

Philosophical Study of Religion

1. What is religious studies?

Religious studies is the single field of study constituted by the question about the meaning and validity of religion, including the validity of such claim as religion may make or imply to decisive existential authority and truth.

2. What is the task of philosophical study of religion?

The task of philosophical study of religion is to ask and answer the properly systematic question (as distinct from the historical and practical questions) constituted by the constitutive question of religious studies about the meaning and validity of religion, especially the validity of such claim as religion may make or imply to decisive existential authority and truth.

3. How is religion to be defined and explained?

Religion is to be defined as the primary form of culture, or "cultural system" (Geertz), through which human beings explicitly answer the existential question of the meaning of ultimate reality for us, and thus express or imply a claim to decisive existential authority and truth; and religion is to be explained, accordingly, in the same way in which forms of culture generally are to be explained—namely, as one of a number of systems of concepts/symbols created by human beings and transmitted nongenetically through which they understand their existence and act to maintain or transform themselves together with others in society.

4.1. *Why is it necessary to distinguish strata of meaning in religious language?*

It is necessary to distinguish strata of meaning in religious language because, allowing that at least some religious language cannot possibly mean literally but only nonliterally (symbolically, metaphorically, analogically, or what have you), one can uphold the claim that such language is cognitively meaningful, as it has to be if religion is to be defined as explicitly answering the existential question of the meaning of ultimate reality for us, only by identifying at least some religious language that can mean literally or necessarily implies assertions that can.

4.2. *What issue did the positivistic critique of theology serve to force?*

The issue the positivistic critique of theology served to force is whether religious language does or does not have "literal [= cognitive] significance" and, if it does, how one is to give an adequate account of the truth claims that it expresses or implies, including the procedures necessary to validate them.

4.3. *What did the "theology and falsification debate" succeed in establishing about the meaning of religious language?*

The "theology and falsification debate" succeeded in establishing three main points about the meaning of religious language: (1) There are two basic issues about the meaning of religious language: 1. whether it is to be understood as expressing assertions; and 2. whether, if it is to be so understood, it expresses meaningful assertions. (2) Given the assumption that the only meaningful assertions (excluding the purely analytic assertions of logic and mathematics) are factual assertions, in the sense of assertions that can be factually falsified, there are three different positions that can be taken on these issues: 1. religious language expresses assertions, and they are meaningful assertions (Mitchell, Hick); 2. religious language expresses assertions, but they are not meaningful

assertions (Flew, Nielsen); and 3. religious language does not express assertions (Hare, Braithwaite). (3) Religious language does not function as it would if it expressed factual assertions.

4.4. In what respects, if any, are functional analysis and revisionary metaphysics alternative accounts of religious language?

Functional analysis and revisionary metaphysics are alternative accounts of religious language in two respects: (1) in respect of all of the positions represented in the "theology and falsification debate," insofar as these positions all agree in assuming that the only meaningful assertions are and must be factual assertions; and (2) in respect of one another, insofar as the first declines to provide the general account of the meaning and truth of religious language that the second insists is necessary and undertakes to provide.

4.5. Why is it necessary to analyze the structure of religious inquiry?

It is necessary to analyze the structure of religious inquiry both in itself and in relation to that of other fields of inquiry, or "domains of truth," in order to specify the generally accessible criteria of meaning and truth but for specifying which one cannot uphold the claim that religious language is cognitively significant.

4.6. How are oppositions of religious doctrines possible?

Oppositions of religious doctrines are possible if some of the constituents of the different patterns of life proposed by the doctrines (i.e., their course-of-action recommendations, proposals of valuation, and/or proposals for belief) are incompatible and, therefore, cannot be jointly accepted without absurdity.

5.1. *What are the main things to be observed about the constitutive concept of theistic religion, "God"?*

The main things to be observed about the constitutive concept of theistic religion, "God," are two: (1) its basis in our common experience or basic faith simply as human beings, insofar as it properly functions to provide an explicit answer to the existential question about the ultimate meaning of human life, and thus about the meaning of ultimate reality for us; and (2) its defining characteristics as a concept, at least when it is radically developed, as it is, in different ways, in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic monotheisms—namely, that it identifies strictly ultimate reality as the universal individual or the individual universal, whose functions as the sole primal source and the sole final end of all things are completely universal even while they are the functions precisely of an individual.

5.2. *What is the significance of the so-called problem of evil for answering the question of the meaning and truth of theistic religion?*

The significance of the so-called problem of evil for answering the question of the meaning and truth of theistic religion is that it provides a test case for deciding the coherence or incoherence of the concept "God," and thus of such alternative theistic concepts as those of classical and neoclassical theism respectively.

5.3. *Who bears the burden of proof in theistic-antitheistic argument, and how, or by what kind(s) of argument(s), does the logic of the constitutive assertion of theistic religion, "God is strictly ultimate reality," require one to argue either for or against its truth?*

Anyone who makes or implies a claim, be it theistic or antitheistic, bears the burden of proof for the claim in theistic-antitheistic argument; and the logic

of the constitutive assertion of theistic religion, "God is strictly ultimate reality," which cannot be true or false merely factually or contingently, but is and must be true or false metaphysically and so necessarily, requires one to argue either for or against its truth by a priori, rather than a posteriori, kinds of arguments, whether religious or philosophical, and so metaphysical and moral.

5.4. Are miracles and such other traditional "credentials of revelation" as fulfilled prophecy, religious experience, and ecclesial authority sufficient to validate the claims of a particular theistic religion?

Miracles and such other traditional "credentials of revelation" are not sufficient to establish the claims of a particular theistic religion because any argument from religious experience or ecclesial authority either begs the question or else refers beyond itself to yet other credentials by which the experience or authority must in turn be authenticated, while all arguments from such other alleged credentials as miracles and fulfilled prophecy have been shown to be open to methodological objections that have so far proved insurmountable.

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