar needs to widely expand its range.

Given the hostility to religious belief in the academy, it's a relief to work among a community of like-minded scholars towards common goals. But I've dramatically changed my understanding of what constitutes 'like-minded'. Twenty years ago or so, I thought 'like-minded' meant 'Christian scholars'. But Sam Lebens, Aaron Segal, and Silvia Jonas have demonstrated the vitality of Jewish philosophy of religion; and Sajjad Rizvi, Enis Doko, and Amir Saemi the vitality of Islamic philosophy; and Cheng Lian, Xu Xingtao, and Kwong Loi-Shun the vitality of Chinese thought. I've learned from devout Muslims and Jews but also from agnostics and atheists, from theists but also from naturalists. I've learned, to use Solomyak's terminology, that we all view the world from a perspective, mistaking our finite perspectives for the eternal, God's-eye, fundamental perspective. As I've expanded my understanding of 'like-minded', I've come to think that we likewise need to expand our conception of 'community' because now more than ever we need, in an age of increasing conflict, a community of like-minded scholars—Christians, Jews, Buddhists, atheists, agnostics, theists, and naturalists—working together towards common goals.

Finally, let me return to my friend, Jonathan Kvanvig. I confessed my friendship as though it were a prima facie disqualifier of my ability to critically comment on his paper; maybe it was; the reader can decide. But I'm sure of this: sitting beside him in class, gossiping about our professors (one student was an especially good mimic of our professors' idiosyncrasies), studying the Bible with him and his wife, and playing tennis and eating cheesecake together contributed to my respect for and admiration of him. Even when I disagree with John, I respect and admire him, and I extend my respect and admiration to his work. I don't accept anything simply because he said it, but I do take seriously what he says as worthy of my attention and sympathetic engagement. I want to help Jonathan become the best philosopher he can be (which means, as fellow Christians, we agree more than disagree). And I think now of Mohammad Saleh Zarepour: I met him in Iran when he was a student, we attended conferences together, shared our papers.

He brought his wife and cute daughter to a workshop in Turkey and I held his adorable daughter. We joked and shared food. I respect and admire Saleh, and I extend that respect and admiration to his work. I want to help him become the best philosopher he can be (even though, as Christian and Muslim, we sometimes disagree). In short, friendship created the conditions of possibility (as my Heideggerian friends aver) for the kind of intellectual community to which we should all aspire, a community rooted in admiration and respect (even in the face of deep and even intractable disagreement).

I doubt that we can become good world philosophers without first becoming friends, with all that that entails.

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