Global Philosophy of Religion and its Challenges

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1. Introduction

The philosophy of religion addresses a variety of issues that are of interest to many people regardless of their religious beliefs—or lack thereof. Yet the focus of the contemporary analytic philosophy of religion (henceforth simply 'the philosophy of religion') has been decidedly narrow. The discipline has been led mainly by Christian philosophers in English-speaking countries whose ultimate goal is to defend Christian theism through reason and argument.[1] The central topics have been arguments for and against the existence of God or the justification of belief in God, with much energy devoted to deriving the metaphysical and epistemological implications of these arguments within the Christian tradition. Even atheist and agnostic philosophers of religion have spent most of their time assessing arguments developed by Christian theists.

It is not my wish to reject Christian philosophy altogether. In fact, many of my own works have focused on issues concerning Christian theism and I believe that Christian philosophy should remain a subarea of a larger field with appropriate adjustments. I argue, however, that if the philosophy of religion takes religion seriously, it has to transform itself into what I call the 'global philosophy of religion', which addresses philosophical problems concerning religion from global, multi-religious perspectives.[2] My aim here is to outline the global philosophy of religion by assessing existing attempts to globalise the discipline. Given limited space, the focus of this essay has to be on the globalisation of the philosophy of religion in terms of how to incorporate multi-religious perspectives into the conceptual framework of the discipline. I set aside more pragmatic issues such as making the discipline more diverse in terms of gender, race, language, or geographical location.

This essay has the following structure. In Section 2, I offer an overview of the current state of the philosophy of religion. Although I advocate for the global philosophy of religion I argue that we cannot make significant *philosophical* progress merely by incorporating inter-religious dialogue into current discourse. In Sections 3 and 4, I critically discuss renowned attempts to globalise the philosophy of religion by two pioneers: Ninian Smart and John Hick. In particular, in Section 3, I discuss Smart's proposal to transform the philosophy of religion into what he calls 'the philosophy of worldviews'. Smart makes

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[1] Throughout this essay, when I use the terms 'Christian philosophers', 'Hindu philosophers', etc., I mean philosophers of religion in the Christian tradition, philosophers of religion in the Hindu tradition, etc. This caveat is necessary because there are philosophers who are Christians who do not work in the philosophy of religion, philosophers who are Hindus who do not work in the philosophy of religion, etc.

[2] The term 'global philosophy of religion' is notably used in Joseph Runzo's textbook *Global Philosophy of Religion: A Short Introduction* (2001) but the view I defend in this essay is distinct from Runzo's.

specific suggestions about how philosophical progress can be made within a global framework. I argue, however, that his proposal seems counter-productive because it could promote the isolation of religious and non-religious traditions, or, worse, exacerbate tensions between them. In Section 4, I discuss Hick's proposals for 'religious pluralism' and 'global theology' as further attempts to globalise the discipline. Hick's approach seems to overcome the difficulty of Smart's philosophy of worldviews because he develops religious pluralism as a way to resolve tensions between religious traditions. I argue, however, that Hick's approach cannot be accepted by many because religious pluralism is a contentious meta-theory which the majority of philosophers of religion reject. His proposal for global theology, on the other hand, seems more promising because it is more general than religious pluralism. Yet, I argue that it is unclear what global theology is meant to do when it is divorced from religious pluralism. In Section 5, I introduce my own proposal for the global philosophy of religion, explaining how it can overcome the difficulties of Hick's and Smart's proposals. I explain that the global philosophy of religion emphasises problems which scholars in distinct traditions can tackle collaboratively. This approach allows for the globalisation of the discipline without compromising the autonomy of distinct traditions. Section 6 concludes.

2. The Current State of the Philosophy of Religion

In the current philosophy of religion, scholars work within their own traditions and rarely interact with scholars in other traditions. Virtually the only time philosophers interact with those outside their traditions is when they defend their views from critics in other traditions. For example, Christian philosophers focus on the traditional Christian concept of God according to which God is an omniscient, omnipotent and all-loving creator of the universe. Based on this conception they discuss such issues as the nature and existence of God, justification of religious belief, the problem of evil, the afterlife, miracles and religious language. They rarely express strong interest in other traditions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Shinto and Sikhism, even though they occasionally interact with Judaism. Their main interest is to defend the validity of Christian theism, or Judeo-Christian theism more broadly, by addressing internal and external criticisms. That is why the philosophy of religion is often accused of being Christian apologetics in disguise. Having said that, I hasten to add that Christian philosophers are not solely responsible for the current state of the discipline. Indeed, we see hardly any interaction between non-Christian philosophers in distinct traditions either. For example, we almost never see interaction between Hindu philosophers and Islamic philosophers or between Buddhist philosophers and Jewish philosophers.[3]

[3] Sophisticated ontological and epistemic theses are found in some of the non-Western religious traditions just as they are in the Western religious traditions. However, a question arises as to whether there is a Buddhist *philosophy*, a Hindu *philosophy*, etc., in the Western sense of philosophy, which addresses fundamental issues through logic and reason. If philosophy in this sense is not present in the non-Western traditions it may not be straightforward to incorporate non-Western religious traditions into debates in the philosophy of religion. There is also a further question as to whether the concept of religion itself is a Western product. I set these large issues aside in this essay.

Some recognise this as a problem and try to incorporate so-called inter-religious dialogue into the philosophy of religion. Inter-religious dialogue is an attempt to promote constructive and forward-looking interaction between distinct religious traditions to achieve better understanding of religious beliefs and practices in other traditions. Notice that inter-religious dialogue does not purport to create a 'world religion' which synthesises distinct religious traditions. Inter-religious dialogue affirms the differences between distinct traditions and does not try to change anyone's religious beliefs. It only promotes a conversation between religious traditions so that people can appreciate commonalities and differences. Religious conflicts are widespread and they often arise from misunderstanding one another's beliefs or failing to appreciate the diversity of religious beliefs and practices. Religious dialogue therefore seems to be valuable in a global society in which people living in multiple religious traditions coexist.

Yet it is far from clear exactly how the introduction of inter-religious dialogue can contribute to *philosophical* progress. It is fascinating to see similarities and differences of beliefs and doctrines between distinct traditions. However, merely comparing religious beliefs does not help us advance philosophical debates. Globalising the philosophy of religion is not fruitful if it is achieved merely as a polite gesture made to express interest in other people's beliefs. Inter-religious dialogue is certainly an important step towards globalising the discipline but it is only a means to an end, not an end in itself.

3. Smart's Philosophy of Worldviews

In this and the next section, I address the work of two pioneers who contributed to the globalisation of the philosophy of religion: Ninian Smart and John Hick. Both philosophers held posts at the University of Birmingham, where I am currently. Unfortunately, I did not have a chance to meet Smart in person as he passed away in 2001, before I moved to the United Kingdom, but his work has influenced me immensely. I was fortunate enough to meet Hick regularly and discuss many philosophical issues with him over six years, until he passed away in 2012. Smart and Hick were ahead of their time and we can learn a lot from them. Nevertheless, in what follows, I argue that their approaches to globalising the philosophy of religion suffer from certain limitations.

Smart's interest in world religions originated in the 1940s when he studied the Chinese language through Confucian texts at his post with the British Army Intelligence Corp. He subsequently completed what he described as 'the first dissertation in Oxford on philosophy of religion after World War II' and taught at the University of Wales, Yale University and the University of London. He moved to the University of Birmingham in 1961 to take up the H. G. Wood Chair, contributing to the expansion of the research programme in the theology department. In 1967, he launched at the University of Lancaster the first religious studies department in the United Kingdom. Smart's work tends to be overlooked in philosophy because he is better known as a world religions scholar. Yet he certainly was a philosopher of religion. (It is interesting to note that J. J. C. Smart, one of the most influential analytic philosophers of the second half of the twentieth century, was his brother.)

In his work Ninian Smart's main concern is that the scope of the current philosophy of religion is too narrow. He writes, "[B]asically the agenda has been Western theism. . . The tradition remains dominated, from the rear, by the idea of natural theology, or by something called theism, or more particularly Christian (sometimes Jewish) theism"

(Smart 1995a: 17). Smart makes a radical proposal to transform the philosophy of religion into a new, global discipline, the 'philosophy of worldviews'. He is frustrated by the fact that contemporary philosophy addresses only a narrow range of worldviews and many philosophy departments in the English-speaking world are themselves committed to particular worldviews, such as secular humanism. Smart calls the new discipline 'the philosophy of worldviews' because it is no longer confined to discussing only *religious* traditions. He says that we should consider non-religious traditions such as Marxism and scientific humanism as well, because they all belong to the same sphere of human life and have created struggles for people around the world. He illustrates this point with examples:

> In Cambodia the life struggle was between Buddhism, Marxism and Khmer Rouge ideology; in Vietnam, between Buddhism, Catholicism and Vietnamese Marxism; in Sweden between Lutheranism and forms of scientific humanism. The actual choices of people cross the boundary between religious and nonreligious ideologies. (Smart 1997: 3)

Since the distinction between religious and non-religious views is not always clear cut, Smart contends, it is conceptually and pragmatically necessary to transform the philosophy of religion into a broader field that he characterised as the philosophy of worldviews.

Smart's philosophy of worldviews goes further than inter-religious dialogue by specifying exactly what scholars should do to make philosophical progress. According to Smart, "the philosophy of worldviews is concerned with examining the criteria for evaluating worldviews, and connectedly discovering the coherence or otherwise of worldviews as formulated" (Smart 1997: 5). The following is my summary of eight items which he suggests philosophers of worldviews should address (Smart 1997: 24-9):

1. Internal consistency: A worldview might contain contradictions and hence might turn out to be internally inconsistent. It is unlikely that such contradictions are very obvious but there might be some implicit contradictions. One might argue, for example, that the doctrine of the trinity in Christianity is contradictory. Although a rich, complex religious tradition is likely to generate some strong tension, other things being equal the less tension the better.

2. Consistency with received beliefs and values: Even if a worldview is internally consistent, it might be inconsistent with beliefs or values that lie outside the worldview. One might argue, for example, that evolutionary biology is inconsistent with a conservative Christian worldview or Stalinist Marxism. But if they are inconsistent, one of them has to be given up or, at least, revised.

3. Epistemic consistency: A worldview can be inconsistent with a received epistemic system. One might argue, for example, that the epistemic system on which a certain religious worldview is based is inconsistent with the epistemic system on which science is based. This is perhaps because the religious worldview relies on revelation or the experience of enlightenment, which science does not.

4. Priority and emphasis: Certain issues are prioritised in one worldview but not necessarily in others. For example, the Holocaust has a special place in Jewish theology as an event of great significance for Jews. As sympathetic to the suffering

of the Jews as Buddhism may be, it is unlikely to treat this specific historical event in the same way as Judaism. Similarly, how much weight we should place upon specific epistemic aspects of religion, such as prophetic, mystical, shamanistic, psychedelic, and conversional aspects, needs to be considered when we address consistency between distinct worldviews.

5. Value of religious experience: Whether any religious experiences are taken seriously depends on a worldview. If the possibility of the transcendent is not entertained in a certain worldview then in that worldview religious experience is ruled out as a valid avenue to the truth.

6. Ethics: The ethical, or more generally, social fruits of differing systems need to be considered as well. They are not necessarily positive; there could be negative ones too. Choosing a faith is like choosing a place to live, so we would want to balance the various good and bad outcomes of distinct worldviews.

7. Anthropology: Worldviews include beliefs and feelings about the nature of human beings. They may concern whether human beings are intrinsically good or bad, whether their troubles originate from sin or ignorance, where they stand in the universe, and so on.

8. Theories about others: Every tradition needs to have a theory about other worldviews. Some traditions might hold that other traditions are equally valid while others might hold that the alternatives are all blasphemous or delusional. We have to test the degree of plausibility of such theories.

Smart's approach is certainly helpful for understanding relationships between distinct religious and non-religious traditions and their links with and implications for metaphysical, epistemic, social, ethical and anthropological issues. Yet I argue that his proposal is unlikely to contribute to significant progress in the philosophy of religion because his main emphasis is on evaluating worldviews in terms of their internal coherence and mutual consistency. He says that the task of philosophers of worldviews is to "clarify the criteria for determining the truth as between worldviews". While Smart does talk about the importance of empathy in understanding traditions other than one's own he also talks about the philosophy of worldviews as a tool for 'choosing and judging worldviews'. In a new global, pluralistic and consumer-oriented world, according to Smart, choosing a faith is a realistic option (Smart 1995b: 1). I mentioned earlier that the philosophy of religion is often accused of amounting to Christian apologetics in disguise because the main focus of the discipline has been on defending Christian theism from criticisms. Smart's philosophy of worldviews would certainly bring non-Christian perspectives into the discipline but putting the greatest emphasis on internal coherence in and consistency between worldviews could result in a discipline in which philosophers merely offer apologetics for their own traditions in defending their worldviews against others. Hence, the philosophy of worldviews could turn out to be what one might deem global, inter-religious apologetics. This is not ideal because it could, ironically, exacerbate tensions between philosophers of religion in distinct traditions. Such tensions might be avoided if philosophers of

worldviews were to focus on the coherence of their own worldviews or their consistency with theses that are not directly related to other worldviews, such as general scientific or moral theories. In such a case, however, the philosophy of worldviews is back to square one: Christian philosophers pay attention only to the Christian tradition, Buddhist philosophers pay attention only to the Buddhist tradition, and so on. That would be a failure of the globalisation of the philosophy of religion.

In the following section, I assess John Hick's alternative approach to globalising the philosophy of religion, which can be construed as in part an attempt to overcome the difficulties that Smart's approach faces.

4. Hick's Religious Pluralism and Global Theology

Hick was an evangelical Christian when he was young but he gradually developed a multi-faith approach to the philosophy of religion. He was particularly influenced by the cultural and religious diversity of Birmingham to which he moved in 1967 to succeed in Smart's H. G. Wood chair. He spent time in mosques, synagogues, gurdwaras, temples and churches and came to think that while all religious traditions look different externally their essences are all the same.

Hick developed this insight into the view he characterises as religious pluralism, according to which all the world's great religions are valid responses to transcendental reality. Hick believes that Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and all the others are equally sound approaches to ultimate reality. Religious pluralism contrasts with religious exclusivism and religious inclusivism. Religious pluralism almost diametrically opposes religious exclusivism, which says that only one religion is the true approach to transcendental reality. Religious pluralism is more sympathetic to religious inclusivism, according to which while a specific religion is superior to others, other religions also offer paths to ultimate reality. However, religious pluralism disagrees with religious inclusivism about the superiority of one religion over others.

In defending religious pluralism Hick needs to explain why distinct religions often make conflicting claims even though there is only a single transcendental reality. For example, some religions follow monotheism, saying that there is only one god, while others follow polytheism, saying that there are multiple gods. Yet others postulate no god at all. In order to explain this fact Hick appeals to the notion of 'the Real', which is, unlike the notion of 'God', religiously neutral (Hick 2004, originally 1989: 236). While he acknowledges the diversity of the world's religions, Hick construes all of them as human responses to the Real, which is 'the postulated ground of the different forms of religious experience' (Hick 2004: 236). He distinguishes 'the Real in itself' and 'the Real as humanly experienced (or manifested within the intellectual and experiential purview of a certain tradition)'. He says that the Real in itself is transcategorial or ineffable. That is, our limited human language and thought cannot grasp its true nature. The Real is neither a person nor a thing but people from divergent religious or cultural traditions perceive it differently—some see it as a person, others see it as a non-personal entity. That is why, according to Hick, there is religious diversity in the world even though there is only a single transcendental reality, the Real. Hick's religious pluralism can be construed as an attempt to overcome the limits of Smart's philosophy of worldviews because it seems to offer a way to eliminate tensions between or the isolation of religious traditions by resolving apparent inconsistencies between them.

I submit, however, that religious pluralism cannot be a requirement for or a basis of the global philosophy of religion. Religious pluralism is, along with religious inclusivism and religious exclusivism, only one of many contentious meta-theories that purport to explain the compatibility or incompatibility of religious traditions. The philosophy of religion addresses all philosophical views concerning religion so a commitment to such a specific theory as religious pluralism cannot be a requirement for participating in a global approach to the discipline. Conversely, if the commitment to religious pluralism is a requirement for participating in a global approach it excludes the majority of philosophers of religion because religious pluralism, whether or not it ultimately succeeds, is not a widely accepted view.

Along with religious pluralism Hick also develops the idea of 'global theology', a future form of the philosophy of religion, which seems conceptually more neutral than religious pluralism. According to Marilyn Adams's interpretation of Hick, global theology is distinct from religious pluralism because global theology is a *change-of-content* move while religious pluralism is a *change-of-status* move (Adams 2012: 34). Religious pluralism does not try to modify or amend the contents of beliefs held in the world's great religions. It only changes their statuses and relationships by making what he calls the 'Copernican shift', a shift of focus from individual religious traditions to the Real itself. Religious pluralism keeps all the religious beliefs fixed but maintains that they all represent limited human responses to the Real. Global theology, on the other hand, according to Adams, does try to change the contents of religious beliefs by comparing and contrasting them or testing them against empirical and conceptual observations. Adams suggests that Hick tries to do this so that he can reach 'a stripped-down content (and perhaps praxis) that could be substituted for what the world's great faiths offer' (Adams 2012: 34). Replacing the contents of the world's great faiths with a stripped-down content sounds like an attempt to create a world religion but that is clearly not what Hick intends to do. In fact, as Hick explicitly says, "[W]hile there cannot be a world religion, there can be approaches to a world theology" (Hick 1980: 21). He also writes, "[I]t is because religious myth and the practice of piety are phenomena of human culture that a global religion will never come about so long as there is—as let us hope there will always be—a wide variety of different styles of human existence. . . We are not concerned here, then, with the possibility of a global religion but with the possibility of a global theology." (Hick 1976: 29-30). Hick outlines global theology as follows:

> [I]f awareness of the transcendent reality that we call God is not confined to the Christian tradition, the possibility opens up of what might be called (for want of a better term) a global theology. Christian theology consists in a body of theories or hypotheses designed to interpret the data of Christian experience. Analogously, a global theology would consist of theories or hypotheses designed to interpret the religious experience of mankind as it occurs not only within Christianity but also within the other great streams of religious life, particularly the nontheistic traditions, including large sections of Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism, and also with the great nonreligious faiths of Marxism, Maoism, and Humanism. The project of a global theology is obviously vast, requiring the cooperative labors of many individuals and groups over a period of several generations. The increasing dialogue of world religions is basic to this work. Out of this there may be expected increasingly to come comparative and constructive

> studies both of particular areas of belief and larger systems of belief. (Hick 1980: 21-2)

Thus, Hick's aim is not to create a global religion first and then develop global theology as a discipline which addresses such a religion. His aim is rather to develop a discipline which addresses hypotheses and data in a variety of religious and non-religious traditions. As an example of 'comparative and constructive studies both of particular areas of belief and larger systems of belief" Hick refers to his book *Death and Eternal Life* (1977). In the book, which discusses the concepts of death and eternal life in multiple religious traditions, he describes his methodology as follows:

> The project of global theology will then be the attempt to use these different affirmations, and the modes of religious experience on which they are based, as data for the construction of comprehensive religious theories. Such a theology would consist in a body of hypotheses about the nature of reality, expressing the basic common ground of the world religions, and receiving mythic expression and devotional content in different ways within different historical traditions. (Hick 1976: 30)

The crucial question here is what exactly Hick means by 'comprehensive religious theories' in global theology. Unfortunately, at this point, he merely goes back to his defence of religious pluralism: "The analogous copernican [sic] revolution in theology is a shift from the picture of the religious life of mankind as centring upon and culminating in one's own religion, to a view of the religions as different responses to variously overlapping aspects of the same Ultimate Reality" (Hick 1976: 31).

Again, no matter how plausible religious pluralism is, commitment to it cannot be a requirement for the globalisation of the philosophy of religion because it is only one of many meta-theories concerning the compatibility or incompatibility of religion traditions. Global theology cannot succeed if it requires its participants to accept such a specific theory. And it is unclear what global theology is meant to do when it is detached from religious pluralism.

5. My Proposal: the Global Philosophy of Religion

What we have seen so far is the following. (i) A mere introduction of inter-religious dialogue into the current state of the philosophy of religion is not helpful because *philosophical* progress cannot be made merely by comparing views in distinct religious traditions. (ii) Smart's proposal of the philosophy of worldviews is useful in this respect because he specifies exactly what philosophers should do in a new, global framework. In particularly, he says that the aim of the philosophy of worldviews is to evaluate worldviews by considering their internal coherence and consistency between them with reference to the eight items I summarised above. However, the philosophy of worldviews could be counter-productive because it primarily emphasises choosing and judging worldviews, which could exacerbate tensions between religious and non-religious traditions or promote isolation. (iii) Hick's proposal of religious pluralism can be construed as an attempt to overcome the difficulties with Smart's philosophy of worldviews because it proposes a way to resolve apparent tensions between religious traditions. However, religious pluralism cannot be a requirement for the globalisation of the philosophy of religion because it is only one of many meta-theories that need to be addressed within the discipline. Hick's global theology, on the other hand, initially appears to be a better candidate for replacing

the current philosophy of religion because it is more general than religious pluralism. However, it is not clear what it is meant to do once it is detached from religious pluralism.

Again, the current philosophy of religion is often accused of being Christian apologetics in disguise. This is because Christian philosophers, who dominate the philosophy of religion, have spent a lot of time defending Christian theism from criticisms by atheists without paying much attention to other traditions. In this way, the tension between two worldviews, Christian theism and atheism, forms the basis of the current philosophy of religion. Smart and Hick try to change this by incorporating inter-religious perspectives. Yet it seems that they are still trapped in the dogma which underlies the current philosophy of religion. The dogma is the implicit assumption that the main goal of the philosophy of religion should be to determine the validity of particular worldviews or traditions. Smart highlights the tensions between worldviews by analysing their consistency with one another on a global scale. He maintains that evaluating and choosing worldviews should be primary activities of philosophers of religion. Unlike Smart, Hick purports to resolve, rather than highlight, the tensions but he is still occupied with how to address the tensions. His interest lies in explaining the source of tensions and removing it by appealing to religious pluralism. In this sense, Smart and Hick still concentrate on the same old problem.

I submit that in order to globalise the philosophy of religion productively we should recognise that the main focus of the field need not be on tensions between religious traditions and that more attention can be paid to common problems that philosophers of religion in distinct traditions can address together. As I mentioned at the beginning of this essay, the philosophy of religion addresses a variety of fundamental philosophical issues that are not restricted to specific traditions. Each tradition (or at least each of the world's great religions and the naturalist tradition) has theoretical and practical resources that have been developed over centuries. It would be fruitful if philosophers from distinct traditions were to share their resources and tackle the common problems together. Of course, it is not assumed here that they are likely to reach the same conclusions concerning the problems. The pursuit of truth is the central task of philosophers so sometimes we cannot avoid highlighting disagreements between distinct traditions. In this sense, global, inter-religious apologetics might be unavoidable. Nevertheless, there is much to be learned by exploring shared problems collaboratively and analysing them from viewpoints that others take. In fact, this is what philosophers do all the time; the point of doing philosophy is to exchange and learn a diversity of ideas so that we can advance our knowledge of fundamental issues. Such an open-minded spirit seems to be missing in the current philosophy of religion.

What I have said does not of course assume that all issues in the global philosophy of religion are relevant to multiple traditions. There are issues that are specific to only one tradition, such as particular doctrines or theories that belong solely to that tradition. The existence of such issues does not undermine the global philosophy of religion. I mentioned above that although I advocate the global philosophy of religion Christian philosophy should remain, with appropriate adjustments, a subarea of a larger field. I believe equally that Buddhist philosophy, Islamic philosophy and so on should remain as subareas too. Interaction and collaboration between distinct traditions are promoted in the global philosophy of religion but the autonomy of distinct traditions is also respected.

The problem of evil and suffering is perhaps a good example of an issue which can be tackled collaboratively by scholars in distinct traditions. Christianity, Islam and Judaism

are Abrahamic religions, so there is some degree of overlap in their views about what constitutes evil and suffering and how we should respond to them. They typically consider the existence of evil and suffering in relation to God. However, non-Abrahamic religions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism, consider evil and suffering rather differently. Buddhism categorises suffering, or *dukkha*, into four main types: birth, sickness, aging, and death. Life is full of suffering but Buddhism does not normally regard suffering as evil or a consequence of evil caused or permitted by a supernatural being. Instead of trying to *explain away* evil and suffering, Buddhism teaches its adherents how to overcome them spiritually. Hinduism, to take another example, places evil in *karma*, the fundamental law of cause and effect. It situates evil and suffering for *Ātman*, the permanent self, in *samsāra*, the continuous cycle of birth, life and death. Hinduism provides a supernaturalistic account of evil and suffering and their roles which radically differ from explanations that the Abrahamic traditions provide. Confucianism, like Buddhism, develops a naturalistic approach to evil. It recognises concepts relevant to evil, particularly moral evil, such as *rén* (humanness), *yi* (justice) and *xin* (integrity), and teaches that suffering and evil are inevitable but they can promote human growth. I do not have sufficient space to discuss in detail what each tradition can learn about evil and suffering from other traditions. Yet we can reasonably expect that each tradition can benefit from the resources of other traditions that have also been addressing the same problem for centuries. The same can be said about many other topics in the philosophy of religion, such as religious and mystical experiences, miracles and the laws of nature, the meaning of life, faith and belief, and death and immortality.

6. Conclusion

Globalising the philosophy of religion initially sounds good to most people, but it is not easy to explain exactly what is good about it for the progress of the discipline. In this essay, I have outlined the global philosophy of religion, which moves beyond inter-religious dialogue yet, unlike Smart's and Hick's proposals, does not collapse into a debate on the tension between distinct religious traditions. The global philosophy of religion promotes collaborative work among philosophers in distinct religious traditions while respecting their autonomy. It also does not require one to commit to a controversial meta-theory, such as religious pluralism and religious inclusivism, which concerns the compatibility or incompatibility of distinct religious traditions.[4]

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[4] I would like to thank Andrei Buckareff, David Cheetham, John Hick, Eric Steinhart and Nick Trakakis for helpful, enjoyable discussions on the topic of this essay over the last few years. I am particularly grateful to Paul Draper and John Schellenberg for written comments on an earlier version.

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