



Religious Epistemology and Dialectic

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Abstract

Much recent discussion of the epistemology of religious belief has focused on justification of belief in the existence of God. Religious belief, however, includes much more than belief in God. In this paper, it is argued that the justification of belief in God is best seen in the context of other interrelated religious beliefs and practices. Philosophers of religion argue about whether religious belief requires evidence and on the sorts of arguments that have been presented. In this paper, a dialectical approach to the justification of religious belief is suggested that draws upon Hegel, Peirce, and W. E. Hocking. Rational reflection on the nature of experience that provides the solution to the problems of skepticism and solipsism in the Hegelian tradition, a tradition self-consciously developed by both Peirce and Hocking. If reason itself is only manifest in social exchanges, then the rationality of religious belief cannot be a private affair restricted to the subject of experience; rather it is the process of communicative interactions in accord with the overlapping norms of those who participate in them. Finally, some implications of this approach for the problem of religious diversity are sketched.



Keywords

Religious epistemology, dialectic, religious belief, justification, Hegel, Charles Sanders Peirce, Hocking.

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1. Introduction

If we take a look at some introductory books and anthologies in the philosophy of religion, we will find that the focus of attention in much philosophy of religion since the last quarter of the twentieth century, at least, is on epistemology.¹ In the post-war period, there was an effort to respond to the challenge of verifiability posed by logical positivism.² With the decline of positivism and the proliferation of various theories of justification, philosophers of religion sought to show how belief in God could be justified.³ Some sought to rework traditional proofs for the existence of God (Craig, 1979). The late William Alston sought to show that the structure of the justification for belief in God was essentially the same as the justification for belief in a sensible world.⁴ Alvin Plantinga has argued at length for a Reformed Epistemology according to which belief in God could be considered properly basic, that is, warranted but without any need of support from argument or experience. Some have sought to show that the weight of probabilities favors belief in God. Kierkegaardian and Wittgensteinian versions of fideism have been distinguished and contrasted with evidentialism, the claim that rational belief requires support by the totality of one's evidence. Atheists have argued that belief in God fails to satisfy the epistemological criteria that govern the natural sciences and are needed for rational belief. So, the question of how to justify belief in God has loomed large, and the answers posed to this question cover a wide spectrum of views. Nevertheless, the sort of view that seems most plausible to me has been neglected, and I think that one reason for this neglect is the tendency to focus on the belief that God exists as paradigmatic, even if other religious beliefs are also admitted.

In order to get an idea of the neglected epistemological stance for religious faith that I'd like to suggest, we can begin by oversimplifying the ideas that have been proposed by philosophers and theologians. The traditional view held by Muslim, Christian, and Jewish theologians was that many important religious beliefs can be demonstrated by rational proof on the basis of self-evident propositions. We can call this position "rational foundationalism", regardless as to whether the self-evident premises used were limited to *a priori* truths or included obviously true *a posteriori* ones. In this sense, Farabi, Anselm and Saadia were all rational foundationalists. As long as there has been philosophical speculation about religion, however, the approach of the philosophers has found opponents. One form this

1. Sufficient testimony to this may be found in Sanders and de Ridder (2007).

2. This theme dominates the pace-setting collection of Flew and MacIntyre (1955).

3. See Hick (1957); Blackstone (1963); Plantinga (1967); Mitchell (1973).

4. Starting with Alston (1982), and leading to Alston (1991), and subsequent publications.

opposition has taken has been fideist. The fideists have argued that faith does not require any demonstration, and have often considered the attempt to prove the existence of God as somehow impious.

With the European Enlightenment, major doubts were raised about rational foundationalism. Spinoza showed how one could adhere strictly to the view that theological matters are to be investigated through the methods of rational foundationalism and yet arrive at entirely different results than orthodoxy had assumed. Hume raised skeptical doubts about the entire project, and Kant argued that the program was ridden with internal contradictions from which the conclusion was drawn that theoretical reason was impotent, that is, incapable of delivering metaphysical truth.

There were several reactions. Some saw in these developments a vindication of fideism. Jacobi's advocacy of the *salto mortale* may be considered an attenuated form of fideism, for Jacobi was no irrationalist. Others sought to prop up a religious metaphysics on the basis of reworked arguments. The argument from design featured prominently in these attempts. Yet others reacted by trying to provide a justification for religious belief grounded in religious experience. Schleiermacher championed this cause in the nineteenth century, and in a very different way, it was advocated by William James at the beginning of the twentieth.

Contemporary epistemology of religious belief is dominated by positions that derive from these: reworked attempts at rational demonstration; various forms of fideism; practical arguments; and arguments from religious experience. Of course, the reworkings are much more sophisticated and complex than what is found among the 19th-century figures. Instead of rationalistic foundationalism, more elaborate forms of weak foundationalism are presented. Probabilistic arguments and inference to the best explanation are introduced to supplement deductive demonstrations. Arguments from religious experience are contrasted and compared with sophisticated theories of sensory perception.

I do not wish to dispute the worth of any of these programs but to turn attention to another sort of program that has been given less attention of late: dialectic. Dialectic has meant many things in the course of the history of philosophy; but here, I intend to examine the dialectical tradition as presented by Hegel, taken up again by Peirce, and further elaborated by Hocking. My claim is that this tradition offers another avenue to religious knowledge.

Although I am drawing from the Western tradition in this discussion, there are also important points in the Islamic tradition through which these themes resonate. Dialectic is usually translated into Arabic as *jadal*, and is understood in a rather negatively charged manner as the art of disputation. Dialectic as a means for acquiring knowledge or wisdom is not known as *jadal*, but is taken to be a spiritual journey.

Generally speaking, dialectic has the structure of a conversation or debate. Claims are made; objections raised; the original claims are clarified or revised; the objections are answered; the objections are revised or withdrawn or clarified; and so on. But this is not enough for dialectic. If dialectic is to be a way to gain knowledge, frivolous claims and objections should not be made, and the aim of the participants should be to find the truth and not just to win the argument. One of the themes that turn up repeatedly in the works of Plato is the distinction between dialectic and mere “eristic”,¹ the art of disputation. Dialectic is not merely aimed at convincing others of one’s position; rather, to engage in dialectic is to take steps to arrive at the right position.

In the *Republic*, dialectic is also likened to a sort of intellectual, and at the same time spiritual, even mystical, journey:

Then isn’t this, at last, Glaucon, the song that dialectic sings? It is intelligible, but it is imitated by the power of sight. We said that sight tries, at last, to look at the animals themselves, the stars themselves, and, in the end, at the sun itself. In the same way, whenever someone tries through argument and apart from all sense perceptions to find the being itself of each thing and doesn’t give up until he grasps the good itself with understanding itself, he reaches the end of the intelligible, just as the other reached the end of the visible.

Absolutely.

And what about this journey? Don’t you call it dialectic?

I do (*Republic VII*, 532).

2. Hegel

Scholars disagree about Hegel’s views on dialectic, and I will not attempt to adjudicate the issues involved in their disputes.² My purpose is only to very briefly review the function that the Hegelian dialectic played in his *Religionsphilosophie*, and for this, the finer points of interpretation may be put off for another occasion.

Hegel was preoccupied with questions of what we would call religious epistemology throughout his life: from his days as a seminarian in Tübingen to the last days of his life when he lectured on *Religionsphilosophie* in Berlin. His life work may be considered a sustained attempt to salvage religious knowledge from the wreckage left by both the skeptical arguments against dogmatism

1. See *Philebus*, 17 a. for Plato’s distinction between dialectical rhetoric and eristic rhetoric, see *Phaedrus*, 269 f.

2. Beiser says that the dialectical method is “perhaps the most controversial aspect of Hegel’s thought.” Beiser, 2005, 21.

(mounted by Hume and Kant) and the fideistic attempts to overcome such arguments (offered by Jacobi and Schleiermacher). The solution Hegel offered was that religious knowledge is not to be found in the traditional proofs nor in religious feelings, but through the application of the dialectical method.

The dialectical method, as understood by Hegel, consists in tracing the development of concepts. In the *Religionsphilosophie*, Hegel starts with very general notions of God and religion, he next considers the particular forms these notions have taken in different cultures, and finally speculates that the developmental sequence of these notions can guide our own views.

There is much that is problematic with the Hegelian dialectic. Perhaps the most important problem is that Hegel tied dialectic development to history. As Frederick Beiser concludes in his recent study: “Hegel had bet his whole system on history; and he had lost” (Beiser, 2005, p. 313). This does not imply that the whole system needs to be thrown out, but it does require considerable renovation if it is to serve its original purpose and show us the way to religious knowledge. Further problems are pointed out by Nicholas Rescher: Hegel thought that every age has a characteristic philosophy and that there is a growing consensus. Rescher points out that many of the major philosophical positions taken in antiquity remain live options today. No consensus is emerging, but controversies of long ago continue to be revived (Rescher, 2006, p. 89 f.).

If Hegel was overly optimistic about the course of history and its relation to dialectical development, this does not mean that there are no lessons to be learned from history, or that there is no dialectical progression to be found through the comparison of various realizations of an idea.¹ Science may stagnate or degenerate; but this does not mean that we cannot recognize scientific advances, even if some cases will be controversial. We may also recognize theological stagnation, advance, and decline, even if such recognition is unable to allow the adjudication of most religious and theological controversies.

J. M. E. McTaggart wrote his doctoral dissertation on Hegel’s dialectic, and in the expanded published edition we find his interpretation of how Hegel applied his dialectical method to the problem of religious knowledge.

Now, if God is identical with all true being, he certainly has “that reality of which all categories are only descriptions.” For, if he has not, nothing has it, since there is no reality outside him, and the denial of all reality is as impossible as the denial of all truth, – to deny it is to assert it. For if the denial is true, it must be real, and so must the person who makes it (McTaggart, 1922, p. 67). Kant’s objections do not affect such an

1. The criticism of Hegel’s optimism finds an analog in Islamic philosophy in Ayatullah Misbah’s criticism of Mulla Sadra’s view of substantial motion, and proposes that it is not only ascending, as Mulla Sadra supposed but also descending and stagnating. See Misbah Yazdi, 2010, p. 176-178.

ontological argument as this.... He did not try to prove God's existence simply from the divine attributes. He relied on two facts. The first was that the conception of God proved that if anything exists, God must exist. The second was that experience existed, and therefore God must exist. The important point in the conception of God, for Hegel's purpose here, was not that he was the most real of beings, nor that he contained all positive qualities, but that he was the only real being. For the existence of an *ens realissimum* or of an *omnitudo realitatis* can be denied. But the existence of all reality cannot be denied, for its denial would be contradictory. And, on Hegel's definition, to deny God's existence is equivalent to denying all reality, for "true being is another name for God" (McTaggart, 1922, p. 68).

For those familiar with the tradition of Islamic philosophy, it will seem that McTaggart is attributing to Hegel an ontological argument that is more akin to some versions of the "proof of the sincere" or "*Burhān al-Ṣiddiqīn*". McTaggart even addresses objections to Hegel's argument on grounds that it involves an illicit move from essence to existence, which he refutes by making the point that is quite well known in Islamic philosophy, that the proof is one that proceeds from existence to existence:

For the presence of the analytic aspect in the transition means that we are working towards the development, in explicit consciousness, of the full value of the whole which was previously before us in implicit consciousness, and the existence of this whole is the motive force of the transition. If, therefore, the result reached by the dialectic has real existence, so also the datum, of which the dialectic process is an analysis, must have real existence. The argument is thus from existence to existence (McTaggart, 1922, pp. 65-66).

Resonance with the Islamic tradition comes into even better focus when we turn to Hegel's own statement from *The Encyclopedia Logic*:

The so-called proofs that God is there have to be seen simply as the *descriptions* and analyses of the inward *journey of the spirit*. It is a *thinking* journey and it thinks what is sensory. The *elevation* of thinking above the sensible, its *going out* above the finite to the infinite, the *leap* that is made into the supersensible when the sequences of the sensible are broken off, all this is thinking itself; this transition is *only thinking*. To say that this passage ought not to take place means that there is to be no thinking.¹

1. "Die sogenannten Beweise vom Dasein Gottes sind nur als die Beschreibungen und Analysen des Ganges des Geistes in sich anzusehen, der ein denkender ist und das Sinnliche denkt. Das Erheben des Denkens über das Sinnliche, das Hinausgehen desselben über das Endliche zum Unendlichen, der Sprung, dermit Abbrechung der Reihendes Sinnlichen ins Übersinnliche gemacht werde, alles

One part of Hegel's proof for the existence of God is that described above, which corresponds roughly with some versions of the *Burhān al-Ṣiddiqīn*. The second part is to show that the absolute reality that necessarily exists is God. It is here that Hegel relies on the dialectic of the historical conceptions of God that reach perfection when God is conceived as the Absolute.

3. Peirce

Charles Sanders Peirce was a Hegelian, at times a very critical one, but over the course of his life, he became quite appreciative of Hegel's work. Peirce's own development of what he called "abduction" and is now called "inference to the best explanation" (IBE) grew out of his study of Hegel. Indeed, Peirce's own understanding of abduction seems to be more Hegelian than common views of IBE, since Peirce viewed explanation as requiring the sort of systematic development that characterizes Hegel's views and not a mere comparison of rival explaining propositions. Hence, we may be justified in claiming that Peirce's view of abduction is dialectical.

The application of Peirce's dialectic to the topic of religious belief may be found in his "A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God." Here Peirce gives three arguments for the existence of God, in such a manner that the second and third arguments involve reflection on the previous ones.

The first argument is dubbed by Peirce "the humble argument", and may be seen as Peirce's answer to his own earlier objections to mysticism. Peirce argues that if the idea of God is entertained and reflected upon by what he calls "musement", which is a sort of free association but includes reflection on logical connections, one will find oneself naturally attracted to the idea of God. This does not, by itself, prove that the idea has validity; but it is reasonable to think that any idea that has such intense natural attraction is correct.

The second argument is the *neglected argument* in the proper sense. (Peirce also uses "the neglected argument" to refer to all three of these arguments together). Here we are to apply inference to the best explanation to the humble argument. Why should the idea of God have such a strong attraction for people of so many different cultures and eras? A plausible answer would be that God has given the human mind the capacity to recognize Him in this way.

Peirce does not have any special name for the third argument, so, we will refer to it as Peirce's dialectical argument; and it is here that the Hegelian influence on Peirce is most obvious, including reference to God as "the

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dieses ist das Denken selbst, dies Übergehen ist nur Denken. Wenn solcher Übergang nicht gemacht werden soll, so heißt dies, es soll nicht gedacht werden." §50 *The Encyclopedia Logic*.

Absolute”. Here Peirce suggests that any philosophical system that aspires to completeness will have to recognize the Absolute. Why this should be so, remains sketchy, but the logic Peirce envisages is of such abstract nature that he makes the grandiose claim that it will include the entire Hegelian system as a mere instance. Since there is no way to imagine the completion of such a system without the Absolute, we find that the dialectical development of a complete philosophy requires us to posit the existence of God.

4. Hocking

Ten years after the publication of James’ *Varieties of Religious Experience*, another major study of religious experience by one of James’ former students at Harvard, W. E. Hocking, was published: *The Meaning of God in Human Experience*. Like Peirce, William Ernest Hocking was also a Hegelian and has been considered the last in a line of American idealists that goes back to W. T. Harris. In the preface to this work, Hocking echoes James with remarks that express dissatisfaction with Hegelian approaches to religion: the Absolute is not the God of religion and philosophizing about God is not the same as worshipping Him.

Much of Hocking’s work is concerned with the relation between feeling and thinking, and he criticizes William James for not giving sufficient weight to the latter. Worship is directed toward knowledge at the same time that it is associated with powerful feelings that help to propel its dialectical development.

The religious experience of man is not an unchanging given, but an ascending quest for knowledge. As experience is gained, misunderstandings are discarded. Both the individual seeker and the human race progress through historical development in which immature ideas come to be recognized as such.

In his *Experience and God*, John E. Smith comments:

Rational dialectic in religion cannot perform the task it is supposed to perform unless it begins with ideas which themselves have been derived from the direct experience of the individual. Only in this way can the thinking self find itself possessed of genuine conviction for the conclusions attained by its thought.

Smith credits Augustine and his followers with this insight and footnotes this with a citation of Hocking for further elaboration.¹

Hocking outlines the stages of “mental evolution” in which the idea gradually becomes free of feeling like part of the dialectic. Pragmatists held

1. “This point and further implications have been developed at greater length by W.E. Hocking, *The Meaning of God in Human Experience* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1912; reissued 1967 with a new Preface by John E. Smith), chap. XXII” (Smith, 1995, p.114).

that all ideas have meaning only insofar as they indicate some action or plan of action. Since it is believed that actions are directly motivated by feelings, ideas must be vehicles for feelings to produce action. While Hocking does not accept this view, he is willing to assume that primitive ideas may be understood in this way. If we begin with instrumental ideas alone, ideas that direct us toward various ends and the means of obtaining them, we may arrive at the recognition that various courses of action have both benefits and harms that need to be considered. Then the idea will gain some independence from action, as it can be associated with different values. The idea of a *thing* arises as a result of the attitude of indifference, a reserved value judgment, a theoretical viewpoint. The merging of ideas and impressions forms the *World-object*, all of the changes and motions in the content of which are understood as taking place against the one ultimate background-field of infinite time, all contents of which are taken to be rooted in one ultimate background stuff, which Hocking calls *Substance*, and he rather portentously announces: "Such World-object, in its complexity, is partially summarized in our idea of Nature; more completely, as objective Reality, whose problematic *Substance* sets the last goal for all idea-meanings" (Hocking, 1912, p. 119). In this dialectical process there is an impulse toward objectivity and religion, yet still connected to a feeling, a desire for the truth: "Some passion for objectivity, for reality, for Substance, quite prior to other passions, there is at the bottom of all idea; a passion not wholly of an unreligious nature, not wholly un-akin to the love of God" (Hocking, 1912, p. 123).

Just as religion cannot be reduced to feeling, love itself has a cognitive component. Love is the dialectical working out of an idea, a "reality-thought", in experience to find beauty and value. Love and sympathy require cognizance of *another*, and hence the understanding of external reality. Hocking goes so far as to say, "Interest in objectivity, which we have found at the root of all idea-making, is love itself directed to reality" (Hocking, 1912, p. 135). The constructivist thesis, that religious experience is the mere by-product of a certain kind of training, that it is construction rather than discovery, is contrary to the direction that the development of religious experience takes as an interest in objectivity. Anti-realism is false to the phenomenology of religious experience. In the dialectic of religious experience, man discovers that first impressions need to be revised. In his basic religious experiences, man becomes keenly aware of his own limitations: ignorance, weakness, humbleness, in which "the negative side of his experience is *made possible by some prior recognition of a positive being*" (Hocking, 1912, p. 236).

Hocking takes the experience of the feeling of not being alone in the

world as the original source of knowledge of God. In its most primitive state, it is merely that there is more than the ego. Thought of as an infinite other, it is capable of inspiring self-sacrifice, even martyrdom. It reaches a more developed level in the idea that what I do not know is nevertheless known, and magic is founded as the first attempt at science, an attempt to overcome ignorance through commerce with the unknown. Likewise, in the recognition of human frailty, there is a complementary idea that everything is under the control of an omnipotent other.

Another aspect of the original recognition of divinity is to be found in the phenomenon of alienation. The religious impulse results from an alienation from the world, “an unwillingness to take his world as he finds it, a consciousness of the everlasting No” (Hocking, 1912, p. 239). Man gradually discovers that this alienation is made possible by God.

We begin with an animism that reflects the dim awareness of reality as spirit, although that awareness is localized. “Spirits are mere flashes of divine life breaking out here and there, spot-wise, in Nature and in human event, as we have seen” (Hocking, 1912, 318). When the spirits are personalized and addressed, we find belief in gods. Eventually, this is replaced by monotheism. True to the Hegelian and mystical traditions, Hocking holds that the truth about God is to be found in contradictory predications: He is person and no person, between the one and the many, between transcendence and immanence. “God appears as a being in whom opposite traits are strangely united: but the nature of the center in which such oppositions agree, or are neutralized, is not picturable – is known, if at all, only to immediate experience” (Hocking, 1912, p. 323). He affirms atheism as the proper purgative for an overly florid religiosity. Atheism fails, however, because it ignores the one hope in a desperate situation, namely, that God might provide a solution to the dilemmas.

He reflects further: “There could be no absolute rapprochement between the heart of this alien-within-the-world which we call Self and its God, unless that God were also in some way alien to that same realm” (Hocking, 1912, p. 329). After briefly pausing over the mystical insights of Brahman pietists who understood that the ineffable within is the same as the ineffable without, Hocking comments, “...we have much to relearn that the Orient has never forgotten” (Hocking, 1912, p. 330). Another advance in religion is when it becomes thoroughly ethical, as in the teachings of Jesus. While admitting that “the advance of religion has been very largely from personality to impersonality” (Hocking, 1912, p. 333), Hocking insists, “there is neither merit nor truth in rarefying the thought of God; nor in presenting him to our conceptions in terms of some thinner and weaker sort of world-unity easier to image and believe in than a personal world-unity” (Hocking, 1912, p.334). God may include a divine and cosmic law, “but God

has also a responsiveness of his own, and herein lies the immediate experience of the personality of God” (Hocking, 1912, p. 336).

Just as the culmination of the dialectic of mere philosophical reflection can be found in the “ontological argument,” there is also a dialectical process involved in worship. Those who become specialists in the ways of worship are the mystics, and Hocking provides a general description of the most fundamental divisions of this process: purification, enlightenment, and union. Religious truth is founded upon experience and established as veritable truth through reason. Hocking tells us that religion is built on “a super-sensible experience, like our experience of our human fellows” (Hocking, 1912, p.155). This would seem to indicate that religion is based on feelings similar to those of trust and love, but Hocking warns, “we cannot find a footing for religion in feeling: we must look for valid religious ideas” (Hocking, 1912, p. 155). Returning to the theme of the will to believe, he writes: “We are to seek the truth of religion obediently in experience as something which is established in independence of our finite wills” (Hocking, 1912, p.155). He concludes that while voluntarism cannot define truth for us, religious truth least of all, it can provide a test for the evaluation of truth claims, but this requires a more extensive discussion of his idealism than we can provide here.

At any rate, reason, as applied to experience, provides justification for religious beliefs. Hocking endorses a version of the ontological argument, a rational argument for the existence of God that begins with a basic understanding of being. However, Hocking’s argument, like Hegel’s, is dialectical rather than deductive. “The object of certain knowledge has this threefold structure, Self, Nature, and Other Mind; and God, the appropriate object of ontological proof, includes these three” (Hocking, 1912, p. 315). If we think that the idea of transcendent reality is an illusion that judgment must be made based on some idea of what is not illusion, and this becomes the transcendent reality we experience in having the idea of it. What Hocking is trying to say is that there is something intrinsic to the structure of our experience that requires us to posit real objects for our idea of an independent reality.

Conclusion

What I have attempted here is only a sketch of how to develop a dialectical approach to the justification of religious belief. With a nod toward Hegel, we may begin with a general notion of a dialectical justification of religious belief; then examine the attempts to realize such a justification in the particular cases of Hegel, Peirce, and Hocking; and finally, point in the direction that a more complete dialectical justification would take.

The approach sketched here need not appeal to a specifically Hegelian

metaphysics at all. What is essential is the attempt to develop a theistic/philosophical *Weltanschauung* about which one may assert with reasonable confidence that it bears the capacity to provide integrative explanations of our place in the world, our ends, morality, our origins, and other fundamental questions (see Löffler, 2006, pp. 151-176).

In conclusion, let us compare how religious experience functions in the contemporary discussions of analytic philosophy of religion with the role that it plays in the dialectical tradition reviewed above. Analytic philosophers of religion are generally skeptical about the ability of pure reason to provide any justification for belief in God in the style of the rationalist tradition. The a priori arguments for the existence of God have been put aside, and hope for religion is believed to lie in some sort of analogy with the way in which some sort of empirical theories are supported by observation. The key is to widen the concept of observation so that religious experience may be admitted in addition to sense experience. Differences arise over whether religious experiences justify religious beliefs, or whether religious beliefs are justified because they are presuppositions of religious experience, or whether religious beliefs are justified because they provide the best overall explanation for what is observed, or because it is rational to interpret religious experiences religiously, etc. In the dialectical tradition, religious experience also plays a key role in the argument for the rationality of religious belief. However, this tradition differs from that of the analytic philosophers not only because the style of argument presented is dialectic, but because it stresses the role played by speculative reason in the understanding of experience generally. It is rational reflection on the nature of experience that provides the solution to the problems of skepticism and solipsism in the Hegelian tradition, and it is further rational reflection and development of these same sorts of ideas that lead to the “ontological argument” as understood by Hegel, Royce, and Hocking. So, while the analytic project gives up on rationalist approaches to the justification of religious belief in favor of approaches modeled on the varieties of the justification of empirical beliefs, in Hocking, Peirce and Hegel, the notions of both reason and experience are expanded beyond those available to, say, Locke and Leibniz. The justification of religious belief is not modeled on the justification of perceptual beliefs as in William Alston, but on the justification of the awareness we have that we are in the presence of another in a personal encounter. The modeling is not one of plugging in different variables in a structure taken from sensory perception but is the culmination of a dialectical development that merely begins with personal recognition. Experience does not provide the raw data upon which reason is called to apply itself, as empiricist models suggest; rather experience essentially

involves the exercise of reason and is validated as it develops in practice through individual and social histories. In this process, emotive and cognitive elements are inseparable, even if not indistinguishable. As a result, the rationality of religious belief is not a private affair restricted to the subject of experience; rather it is present potentially for all who would apply reason through the dialectic described. This is its claim to objectivity.

To the question of whether religious experience has cognitive content, or is composed entirely of feelings, religious experience definitely has cognitive content. The very idea of experience bereft of cognitive content is somewhat misleading. Even such experiences as intense pain are typically interwoven with thoughts of bodily harm.

Of course, our experiences reflect the way we have learned to understand them, and so, our religious experiences will typically reflect our religious training. However, this does not mean that religious experiences are constructed by the mind and fail to reveal any supernatural reality.

Religious experience does not provide data that can be used to justify religious belief. Rather, it is successful rational reflection on experience in a religious manner and the development of religious experience that shows the rationality of religious belief. The rationality of religious belief is to be found in the success of the application of reason to experience religiously.

Religious experience is not essentially private, except in the trivial sense that each person is the subject of only his or her own experiences. The objectivity of religious experience is to be found in its openness to all to apply religious reason to experience, to follow the way of the rational mystic.

The Hegelian tradition of dialectical reasoning about religion should be of interest to those working in Islamic philosophical theology for several reasons. First, it offers a way of defending a rational metaphysics and metaphysical theology against those who favor approaches to theology based on feelings or based on approaches that incline more to empiricism. Although there are important differences between the sort of metaphysics and rationalism favored by Hegelians and those found in Islamic traditions of thought, there are similarities and opportunities for rapprochement, such as the similarity with the *Burhān al-Šiddiqīn*, mentioned above. Second, contemporary Muslim scholars often express misgivings about religious experience because they see it as opening the way to relativism. If the justification for religious belief is based on religious experience and religious experiences differ among those with different religious beliefs, would this not imply that one belief is as good as another and that there is no rational way to adjudicate the differences? Of course, answers to the charge of relativism may be found in analytic philosophy of religion in which religious experience plays a central role, but it is here that the dialectical

method may be found by Muslims to offer the most help. The role given to religious experience in dialectical reasoning is not that of properly basic beliefs that can be retained without further justification as long as defeaters are kept at bay; rather, religious experiences provide a point of departure that must be further developed. Both the beliefs drawn from religious experiences and the experiences themselves must run the gauntlet of rational criticism and the dialectical progress before they can do theological service. Third, Hegel, Peirce, and Hocking defend forms of mysticism that bear marked affinities to Islamic *‘irfān*, which has had such a tremendous influence through centuries of Muslim theological reflections.

Finally, attention to dialectic in the philosophy of religion may prove to have a mutually beneficial relationship to religious dialogue. One of the key elements of dialectic prominent in Plato seems to have gotten lost in the Hegelian tradition: the principle that dialectic is an appropriate kind of dialogue in which the aim of the participants is not to win an argument, but to seek truth. In the Hegelian tradition, one does not find the distinction between eristic and dialectic that featured so prominently in Plato. If, however, we could distinguish historical dialectic from historical eristic, Hegel might be rescued from the chains that bound the success of his philosophy to the contingencies of actual historical turns of events. The dialectic/eristic distinction in Plato depends on the aim of avoiding error and attaining truth. So, too, we should distinguish the courses of history that we collectively bring about as we aim at the truth from those that arise from struggles for power.

Concerning religious dialogue, the need for participation in mutually supportive efforts to attain truth and avoid error instead of winning contests for one's denomination will characterize dialectic approaches.

What we find in Hegel, Peirce, and Hocking is not so much tracing of history as an idealization that portrays how historical development could take place in a dialectical manner. Even when religious dialogue fails to result in denominational agreement, it can lead us toward religious truth and knowledge, not only despite, but by virtue of, our differences.

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