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# Religion and the Life-World

This special issue of *Eidos. A Journal for Philosophy of Culture* follows on from the double special issue on *Science and Religion* published at the end of last year. This double issue focused primarily on questions in metaphysics and ontology. What several of the contributions have pointed out, however, is that the naturalistic worldview, which takes empirical science to be the only reliable source of knowledge, also implies a certain approach to living. Unsurprisingly this outlook extends beyond epistemological commitments of naturalism and has consequences for the fundamental values which guide some of our choices and shape our outlook on the world. Being critical of this trend Roger Scruton has called it the charm of, or enchantment with, disenchantment.[1] That is, satisfying a pre-theoretical motivation, in this case a suspicion or even hostility towards the supernatural, by a reductive application of explanations that are only applicable to material objects. The most direct treatment

1) See for example Roger Scruton, *The Face of God: The Gifford Lectures 2010* (London and New York: Continuum, 2012), 28.

of this theme in the two issues on *Science and Religion* comes from Joshua Farris in his exchange with Stephen Priest.[2]

The effects of this kind of reductionism, as Farris argues, are not just theoretical but, perhaps more importantly, practical. A significant part of the appeal of the reductionist explanation of the world, and the human place in it, is that it enables its adherents to dismiss the normative and axiological claims of value systems grounded in notions, which do not describe physical states, such as justice, prudence, courage, love, loyalty, beauty, and so on. The implicit charge here is, of course, that these notions, shown up to be a kind of fiction, are merely expressions of deterministic processes (and so not normatively efficacious), or, worse yet, a result of power dynamics invented to further the interests of one individual or group over another (and so morally deplorable).

As many of the contributions to the two issues on *Science and Religion* have argued this assessment of the foundations of human societies, after decades of dominating the discourse, is now being challenged and rejected. In line with much contemporary scholarship, however, the challenge came in the form of arguments against the ontological and metaphysical claims behind the reductionism rather than in the form of affirming the normative and axiological claims of non-reductive value systems, and the forms of human life resulting from them.[3]

This has prompted the editors of *Eidos. A Journal for Philosophy of Culture* to prepare the current volume devoted to *Religion as a Way of Life*. For the defense of the world of religious experience has been both largely missing from the debate between naturalism and supernaturalism in Anglophone philosophy until recently, and has seen a resurgence in the last decade or so.[4] For example Roger Scruton, quoted above

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2) See Joshua Farris, "De-Conditioning and Images of the Mind: Scientific Images and Dualistic Images," *Eidos. A Journal for Philosophy of Culture* 7, no. 3 (2023): 31–47; Stephen Priest, "From Here to Theology: Response to Joshua Farris," *Eidos. A Journal for Philosophy of Culture* 7, no. 4 (2023): 5–13.

3) It is understandable that in light of attacks on the metaphysical foundations of religious belief and doctrine the favoured response has been to argue in support of these foundations, and so only indirectly in support of religious forms of life. It does however seem that this approach misses much that is important in religion as it manifests itself in and guides human life.

4) Some classical examples of the kind of debate that prevailed in the latter half of the twentieth century and at least the first decade of the twenty first include, on the one hand, Anthony Flew's *God and Philosophy* (London: Hutchinson & Co LTD, 1966), and, on the other Richard Swinburne's *The Existence of God* (Oxford:

criticizing the attack on non-reductive value systems, in his book on the Anglican Church openly states that:

> We need to recognize that religion is not simply a matter of believing a few abstract metaphysical propositions that stand shaking and vulnerable before the advance of modern science. Religion is a way of life, involving customs and ceremonies that validate what matters to us, and which reinforce the attachments by which we live. It is both a faith and a form of membership, in which the destiny of the individual is bound up with that of a community.[5]

Consequently, Scruton suggests, that to the English the Christian religion is not merely a set of doctrines to be believed, but "an immortal projection of England in a realm beyond space and time."[6] This might sound abstract, but what Scruton means here is that the Anglican Church has provided an opportunity to celebrate the important rites of passage of the community, giving them a validation and significance, which point beyond this world and inscribe the meaning of the human bonds they represent into the fabric of reality.[7]

Religion, on this view, opens to our experience a world of facts which are not just facts about the physical but about the normative, the transcendental, and the personal realms. The eternal reality of these facts eludes us when we consider the naturalistic

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Oxford University Press, 1979). In 1996 Swinburne returns to the metaphysics of God's existence in *Is there a God?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), partly summarising, partly advancing his argumentation. Only three years later Oxford University Press publishes David Brown's *Tradition and Imagination: Revelation and Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), – the first part of a trilogy which culminates with *God and Enchantment of Place* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). In the first two volumes of this trilogy Brown attempts to widen the scope of theology by including the historical evolution of the Church and Christianity as a source of spiritual guidance and ground for community formation as much as religious dogma. In the third volume Brown discusses ways religion both shapes and proceeds form a certain experience of the world both natural and human made. I believe that this approach, which Brown still considers to be on the periphery of philosophy of religion and theology, is now quickly gaining importance.

5) Roger Scruton, *Our Church, A Personal History of the Church of England* (London: Atlantic Books, 2012), 6.

6) Ibid., 40.

7) Ibid., 47.

picture of the world, but through religion it is made manifest in our lives and our lives made part of it.[8] Religion, for Scruton, first and foremost addresses the question "why?" not in terms of providing a cause, but in responding to our need for meaning – and experiencing the world as meaningful is a form of religious experience.

Similarly, John Cottingham in *Why Believe?* echoes Alistair MacIntyre in suggesting that we have an innate need of – that we are fundamentally dependent on – orienting ourselves towards enduring values and contends that religious belief offers a "home" for these aspirations.[9] To reject the belief in God and the transcendent, as Cottingham argues, is to become ontologically homeless, even if we reject these things for ontological reasons. Reason cannot bring us home, Cottingham suggests, as this requires trust.[10] For a home is not created by a rational belief in the safety it provides, but by our trust towards it – a trust that we in turn want to earn back as much as we benefit from it.

There is no place in the physical world for trust understood in this sense. I no more "trust" the bridge I am crossing than I "trust" that gravity will hold down the table in my study. In the physical we move in calculable space and only hedge our bets when we are forced into probabilistic reasoning, which too is a calculation. Real trust on the other hand is not based on any calculation, however, this does not mean it is an irrational attitude, or that it is an attitude we adopt when we do not have all the facts and cannot predict an outcome. As Cottingham writes:

> Nothing distorts the mindset of the typical modern thinker than the unspoken assumption that only quantifiable, scientifically measurable aspects of things can count as genuine constituents of reality.[11]

As human persons we exist in a world of meanings and values, which are no less real when they are defied – that we can strip a person of dignity does not undermine, but confirms the reality of what we have stripped away. Neither are these values and mean-

8) Ibid., 6.

9) John Cottingham, *Why Believe?* (London: Continuum, 2009), 5.

10) Ibid., 10.

11) Ibid., 13.

ings arbitrary just because they can be in conflict – the possibility of conflict shows that they are independent of our will and desire. Religion can be seen as a roadmap that guides us through these conflicts.

This aspect of religious belief is being acknowledged not only by religious philosophers, but by atheists too. For example, Tim Crane in his *The Meaning of Belief* analyzes religion not from the perspective of its claims to truth but as a way human beings orient themselves in the life-world pervaded by normative meanings and values.[12] Crane considers religion to have four essential elements: "first religion is systematic; second, it is practical; third, it is an attempt to find meaning; and fourth, it appeals to the transcendent."[13]

These are of course the same aspects of religion that Scruton and Cottingham emphasize. It seems therefor that if we shift perspective in this way and focus on the immaterial reality of value and meaning we are in the position to become open anew to the significance of religion as a way of life. "Anew" because the almost exclusive preoccupation with the truth of religious dogma is relatively new in the English-speaking world.[14]

After a wave of various reductionist "ism's," which presided over the twentieth century, the field seems to be wide open to explorations of the place of religious experience in the everyday and how it shapes the life-world of human communities. It is with this in mind that *Eidos. A Journal for Philosophy of Culture* presents two papers, which engage with the way religion shapes our experience of the world.

The first paper in the thematic section, by Janko Nešić, Vanja Subotić, and Petar Nurkić, "The Therapeutic Role of the Monastic Environment for Individuals with ASC: The Case of Hildegard of Bingen and her Lingua Ignota," considers how a monastic environment in the Middle Ages provided a therapeutic and inclusive environment for individuals with ASC. The second paper "The Saving Order of Science: New Atheist Sam Harris's Scientism is not Fundamentalism but Affective Attachment to a Salvific

12) See Tim Crane, *The Meaning of Belief, Religion from an Atheist's Point of View* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2017).

13) Ibid., 6.

14) See for example a typical discussion of the 19c. in J.S. Mill, *Three Essays on Religion* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1874); and, for comparison, a contribution as late as C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1943).

Epistemology," by Stefani Ruper, looks at materialistic scientism as essentially defining a "form of life" predicated on a goal akin to that of many religions: salvation.

The volume includes two further contributions in the Forum section: "The Problem of Being Someone" by Stephen Priest, and "Ontology or Practice? An Ingardenian Examination of Crittenden's *Ficta*" by Hicham Jakha. The first of these papers considers the question what it consists in for anything to be yourself. Priest argues that "being someone" is an "extra" feature of anything that exists in the sense that there are no logical or "scientific" facts that could account for it. He argues therefore that the problem is metaphysical, and if it is to have a solution, we must look for theological answers. The second paper Jakha criticizes Charles Crittenden's account of fictional objects arguing that his ontology of fictional objects does not support his weak eliminativism. Jakha argues for a return to Roman Ingarden's ontology of fictional objects, which postulates purely intentional objects that are formally incomplete, and which readers complete by resorting to practices of language and literary criticism.

The topic of objects is also discussed in the last paper of this issue. In the "Discussion Papers, Comments, Book Reviews" section, Marcin Rychter reviews *Objects Untimely*, a book by Graham Harman and Christopher Whitmore that applies the object-oriented approach to philosophy and archaeology.[15]

15) Graham Harman and Christopher Witmore, *Objects Untimely: Object-Oriented Philosophy and Archaeology* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2023).