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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

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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-colonialize. 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

[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

[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,

[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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