Chapter (VII)

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Philosophy of religion is less honored and perhaps less practiced than it used to be. This is so for various reasons, mainly because theology has more vigor and has regained some of its rightful territory, formerly lost by default. A minor but important reason is uncertainty about the function of philosophy of religion. I want to suggest some distinctions which may clear up some of this confusion. And I want to use these distinctions to bring up some problems with which philosophers might concern themselves more than they do.

The first two kinds of philosophy of religion I shall discuss consist in discourse about religion. For both, philosophy of religion means the sort of discourse about religion which is appropriate for philosophers. Since philosophy is different from science, philosophical discourse about religion differs from the discourse about religion which goes on in the phenomenology, history, psychology، and sociology of religion. But how is philosophy different from science? What does philosophy do that science does not do? About this there are differing views which lead to two sorts of philosophical discourse about religion. I shall call them "analytical" philosophy of religion and "constructive" philosophy of religion.

The third kind of philosophy of religion I shall discuss is not discourse about religion but religious discourse. It is religious discourse which is at the same time philosophical, in contrast with un-philosophical religious discourse. That is to say it is religious philosophy. Thus the three kinds of philosophy of religion I propose to discuss are analytical philosophy of religion, constructive philosophy of religion, and religious philosophy. I shall discuss some problems about them and some problems for them.

I

Analytical philosophy of religion, which is concerned with the meaning of religious beliefs without deciding their truth or falsity, seldom, if ever, appears in a pure state. Sometimes it is employed, in a deliberately instrumental way, by constructive philosophers of religion, by religious philosophers, or by antireligious philosophers. At other times, though it purports to be pure, it is shaped by hidden decisions, positive or negative, about the truth of what is analyzed.

This fact suggests the main problem about this kind of philosophy of religion. Is it possible to analyze religious statements without making decisions about their truth or falsity and without being affected in the analysis by these decisions? Is all analysis, indeed, infected with and directed by presuppositions about existence of one sort or another? However this question is answered, it could be argued that analysis is useful and important even if it is incomplete. With this I would heartily agree.

I would urge the importance, for analytical philosophy of religion, of the history and phenomenology of religion. To suppose that "we all

know" what the terms of religious statements mean is a rash assumption, sometimes made by otherwise learned and acute philosophers. Historical knowledge does not give answers to analytical questions. It does suggest possible meanings which might have been overlooked.

In addition to giving us possible meanings of the terms of religious statements، the history of religion will suggest questions for analysis to answer. For example, consider Kant's Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone. We might be led to ask whether it presents some object of belief or feeling or desire which has the function of being supremely important, as the Way is in the Tao Te' Ching, as the One is in the Enneads of Plotinus, as God is in Calvin's Institutes، as Nature is in Spinoza's Ethics, or as Humanity is in Comte's Positive Polity. Does Kant's treatise present anything of this sort? God? The Moral Law? Humanity? The "good principle"? Some complex of these, or of some of these? If nothing of this sort, then what is the basic structure of Kant's religious proposal?

This is an analytical question. An answer to it does not entail approval or disapproval, though one of these may accompany the analytical judgment. Also, it should be noted, this is not a historical question about Kant's intention. It is rather about the system presented in the treatise. We need not commit the "intentional fallacy" (substituting the historical question for the analytical question) in answering it. But it is a question, or set of questions, suggested by the history of religion.

Of course, useful analytical remarks can always be made about religious statements, without taking account of the history of

religion and even without considering the sort of interest religious statements express. Religious statements are not as such semantically peculiar (though some religious statements are semantically peculiar). Their modes of reference have analogues in other types of discourse. Hence there can be a logic which governs religious discourse as well as other types of discourse. Nevertheless, the kind of analysis which ignores historical contexts, intentions, and interests will be very incomplete. I do not see how it is possible to understand such statements as "Faith is the substance of things hoped for" or "That art thou" without taking account of the particular kind of human interest these statements express and the intentions with which they are made. And I do not see how it is possible to give a complete analysis of a statement without understanding it.

Instead of ignoring the context and intention of religious statements, analysis might take account of the fact that they are statements aimed at expressing and communicating religious experiences and beliefs. This sort of analytical philosophy of religion seems to me much more promising and useful. Now if we are to take account of the kind of interest expressed by religious statements, we need a working theory of how religious interests differ from other interests. To be useful in analysis this would have to be a general theory, applicable equally to various forms of religion, not a special theory giving eminent status to a particular form of religion. Such a theory would not itself commit us to a particular religious position, though, as a matter of additional fact, we might be committed to one.

Many general theories of religion, of different sorts, have been proposed and defended. Some refer to a characteristic emotional quality held to be present only in religious experience, for example، "awe." Other theories refer to some essential attribute of the object of religious belief which is said, for example, to be always something "infinite" or "supernatural." Still other theories refer to some function the religious object has in the experience of the religious person، some place it has in his universe.' In my judgment theories of this last sort are most likely to be fruitful in philosophical analysis. To this point I shall return later on.

Finally it needs to be said that, however important analysis may be, it is not enough. We want to know about some religious statements not only what they mean but whether they are true.

II

Constructive philosophy of religion offers non-religious grounds for religious beliefs. Unlike analytical philosophy of religion, it undertakes to decide the truth or falsity of religious beliefs. Unlike religious philosophy, it undertakes to make this decision on non-religious grounds. It aims to construct answers to religious questions out of non-religious premises. Sometimes, though not always، this has been the aim of "empirical" philosophies of religion. Is this kind of philosophy of religion possible؟ By "non-religious grounds" I mean reasons for belief which do not presuppose, or aim at awakening, a religious interest. Another way of putting this would be as follows: non-religious grounds are reasons acceptable to non-members of any religious community (however broadly defined) to which the

proposer may belong and acceptable to members of any such community by virtue of experiences they share with non members.

More shortly, in order to understand and accept these reasons, it is not necessary that the propose should share any religious commitment with the proposer.

Examples of such reasons are appeals to (1) such public facts as physical motion and biological adaptations; (2) common facts of moral or aesthetic or religious experience (taking these as objective historical facts); (3) the nature of thought (for example, arguments for the identity of thought and being) or the nature of the self. From premises like these، constructive philosophy of religion undertakes to arrive at religious conclusions.

This sort of reasoning is not peculiar to proponents of any particular religious view, such as theism. Some arguments for a religion of humanity, appealing to scientific refutations of ancient myths and to the historical success of technology, are of this sort. For example, it is argued that science has shown that no supernatural being exists, that belief in the supernatural has confused and weakened moral effort, and that by the use of intelligence human beings can remake the world. Some humanists seem to hold that though none of these statements expresses or presupposes a specifically religious interest, yet a religious conclusion follows from them.

This sort of constructive argument for humanism is comparable with constructive arguments for theism. In one case it is argued that, since humanity is the sole agency for reconstructing the world، humanity is the object of religious devotion. In the other case it is

argued that, for example, there is a first efficient cause of the world, "to which everyone gives the name of God".

This second kind of philosophy of religion, like the first kind, does not always appear in a pure state. Implicit appeals to the values and beliefs distinctive of some religious community often lurk in the interstices of such arguments. So it is sometimes difficult to tell whether a particular piece of reasoning is offered as constructive philosophy of religion or as religious philosophy. But some philosophers of religion, for example, Edgar S. Brightman and F. R. Tennant, have maintained views similar to the one I am describing. Indeed, much philosophy of religion in the past century has assumed that, beginning with a general interest in finding out what is real and reflecting on our general experience, we can arrive at religious conclusions. It has been a fairly widespread assumption that constructive philosophy of religion is possible.

Like metaphysics, constructive philosophy of religion is now beset by positivists, on the one hand, and by existentialists, on the other. But in one important way the problem about constructive philosophy of religion is different from the problem about metaphysics. For the former claims to lead to religious conclusions, a claim the latter does not need to make and often does not make.

Therefore, there are two problems about constructive philosophy of religion. In so far as it employs metaphysical assertions, it must face the questions raised by Hume, Kant, and contemporary positivists. It must show that these assertions are meaningful and sound. But this would not resolve the second problem, which may be put as follows: If the conclusion of the argument is an answer to a religious

question، does it not seem that the religious question-and not merely some general question about the nature of reality-was being asked in the beginning? I suggest that only if we ask religious questions, explicitly or implicitly, do we get religious answers. If we get religious answers, it is a sign we have asked religious questions.

Let us revert to the argument for a religion of humanity. The conclusion was that, since nothing exists beyond the world and since human beings are the only creative agents in the world, therefore humanity is the object of religious devotion. Does this conclusion follow from the premises? Does it follow without the additional premise, "Whatever is the agent of creation is the object of religious devotion؟" Of course, this premise may be implicitly shared by the proposer of the argument and the propose. Or the presentation of the argument may occasion an awakening of this particular religious commitment. But in one way or another conclusion of the argument، which is a religious statement, depends on the additional premise, which is also a religious statement. I suggest that, to justify a religious statement as the conclusion of an argument, there must be at least one religious statement among the premises of the argument. And if this is so, then constructive philosophy of religion is something more, or something less, than it purports to be.

This is a good place to raise a question about ontological philosophy of religion، which begins with being as such, not with this or that being. Is it held that anyone who thinks about the question "What is being?" with genuine but disinterested curiosity will discover what being is? And is it supposed, further، that the answer to this question amounts to an answer to the religious question؟ If so, then this would be an example of constructive philosophy of religion. If I

understand him correctly, Paul Tillich holds that the ontological question is asked with religious concern. I suppose‹ therefore, that his ontological philosophy of religion is not constructive philosophy of religion but religious philosophy.

III

Religious discourse is not discourse about religion, any more than scientific discourse is discourse about science. Religious philosophy is religious discourse which is at the same time philosophical. It is religious discourse which has survived philosophical analysis. But it is not confined to analysis. It includes decisions and proposals about the truth of religious beliefs. In contrast with constructive philosophy of religion, on the other hand, the reasons given for religious beliefs are religious reasons. That is, they are reasons which presuppose or aim at awakening a religious interest of some sort. Examples of this kind of philosophy of religion‹ expressing very different points of view‹ are John Dewey's A Common Faith‹ Roger Hazelton's Renewing the Mind‹ and W. T. Stace's Time and Eternity.

In religious philosophy we have the religious man philosophizing, that is‹ seeking clarity and generality of understanding. Therefore, the main problem about religious philosophy is this: Is religion compatible with clarity and generality of understanding? Marxists‹ Freudians, and others say it is not for various reasons, some of which have considerable weight.

When these reasons are examined, it becomes clear that they are directed against a certain class of beliefs, called "supernatural" but often not skillfully defined. By the defender of religious philosophy,

this restriction of religion to belief in the supernatural or to attitudes which include this belief may be accepted or rejected. If it is accepted, then he must show that it is possible to think and speak with reasonable clarity about the supernatural and give a reasonably coherent account of its relation to nature. Only such a demonstration could justify the possibility of religious philosophy. But let us examine this restriction more closely.

Accepting this restriction, an individual is religious only if he believes in a supernatural reality. Any religious belief is concerned with an object to which the attribute "supernatural" belongs. This attribute is thus essential to the religious object. We might therefore call this theory of religion a substantival theory.

Religion is defined in terms of an essential attribute of the object of religious belief.

On this view, "being religious" is not like "having aesthetic enjoyment" but is like "having enjoyment of significant form"; it is not like "being moral" but is like "conforming to social standards;" it is not like "being a citizen" but is like "being a Democrat" or "being a Republican"; it is like not "being scientific" but is like "being a Lamarckian" or "being a Freudian".

Now, with theories of this sort, "being religious" and "being philosophical" may become incompatible. This will occur if the individual finds the essential attribute self-contradictory or if the existence of a being with this attribute is incompatible with other beliefs he cannot reject. In either case, he might stop being religious, or he might stop being philosophical. He could not continue being

both religious and philosophical at the same time. That is, religious philosophy would be, for that individual, impossible.

Notice that this is not the same as saying that there are problems for religious philosophy. It is rather a problem about religious philosophy, about whether religious philosophy is possible. On any theory of religion there can be tensions between a particular religious belief and a philosophical concern. Just so there can be tensions between a particular moral belief and a philosophical concern or between a particular scientific belief and a philosophical concern. Particular moral beliefs have to be made clear and related to other beliefs. Sometimes, as a result of philosophical examination, they will be rejected and exchanged for other moral beliefs. One would then be moral in a different way. In a similar manner، there are problems for religious philosophy. But on a substantival theory of religion there may be conflict between any and every religious belief and having a philosophical concern.

We have been considering the implications of accepting the restriction of religious beliefs to belief in the supernatural. Now let us consider the possibility of rejecting this restriction. Other theories of religion than substantival ones are possible. For example, we might construct a theory of religion which would permit the attributes of the religious object to vary without restriction. What would be constant among all the varieties of religion, on this sort of theory, would be the function of the object in the universe of the religious person.

One such theory is that of Erich Fromm, who defines a religion as "any system of thought and action shared by a group which gives

the individual a frame of orientation and an object of devotion." Another such theory is that of Paul Tillich, who, for the purpose of interpreting the history of religion, interprets God as "that which concerns man ultimately," so that "early Buddhism has a concept of God just as certainly as does Vedanta Hinduism," and "moral or logical concepts of God are seen to be valid in so far as they express an ultimate concern."' We are not concerned with Fromm's or Tillich's own religious views. Here they are proposing general theories of religion, and it is clear that these are functional, not substantival‹ theories of the religious object.

On theories of this sort there cannot be conflict in principle between religion and philosophy. There can be conflicts between holding some particular religious belief or other and being philosophical‹ just as there can be conflict between holding some particular scientific belief (such as belief in the ether) and being philosophical, or between some particular moral belief (such as belief in primitive taboos) and being philosophical. But we would not in this case speak of a conflict between religion and philosophy, any more than we would speak of a conflict between science and philosophy or between morality and philosophy. Hence, on this sort of theory of religion, religious philosophy is always possible. For it would be possible, whatever one's religious belief happened to be‹ to persist in a concern for clarity and generality of understanding.

In conclusion let me add these summary remarks about the relation between philosophy of religion and general theories of religion. Analytical philosophy of religion needs a general theory of religion as a guide to the intentions of religious statements and hence as a condition of understanding their meanings. Religious philosophy

needs a general theory of religion as a formal guide in religious inquiry and as a protection against dogmatism. Constructive philosophy of religion could dispense with a general theory of religion. But it is questionable whether this kind of philosophy of religion is, as an independent program, logically possible.