

Religion and Secularism

written for K&K

Are science and religion in conflict with one another? To what extent can their respective domains be separated? Is scientific reason the only form of reason?

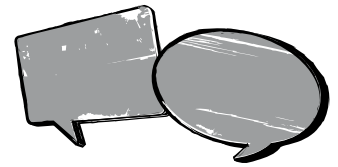
Gábor Boros: As a matter of pure fact, there are countries in which they are in conflict with one another, i.e. there are scientists and theologians who propagate evolutionary and creationist theories respectively without any signs of willingness for peace negotiations. In every culture in which the dominant religion pretends or pretended in a way that forcefully influenced the mind of later generations to make assertions that are or at least can be understood as explanations of facts of the natural world, science and religion are in at least potential conflict with one another.

There is no way to “separate” their domains once and for all. It is always an important task for the representatives of the one and the other domains to negotiate, as it were, the borders. Probably, they are not in the same level, they are measured by different dimensions.

I think we can legitimately speak about several forms of reason that are important in their own domains, such as religious reason, historical reason, emotional reason, etc. However, there certainly are people willing to confine reason to science – but I myself do not think this is a good way of handling the problem of the several departments of human existence.

William E. Connolly: I suppose that the Newtonian universe and classical Catholicism were in sharp tension. But, even there, Newton favoured a single God, with no trinity, secretly of course. There are some conceptions of science and religion today that differ from one another, but are not perhaps deeply contradictory. If you support, as I do, the idea of a world of becoming in a universe that is open to some degree, then it is easy to see how you could have both theistic and non-theistic versions of such an image. Catherine Keller, in the *Face of the Deep*, advances a theistic view and I a non-theistic view, for instance. The interesting thing to me, however, is to pay attention to how the contents of a creed and the dispositions of a spirituality are not identical. So that it is possible for people advancing different creeds to identify affinities of spirituality, providing a basis for a productive pluralist assemblage. It is when a creed, secular or religious, is filled with dogmatism and an unwillingness to appreciate without resentment its reasonable contestability in the eyes of others that it tends to become filled with an ugly spirituality. There will always be tension between science and religion, I imagine, but there are productive ways to negotiate those tensions, ways that do not make the news much today, but nonetheless ways filled with potential.

Herman De Dijn: Science and religion are two radically different domains (as



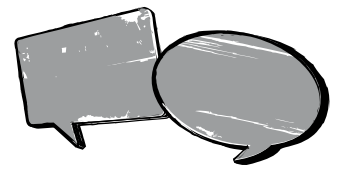
also Einstein, Spinoza, and Wittgenstein would say, but not perhaps for exactly the same reasons). Science has to do with finding out *what there is*, and why and how things can succeed each other as they do. Religion has to do with *how we should live* in the face of (individual and collective) death (or as Leszek Kolakowski puts it: “Religion is a man’s way to accept life as an inevitable defeat”). Even though they are two separate domains, science can impact on religion because religion and its narratives (may) touch on certain factual issues here and there (claims of existence, or of ‘miraculous’ happenings, for example). If these factual claims turn out to be mistaken, sooner or later religion has to somehow rearrange its narrative.

We have to make a distinction between the rationality of science and the reasonableness of/within our way of life. Religious ways of life can be judged as being more or less reasonable (judged that is from a standpoint which is never strictly universal, nor strictly particular).

Egon Gál: Science and religion are in conflict when it comes to explaining physical and biological phenomena. For instance, creationism is in conflict with Darwinism. Science doesn’t need a supernatural power to maintain the world order, it doesn’t even need an immaterial and immortal soul to safeguard one’s moral life. However, I consider the belief that scientific rationality can fully replace religiousness to be a big misunderstanding. Indeed, religious thinkers of the past had known much more about human nature and sociality than the Enlightenment philosophers. Kant’s

moral imperative, the Decalogue and Paul’s Epistle to the Corinthians are but various ways of talking about the natural human sense for morality. Unlike Kant, the authors of Genesis and Paul knew that morality is rather a matter of social sense and respect for authority than a matter of reason. Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker was right when he wrote that even though the rise of modern science in the 17th century entailed the world’s de-deification, it has also brought a question: Is this de-deification a truth or is it a kind of narrowing mental horizon? For Weizsäcker, it is both. It is an abolition of a myth that cannot be revived again the same way that it was. Yet it is also a deprivation of wisdom that was comprised in this myth and is missed by science.

Philip Goodchild: Both ‘science’ and ‘religion’ are extremely broad categories, and there are certainly beliefs deriving from science and religion that contradict each other. One common response is to seek to purify both science and religion so that they keep to their own distinctive domains (such as evidence and meaning). I find this inadequate because it prevents adapting our understanding of the human condition to our knowledge of the world we experience. If an essential element of the religious quest is to overcome the parochialism of a self-centred worldview, then such a quest involves challenging anthropocentrism by understanding the world we inhabit on its own terms, and science is necessary for such understanding. Key areas of conflict between science and religion in the past have been over categories of causality and explanation: if mechanics describes

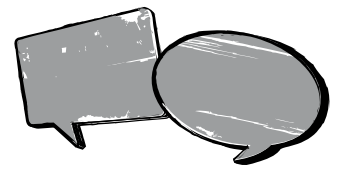


a deterministic world, or natural selection gives an explanation for the emergence of complex beings, then what role remains for providence? Yet perhaps the providential God is already an anthropocentric projection. More significant challenges come from biological conclusions that humanity is not separable from other animals in any distinctive way, from ecological conclusions that the course of history is determined by the environments required by humanity for its symbiotic existence, from psychological conclusions that human behaviour is an effect of drives and hormones, and from historical and cultural conclusions that human meaning is constructed in local and temporary ways. Each of these offers a deep challenge to most religious world-views that is all too often brushed aside, even by religious experts on science. Yet not all evidence points in the direction of reductionism. The significance of the fine-tuning of the initial conditions of the universe so that it is capable of supporting life, the significance of complexity such that infinitesimal alterations make a difference to macroscopic behaviour, and the significance of quantum coherence and its macroscopic effects all suggest that any metaphysics formed on the basis of twentieth-century science is likely to be wholly inadequate to describe the world we experience. Once questions of time, occasion, orientation, and composition are given due significance, then the world seems to exhibit certain tendencies, evaluations, or even a trust that what happens actually matters. Religious believers tend to see reality as morally significant, and not merely neutral. In fact, to affirm that 'God exists' or that the world was created

can be taken as a simple affirmation that reality itself has moral significance. The scientific method, with its elimination of all unwanted variables in a closed laboratory environment, as well as its reduction of the world to that which can be measured, is poorly placed to give a full account of reality: it can only replace reality with limited and partial models. It eliminates moral significance in advance.

Henri Laux: Contrarily to what one might have thought at the moment of the birth of modernity, contrarily to what one may still continue to think today in a fundamentalist perspective, there cannot be a conflict between science and religion. The objectives of one and of the other are not the same; their languages correspond to different goals. Science is interested in an explanation of nature, in the laws which govern its functioning. Religion is of the order of meaning; it reflects on the origin and the end of the universe and of man. When it speaks of a creation by God, it does not pretend to intervene on the manner in which it is accomplished; it simply introduces a radical alterity, it proclaims that man has not given life to itself, that it has its life in another; to give an account of the physical and biological mechanisms of this process, is not within its competence.

On the other hand, the conflict is legitimate when it is a question of reflecting on what one is to do with the technical possibilities offered by science, but in that case it involves all aspects of meaning: religious or philosophical. Thus, the development of biology, of medicine, of the atom ought to enter into a discussion with the ethical requests of the great tra-



ditions of humanity in order to ask itself what might be consistent with a respectful development of man.

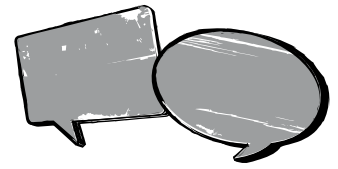
František Novosád: No, religion and science are not in conflict: so as there is no conflict between science and art, science and sport, science and fairy-tales. Scientific reason possesses no monopoly for rationality. Indeed, there is also a rationality of practical reason, rationality of philosophical reflection, and rationality of artistic production. Each one of “symbolic forms” that form culture as a complex is characterized by a specific rationality. They can coexist as long as they respect their respective competences. However, there is nobody to demarcate these competences “arbitrary” and therefore are boundaries among them stabilized in series of conflicts. Nowadays, religion is rather concessive to science. Theologians are well aware that science deals with something else than faith.

Michael Ruse: I certainly think that science and religion can be in conflict with one another. For instance, you cannot possibly hold to a literal reading of Noah’s flood and at the same time to the modern theory of plate tectonics. On the other hand, I don’t think that science and religion necessarily have to be in conflict, and this indeed is the theme of my most recent book, *Science and Spirituality: Making Room for Faith in the Age of Science*. In that book I argue that science is deeply metaphorical, and that metaphors not only want to help make discoveries but put on blinkers to prevent one asking impossible or irrelevant questions. I argue that modern science is dominated

by the machine metaphor, and this means there are certain questions that not only go on unanswered but go unasked. For instance questions about why there is something rather than nothing, what is the ultimate foundation of morality, the nature of sentience, and whether there is a point to it all? Whether or not one wants to say that religion is a form of reason, I think, it is a moot point. But I would certainly say there are meaningful questions that are not even attempted by science.

Is faith an essential aspect of human existence? Is all faith religious faith?

Sarah Allen: If by faith is meant something like belief without certain knowledge or repeatedly successful empirical proof, then faith is surely an essential aspect of human existence. Faith, in this broad sense, is what moves us to explore, experiment, try out and trust before knowing the result of an action, idea or relationship. Without such a faith we would never get started on anything. William James writes compellingly on this subject in his essay “The Will to Believe,” where faith traverses such diverse realms as scientific discovery, love, social bonding, morality, and religion. Religious faith, in this sense, is but one form of faith amidst many others. While some might think that this conception of religious faith belittles its importance, I think we can make religious faith more comprehensible, less extraordinary and unbelievable, to the non-believer by tying it in to more mundane forms of belief with which everyone is familiar in their everyday lives.



Boros: The answer depends much on the definitions of the meanings of the respective terms. I think the fundamentalists of all sorts of religious faith tend to say that faith cannot but be understood exclusively as religious faith and especially as faith of their own religion. The latitudinarians are willing to include in religion all those who have a not exclusively scientific-rational attitude to life. They can be viewed as staying on a lower level of religious faith. I myself tend to the latitudinarian side.

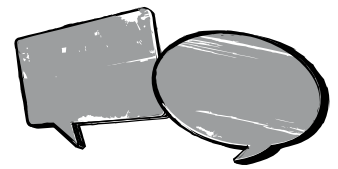
Connolly: I imagine that there will always be aspects of the world, including the cosmos and the most subtle features of human brain processes, that challenge the outer reaches of reliable knowledge. Since we are layered selves, with multiple levels of sophistication, it seems probable that some of those mysteries will be filled by us, explicitly or implicitly, with elements of faith that inform our actions. Of course, this notion of “faith” will not take the same form as some notions do which fill it with divine grace. So we will also disagree, not just in the content of our faith but in what counts as an element or example of faith. Here again, there are modes of faith operative in secular and religious modes of life, and you can see how differences here could in principle become modes to appreciate, rather than to fight over.

De Dijn: Faith is an inescapable aspect of human existence, especially as group-existence. Not all faith (*fides*, ultimately a kind of trust) is religious faith. Religious faith is, to talk with Wittgenstein, faith in the light of the final judgment on our lives

on ‘Judgment Day’. There are numerous forms of faith: faith in ourselves, faith in our children and friends; faith that human beings are persons, with a special dignity (which is tied up with the faith that they “have a soul”; see again Wittgenstein: “I am not of the opinion that he has a soul”; this is not a quasi-scientific belief; faith in the soul means that vis-à-vis human beings I spontaneously have an *attitude* ‘as towards a soul’).

Gál: It depends on what you mean by the word “faith”. This word (*emuna* in Hebrew) originally meant loyalty and trust. As Prague rabbi Sidon said, anything beyond that was acquired by this term is just cultural sediment dimming its original meaning. To believe in God has originally meant to be loyal to him and to trust him (not to seek other gods, as Sidon says), similarly to the way that a human being is loyal and trusts their partner, or a word. All the controversies between orthodox theists and orthodox atheists, over whether God exists or not and how He exists, are only cultural sediment dimming the original meaning of the word “faith.” In its original meaning, faith is an important, though I don’t know whether a substantial, aspect of human existence. I think that even for a secular human being, loyalty and trust are linked to a religious-like attitude to the world.

Goodchild: Insofar as all perception and action involve an element of faith in the continuous and predictable nature of the world, then faith is universal. This is especially clear in economic life where evaluation and interaction are matters of confidence. While evidence is important



when it is available, decisions involving cooperation with others have to be based on promises and trust. It may not be clear that all such faith is a religious faith. Yet where we place our trust is already based on trust, so the question of how human cooperation can be grounded is ultimately a religious question. What do we trust that others trust so that we can work together? Sometimes people have assimilated desire to worship: what you most desire, what you take as of ultimate significance for yourself, is your god. Such claims ring hollow for those who actually spend their lives pursuing money, sex or power: they do not worship these, or expect to find ultimate fulfilment in them. These simply structure the games that they play. Yet, questions about where fulfilment is ultimately to be found, or questions about the basis for trust and cooperation, are religious questions. So not all faith is religious, but a critical faith is in some sense a religious faith.

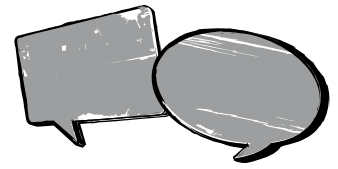
Laux: Of course, there needs to be an agreement on the definition of “faith”. In a very fundamental sense, one can understand by the notion of faith the openness to the other, the confidence in the other. There is no life, no relation, without that. It is essential for humanity to understand its relations, not in the form of fear or of suspicion, but, rather in the form of words exchanged in confidence. History would have no present, nor future, without the desire for an opening by each to the other. This desire and the realization of this desire could be called “faith”.

In the field of religion all that is equally valid, but faith involves a more precise sense. Thus, in Christianity, faith consists

in believing that God has taken flesh in humanity, that the Son of God, Jesus has been resurrected from among the dead, that his Resurrection founds an absolutely new life. Of this Resurrection, we have no mathematical certainty, nor any material proof; but it is the faith of those who have been met by the Resurrected, the one who transmits the certainty of the event throughout all generations. The personal relation of the believer to his God is, thus, on the order of faith. Faith is not transmitted like some material good; it creates itself, it supposes a personal engagement.

Novosád: Faith, ergo orientation in the world based on beliefs whose causes are searched only in exceptional situations, is a fundamental medium of our life. Religious faith is only one of the possible guises of faith.

Ruse: I do not at all see that faith is an essential aspect of human existence. My suspicion is that people who argue this are, at least in the Western world, usually Americans and generalising from their experience of their own country. Certainly, if you go to the United Kingdom you find many people live quite happily without any essential faith, and this I believe is true of other countries also. I prefer not to use the word “faith” in contexts that are not religious, for instance about whether or not the sun will rise tomorrow. The claim that the sun will rise tomorrow it seems to me is based on the best evidence that we have. Faith, as I read it, in some sense goes beyond the reasonable and as such is best left to the domain of religion.



Does morality presuppose religious faith as its essential foundation? Can there be a non-theistic morality?

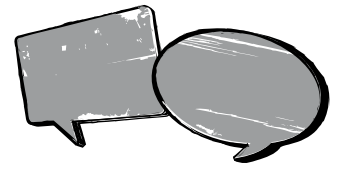
Allen: Though some forms of morality are based in religious faith, I do not think that all forms of morality *require* religious faith as their foundation. To make such a strong claim would be to relegate all non-believers either to a status of immorality, or at least to attribute to them a less developed sense of morality that is unaware of, or confused about its own foundations. Yet, morality and immorality seem to be fairly equally distributed amongst believers and non-believers alike. And if one looks to ethical theory, there are all sorts of ethical theories that can function perfectly well without recourse to some god, divinity or sense of the sacred, for example: utilitarianism and other moral sense or sentiment based theories, certain forms of virtue ethics, and a godless Kantianism. Having said this, morality seems to be fertile ground for dialogue between believers and non-believers in that hopefully some agreement around shared human values can be found where accounts of their sources and foundations differ.

Boros: I do not think religious faith is in itself and necessarily theistic, and in this sense yes, absolutely, there can be more than one sort of non-theistic moralities. Moreover, I do not doubt the atheists have their own values without essential religious foundations (non-essential religious foundations would be the above “lower level religious faith”). And of course there also are less clear-cut cases. For example, Spinoza’s ethics can

be taken to be an atheist morality – this is the view of Robert Misrahi among others – but also a religious one, since he does speak about a – non-theistic, I would say – God.

Connolly: I don’t think so. There are modes of ethics which are not derived from a God, or even a transcendental imperative. They are grounded, initially, in care for this world, a care which grows up in us when we are lucky, a care which can then be cultivated more actively. This does not reduce ethics to “preference” - a silly idea - but anchors it in living processes: an ethic of cultivation rather than a morality of derivation. These two modes of ethics are apt to misunderstand each other. But the task is to put them into communication without giving all the authority to one party in advance, so it is both judge of the issue and a partisan with respect to it.

De Dijn: The first question here should be what is morality? With Hume (and Spinoza, Einstein, and Wittgenstein again) I take it that morality consists in certain attitudes and emotions as related to fundamental distinctions inevitably operating in the life world or common culture we belong to: fundamental distinctions between human beings and animals, children and adults, men and women, people alive or dead, people with whom I can have sexual intercourse or not, etc. Morality is therefore not a strictly rational business (as Kantians or utilitarians seem to think). Originally morality was inseparable from religion. Through secularisation and the demise of religion in many (groups of) people, morality has



to survive outside the sphere of religion. Furthermore there are constant attempts to make it 'more rational'. The result is a lot of confusion as to what morality is; let alone what the true morality is. This is our modern predicament.

Gál: Rather the other way round: religion presupposes morality as its foundation. Every morality has a pre-religious origin; it is a constituent of our biological equipment. The moral sense enables us to live and orientate in a society in the same way that a sense for perspective enables us to live and orientate in a space. Morality is what holds society together. Life without morality is like a life out of society; such a life is perhaps not even possible. Religion has just equipped our moral instincts with concepts and incarnated them into stories and myths. A moral atheist is just as common as an immoral theist. Even Hume has already observed that: "Ask any person what he holds most certain, and he will tell you his belief in God. Look at his behavior, and you wouldn't think he believed in God".

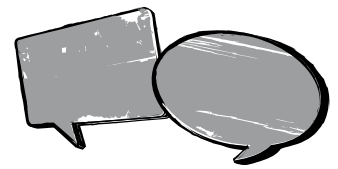
Goodchild: There certainly exist non-theistic moralities, as well as polytheistic and Buddhist moralities. But to raise the question of an essential foundation of morality is perhaps already to pose the problem in philosophical terms that are liable to produce a theistic answer. Most moralities do not have or require an essential foundation. They are simply to be followed. Only when one poses the critical questions of whether they should be followed or are morally correct, does one introduce the question of an essential foundation. As soon as one is critically

assessing moralities, then one invokes a metaphysical basis for morality, something that plays the role of God.

Laux: Even if one must not forget all that religious traditions have brought to the development of moral consciousness throughout the ages, one must recognize that a human morality does not necessarily require religious faith as its foundation. Thus, in the strict sense, there are no specifically or exclusively religious moral norms. Justice, respect for others, giving of oneself in the extreme - all that - could be lived outside of religious faith. A secular morality is certainly possible and legitimate. At the same time, for the believer, his behaviour cannot be disconnected from faith in God. In that case, ethics takes a particular signification for him, in the measure that it becomes part of a global engagement, of a process of unification of his life. His faith can, then, lead to an absolute gift of himself. Forgiving his enemies, and the offering of his life for the good of humanity, are its manifest signs.

Novosád: The main course of modern philosophical thought tries to present a possibility of such a morality that would not be justified religiously. From a structural point of view, the coincidence of moral and religious is contingent. From a historical point of the view, this coincidence is a rule.

Ruse: I do not believe that morality demands religious faith as a foundation. I have no faith, yet I like to think of myself as moral human being, certainly no less moral than the many evangelicals who



live in the same part of the United States as do I. (I'm referring to the South.) So I would certainly say that there can be a non-theistic morality. As far as I'm concerned there are no foundations to morality, but others of course want to find foundations in a non-secular way. For instance someone who is a Platonist might think that there existed eternal forms, rather like mathematical entities, and that these determine morality. The main thing is that one does not have to have religion in order to have morality.

Must life be seen and lived with a view to an “after life” in order to be lived fully?

Allen: If by the “after life” is meant a goal or ideal that one strives to realize within this life while admitting that it will always continue to transcend this life, then living with a view to an after life can be a source of great value, inspiration and creativity for the here and now. However, I agree with Nietzsche that living merely *for* an after life or placing all one's hope in an after life to the detriment of this life, rather than living and hoping for and within this life, can also have the opposite effect of draining all value out of this life. The difference between these two visions lies in what one means by the “after life” and how one relates it to this life.

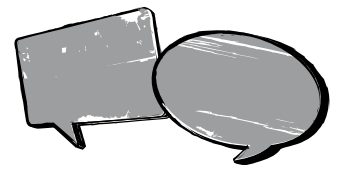
Boros: That is an interesting way of putting the question, which mirrors the radical shift designated habitually by the term “secularisation”: life is principally viewed from the point of view of the “present life”. Most people in the 17th

century would have posed the question the other way around: can one come to the idea of a “fully lived life” without an after-this-life? And there is the difficult question concerning the precise character of the “after-life” even in the case of those people who firmly believe in, say, the Christian God. Certainly, most people today who do reflect seriously upon this difficult question will find it equally difficult to stick to a hard-core, imagination-based idea of the after-life as we find it depicted in well known art works like in Dante or Tintoretto. I would opt for a “modest”, rather Aristotelian concept of the after-life, involving the conviction that a fully lived life is a life which is – at least potentially - judged good by those whose judgement is or would be important for the person concerned.

Connolly: No. But many who have been instilled with such a feeling will have a hard time seeing and feeling how it is unnecessary. And I doubt that the idea of fullness is the best one. Perhaps vitality and involvement are the better words.

De Dijn: It can *de facto* be lived fully without such a view, both individually (see Spinoza) and collectively (see certain religious groups in Jewish or Buddhist religion, for example); who can doubt this? What is required is that such a life is geared towards some or other form of transcendence (see next question).

Gál: I do not believe in a life after death and I do not know if my life would have been fuller if I had believed. But now, since I am old enough, it sometimes



comes into my mind that if I had believed when I was young, I would maybe not have committed some of the follies.

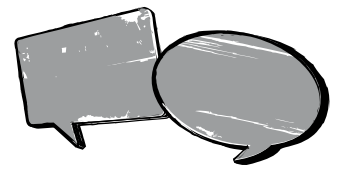
Goodchild: Life can only be lived partially. Those who live apparently ‘full’ lives are those who live shallow ones. An intense experience of life involves tension, self-overcoming, and even inner conflict. It is only through our failures and impotence that we can feel the significance of reality, and we learn to understand others insofar as they struggle under this confrontation with reality. But it may not be necessary that such partiality be tragically affirmed. To live life in relation to an ‘after life’, that would be full, may be a strategy for not living life fully – and yet, in all its ambivalence, even this may give life some depth. Alternatively, to live without an ‘after-life’ may bring the despair of trying to live as full a life as possible or the despair that a full life is impossible. Again, such partial living may give life some depth. Life itself ensures that we all experience a little intensity, however we live it. The decisive question is whether we are able to cultivate some joy alongside the pain, or whether we sacrifice all possibility of joy. Hope and imagination of future joys may, of course, defer their realisation in the present, and yet they can also be the condition of the decisive action that makes life more complex and intense.

Laux: It would be disrespectful to say to a non-believer that his life cannot be lived fully if he does not believe in another life after death. By the same token, the believer may attest that, for him, life would not be lived fully if it stopped at death. The sense of the Christian tradi-

tion, for example, is to say that man is not alone, that God loves him and waits for him, and, therefore, death is not the last word of its existence, death is conquered, all forms of evil are left behind; life does not end in an impasse, a future of limitless goodness is promised him. That already transforms the relation to the everyday. It gives a radically new depth to the most ordinary behaviour, as well as to the most painful trials of existence. Such a life is lived, then, as a response, as a dialogue: it escapes from the solitude and from being closed up on itself. In placing itself in dynamism of such vastness, life attains an altogether singular fullness. Religious faith is not spared from finitude, but it becomes the site of a radical self-transformation, the site of a hope that renews the meaning of all things.

Novosád: Life „after life“? Let’s stay serious!

Ruse: Absolutely not! In fact many would argue, and I am one of them, that only by putting aside thoughts of an afterlife can one hope to live out a full and satisfying life down here. I agree strongly with the advertisement on the side of the bus: ‘God probably doesn’t exist, and so get on with your life and enjoy it’. The trouble with people who are always thinking about the afterlife is that they are prepared to put up with all sorts of injustices down here because they think they will be smoothed out later. Too often, this is a power-play by the people in charge to keep the rest of us down and subservient. I strongly disagree with the belief that an afterlife is necessary for a full and satisfying life here on Earth.



What is your conception of “transcendence”? What do you make of the Christian doctrine that Christ is the incarnation of (a transcendent) God?

Allen: (This also answers the following two questions.) “Transcendence” to me refers broadly to anything that remains beyond our grasp and comprehension, yet touches us in some way, for were it not to touch us at all there would be no experience or event of transcendence to speak of. Yet, it is characteristic of transcendence that the language we use to describe it remains at best partial and unsatisfactory (especially to the sceptic) and at worst confused. Following somewhat in the direction of mysticism, I think the language of transcendence can only begin to make sense if one has some experience to relate it to; at the same time, I do not think experiences of transcendence are the exclusive privilege of mystics, but are to be found in many of the everyday experiences of coming up against the limitations of our comprehension and our power, yet sensing that there are realities and forces that lie forever beyond these limits.

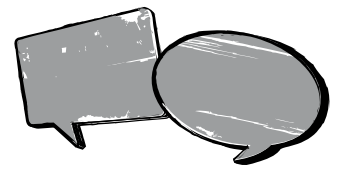
The Christian doctrine of a transcendent God incarnate in a this-worldly Christ is, to my mind, a fascinating symbol for reflecting on the relationship between transcendence and immanence. The death of Christ on the cross, especially, is a powerful metaphor for the way of all immanent manifestations of the transcendent: they are mortal, ephemeral, and come to an end, without transcendence itself dying out.

In my view, not only Christ but any human name for, and account of gods is an immanent manifestation of some-

thing which transcends us. As such, these immanent visions of gods are bound to cyclically meet their demise. The “death of God” or of gods is thus part and parcel of religion and religious faith. Inevitably, as Nietzsche prophesied, we have not only the death of gods, but the rebirth of new gods out of the ashes of the old. New immanent manifestations of the transcendent arise as old ones get torn down. If the death and rebirth of gods is indeed cyclical in the realm of immanence, then I don’t think that one has to seriously be concerned about the end of religious faith in the modern world, though one might well be worried about the end of a particular and fixed version of religious faith.

Boros: Roughly: my conception of “transcendence” would certainly be the paradox-like concept of an *immanent* transcendence. Not a physical space beyond the universe but rather the space of meaning and consciousness – in every possible domain - scientific and moral included – within a universe otherwise void of both. Philosophically, not theologically speaking this space can be designated by the name of God, and the incarnation of this God is the symbolic *caro* [flesh] invested with the fulfillment of full-fledged meaning, the scattered ancestors of which were the ancient Gods and mythic figures, whereas the very sensitively rationalized variation of it is Spinoza’s Christ who exchanges with God *de mente ad mentem* [mind to mind].

Connolly: I am an adherent of radical immanence. There are, in that view, modes of, shall we say, non-divine or mundane transcendence. And every practice



or way of life encounters an outside. But it is not necessary to fill this outside with divinity. It is merely one possible way to go.

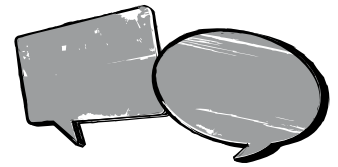
De Dijn: I take transcendence to be a fundamental ‘anthropological’ category, pointing towards essential characteristics of human life. It means the presence in human life of meanings which *transcend* what can be fully explicitated (in other words, meanings which I would call ‘symbolic’, in the cultural anthropological sense of the word, as against literal, scientific, or pragmatic meanings) or values which transcend what is purely instrumental (in other words, values ‘in themselves’, or values which are identifiable with what Alasdair MacIntyre calls ‘goods internal to a practice’). I take it that the religious notion of Transcendence has to do not with what literally transcends the natural or the empirical realm, but with the answer to the ‘problem’ of the vulnerability of all fundamental symbols and values of the life world (see again Kolakowski’s saying quoted above). The danger, especially in the modern world of today, is to reify this religious notion of Transcendence; i.e., to replace faith and hope with the craving for certainty. The sub-question on Christ I consider as a theological, rather than a philosophical question.

Gál: I don’t have my own conception of transcendence, but if you want to hear, I think that to have a conception of transcendence means to believe that there exists something reaching beyond us and not graspable by reason, a power that bestows upon human life meaning, fullness and a moral foundation. Einstein

put it the most perfectly: “Awareness that there exists something impenetrable to us – manifestations of the deepest reason and the brightest beauty that, for our reason, are attainable only in their simplest forms – this awareness and sense creates the real foundation of religiousness.” For me, Jesus was a normal Jew, prophet and reformist. However, I like Vattimo’s explanation of the incarnation as God’s act of becoming a human, an act which has initiated the secularization process. For Vattimo, this secularization is a continuation of the Jewish-Christian tradition by different means. In his view, the history of religion is a developing process from the religion of law to the religion of morality, and what grants human life meaning, fullness and moral sense, is nothing else than the other people around us.

Goodchild: This is a technical issue for those who work on the fringes of the Christian church, and one that has immense significance for the formation of identity and the possibility of communion and mutual acceptance. I would prefer not to comment without significant preparation. Suffice it to say that I am not entirely content with any Christology that I have read.

Laux: By “transcendence” I mean the presence to the self something infinitely greater than the self. In contrast to immanence, which induces the sovereignty of the subject, transcendence inscribes in the real that which goes beyond the real, assuring its foundation. In the Christian tradition transcendence is not an abstract or indefinite force: it manifests itself as a person at the heart of history. Christ is the



transcendent divine presence at the heart of humanity, having come to transfigure humanity by referring it to him that is his origin, his Father and the Father of all men. **Novosád:** Transcendence? Human being has always been a part of larger complexes. In this sense and context, transcendence is just a word to express one's personal respect towards natural and socio-cultural conditions of our life, as long as these conditions enable us live in dignity.

Ruse: Speaking as a nonbeliever I really don't have a lot of conception of transcendence. I presume that, in some sense, what one is talking about here is a being that lies beyond space and time as we know it. However, for me this is a very empty category and quite possibly incoherent. So I make very little of the Christian doctrine about Christ, believing it to be false and quite possibly incoherent.

What do you think might be the place of religious faith in a modern world? Do you think that it is a matter of time before religious faith dies out?

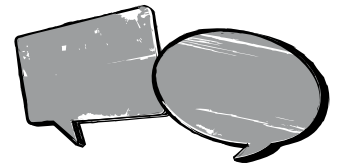
Boros: I cannot see any sign of religion's dying out in our modern world taken as a whole, just the opposite. Consider for example, the curious fact of there being at least as many hard-core natural scientists who believe in God(s) and go regularly to church or other sanctuary as there are hard-liners of a not only methodologically atheist conviction.

Connolly: I do not see faith in transcendence dying out. I imagine it will become intensified in many as new experiences cast doubt on previous faith in a per-

sonal God. So they will be tempted to intensify the faith rather than explore it again. Others will find deep comfort and inspiration in this or that mode of transcendence. The idea that religion would die out was a strange projection advanced by a set of secular thinkers. I do think and hope that a large minority of people in many places and walks of life will pursue generous versions of non-theism.

De Dijn: I do not think religion will go away, not even in the western world (not even in the secularist 'exception' to the rest of the world which is today's Western Europe); religion is too much a natural phenomenon belonging more or less inevitably to groups of humans (see my answers to question 1 & 5). Some religions may die out (this happened before), but certainly not all. What may happen – it actually is already the case – is the appearance of new forms of religion or of religious groups, for example the arrival of very individualistic forms of religion (or 'spirituality' as this is sometimes called today) or of new 'non-believing' groups of Christians (in the words of Grace Davie: those "belonging, but not believing", as against those who "believe without belonging (to a church or denomination)"); etc.

Goodchild: I see the modern world as the period during which humanity was able to reconstruct its own knowledge, society and environment through its own self-assertion, power, and self-confidence. I believe that this period was made possible by the harnessing of fossil fuels on the one hand and the creation of money as credit in an expanding economy as



the basis for trust, cooperation, and the shared goal of the creation of wealth, on the other. Since various ecological limits set absolute limits to an expanding economy, the modern period will end, and along with it, human self-confidence. I think it is only a matter of time before modernity dies out. Human cooperation must seek other bases, or else there will be simple conflict. The shape of religious faith to come is harder to predict: some faiths will no doubt conserve existing forms, but newer elaborations may be possible.

Laux: Religious faith cannot be tied to a particular age of the world, in the measure that it belongs to the intimate essence of man in search of a meaning that exceeds the limits of the world. The modern world, more than any other, is characterized, at the same time, by the place accorded to the rationality organizing it, and by the demands of individual autonomy. None of that goes against religious faith. Faith and reason are not opposed to one another. Reason invalidates itself when it cannot recognize that it is rooted in a singular history and is nourished by the convictions that are transmitted by this history; or when it claims to deploy a technical rationality rather than seeing itself as a search for freedom. Religious faith, itself, is not the opposite of reason; it is called upon to give an account of its convictions in a language admissible to everyone. It is able to show that its comprehension of existence agrees with the most universal demands of reason. Thus, religious faith cannot die; it belongs intrinsically to the essence of human nature, even if not everyone

recognizes itself in it. One should distinguish between the sociological extent of religious practice within definite cultural formations, which is variable and contingent, and the nature of faith, which will last as long as man will.

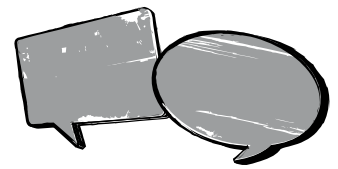
Novosád: I don't see any indications of religion losing its position in the modern society. What changes is the significance of churches, guises of religiousness; religion persereves. All the attempts to create a "society without religion" have ended up as a catastrophe.

Ruse: I am not a sociologist or a soothsayer so I cannot tell if religious faith will die out. It seems to me quite possible that it will not, but that, possibly with the spread of science and knowledge, it might become a lot less important sociologically. Personally, I think we would be better off without faith, but I'm certainly not sanguine as to the possibilities of doing this, at least not in our lifetimes. This is the reason I am more inclined to try to work with people of faith, rather than simply opposing them in the mode of the so called „new atheists.“

Can religious faith survive the "Death of God"?

Boros: "Nietzsche had died, thus spoke God."

Connolly: If you keep in mind this attenuated connection between creed and spirituality, it is possible to think of growing numbers of people who deny a personal God but affirm spiritual connections to the world, even the cosmos.



De Dijn: Of course, see answer to previous question.

Gál: Religion will survive, and the question is rather whether the notion of the “Death of God” will survive. For me, the question is whether what will survive will be the myth or the wisdom contained in it. For most of human history, religion has been an ethical foundation binding everyone in a society. It seems that not even liberal democracy can exist without such a foundation. Whatever will be the ethical foundation holding society together in the future, it will become a religion, no matter what stories people tell or what treatises they write to justify their moral intuition. No society can exist without a certain number of common beliefs. “For a society to exist and also to prosper it is inevitable that all minds are maintained together by several major notions. This wouldn’t be possible if any of them has not sometimes drawn from the common source of ready and unquestionable truths.” (Tocqueville)

Goodchild: I see the “death of God” as a profound cultural shift that affects believers and unbelievers alike: human life and cooperation is managed according to norms other than theistic piety, so that believers struggle to live their lives according to the ‘will of God’, however pious they might be. Religious faith survives in mourning. Yet the evidence of the continuing global strength of world religions suggests that secularisation is a relatively local phenomenon possible in wealthy societies. Exposure to fate, and fortune, where there is inadequate insurance or welfare, tends to encourage

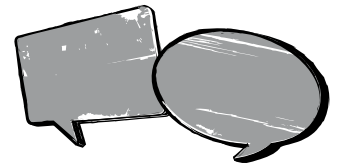
religious faith. I am expecting an intensification of religious faith worldwide over the course of this century.

Laux: In connection with the previous remark, one can say that the expression “Death of God” is the historical name of a philosophical problem. A certain conception of God could have died, and without a doubt will always be called upon to die. For, the Mystery of God always calls forth a speech more and more appropriate on the part of man. Connected to man’s intimate nature, like the desire for love or the desire for freedom, religious faith is not of one time or of one place but of all times and of all places.

Novosád: I am sure that religious faith certainly survives all the philosophical bubbles around the “Death of God”.

Ruse: Well, I’m really not quite sure what one means by ‘death of God.’ Certainly there are religious people who do not have much belief in the deity, for instance the Quakers and the Unitarians in our own society and the Buddhists in Asia. But does one want to say the Quakers and the Unitarians have religious faith? They are certainly religious but whether they have faith I think is another matter. I am inclined to say that without God one has no faith but please understand I speak as a nonbeliever, in other words I do not have a dog in this fight, and believers may differ from what I am saying.

What are the limits of politicizing religion? Must religion remain a strictly private matter? And, if it does can it remain true to its original mission?



Allen: I am a strong believer in liberal secularism, where the state's role is to protect individual freedom of conscience and religious belief within the limits of not harming others. As such, I am uncomfortable with the state taking any explicitly pro-religious or anti-religious position. I am also uncomfortable with the state limiting people's freedom to express their religious beliefs, for example, by outlawing the wearing of certain religious symbols in schools or even in the street. Regarding the latter, I'm thinking particularly of something like France's recent "burqa ban." In essence, I don't think it makes sense to try to restrict religion to a "strictly private matter." As well as encompassing individual beliefs, religion is social, communal in nature, and should be able to manifest itself to some degree in the public sphere. Just like any other type of freedom of association, religious individuals should be able to band together to pursue their vision of the good life in common as long as it does not harm other individuals. Certain more general state functions and levels of government, however, should remain neutral on the question of religious belief or non-belief to ensure that all citizens are treated fairly and equally, regardless of their particular religious or non-religious leanings.

Boros: If religion should lose its influence upon the majority of people, it would lose its charm for the politician. At that moment we would only have politicized sport, rock music, musical theatre, and so on - whatever attracts people. Religion as a strictly private matter is nothing but

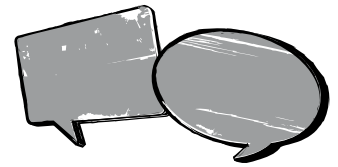
a borderline concept of Locke-and-Bayle-based Enlightenment.

Connolly: There is no such thing as a religious orientation without any public and political dimensions. It is not if, but how. The biggest mistake of secularism was the idea that religion could simply be private, while secular reason could rule in public life. What is needed today is a pluralism that is much more deep and robust than that!

De Dijn: For truly religious people religion is too important an element in/of human life to be a purely private affair (it is not purely a matter of my most individual thoughts or inner feelings, which is a very 'protestant' and one-sided way of seeing religion); it has also to do with behaviour related to sacred places, times, objects, ways of meeting, dress, etc. So it is an illusion that politics could relegate religion to the purely private sphere. Furthermore it is part of our modern heritage that there is freedom of religion also within the public sphere; religious people as religious people have something to contribute to the general community (for example in ethical matters, or to counter the pervasive influence of the market on civil and social life).

But it is also part of our heritage that there should be a separation of religion and politics in the strict sense: it should never be the religious authorities who make the law of the land or uphold it (it is to the disadvantage of religion itself when it usurps political power). Both sides of the heritage should be honoured.

See also my paper: "Cultural Identity,



Religion, Moral Pluralism and the Law”, in: Peter Losonczi & Aakash Singh (eds.), *From Political Theory to Political Theology: Religious Challenges and the Prospects of Democracy*. London, Continuum, 2010, p. 61-72 (with references to other papers).

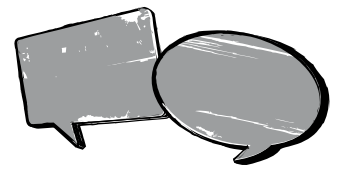
Gál: In the past 20 years, religion is rather being radically de-privatized. First, it seemed to us here in Slovakia that it was a reaction to suppressing natural religiousness by the previous regime. However, something similar goes on also in older and better-established democracies. Never since World War II has religion been as intensely present in the public sphere as it was during the end of previous and the beginning of this century. The reason might be that secular Enlightenment reason doesn't possess the means for creating a common ethical foundation binding everyone in a society. The problem is that not even any of the established religions possess such means, unless we suppose that all in the political society confess the same religion. Politicizing religion, accompanied by the confrontation of collective identities, means only that we will need to get accustomed to a democracy having no common agreement in view on some of the important questions regarding human life. In my view, the one limit that should be placed on politicizing religion is that religious doctrines should not be used as political arguments for enforcing certain ways of life.

Goodchild: Most religions were formed in societies where they had a live political significance, even if they were formed

by world-renouncers who retreated into the forests. Even the notion that religion is a strictly private matter was originally a political position put forward by dissenting Protestants to safeguard their faith. So while a 'de-politicizing of religion' may be possible, I am not sure that 'politicizing religion' is meaningful. One only has to scratch the surface to see political forms embedded in religion. Of course, one might not like all that one discovers by such means.

Laux: Religion can neither coincide with any type of political or juridical organization, nor can it limit itself to the private sphere. In both case it would negate its own essence. But in the measure that it animates a historical existence from within, it inspires necessarily, acts which unfold their effects in the inter-individual and public sphere. Religion informs behaviours within democratic processes; it is practiced in a universe of words exchanged, it respects different sensibilities, it respects the decision taken by pluralist political body, and it opposes violence.

Novosád: Religion can be a "private matter" only in its secondary form. In its primary form it is a paramount political matter since it distinctively separates those who belong "to us" and the "strangers". Nothing divides people as much as their gods. Political power's destiny is to be proximate to religion and this proximity has only exceptionally a form of conflict. In the history, religion has more often worked to legitimize political power directly or by indirect means.



Ruse: I believe it's a very good thing if religion does remain a strictly private matter. I do not think that it is a private matter here in the USA, and in fact a great deal of opposition to social and other practices come directly from religion. I'm thinking for instance of abortion and the rights of gay people. My own feeling is that we would be a lot better off if religions have no say at all in the public square, but I am not at all optimistic that this will happen in the USA in the near or even the far future.

Do you think there is a place for religious education in publicly funded schools? Is there a way in which a religious education can produce open minded individuals who respect differing views?

Allen: Religious traditions and texts, whether one is a believer or not, are part of our cultural heritage and history. As such, learning about them is an important part of learning about where some of our dominant ideas and values come from. Moreover, in pluralistic societies one is bound to encounter and even live alongside people who have different beliefs and religious traditions than oneself. In order to foster understanding and diminish fear of, and prejudice against the unknown, we should also be learning about religious traditions other than our own. In this open-minded and pluralistic sense, then, I think religious education has an important place in publicly funded schools.

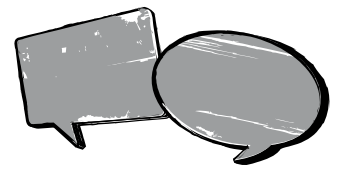
Boros: There can be a place for facultative – and preferably pluralistic – religious education in publicly funded

schools but no place for obligatory one. The second question seems to be a riddle for me: is it possible that you have not yet met religiously educated open minded individuals who respect differing views? As I have been taught by my experience, there are more open minded individuals among religiously educated people than such who do not respect differing views, and I do not think non-religious education has more chances to “produce” open minded individuals than the religious one.

Connolly: No, unless you mean a history of different religions and the challenges they have faced from perspectives that deny a personal God. Then, yes. Both the pretty and ugly elements would need to be presented.

De Dijn: Learning *about* religion and the different (major) religions in a fair and objective way should be part of any general education, although it is not an easy thing to do because of the very diverse sentiments vis-à-vis religion. Religious education - in the sense of at the same time introducing into a particular religion - is not (necessarily) contradictory with educating people with an open mind (as is clear from sociological surveys concerning attitudes of religiously educated people in my own country, Belgium, for example): it is not people with a proper sense of their own (religious) identity which are necessarily narrow minded, but people who have trouble knowing what their own identity is.

There is no unique or once and for all answer to the question whether there is room for religious education in publicly



funded schools. In some countries where most people are sociologically speaking of the same religion, this can be perfectly acceptable; of course, in case the diversity of the population increases, problems may arise. Even then, if there is a long tradition with good and open minded religiously affiliated schools, as is the case in Belgium for example, it may be wise politics to continue funding these schools because of the diversity within the school system (the choice of parents) and the good standards of education in these schools. This allows closer public control of these religiously affiliated schools.

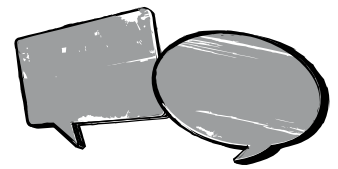
Goodchild: In the UK, religious education is a compulsory element of state-funded schooling. It teaches about a variety of faiths, and it has the dual aims of learning about religion and learning from religion. While there is, of course, stronger and weaker practice, the primary aim is to produce open minded individuals who respect differing views, and it is often successful in indoctrination into relativism. The entire effort is hampered by the dominance of a cultural prejudice that religion is a matter of private conviction that some people take to be extremely important, while others ignore it without significant detriment. What gets lost here is a wider conversation about the fundamental limits of human experience, such as birth, life, death, love, morality, law, grace, liberation, enlightenment, ecstasy, promise, the cosmos and God, a conversation that religions have formulated themselves around. This is necessary for the meaning and orientation of knowledge, endeavour and trust. Without this, people construct the meaning of their work, associa-

tion and consumption in an ad hoc way through imitation, without constructing their lives around any definite conception of purpose or project. Perhaps it is better to live in such confusion than to commit one's life to an illusory purpose, but as an entire culture, it is necessary to have such ongoing conversations when humanity is so ill-adapted to the world and the society that it has constructed. In this respect, I lament the absence of a proper theological and philosophical education throughout the vast majority of the population, including most intellectual and religious leaders.

Laux: A responsible education ought to permit the educated to situate itself in the world, and, therefore, to be acquainted with systems of values and references: traditions that offer meaning. In a privileged way, religions are part of such traditions. It is not a matter of teaching faith – that is not the busyness of schools; rather, it is to inform about the sources of meaning available, and to make students reflect on how these sources allow for a comprehension of existence. A better understanding of different traditions will develop a spirit of tolerance and dialogue. It is ignorance and caricatures that give rise to mistrust, and then to violence.

Novosád: In public schools, religion should be dealt with only as a cultural and historical phenomenon. Religious education should remain a matter of respective churches.

Ruse: Although I lived in Canada for nearly 40 years which has publicly supported religious schools, I am strongly



against public funds being used for religious education of any kind whatsoever. I think that if people want to teach religion then they should do it on Saturday for the Jews and Sunday for the Christians. I would not even object if the Moslems wanted to take some time off on Fridays for their services, although I'm inclined to think that in the West we don't have to accommodate every religious minority in quite this way. The main thing is I do not think that there should be any religion whatsoever in publicly funded schools.

Are religions, in general, helpful or harmful for achieving peace and good will among peoples?

Allen: I think this really depends on the way religious beliefs are held and communicated. If a religious believer or community is very hostile towards those that think differently, and communicates their beliefs in a dogmatic, proselytizing and militant manner that leaves no opening for questioning or thinking otherwise, religion manifests itself in my opinion as harmful, at best closing all doors to dialogue and free thinking, and at worst leading to violence. However, such close-mindedness, dogmatism and violence towards difference can manifest themselves just as well amongst non-believers as believers. These traits are weaknesses of human character rather than of religion proper. On the other hand, if religious beliefs are held and communicated in a more open-minded and reflective way, the teachings of various religions – for instance, teachings on human weakness, love, forgiveness, conscience, and personal responsibility

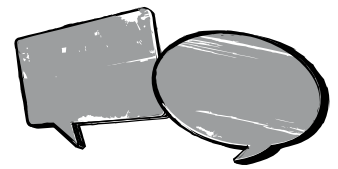
– can carry universal messages that are meaningful across differences in belief and provide important symbolic tools for working towards “peace and good will among peoples”.

Boros: I do not think one can assess this question “in general”. Almost the whole history of humankind has been deployed in highly religious cultures.

Connolly: There is a tremendous variation and ambivalence here. Transcendent faiths can be great when they are checked and inspired in part by forces outside their purview. Same with the non-theistic faith I embrace!

De Dijn: Some are, but not all, and even then not necessarily all the time or forever. So, as Spinoza would say, in view of the pervasive nature of religion, politics (and public opinion) has to keep an eye on this aspect of religious influence.

Goodchild: Religions, in their historic traditions that have developed over time, are generally helpful, in part because of what they have learned from their history. The glaring exceptions to this would seem to lie in issues of gender equality and sexual orientation. Yet religions also function as a symbolic conduit for whatever people feel matters immensely, and so become channels of defensiveness and anger. Perhaps without such symbolic expression and organisation, this anger could be more destructive and chaotic. Yet religions can sacralise the unhealthiest emotions. So religions, in general, are ambivalent, deeply ambivalent.



Laux: There is a rather negative image of religions today, being accused of causing violence. But one should not confuse fundamentalism and fanaticism with the intimate message of spiritual traditions. From this point of view, it must be recognized that the deviation of an Islam politicized to the extreme in certain regions of the world does harm to the way religion is perceived. Nevertheless, religions are promoters of peace, but as all human values, they could be turned away from their goals by uses that distort them. A religious expression that justifies violence by that very fact contradicts itself: it ceases to be spiritual. God, being the God of life, it is a logical contradiction to invite to kill in his name.

Novosád: When it comes to the rate of generating conflicts, all the communities of faith, religious ones included, proceed through three phases. In the first phase believers are ready to die for their faith, in the second one they are willing to let die others for their faith and only in the third phase do they start proclaiming tolerance. The problem of the contemporary world is that religions evolve unequally. While some are in the first phase, the others are in the third one.

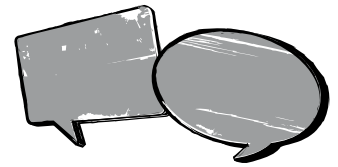
Ruse: I think this question is a little bit like asking „how long is a piece of string?“ Sometimes religion can be quite helpful. At other times obviously religion leads to great hurt, for instance as we used to see in Northern Ireland. Often however where we have conflict, and religion is involved, it is not the only factor. For instance think of the religious disputes going on the Middle East between Israel

and its Arab neighbours. These are fights as much over possession of land as they are about religious beliefs. So certainly I think religion can be a bad thing with respect to peace, and also can be a good thing. However my suspicion is that it's rarely religion alone which is causing strife between groups.

What role do you think the rise of religious fundamentalism plays in producing hostility towards all religions?

Allen: Any kind of fundamentalism, religious or otherwise, manifests itself in hostility and thus produces hostility in those who do not agree with the fundamentalist's position. Further, if one reduces all religions to fundamentalism then one is likely to feel hostility towards all religions, seeing religion itself as the problem and not the fundamentalist attitude in which it is held. Just like the fundamentalist, however, the reducer of all religion to fundamentalism is short-sighted, painting a world made of shades of grey in a more easily compartmentalized black and white. Both sides are, in my view, guilty of absolutism, and along with Albert Camus and Isaiah Berlin (among others), I would assert that it is such absolutism, rather than its religious or non-religious flavour, that is most hurtful to human life.

Boros: This consideration plays a big role, to be sure, even if the overwhelming majority of religious people are not fundamentalists – which is a fact mostly ignored by those who are not religious or belong to another religion than the one to which the fundamentalists in question belong.



Connolly: Its role is crucial today, but it is interwoven with a variety of other forces, including the hegemony of neoliberal capitalism at the global level, regional inequalities, and a sense of cosmic insecurity which marks the late modern era.

De Dijn: First of all, the term ‘fundamentalism’ is used today to discredit anything one does not like (there is even talk about enlightenment fundamentalism). So it seems important, to try and properly define religious fundamentalism. I take it that religious fundamentalism is different from the pre-modern, traditional form of religiosity (so it does not make sense to accuse such forms of fundamentalism). Religious fundamentalism is the post-traditional form of religion which claims the truth in a pseudo-scientific way (it is at the same time the enemy of science and claims to be more scientific even than science; and although it uses modern techniques, it claims sometimes to have even more powerful and more sophisticated devices or methods than modern technology itself). Paradoxically, although it is inconceivable without modernity, it is anti-modern in spirit; it cannot live with the divisions which are typical for a modern mentality and society (division between science and religion, religion and politics, public and private; etc.).

Goodchild: It allows the caricatures to dominate, so that a wider public has little conception of what it is like to lead one’s life as a devout believer in sincere devotion to what is perceived as good and right. Most religious life is about self-criticism and self-transformation, not about imposing a vision on others.

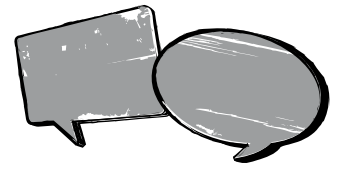
Laux: It is clear, as it has just been said, that religious fundamentalism brings with it a suspicion toward all religions. Still, it should be clear that fundamentalism is a negation of religion; in reality it confuses itself with a political ideology. Instead of criticizing religions, the task should be to unmask the violence that hides within societies, and to call for a democratic functioning of confrontation. Religious violence occurs most often in authoritarian societies; those which by definition are unable to regulate their internal conflicts by the use of dialogue, through a system of laws and rights that guarantee the freedom of all.

Novosád: Fundamentalism is a foundation of every religion.

Ruse: Certainly, the rise of fundamentalism does not at all help the role of religion in society. But I think that in American religious fundamentalism is very deeply ingrained in a great deal of Protestant evangelical thought. So I would want to say that in many respects religion is religious fundamentalism and, for that reason, it would be a bad mistake simply to say that fundamentalism is causing problems for religion.

Are there any reasons an atheist might want to fight for preserving the essence of religious faith? Who, in your view, is an “atheist”?

Allen: There are many different kinds of atheist, but two in particular stand out to me: the militant atheist who is bent on ridding the world of the “harmful” and “immature” illusion of religion; and



the nostalgic atheist, who would like to believe and sees some value and beauty in religious faith but cannot find their own access to it. The former would seem to have no stake in preserving the essence of religious faith, but would soon lose a significant point of reference for their own identity, albeit by way of opposition, were religious faith to disappear. The latter, I think, seeks out dialogue and interaction with religious faith in order to better understand their own lack of it, and thus has a clear stake in helping to preserve the essence of religious faith – whatever that essence may be, which I think remains open to question.

Boros: An “atheist” may be taken literally – though not historically – as one for whom the existence of a personal God is of no importance. Sure, she might want to fight for preserving the essence of – liberal, not fundamentalist – religious faith; against those political powers which would try to force her to accept, or reject – without inner conviction – the existence of a personal God.

Connolly: A non-theist is one who denies a personal God, but who acknowledges the contestability of that faith; and pursues the contest. The idea of “atheism” is sometimes tied up with greater self-certainty and the sufficiency of reason. A non-theist certainly sees the point of multiple faiths checking and interrogating one another. Hubris is the most worrisome thing today, that and widespread tendencies to pour a certain resentment of the human role in the cosmos into the operational terms of faith. So, yes a non-theist seeks to pursue positive spiritual

affinities across differences of philosophy and creed.

De Dijn: Many atheists today seem not only to know with utmost certainty that there can be no God, but they also seem to think that, even though religion clearly is a product of human evolution, nevertheless religion is invariably a most negative affair (which would almost lead one to believe in the devil). I do not like the moralistic and activist character of this ‘anti-God-squad’ (John Gray). Of course there are atheists who simply and honestly think (as David Hume did) that the God-concept is incomprehensible, but who would nevertheless fight for the preservation of the freedom of religion, also in public life. Any fundamental human activity – including religion, but also atheism - can turn out to be terribly bad or very good. So why would an atheist not be able to see what is good (sometimes) in (some) religion.

It is not difficult to find on the web interesting articles of the kind of: “An Atheist’s Defence of Religion”.

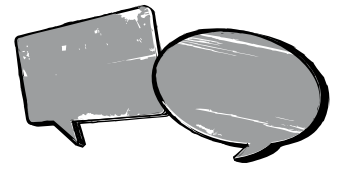
Goodchild: An atheist may be committed to fostering the diversity of ways in which people may commit themselves to living their lives according to what they take to be good and true. Some of these ways may involve conceptions of a personal God and a set of devotional practices; others may take different forms. Both may be able to learn from each other what they have overlooked. But it is possible for a devout atheist and a devout believer to have much in common in that they view their lives as problems for active engagement. Often, differences over theistic belief are



Eduard Grečner, foto: Miro Nôta



Eva Borušovičová, foto: Miro Nôta



a minor part of a shared life that unites friends. I tend to think that people have differing levels of engagement with reality, some broader than others, and some deeper than others. While theism often brings with it the self-perception that one has a broad and deep engagement, this is often illusory. I like to distinguish between explicit theists and atheists on the one hand, who take themselves as having a certain kind of belief, and implicit theists and atheists on the other, who actually shape themselves and their lives in ways outside their own imagination. One can be explicitly theist, even a devout believer, and implicitly atheist; one can also be explicitly atheist, but implicitly theist. There are far more significant operative differences between people than their self-perceptions or whether they belong to a religious group. The problem of religious fundamentalism is that in claiming certainty of divine obligations and duties, it focuses lives around a projection that is far from divine. These are implicit atheists. It is the shallowness of people's perceptions of religion, whether they are religious or not, that is a major obstacle, and an outcome of the "death of God". Those atheists who understand the "death of God" as a profound enactment of the heart of Christianity are, of course, implicit theists, for they have a focus for what they take to be of ultimate significance. Such atheists might fight to preserve the essence of religious faith.

Laux: All men, whatever their philosophical orientations, are called upon to improve the quality of human relations.

Whatever might be their convictions about God, they could find a great utility in traditions that offer sources of meaning, of justice and of peace. By the same token, the "atheist" - if one understands by that he who does not believe in God - in as much as he is a member of humanity, and in as much as he is a citizen of a particular society, has every interest in dialoguing with traditions that intend to promote those values.

Novosád: There are atheists who like visiting museums and so are concerned to have showpieces in the best condition.

Ruse: Personally I see no reason to preserve religious faith. I am a great deal happier and more comforted for having given up a belief in a God, particularly belief in a God who is going to judge me and surely will find me wanting. This is not arrogance on my part but a refusal to be kept in control by a group of people who made up a set of rules and their own false ontology. I do not want to be run by members of the Catholic hierarchy and I do not want to be run by elders of the Calvinist church. So I want no religious faith. Whether or not this makes me an atheist is really a matter of some indifference. I am more generally inclined to speak of myself as an agnostic, believing meaning that I have no faith but also I have no way of disproving the existence of God. However when it comes to the essential aspects of the Christian religion - for instance Jesus dying on the cross and rising three days later - I think I would regard myself as pretty atheistic.