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Guest Editor's Introduction:

The Prospect of Analytic Philosophy of Religion (in East Asia)

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Religion and its related thoughts are an important aspect of human life and worldview. With the emergence of the analytic philosophy tradition, influential analytic philosophers like Bertrand Russell, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and A. J. Ayer, whether they were religious or not, often had interesting discussions on religious philosophy. Indeed, analytic philosophy, with its emphasis on clarity, logic, and argumentation, has provided a rigorous framework for examining and elaborating on religious beliefs and experiences. To this day, the analytic philosophy of religion has matured in the international academic community: it has become one of the main fields of analytic philosophy scholarship, and has close ties with metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, philosophy of science, political philosophy, and other areas of analytic philosophy. There are quite a few relevant specialist

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journals which are widely recognized as decent journals within analytic philosophy, such as Religious Studies, the International Journal for Philosophy of Religion, Sophia, and Faith and Philosophy. There are also notable new journals arising, such as the Journal of Analytic Theology, specialized in the incorporation of analytic methods in theology, which started publishing in 2013, and Agatheos, a new general philosophy of religion journal based in Europe, which, despite not having started publishing yet (at the time of writing), has already formed an editorial board consisting of some of the most renowned leading scholars in the field.

An important question, then, is where the analytic philosophy of religion is from and where it should go.

Pioneers of analytic philosophy

We have just mentioned Russell, Wittgenstein, and Ayer, three remarkable pioneers of analytic philosophy during its founding period. While all were interested in the relationship between religion and philosophy, it is fair to say that none of them had a positive recognition of any religious worldview as a general basis for philosophy. Russell (1927) was the first among them to both build his own reputation and extensively treat religion. He published numerous essays criticizing religion and engaged in a famous debate with the Roman Catholic Jesuit priest and historian of philosophy, Frederick Copleston, concerning whether theism or atheism is more plausible. Russell remained eloquent in his remarks, but perhaps his work should be described as public intellectual activities: he criticized the reasonableness of several arguments for the existence of God and promoted secular humanism

and rationalism, thereby contributing to a common enterprise pursued by numerous public intellectuals and academics arguably since the French Revolution.

Ayer (1936), by contrast, was a pioneer in developing an original academic doctrine in the philosophy of religion as part of his research: as an extension of his positivism and verificationism, he argued that theistic claims are meaningless because the existence (and non-existence) of God cannot be verified – for this same reason, he even denied being an atheist. Wittgenstein (1966), despite his sympathy for religious life, did not formally publish any work in the philosophy of religion. His unpublished writings and lectures, which were eventually published, utilized his famous concepts of "language games" and "forms of life" from his later work, particularly formulated in Philosophical Investigations. Put simply, philosophy should consider religion on its own terms; religious language forms its own language game and constitutes a distinct form of life. This view allows religion to possess its own sui generis rationales but also undercuts religion's potential role as a source of metaphysical and epistemological principles for our wider philosophical worldview.

This development is unsurprising. Analytic philosophy and its earliest school, positivism, emerged as negative reactions to various schools of speculative metaphysics of their times, and its founding fathers associated themselves with the ideal of human progress through rationality and scientific methods. However, philosophical schools like positivism eventually faded out, and discussions surrounding religious

issues persisted. Religious and critical voices have reemerged in academic philosophy.

The Reemergence of Analytic Philosophy of Religion since the Mid-20th Century

Alongside the early 20th Century analytic philosophy's relative lack of interest in the philosophy of religion, philosophers from the Christian traditions have engaged with analytic philosophers and assimilated their approaches. For example, we mentioned the Roman Catholic Jesuit priest and historian of philosophy, Frederick Copleston, who had a public debate with Russell. Nonetheless, in the mid-20th Century, the publication of New Essays in Philosophical Theology (1955), edited by the English philosophers Antony Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre, marked a real turning point where issues in analytic philosophy of religion began to be widely assessed within academia, and are considered as genuine topics in metaphysics, epistemology, moral philosophy, philosophy of language, and so on. The volume includes essays with both theistic and atheistic stances, contributed by a number of analytic philosophers who remain eminent and influential today, such as J.N. Findlay, Antony Flew, Alasdair MacIntyre, C.B. Martin, A.N. Prior, J.J.C. Smart, and Bernard Williams. (Interestingly, the famous materialist philosopher J.J.C. Smart defended a theistic stance in this volume and later regretted this.)

With the establishment of the analytic philosophy of religion as a field, the development of its current form is often attributed to the contributions of

Alvin Plantinga and Richard Swinburne. Both philosophers have made notable contributions to other philosophical fields such as metaphysics and epistemology, and provided very original systematic defenses of Christian theism. Plantinga (1967; 1983) has defended the view that belief in God does not need to be conclusively demonstrated through compelling evidence to be rational; rather, such beliefs can operate as a foundational part of our belief system. Swinburne (1979) has defended the view that theism can be considered a coherent and probable hypothesis according to conventional standards applied to scientific theories. Specifically, when considering different arguments for theism, we find that theism often provides the simplest and thus most attractive explanations for highlighted phenomena; and these arguments, when considered together, cumulatively demonstrate the high probability of theism over other alternative views. These contributions marked the beginning of a trend of specialized, systematic debates on the existence of God, the problem of evil, the rationality of religious belief, religious language, and various metaphysical questions relevant to God's attributes. Renowned names in the field include theist scholars include (but are not exclusive to) Robert Adams, William Alston, Peter Forrest, John Hick, and Peter van Inwagen, and atheist scholars include (but are not exclusive to) John Mackie, Michael Martin, Kai Nielsen, William Rowe, and Jordan Sobel (Oppy 2021).

It is worth mentioning the discussions of religion in analytic political philosophy, which often developed quite independently of the discussions above. One notable figure is John Rawls, a founding figure of the current shape of analytic political philosophy. Rawls, who was deeply religious in

his youth and lost his faith due to the atrocities of the Second World War, maintained an interest in religious issues throughout his life (consider Rawls 2009). His discussions on the relationship between liberalism and religion, particularly in his renowned A Theory of Justice (1971) and Political Liberalism (1993), remain remarkable contributions to the exploration of religious themes within the political realm. These works, broadly "Kantian" in their approach, maintain the secular liberal thesis that justice and public reason should act as neutral, universally accessible procedural norms of political deliberation, with specific moral and religious perspectives participating in a pluralistic manner. This has set the stage for an ongoing debate on the role of religion in the democratic public sphere. While similar ideas of secular public reason have been accepted by most liberal theorists, including notable figures like Jürgen Habermas, Charles Larmore, and Martha Nussbaum, many religious thinkers have presented challenges from liberal, communitarian, and conservative perspectives.

The literature mentioned above includes many high-quality works that exemplify the application of analytic philosophy to religious issues; furthermore, these works have provided valuable frameworks that contemporary thinkers continue to find useful. However, up to this point in this article, it should be evident that the authorship of this body of work predominantly reflects the experiences and perspectives of white, male, Anglophone intellectuals. This demographic homogeneity has also shaped the thematic focus of relevant discussions, which largely reflects the traditional debates between Anglo-American secular progressives and specific Christian theist groups regarding their personal beliefs and social

and political stances. There is no doubt that these debates concern many important philosophical issues, but it is challenging to see how they could be sufficiently sensitive to all philosophical relevant religious issues, and how they could comprehensively cover philosophical concerns facing different cultures around the world – it is even possible that current Western society itself has slowly expanded its attentions. This raises a pressing question: Is the field capable of accommodating the insights from a more diverse array of participants, including non-white, non-male, and non-Anglophone thinkers, and can it address philosophical questions that go beyond the traditional debates dominated by Anglophone intellectuals?

Entering the 21st Century through the late 20th Century

We have seen how the reemergence of analytic philosophy of religion in the mid-20th century, contributed by eminent scholars including (but not limited to) Plantinga and Swinburne, has provided a foundation for analytic philosophy of religion as a specialized field. In an age where most philosophical fields are becoming increasingly specialized, this acts as a basis for technical sophistication. While there is no doubt that classical discussions such as those of the standard arguments for and against God remain important for both academic philosophy and public reflections on religion, did analytic philosophy of religion expand its scope of discussion? It did. To demonstrate the breadth and diverse interests within the field, let us

consider two illustrative examples, chosen to highlight the range of topics rather than to serve as a comprehensive overview.

J. L. Schellenberg's book, Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason (1993), defends the problem of divine hiddenness as an argument against the existence of God and is one of the few successful attempts to have added a new member to the pool of "standard arguments" in analytic philosophy of religion. The argument is that if God loves us in a perfect manner, then God should have revealed Himself to all non-resisting people in order to develop a personal relationship; but this is not the case, so God does not exist. While the argument form may look standard, Schellenberg has deeply investigated the relevant discussions of divine love and God-human relationship in both philosophy and theology. The book has thus been widely considered as both philosophically and religiously sensitive.

Helen de Cruz employs a multidisciplinary approach to the philosophy of religion that incorporates cognitive science and experimental philosophy – the latter of which uses empirical methods, such as surveys, to gather data on people's intuitive stances on various philosophical issues. She uses these empirical methods to investigate how people's intuitive tendencies influence their religious beliefs, and how we should, based on these findings, reevaluate certain positions in the philosophy of religion (consider, e.g., De Cruz and De Smedt 2014).

There are many further examples whose comprehensive surveys are impossible here, such as the incorporation of decision theory into the discussion of Pascal's wager (for a survey, see Hájek 2022), and the considerations of cosmology and probability theories in the discussion of the

cosmological argument (for a survey, see Reichenbach 2022). These examples showcase how analytic philosophy of religion could benefit from widening its scope and interacting with other fields. We should expect that the field can expand its scope through more interdisciplinary dialogues with theology (of different religions and sects), history, sociology, anthropology, archaeology, decision theory, cognitive science, neuroscience, experimental philosophy, physics, and so on, or at least from incorporating some of these disciplines' latest findings.

Indeed, there are also many voices within the field itself advocating for the need to widen scopes and embrace renewal. This trend is reflected in two recent volumes published by Oxford University Press: Alternative Concepts of God: Essays on the Metaphysics of the Divine (2016), edited by Andrei Buckareff and Yujin Nagasawa, and Renewing Philosophy of Religion (2018), edited by Paul Draper and John Schellenberg. Both volumes have gathered a considerable number of essays by leading experts in the field. Furthermore, from 2020 to 2023, a team of philosophers of religion at the University of Birmingham, led by Yujin Nagasawa – who has held positions as the president of the British Society for the Philosophy of Religion, the chief editor of the journal Religious Studies, and the editor of the book series Cambridge Elements in Global Philosophy of Religion – spearheaded the Global Philosophy of Religion Project. This $2.42 million research initiative, funded by the John Templeton Foundation and the Dynamic Investment Fund at the University of Birmingham, addresses some of the most fundamental issues concerning religious concepts and beliefs, with a particular emphasis on sensitivity to a variety of religious traditions and geographical locations,

especially those underrepresented. The project has gained wide participation from leading philosophers in the field and experts on various traditions across the globe.

It is noteworthy that there is no consensus or general view on how this widening or renewal should be approached. For example, in the aforementioned 2018 volume edited by Draper and Schellenberg, the various contributors advocate very different suggestions on how to renew the field. But, at least for now, perhaps we do not need a clear answer to the question. The message for us is that many leading experts see the need for renewal, and through further discourse and effort, the right way of doing so may eventually reveal itself through the field's collective exploration. A question for us now is: how could the East Asian circle participate in this development?

The Prospect of East Asian Contributions

The philosophical landscape of East Asia is expansive and varied and should not be seen as a monolithic entity. Some philosophers engage with traditional Asian philosophical schools and religions; others engage with analytic or continental philosophy, viewing themselves as indistinguishable from their Western colleagues. Some apply unique approaches to analytic or continental philosophy; others combine these various research directions; still, others explore all these research directions distinctly, without overlap; and there are more research directions than we can point out here. Furthermore, some philosophers are followers of certain Asian philosophical

schools and religions; others have embraced certain Western religions; others are atheists or naturalists; and others study ideas in certain Asian philosophical schools and religions but do not commit themselves to those ideas, perhaps remaining naturalists or embracing certain Western religions. All these are not merely individual choices but also reasonable academic stances that can be found in a philosophical community, both in the East and the West. To overlook this diversity and treat the potential East Asian contributions to the field as unitary is to impose a rather simplistic stereotype, which restricts one's reflection on the issue. Taking this into account, we offer one perspective on the issue – without presenting it as the sole perspective.

Let us assume that one of the important functions of the philosophy of religion is to provide a platform for dialogues and comparisons between worldviews (Oppy 2014) – whether those that mainly interest professional philosophers or those that mainly interest the general public. The East Asian circle can make at least two important contributions to the field. One is well acknowledged: East Asian philosophical schools, religions, and even general perspectives provide additional important worldviews or insights that help constitute good worldviews. The other is often overlooked: philosophers in the East Asian circle are increasingly competent in their research in analytic philosophy, continental philosophy, history of philosophy, and other general philosophical areas, as demonstrated by their increasingly strong publication records in leading international journals. Regardless of whether they work in a way that differs from the mainstream Western philosophical community – which varies between individuals – their contributions will help to enlarge the pools of philosophical ideas and criticisms, which have often been

antecedently dominated by particular small white, male, Anglophone circles. With this in mind, perhaps there is no question about the prospects of analytic philosophy of religion in East Asia: just as in the Western case, the philosophical community in general is sufficiently competent, and whoever is interested can participate in the field – this is already an ongoing trend.

Without casting any negative aspersions, we outline certain current challenges to the development of these unique contributions:

i. Readiness for technical critique. Analytic philosophy is particularly specialized in technical clarity and critique. Despite possessing considerable philosophical depth, sophistication, and potential for development, philosophical positions that have traditionally been overlooked by analytic philosophers – unlike widely discussed positions such as Western monotheism and atheistic naturalism – are often not as well-equipped theoretically to address technical criticisms. This is not to suggest that these positions are, by their nature, indefensible or less plausible – perhaps there is no prior reason to think that they are by their nature worse than some positions that got widely discussed because of various historical reasons. Rather, there has historically been less effort directed towards fortifying them against such critiques. And, despite often having good philosophical depths and sophistication, experts in these traditions may not typically specialize in the style of critical discussion characteristic of analytic philosophy. This creates a challenging cycle: analytic philosophers with a critical attitude may find these positions, in their current forms, vulnerable to technical criticisms, and scholars with the relevant analytical skills are often less inclined to refine these positions and develop theoretical ammunition against such critiques.

ii. Sufficiency of common grounds. Historically, certain East Asian traditions are in fact particularly well-developed in terms of their theoretical recourses for critical analytical discussions. One notable example is Buddhist philosophy, within which the approach of "analytic Buddhist philosophy" is well-developed. However, these traditions have their own rich history, and thus often prioritize different questions and topics of interest compared to those typically explored by analytic philosophers of religion. Particularly, unlike Western religious traditions, some Eastern religious traditions do not strongly identify themselves with religions or supernatural beliefs in the Western sense – some of them may nonetheless posit supernatural entities, albeit not being particularly concerned with their supernatural nature – while some others are not particularly concerned with those philosophical questions surrounding comparisons with other worldviews. This divergence in focal points can at times limit the extent of dialogue and collaboration.

iii. Recognition of analytic philosophy of religion. Despite both analytic philosophy and religious studies being well-established disciplines, the philosophy of religion does not always receive adequate recognition as a specialized field, especially compared to areas like metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics. This sometimes happens in East Asian countries, where a rich diversity of philosophical approaches exists, and analytic philosophy is only one of many. Such diversity leads to a "standard image" of analytic philosophy as being distinctively different from other approaches, characterized by technicality, formality, or even exclusively scientific attitudes. It shapes perceptions among both analytic and non-analytic philosophers, and discussions surrounding religious issues frequently fall

outside such an image. Furthermore, analytic philosophy of religion in its current form has predominantly focused on Western religions. This also limits its current appeal and recognition in East Asia, where a wide array of religious traditions exists. Hence, good analytic philosophers may overlook their potential contributions to the analytic philosophy of religion, despite the fact that their non-academic, personal interests in some issues may fall within the field's scope of discussions.

iv. Increasingly competitive environment. This challenge may be considered an upshot of the previously mentioned factors. The competitive nature of early philosophical careers globally has a significant impact in East Asia as well. The pressure to stick to well-known topics, which are seen as easier to publish in top journals and being recognized, often stops young philosophers from working creatively. This competitive pressure, compounded by the aforementioned issues of readiness for technical critique, the sufficiency of common grounds, and the recognition of analytic philosophy of religion, may potentially discourage exploration outside the accepted norms. This limits the diversity of philosophical exploration and the development of unique contributions within the field.

We hope it is sufficiently clear that these challenges are presented not as insurmountable obstacles but as areas for cautious optimism and potential growth. There is probably no simple, one-off solution to these complexities; any such proposal may be based on a simplistic understanding of the complex dynamics within the East Asian philosophical community, which, as we have mentioned, is far from homogeneous. It is also important to avoid overly emphasizing any single specific type of "East Asian contribution to

the field" and any single specific type of its functional purpose, as this likewise simplifies the rich academic diversity and dynamics in the community.

Nonetheless, it is undoubtedly beneficial to increase the visibility of "analytic philosophy of religion in East Asia" and to establish more platforms for it, which bring together leading analytic philosophers and scholars from various traditions eager to express their perspectives on religious matters. Such platforms would include good publication opportunities, well-planned conferences, robust research networks and societies, strong support from renowned international scholars, and the backing of academic institutions and funding bodies. After all, the pressing issue is to raise greater awareness of this field, recognize it as a valid academic specialty, and create more opportunities for potential contributors. Greater awareness and recognition of the field highlight the value of potential contributions to potential contributors and their surrounding community and institutions. This inspires a commitment to the field and the development of collaborative dialogues and networks, which, again, require effective platforms and opportunities to actualize. Finally, we also see grounds for optimism in settling issues of readiness for technical critique and sufficiency of common grounds only through the collective commitment and effort of philosophers of different specialties – specifically when they come together to engage in exchanges that explore the mutual benefits of their varied perspectives and methodologies, and when they recognize that employing their unique theoretical resources to enhance the discourse would generate valuable and acknowledged research outputs. Despite the complex

diversity and dynamics within the community, there is optimism that a more substantial form of "analytic philosophy of religion in East Asia" will emerge through committed scholarship and collaborative efforts.

Of course, the success of these suggestions will ultimately depend on the willingness of the relevant scholars, but as we have mentioned, there are already significant contributions to analytic philosophy of religion in the geographical area, and there is ground for expecting further expansion of such contributions.

Synopsis of articles

This special issue aims to pioneer platforms for the development of analytic philosophy of religion in East Asia and has gathered contributions from both international scholars and Asian scholars. Within the collection of articles, there are standard articles by analytic philosophers of religion, as well as an article in which the author discusses analytic Christian theology through the lens of certain conceptual tools from classical Chinese philosophy. Additionally, there is an article by two analytic metaphysicians who apply their expertise to critique a model of divinity in the philosophy of religion.

The lead keynote article by Graham Oppy, "Good Argument", presents a radical alternative to the standard conception of argument which focuses on the assessment of premises. The standard conception considers arguments as sets of propositions or acts, with one serving as the conclusion and the others as premises, which are ranked according to their goodness based on the virtues of connections between premises and conclusions, as well as the

virtues of the premises themselves. Oppy criticizes this view for leading to the absurd conclusion that arguments should not be advanced in properly cooperative conversations, as this would violate Gricean maxims of conversation, which emphasize quantity, quality, relation, and manner in assertions and argumentation. Oppy then proposes an alternative conception of argument that emphasizes the premises' relevance to the target audience's webs of belief or theoretical frameworks, under which the identification and accurate attribution of premises without necessarily considering their assertoric virtues. He argues that this conception of argument would lead to more productive philosophical inquiry.

The article by Helen De Cruz, "Delight and Music: A Confucian Perspective on Christian Liturgy", explores the function and significance of Christian liturgies through the lens of pre-Qin Confucian philosophy, particularly the works of Confucius (Kongzi) and Xunzi. For De Cruz, Christian liturgies, beyond being mere symbolic enactments of theological principles, serve as tools for personal and collective transformation, specifically orienting Christian communities towards God and facilitating transformation by ordering desires. She appeals to the Confucian understanding of of li (ritual/etiquette) as ethical and metaphysical practices that aid in self-transformation and social harmony, and argue that it applies to Christian liturgical practices. For example, confession is considered as a form of apology-facilitation that acknowledges human fallibility and seeks reconciliation with God, while music is considered as liturgical tool for mood management which enhances the communal and emotional aspects of worship.

The article by Chung Him Kwok and Hsuan-Chih Lin, “Pantheism, Mereology and Composition as Identity”, critically examines mereological pantheism, according to which God is identical with the universe characterized through mereological (part-whole) concepts. The authors argue against the tenability of mereological pantheism by challenging its reliance on three main theses: first, existence pluralism (the belief in the existence of multiple entities); second, the idea that entities possess mereological structures best described by classical extensional mereology; and third, the notion that composition is equivalent to identity. They argue that these theses are jointly inconsistent, and mereological pantheism faces a challange: denying existence pluralism leads to either theism (belief in one God) or atheism (disbelief in any gods) rather than pantheism, rejecting mereological structuring contradicts its foundational premise, and dismissing the composition-as-identity thesis creates a gap between God being the universe's composition and God being identical to the universe. The authors also explore alternative strategies for establishing the identity of God with the universe but find these approaches unsatisfactory for maintaining mereological pantheism’s claims.

The article by Tien-Chun Lo, “A Theistic Defence of Truthmaking Maximalism”, offers a theistic defense of truthmaking maximalism, the thesis that every truth has a truthmaker, against objections that challenge its ability to account for negative truths (like “There is no hobbit”) and general truths (like “All ravens are black”). The critique often leveled against truthmaking maximalism is that it seems to require the existence of peculiar entities such as negative facts and general facts to serve as truthmakers for

these kinds of truths. Lo proposes a theistic solution, arguing that truthmakers for negative and general truths can be understood as positive, singular facts about God's will. This, argues Lo, avoid the need to posit negative or general facts. This solution is built on three assumptions. Firstly, God is essentially omnipotent. Secondly, God's will is perfectly efficacious, meaning that if God wills something to be true, it is true. Thirdly, the creation and facts about the universe are grounded in facts about God, not caused by God in the conventional sense. According to Lo, truths about the non-existence of entities or general states of affairs are made true by God's willing them to be so, with God's will serving as the grounding and necessitating factor for these truths.

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