

EDITORIAL

There are many reasons for the nasty ditch between analytic philosophy of religion (including analytic theology) on the one hand and theology and so called continental philosophy of religion on the other. Perhaps the most important reason for the rift between these two camps has to do with the issue of theological realism. In the eyes of most analytic philosophers of religion, theologians and 'continental' philosophers of religion are antirealists or have at least strongly antirealist inclinations. Defenders of the theological realism view nonrealist positions as illegitimate and unnecessary reductionist moves to safeguard religious beliefs. Viewed from the perspective of most continental philosophers, theological realists are in the grip of scientism and a wrong view of the nature of religious discourse.

If one aims at bridging the gap between these two camps one cannot avoid the question of theological realism. But one has to be suspicious of these labels as one should always when it comes to -isms in philosophy. Speaking of '*the* issue of realism' is overly simplistic because in fact there are a family of different topics comprehended under the umbrella term 'realism'. One should at least distinguish between the question of the semantic status of religious utterances and the question of the ontological status of possible objects of reference of religious language. Even if one concentrates on the second aspect of the realism issue there are different kinds of realism/antirealism, which must be distinguished carefully: ontological realism, according to which the world is independent of the human mind; semantic realism, according to which a proposition is true if and only if it corresponds (in a wide sense) to reality; epistemic realism, according to which reality is not totally unrecognizable by human beings; and 'existential antirealism', sometimes called 'irrealism', which means the denial of the existence of certain beings.

Furthermore realism is not an all or nothing matter. You need not acknowledge all kinds of realism (or antirealism, respectively); realism/antirealism allow for different grades (e.g. different grades of independence of the world from the human mind) and scope (e.g. the combination of antirealism in philosophy of mathematics with a realist stance in respect to religion); and even in a single area one need not be a through and through realist: one can be a committed realist concerning all central Christian doctrines but take an irrealist view of some special doctrines like the limbo.

In one way or another all the following articles evince the complexity and subtlety of the issue of theological realism.

Pihlström not only clears the ground by making helpful distinctions and terminological clarifications but also introduces the term of ‘recognition’ into the realism debate. Schönbaumsfeld argues against the pernicious misunderstanding of Wittgenstein as a relativistic noncognitivist and defends the intimate but nonreductive relation between the attitude towards a religious belief and its content.

Both Rossi and Jonkers view the rift between continental and analytic philosophy of religion under the aspect of realism. Jonkers criticizes the theoretical character of the realist’s approach and replaces it with a practical approach in a broadly Kantian spirit. Rossi also refers to Kant in his plea for methodological and metaphysical modesty which acknowledges the finitude of the human perspective.

Grosshans and Johannesson try out Putnam’s middle course between a too strict metaphysical realism and a too strict antirealism. Schlette compares Putnam’s stance on theological realism with Mark Johnston’s position in the context of the tension between naturalism and theism in late modernity, hinting at the importance of religious experience as motivation for theological realism. In contrast Schärfl argues for a (moderate) antirealist position on the basis of religious experiences after he has identified the mind-independency thesis as the core of realism. On the other hand Gäb’s defence of a (semantically) realist theory of the metaphorical meaning of religious language refers to religious experiences as indispensable for a realist theory of religious language. The concept of religious experience in the work of a leading proponent of theological realism is analysed and criticized by Nickel and Schönecker.

With one exception all papers in this issue are based on talks at the Templeton Conference on Analytic Theology: ‘Philosophical Perspectives on Theological Realism’, in Mainz (9-11 September) 2013. Pihlström’s text is based on his presentation at the Second Templeton Summer School ‘Philosophical Perspectives on Theological Realism’, in Mainz (26 August – 6 September) 2013. Both the conference and summer School were financially supported by the John Templeton Foundation.

We hope that this special issue will help to overcome mutual misunderstandings and to highlight and clarify real disagreements.

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