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A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE DOMINANT CONCEPTION OF GOD AND WESTERN RELIGION: SECULARISATION VERSUS SECULARISM AND THE SEPARATION OF SCIENTIFIC AND RELIGIOUS QUESTIONS

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Abstract: The content of this article draws its influence from the cultural context within which the debate around the secularity of religion - Secularisation versus Secularism - found its grounds in 1960s Europe after Dietrich Bonhoeffer's prison writings. The concepts of Secularisation and Secularism serve as the focal point of this paper and will be subsequently analysed and critically evaluated in terms of their 'usefulness' for modern society. Commentary on the manner in which the 'dominant' conception of God is traditionally understood in Western culture and the way in which this dominant view is believed to have constantly shifted as guided by logic and rationality/reason will also be provided. Drawing influence from the field of the Philosophy of Religion, this article will attempt to discuss, expand on and reveal why the Secularisation of religion – not necessarily in opposition to Rodney Stark's anti-Secularisation views – appears to be an inevitable and consistent product of human development, specifically in modern times. This acknowledgement of the dismissal of Secularism becomes especially important when one realises that scientific and religious questions can – and should – be meaningfully separated.

Key words: Philosophy of Religion, Sociology of Religion, Theology, Secularisation, Secularism, Science and Religion.

1. The Two Conceptions

The conventional understanding of God in Western culture stems primarily from the Jewish tradition (Rowe 2007, 5; Berger 2001, 449). It is within this Hebrew practice that we find one of the first known traditional monotheistic (worshiping only one) conceptions of a God — in this case, *Jahweh/Yahweh.* Unlike polytheistic conceptions (worshipping many gods), the monotheistic notion holds that God is sovereign over all people and is not simply one 'god' among many (Rowe 2007, 5). The Christian/Hebrew God is seen as the ultimate creator of Heaven, the cosmos (the universe) and earth.

According to John Robinson (cited in Rowe 2007, 5), this Western traditional understanding of the Judeo-Christian God has generally undergone extensive changes across different periods, many of which were made by those with some form of authority or institutional backing when inconsistencies were found (Robinson 1963). A noteworthy example here is Charlemagne's *circa* 809-810 council meeting, which set out to resolve notions surrounding the problems of the Holy Trinity.

1.1. Old/Ancient *Theism*

There are two different perceptions that often arise within the study of Western religious traditions; these can be divided into two 'general' categories. The first (1st) of these, old theology/*theism* (from the Latin *theos*) conception – which, according to Rodney Stark (1999), may not have been that widespread culturally – holds the understanding that God and Heaven are situated "in the sky" and "in nature". This is also a type of *deism* and this article will refer to this as 'old' *deism.*

The typical usage of *deism* usually refers to the idea that God is perceived as apart of or within the ontological structure of nature. It is important to point out that, whether God is nature or can control nature is a philosophical issue that is beyond the scope of this article. For instance, it may seem as if God initiated nature and evolution and left it to its own devices but it would be difficult to prove this because it requires a theological investigation beyond the scope of this article. To clarify, is God in control of the rain and decides when and where it may happen or did God simply devise physical laws that forms part of a self-governing system. In other words, is God constantly making sure that the earth is spinning or is the earth within a self-governing system that was intelligently designed.

The more modern *deistic* view described below (in §1.2) is an adaption that is proposed by this article. The view that God is separate from nature

is an idea that initially preceded what one typically calls *deism*. This is why the distinction between old and modern *deism* is necessary to make.

Returning to the old theological/*theism* view, it is believed to have arisen during a time characterised by limited scientific knowledge and was held specifically throughout the ancient/pre-Christian, Classical and Medieval periods, when it was not possible to travel directly into the sky or atmosphere to observe and confirm whether or not God was there (Nash 2008, 14).

Conversely, the general population (which was often illiterate) was unable to directly challenge or engage with the views of the church and Western/European society. In other words, rational thinking was not to be placed above church dogma (Smith 2012, 117-120; Berger 2001, 446-447). Most of the population, however, may not have even been aware of these religious views, according to Stark (1999).

Before the modern period, it was not possible to separate religion, the church and the state as those in power and with influence (whether positive or negative) were not to be questioned due to the hierarchal/bureaucratic nature of the state (Iqtidar 2012, 53). As scientific, logical and technological endeavors advanced, and became more difficult to deny, the concept of God residing "in the sky" gradually became an unacceptable viewpoint (Hick 1990, 5; Rowe 2007, 5,14-15; Nash 2008, 13). An increase in religious influence and literacy, with some becoming familiar with important texts and having more access to education due to the partial effects of the Reformation, also resulted from this viewpoint.

1.2. New/Modern *Deism*

The second (2nd) perspective, the modern *deism* conception (from the Greek *deus*), emphasises the notion that God and Heaven are not within our realm or dimension and are, therefore, unreachable — unless one departs from the physical, earthly realm (Rowe 2007, 5). According to John Hick (1990, 5), God and Heaven came to be perceived as existing "out there" (in space) instead of "up there" (in nature) – this shares a partial relation to the Kantian perspective of Neumena ("spiritual") and Phenomena ("phenominal").

This conception became the norm to those who engaged with and had access to this information during the Medieval period and the Renaissance, when important seminal texts, specifically philosophical and theological literature, were discovered and translated. These texts were initially preserved and translated by Muslim/Arab scholars and possibly influenced by ancient Near-Eastern (Mesopotamian) history (Nash 2008, 13).

These ideas were only strengthened once it was possible to observe the cosmos and travel into the sky or atmosphere (hence the label:

modern *deism*). If one could not observe or experience any trace of God or Heaven in the sky, atmosphere or cosmos, it was rational to presuppose that neither God nor Heaven existed within our physical realm (Hick 1990, 5; Rowe 2007, 5). In other words, it became rational to conclude that God and Heaven exist outside of our conceptual understanding of time and in another dimension, one that we are unable to see or experience (if one believes in the traditional existence of God). Moreover, our ontological understanding of God shifted, he progressed from a spirit occupying the natural to a spirit residing within the spiritual.

1.3. Religious Progress

It is important to note that both the old theological/*theism* conception and the modern *deism* conception produced and advanced important *Ontological* and *Cosmological* arguments which are commonly accepted and known within theology, religious studies and philosophy discourses.

There appears to have *always* been a progressive shift in religious thinking, specifically among those considered informed. This happens when one is confronted with and influenced by undeniable scientific, educational and technological endeavors and developments due to globalisation and modernisation (Berger 2001, 443). It should be stressed that this article's main premise is not necessarily in opposition to Stark's claims that reveal that religiosity was never as widespread as is often perceived (Stark 1999).

Rather, this article postulates that some of the circulating philosophical, religious and historical ideas – from some of the important figures and writers (listed in §2) in the fields of religion and philosophy – available to us seem to suggest that the dominant conceptions of Western religion, even if it was within isolated cases, have gone through some sort of change. Furthermore, Peter Berger (2001, 445) indicates that the survival of the Secularisation theory remains with those who had received an isolated, Westernised education. If one follows Stark's theory (1999), other than among those with access to education, the need to Secularise was not necessary since religion "was not that widespread".

By way of a brief opposition to Stark's theory (1999) it can be argued that different geographical regions and religious officials would have offered various interpretations of similar ideas. John Sommerville (2002, 362) terms this "Religious Culture". The implication here is that it would be difficult to pinpoint one globalised, coherent form of religion.

This lack of organisation and standardisation does not mean that there was a reduction in religious thought. Rather, it indicates that there were different specialised versions of religious thought that were known and developed by select individuals until globalisation and modernisation

allowed for the *most* logical of these interpretations to be compiled and formulated according to accepted popular standards. In addition, those who are able to effectively interpret religious scripture often hold influence over those who cannot. The probability that a religious message, with the potential to reach widespread audiences, would remain the same after interpretation by different officials and oral transmission is minimal. The lack of one coherent and consistent religious story is why it appears that religion was not as widespread as we may mistake it to be. In other words, the illiterate could not interpret religious messages for themselves, and officials may have variated and changed certain aspects of religion to fit their agenda.

2. The Dominant Western Conception

According to William L. Rowe (2007, 5) the first conception of God, the old traditional theological ideology, began to evolve and change, specifically from religious and philosophical texts, after input by thinkers such as Charlemagne (Charles the Great), St Augustine, Boethius, Bonaventure, Avicenna, Anselm, Maimonides, and Aquinas. Even before one was able to physically travel into the sky or atmosphere, the idea of the 'whole' of God existing in two different places proved to be problematic in logical, argumentative and rational terms.

The problem concerning what constitutes a 'dominant' religion is beyond the scope of this article and can form part of a future study. This article aims to be all inclusive. Refer to David Bentley Hart (2013) for discussions concerning what some of the "major" religious traditions could be.

According to this article, the modern *deism* conception of God, specifically a Western one, according to commonly-accepted dominant and traditional features, holds the view that God can be perceived as a supernatural being separated from the world, existing outside of time in another dimension, not subject to natural laws, omniscient (all-knowing) and omnipotent (all-powerful). In addition, God is perceived as "all-good", in terms of moral goodness, "perfect ("none greater can be perceived of"), and is the "first causal creator", who is "self-existent" and eternal. This definition is influenced by a combination of Aquinas' *Cosmological* argument and Anselm's *Ontological* argument. The reader should note that there are important criticisms against some of these arguments, but these well-known arguments will not be rehearsed here for the sake of scope.

One dominant Western traditional view holds that God is not capable of self-contradiction and is only able to do that which is logically possible. The pseudo-question concerning God's ability to create an immovable object that not even he himself can move serves as one of these logical contradictions. This definition is, therefore, dependent on what one

perceives the nature of *God* to be. It relies on one's subjective ideas and beliefs concerning what God is capable of (Hick 1990, 7-9,14; Rowe 2007, 5-7,14,16; Youtz 1907, 430).

The modern *deistic* perspective is not affected by arguments of logical contradictions because God could exist in 'whole' in two places at once, without this being a contradiction, as he possibly resides within another dimension – the fourth, or other, dimension – in which omnipotence, omniscience and a state of quantum-superimposition could be possible. The state of superimposition would make it possible for him to move an object which he designed, by definition, to not be movable. This idea of quantum-superimposition is in fact a reality. To clarify, the processors in quantum computers do not follow a binary (only 1[on] or 0[off]) system. It can be both on and off at the same time (traditionally this is perceived as a philosophical contradiction).

This above premise suggests that tolerances and consensuses are often made up by what seem to be logical rational arguments according to human conventions. In other words, religious texts, doctrines and mythology may not always offer reasonable explanations of or reasons for their assertions, and this then leaves humanity with the difficult task of generating plausible answers and theories using science, technology and rational thinking (logic).

This shows that the ideology of the existence of God, or questions concerning the existence of God, does not seem to halt human advancements but, rather, works alongside and in conjuncture with and urges on human progress and endeavors. For this reason, this article postulates that religion often helps humanity ask questions concerned with the nature of the universe and the reality in which we live. Answers to these questions provided by religion occasionally create doubt and confusion and encourage some thinkers to provide additional logical answers to strengthen views or resolve inaccuracies or contradictions.

One example is the conception of the *Big Bang* as first causer (an entity or event that exists with no prior causes). It seems logical in modern times because humanity, having grappled with questions of first causers, has reached a logical consensus. These types of questions have been contemplated since the time of the ancient Greeks. The common mode of reasoning is that the view of God as the first causer of the universe can simply be replaced with the ideology of the *Big Bang* as first causer. Within this change in thought, being able to explain the creation of the universe without God serves as the foundations of modern scientific understanding.

However, the structural backbone on which the arguments rest can be considered as similar. In the one case, a supernatural, controlling being is seen as the first causer; in the second, a random – currently unexplainable – initiator of events is viewed as the first causer, creating a causal chain of random physical and chemical motions and collisions. For

those with religious inclinations, it seems tempting to suppose that God initiated the *Big Bang*.

There is, however, a problem. The two cosmic initiators both seem to have been in motion before the universe as we know it was created and this means that the explanation on both accounts is unsatisfactory. In simple terms, we still have no answer to the question of who/what set God in motion or who/what set the *Big Bang* in motion. Ironically, it can be argued that randomness created God, which is essentially the same answer we are given with regards to the *Big Bang* conjecture.

In short, the first causer can be God, the random effects of the universe, or the *Big Bang* as a physical remnant of God's character (this last explanation, as a pseudo-statement, is tangibly unprovable). To clarify, one does not necessarily need to attempt to explain how the *Big Bang* began in religious terms, neither does one need to explain in scientific terms how God exists or how a supernatural being may have interacted with and initiated a predominantly material causal chain. The *Big Bang* could be a physical characteristic or manifestation of the spiritual God which we are unable to understand, detect and prove with our current technological understanding. Dr. Niel deGrasse Tyson explains this with the analogy that describes how an ant on a table (representing humans) cannot perceive other angles of the table as humans can (representing a being in another dimension – potentially God).

Due to the above-mentioned reasons, it would be best to offer a preliminary conclusion. For the purpose of this article, it can be postulated that science and religion can be meaningfully separated since they appear to answer, or are concerned with, different questions (Smith 2012, 117-120; Van Niekerk 2018). Abdel-Wahab El-Messiri (2002) terms this "Partial Secularisation" (Arabic: *al-'almāniyya al-juz'iyya*).

The Journal *Zygon* is dedicated to the study of these types of interconnections (between science and religion - http://www.zy-gonjournal.org/issues-index.html). Refer also to the work of Philip Clayton (2012) for an introduction to aspects associated with the study of the link between science and religion. Other important scholars in this field include, to name only a few, Tshaka Cunningham, Michael Hanby, John Polkinghorne and Wentzel van Huyssteen.

The importance of separating scientific and religious questions will be discussed in more detail in section §3 below.

3. The Importance of Partial Secularisation

The concept of Secularisation in general can be described as a dualist system in which the belief in both God and science can be used interchangeably to account for, and explain, the physical world and Heaven; the 'other', unexplained realm/dimension (Iqtidar 2012, 51).

Modern Western society and thought, according to Humeira Iqtidar (2012, 53), has become more secular, and religion has entered into a stage of "privatisation". One is, therefore, encouraged to look to both science and God for answers (Iqtidar 2012, 54). More specifically, one can turn to science for empirical answers and to God in moral and metaphysical endeavors even though metaphysical questions may not be answered directly. This highlights the notion that religion and science are concerned with different types of questions (Van Niekerk 2018). Iqtidar (2012, 55) states that "Religious practice is no longer a matter of following norms unthinkingly". David Nash (2008, 15) agrees and indicates: "Secularization theory, in various forms, suggests that the modern world is more secular than the pre-modern, and this in turn more secular than the medieval."

The above hints at a constant, but not necessarily widespread, progression. Although, it seems like Secularisation, as Iqtidar (2012, 53) and Nash (2008, 14) suggest, has not progressed any further since it provided a sense of religious freedom of choice and tolerance, especially in modern times.

Events such as the Reformation and the Enlightenment confirm this ideology of constant movement towards the creation of a secular society, and it often seems that Secularisation inevitably leads to Secularism (Iqtidar 2012, 55; Nash 2008, 15). The Enlightenment is a Western European conception in which science was favoured over theology (literature held more credibility and social value). This inevitable move from Secularisation to Secularism will be discussed in more detail later in this study. In short, the recurrent pattern appears to be that once a religion is established, one begins to find more questions than answers.

The outlook is often that instead of turning to religion to explain ostensibly mysterious events, one can turn to science in order to provide a working theory that can eventually be "falsified" (refer to Popper 1968, 37). A better way to think of this view, which does not entirely reject religion, is that if a religious claim cannot be explained in terms of science, then it can remain within the sphere of religion. Religion can, therefore, be used as a guide to help separate religious and scientific questions. In other words, one can turn to religion to see what questions have not been answered and to determine whether one could find better, more logical, scientific answers.

The implication here is that if religion attempts to explain something dogmatically, then one could attempt to ascertain whether science would be able to explain it more meaningfully. If one does not know what causes rain, for example, and, therefore, concludes that it must be the work of "a god", then in an attempt to explore the validity and logical 'soundness' of the claim in a process of preliminary falsification, one could turn to science (a filter/lens to deduce and test information). The proposal is that, if the claim seems difficult to answer through science, then it can remain

within the realm of religious explanations until humanity advances to such a stage that it could possibly be tested again according to different schemas (falsified). It is important to stress that scientific falsification does not mean something is proven wrong, rather it means that a theory should be open to be tested repeatedly as if it was false. The claim is not held dogmatically and is constantly being tested.

The premise of this argument, therefore, holds that the move from different conceptions of religion, together with logical grounds, calls for the inevitable Secularisation (a type of falsifiability) of religion, specifically in modern times. This article postulates that this move from religion to Secularisation means that humanity has become well-equipped in utilising logic and reason in order to understand an 'old' moral manual (the Bible) that has become slightly outdated. The comparison to an old manual, not intended to be derogatory, is made because the Bible's has been translated numerous times. According to Roland Barthes (1967) and Reception Theory, we as readers should be cautious in generating meaning from such a text, since perceptions can change and become lost (as per the Historicised Reception Theory). Cultures do not necessarily remain stagnant.

More specifically, the conception of the Bible as an old manual or guideline is illustrated by how humanity was forbidden to eat pig meat because it was considered to be "unclean" (Leviticus 11, 7-8): "And the pig, because it parts the hoof and is cloven-footed but does not chew the cud, is unclean to you. You shall not eat any of their flesh, and you shall not touch their carcasses; they are unclean to you."

Refer to Walter Houston's book: Purity *and Monotheism: Clean and Unclean Animals in Biblical Law* (1993) for an extended discussion. On another note, some readers may notice that the English translation may differ from the Bible they have. There are different versions of the Bible and there is constant debate concerning the correct reading of passages. This helps prove the point of the problems of translation.

Through the Secularisation of religion, one can now easily deduce, as is commonly done, that the reason why people were forbidden to eat pork in the past was because the meat itself was more susceptible to disease, due to weather and living conditions, than other meat. This is a popular conception. Gordon Wenham (1981, 10-11) offers a criticism towards this popular view by stating that the term "unclean" was a problem of classification. In either case, whether the meat was more susceptible to diseases or categorised incorrectly, the logic of this article still follows. That is humans have reached a point in which they can offer corrections due to technological and scientific advancements, or in this case language and definition amendments (a Jehovah's Witness would be against these technological advancements).

In modern society, science and technological advancements have allowed humanity to safely consume this meat. The question of whether

one should follow or dismiss this dictate will be discussed. It is worth noting that this is only one example – one that is often quoted – of many, and that similar logic is applicable to many other behavioural dictates (providing additional examples can form part of a future study).

With the above in mind, one can understand how a religious view can be safely and reasonably falsified and placed into a scientific category. The only dire moral problem one now faces is determining whether one *ought* not to eat pork because it was specifically, and presumably, 'said' by God not to do so (the Word of God in textual form). Additionally, we cannot be entirely sure whether or not this was a subjective afterthought interjected by a scribe or prophet (how accurately has the Word of God been passed down?). It becomes important to differentiate between "Rhema" (the Spoken word of God) and the "Logos" (the written word of God).

In order to partly resolve this, one may need to look into the conceptual definition and one's understanding of what it means to be "unclean". In philosophy, this is often referred to as the examination of religious language. It would be an entirely different statement if God clearly 'said' that one should not eat pig meat because one plainly and simply *should* not — as opposed to giving a reason as to why one should not (because it is "unclean"). This seems to imply that if the meat or animal *was* "clean" or *could become* "clean", then eating it would not be problematic. At present, one could ask the question of how would one scientifically, religiously or spiritually "clean" an animal? (This is an open question that requires further investigation).

The problem here seems to be a language and translation problem, the already-mentioned philosophical one of religious language, rather than a scientific or religious problem. If one considers the Ten Commandments, there seems to be an implied sense of understanding that cannot easily be confused. One almost inherently knows what they mean, what they imply and why it would be wrong to ignore them, unless one has psychopathic or sociopathic tendencies or other mental orders/disorders. To harshly kill humans without reason (to commit murder) appears to be inherently wrong. It should be noted that the manner in which religions often justifies murder, such as allowing killing for war or capital punishment, is beyond the scope of this article.

Additionally, the philosophical issues brought up by euthanasia and the thought experiment focused on asking whether it would be morally acceptable to save, for example, ten humans by killing one (the famous trolley/rail car problem) is far too complex to attempt to resolve in this article – hence this paper holds the notion of 'wrong-ness' in a closed system. Religiously speaking, this philosophical trolley/rail car problem already appears to have been answered by Jesus, who chose to sacrifice himself (in human form) for the sin of all of humanity.

It should be pointed out that, to 'murder' and to 'kill' have different implied meanings that are still not fully understood and probably can

never be meaningfully understood (religiously speaking). The two phrases "to stop all murder" and "to stop all killing" seem to mean something different. Are humans allowed to kill or murder animals and what constitutes as murder? The bible mentions that only certain animals may be consumed. Does this then mean we should consume them while they are alive if all killing is forbidden? To partially resolve this, we can look to how one usually constructs an argument to prove why something may be wrong. In these instances, a person will usually be inclined to use a word that has a more negative connotation (murder) as opposed to one that may be more justifiable (killing). This is why murdering humans is forbidden but killing humans in war time and killing animals to sustain humans is somewhat justifiable.

Questions in which there seems to be no inherent ambiguity or confusion are often those that can be considered as religious questions (they can be easily understood). God specifically warns not to break any of the Ten Commandments. Scientific or medical questions, on the other hand, can be concerned with, for example, whether an animal is "clean" or "unclean" and safe or unsafe to consume. However, it should be noted that current scientific and medical thinking could also be mistaken and some form of caution or reasonable scepticism is usually required.

Humanity only 'recently' discovered that language might not be as reliable as we wish it to be. For example, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Gottlob Frege, and John Stuart Mill all questioned the accuracy of linguistics, language and interpretation. The more modern form of Deconstruction theory from Jacques Derrida and the Postmodernism movement in the 1950s extended upon these ideas. Conversely, could it be possible that God knew that our language systems would be flawed and that it would take several thousand years for us to eventually be able to question and fix the possible errors and mistranslations we have created for ourselves? The above hints at the need to attempt to separate religious and scientific questions – simply because we cannot be certain. A possible solution would be a form of a probability gamble - refer to Pascals Wager (a more general approach to probability theory will be discussed in §6).

4. Is Secularism Necessary?

The Secularised-God conception holds that the notion or belief in God is to be deemed as irrelevant for modern society (Iqtidar 2012, 55). This dismissal of the belief in God is based on the idea that science and technology are able to answer more questions and are more beneficial for human development than belief in dogmatic religion that cannot be objectively and emperically proven (Berger 2001, 443). According to Iqtidar (2012, 51), "Secularism is a doctrine that ostensibly calls for a separation of the church and the state". More specifically, Secularism

holds the view that logic and reason are the ultimate tools, and that one does not need to rely too heavily on religion in modern society. Therefore, according to Secularism, people should be focused on day-to-day living (a pragmatic conception) and not be concerned with the metaphysical ideas or problems of religion, the soul and existence (Iqtidar 2012, 53). Many Stoic philosophers, pursuing *eudaimonia* ("good spirit"), from antiquity advocated for this style of living/existence (refer to the work of Lucius Annaeus Seneca for an introductory guide on Stoicism).

This article asks whether a move to Secularism (a dismissal of religion) after an initial Secularisation (believing in both God and science respectively) is, in fact, necessary or inevitable. In short the current author suggests that this move to Secularism is not necessary. This is because it appears as if the co-existence between religion, science, medicine and technology has already enabled human development to reach the point at which it is at present. More importantly, when used interchangeably, religion and science are both useful in answering different types of questions (Van Niekerk 2018). Ironically, one cannot attempt to Secularise without religion. Proponents of Secularism require religion initially, since Secularism is only possible when there is a move from religion to Secularisation (Iqtidar 2012, 52). The problems of Secularism will be discussed in more detail in §5.

The reader should note that this article serves as an introduction to the Secularisation/Secularism debate. More recent contributions on this topic have been made by José Casanova, Talal Asad and Charles Taylor. Discussing these works are beyond the scope of this article.

5. Shifting Cultural Contexts and the Dismissal of *Secularism*

During the 1960s, there was a noticeable shift in the modern cultural thinking concerned with the conceptual understanding of God, with partial influence from the prison writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. This thinking marks a period in which the Secularity-debate (Secularisation versus Secularism) was founded and rooted within modern European culture. Ultimately, this modern period seems to question what the concept of religion, in actuality, entails. Bonhoeffer (1959, 258-259) can be quoted stating that: "We are moving towards a completely religious less time; people as they are now simply cannot be religious anymore. Even those who honestly describe themselves as 'religious' do not in the least act up to it, and so they presumably mean something quite different by 'religious'."

Bonhoeffer (1959, 286) also suggests that, in the modern period, one does not need to turn to religion to answer many perplexing questions. Advancement in science and technology have already answered many of the questions that religion traditionally has attempted, but failed, to

answer. For example, one can now turn to science to rationally and logically understand the theory of gravity (Newton's laws) instead of being told religiously and dogmatically that it just exists because God willed it to be so (Nash 2008, 14; Nietzsche 1974). This form of argument, in philosophical logic, results in a circular fallacy that "begs the question". Bonhoeffer (1959, 258-259,264) also points out that logic and reason has also reached new developmental heights: "As to the idea of 'solving' problems, it may be that the Christian answers are just as unconvincing - or convincing - as any others."

Bonhoeffer (as cited in Robinson 1963, 36,38) refers to God as a "*deus ex machine*". This means that God is often perceived as an entity that exists to (Bonhoeffer 1959, 286): "...provide the answers and explanations beyond the point at which our understanding or our capacities fail" and "he [God] is not required in order to guarantee anything, to solve anything or in any way to come to the rescue."

Bonhoeffer (1959, 331) further suggests that God ultimately allowed himself to be pushed aside from human affairs since he chose to leave our realm/dimension, and, in doing so, became unable to help us directly in our earthly plane of existence. If one compares God's active involvement during the writing of the Old Testament to his involvement afterward, then one will notice that he currently chooses to reside in the astral realm (the fourth/other dimension) and rarely seems to be involved in earthly affairs.

To make matters more perplexing, and by way of criticism of the above notion, the ability to scientifically and meaningfully prove that God is either active or inactive in the affairs of earth and humanity is a difficult problem to solve. As discussed earlier, it is possible to perceive other lower dimensions when one is in a higher dimension. Therefore, it may be probable that God, being in a higher dimension, is still active (without our knowledge) in our dimension.

One important question that can be taken from Bonhoeffer's argument is whether the belief in God or the striving for salvation are relevant or important in modern society (Bonhoeffer 1959, 264): "It is not with the beyond that we are concerned, but with this world as created and preserved, subjected to laws, reconciled, and restored."

John Robinson (1963, 22) further elaborates on this, stating that it appears that one does not need religion in order be a 'good' person; one does not need desire for personal salvation or any sense of sin. Vernon Pratt (1970, 70) goes as far as to ask what the purpose of life is and whether one really needs to strive for salvation in order to be able to better oneself or to be kind to others (Pratt 1970, 68,70). Conversely, does one need the metaphysical realm or is scientific and empirical information enough to formulate a theoretical (epistemological) understanding of the world and universe? A similar Existential question that contemplates the

necessity of the belief in God in the modern period famously comes from Jean-Paul Sartre (2007).

An idealistic concept that questions whether a diamond is soft before it is touched does not necessarily provide one with useful practical information - as a pragmatist would argue (Nash 2008, 15). Sociologists, therefore, ask the question of what "purpose" religion actually has in human society (Pratt 1970, 69). Is religion primarily used to keep humanity organised and subservient? Without God, is life pointless and absurd (Nihilism) or is it a part of something greater, such as belonging to a larger whole or a community (Pratt 1970, 74-75)?

Pratt (1970, 69), in creating a distinction between "point" and "purpose", introduces an important criticism and question to keep mind. He (1970, 69) emphasises the notion of something that can be "an agent itself" or that can have an "agent as a designer" (the intellectual design argument - Refer to Thomas Aquinas and William Paley's Teleological argument concerned with an intelligent designer; God).

To elaborate, one can deduce that the "point" of the heart would be to pump blood throughout the body, but what would the heart's "purpose" (the 'drive') be? Would the "purpose" of the heart be the same as its "point" (are these merely synonyms) — and would this then imply that the heart is an "agent from a designer" or an "agent of itself" developed by evolution (Pratt 1970, 69). The same distinctions can be applied to God and religion, although humanity might be mistaken about or oblivious to what the point and/or purpose of God and religion, in actuality or according to the Bible, might be.

This article postulates that this accounts for why one should dismiss the temptation of outright Secularism by abandoning one's religion, and rather subscribe to Secularisation, since one could simply be mistaken (logically speaking, the risk is too great to abandon religion).

6. Critical Evaluation

It would appear to be more beneficial to make use of logic and reason alongside a structural underlining (*urline*) religious view that shares dominant features with most major religions. To clarify, one can, to some degree, deduce that humanity is "on the right track" if most of the dominant religions share similar baseline fundamental teachings. Hypothetically, if four out of five dominant religions, all with ancient texts and long-standing traditions, claim that murder is morally sinful then it would seem logical and safe to conform to that ideology (refer to Nietzsche 2013). It is important to note that this article will not attempt to define what counts as a religion (as mentioned, this topic is beyond the scope of this article and can form part of a future study).

Hypothetically, if only one out of five religions claim that eating pork

is sinful, then there is a possibility that either only one is mistaken, or that all of the other four are mistaken. One can then use probability theory to determine which is the safest option. One would need to decide for oneself which is the most probable. Refer to Richard Swinburne (1981) for more information concerning the topic of beliefs and probability judgments.

If we were all mistaken, would God not intervene in some way so as to transmit a 'clearer' message? Is there a way in which one can prove that it is the authentic God intervening? Would God have condemned the ancient Sumerians and Akkadians (before the Babylonians) for the worship of many gods? His message was, after all, more than one thousand years too 'late'. Would there be some form of leeway for those cultures who had no knowledge of the God of the Bible? Additionally, it may be that the message was fragmented amongst the many different languages and cultures that existed in the ancient Near-East (Mesopotamia). The story about the *Tower of Babel*, and how many different languages arose and fragmented knowledge, comes to mind here. The reader should note that there are ancient cuneiform texts that bare similes with the bible. The ancient flood tablet (*Atrahasis* from the *Epic of Gilgamesh*) reveals a story similar to Noah's Ark and was written many years before the bible. The ancient law codes (of *Ur-Nammu* and *Hammurabi*) also have similar laws and commandments that the Bible enforces. The ancient kings list also reveals names and cities that also appear in the Bible showing that there is a clear link to the ancient Near-East and Christianity (one would need to argue against carbon dating to suggest the Biblical scrolls are older than cuneiform tablets).

As mentioned, the different major religious views in modern society, which frequently share characteristics, often cause one to encounter the question of whether one's own religion is the 'true' religion. All religions usually claim to be the only authentic one.

In modern society, and due to Secularisation, this question of authenticity has become even more perplexing, since religious authorities often change practices (becoming more secular) in order to become more tolerant and welcoming of other religions to seem more "authentic" and therefore the "one true religion". Eva Hamberg (2015, 3) states that this form of religious competition often damages the credibility of the religions involved due to inherent logical inconsistencies (the inconsistencies found between the Old and New Testament falls away because some modern Christian's only follow the teachings of the New Testament).

The *Irenaean Theodicy* of the *Eschatological* justification is important here. This is the idea that the world is meant to cause suffering so that one can overcome harsh conditions through faith in a process known as "soul-making" (a similar idea can be found in Verdana Buddhism). This eradicates the paradoxical "problem of evil", since evil is necessary because a life without pain will have no point and nothing to overcome.

We are therefore left with the difficult task of choosing the religion that speaks to us most but at the same time it is important to separate religious and scientific questions so that humanity can progress.

This article will take an all-inclusive stance and will not make a claim regarding what should be considered as the penultimate authentic religion. However, the focus of this article is on critiquing the dominant conception of God in the Western culture (Christianity) and the implications of secularism and secularisation. Many of the arguments posited in this article can be adapted and applied to other religious traditions.

7. Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, this article finds that there must be some point or purpose to religion, since many religions share fundamental ideas. These shared baselines do not appear to be merely coincidental. The higher the numbers, the higher the probability. Additionally, one might simply be unaware of the true point and purpose of religion, and one should, therefore, not be quick to dismiss (the secularism of) religion because religion in a Secularised form (the secularisation of) might still aid human logic and reason, as it has done in the past.

Without religion and Secularisation, the act of Secularism becomes impossible. There would be no need to become secular. It appears that religion, even in oppressive and dogmatic form, eventually leads some thinkers to critique the norms that are prescribed to them. If religion, or even science, was not problematic, then there would be no need for logic and reason or advancements. In other words, if religion and creation were perfect, then what would the point and purpose of life, religion and logic be?

This article holds the view that one cannot know exactly which religion is true and authentic and that all religions that have longstanding traditions and texts (in the form of "rough guides" or "outdated manuals") aim to point, generally, to the true nature of God, an understanding of which cannot be fully reached. Humans are often characterised as products of our environment which means that subjective understanding is also composed of a sort of environmental understanding (refer to the movement of the "Zeitgeist").

God can be seen in all religions; the differences are only variations in interpretation. Additionally, that fact that one or more religious ideologies may be completely misguided and "off point" is not a problem. Especially if one follows the dominant underlining messages of most religions, then one can safely assume that one is on the "right philosophical moral track". This is similar to the theory of Pascal's Wager. The main drawback of this idea is that it is a gamble and we simply cannot know whether it is true or

not. There are also many issues that arise and they are mainly issues brough about by the problems of religious language and definitions. Does the bible specifically state that one cannot view all religions as varying interpretations of one penultimate religion?

In closing, even if one does not believe in God or religion, one can still conform to the general principles that are provided by most religions, the most common being not to commit murder, since society seems to be built around these universal religious practices and contracts — the philosophical social/moral contract that most people adhere to. The most important thing modern society can aim to do is continue to separate religious and scientific questions.

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