

Religious Studies at 60

YUJIN NAGASAWA

University of Oklahoma, USA

e-mail: yujin.nagasawa@ou.edu

Abstract: This article serves as the introduction to *Religious Studies Archives* 8, commemorating the journal's 60th anniversary. I have selected six articles, each representing the most oft-cited article from its respective decade. For each article I offer a brief discussion of its significance in light of the broader trends in the philosophy of religion during that period.

Introduction

The first issue of *Religious Studies* was published in 1965. The journal was titled as such because its founders—including the first editor, H. D. Lewis—held a broad view of the philosophy of religion, one that incorporates historical, anthropological, psychological, and sociological perspectives. As Stewart Sutherland, who succeeded Lewis as editor, notes, the academic discipline of religious studies was still in its formative stages during the 1960s. During this period, scholars such as John Hick, Geoffrey Parrinder, and Ninian Smart explored distinctive approaches to shaping its development (Sutherland, Ward, and Byrne 2015, pp. 286–287). The inclusion of Robert N. Bellah's 1968 article 'Meaning and Modernisation,' which is not a philosophy of religion article in the strict sense, reflects the journal's engagement with intellectually exploratory approaches at the time.

Bellah, an influential American sociologist of religion, argued in the article that modernisation poses a fundamentally moral and religious challenge, disrupting traditional systems of meaning and identity across cultures. In societies where religion failed to adapt to modern conditions, new secular or quasi-religious ideologies—such as liberalism, romantic nationalism, and radical socialism—arose to fill the void. Bellah concluded that successful modernisation depends not only on political or economic reform but also on a society's capacity to regenerate meaning and motivation in the face of ongoing change.

In its inaugural year, *Religious Studies* published a single issue. From the following year until 1968, it was issued biannually. In 1969, three issues were published, and by 1970 the journal entered full swing and adopted a quarterly publication schedule, which continues to this day. Following its early years, the journal gradually established a clear focus on the philosophy of religion. James Rachels's 1971 article 'God and Human Attitudes' stands as the most oft-cited article of the journal's second decade. In the article, Rachels introduces a novel a priori argument against the existence of God by focusing on the concept of worship-worthiness. He argues that worship necessarily entails total subservience and self-abasement, which are incompatible with moral autonomy. Therefore, no being could be a fitting object of worship; and since God is, by definition, worthy of worship, it follows that God does not exist. The concept of worship-worthiness remains a widely discussed topic, and *Religious Studies* continues to publish articles engaging with this theme.

William P. Alston's 1986 article 'Does God Have Beliefs?,' like Rachels's, examines a divine attribute—in this case, omniscience. Inasmuch as omniscience is typically understood as a form of knowledge and knowledge is often analyzed as a form of belief, it may seem natural for theists to claim that God has beliefs. Alston, however, argues that this is a mistake. He contends that God's knowledge does not involve beliefs in the same way human knowledge does. Instead, divine knowledge is best understood as an intuitive, direct awareness of facts—an immediate cognitive grasp that surpasses the propositional structure characteristic of human belief. A number of influential articles on divine attributes appeared in the mid-to-late 1900s, and the articles by Rachels and Alston remain among the most significant to have emerged from that period.

In his 1997 article 'What is Scientism?,' Swedish philosopher of religion Mikael Stenmark examines the concept of scientism in depth. Science is often contrasted with religion and critics of religion frequently claim that religion serves merely to fill gaps left by science. Conversely, those wary of an overreliance on science often accuse its defenders of scientism. The term is frequently conflated with related positions such as scientific naturalism and scientific materialism. In his article, Stenmark provides a comprehensive analysis by carefully distinguishing between forms of scientism and exploring their distinctive features and implications. The article gained particular prominence in the early 2000s, during the height of the intelligent design controversy

and amid growing public interest in the works of the so-called New Atheists, such as Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins, and Christopher Hitchens. This was a time when debates over science and religion attracted widespread attention.

One of the most widely discussed arguments about God in *Religious Studies* over the past three decades has been the argument from divine hiddenness. First fully developed by J. L. Schellenberg in his 1993 book, the argument says that the existence of nonculpable nonbelievers—those who fail to believe in God through no fault of their own—poses a serious challenge to the existence of a perfectly loving God. In his 2006 article ‘Divine Hiddenness and the Demographics of Theism,’ Stephen Maitzen extends this argument by highlighting the uneven global distribution of theistic belief. He tries to show that this demographic disparity strengthens the hiddenness argument and undermines many standard theistic replies.

In his 2012 article ‘Authentic Faith and Acknowledged Risk: Dissolving the Problem of Faith and Reason,’ Daniel J. McKaughan offers a fresh perspective on the nature of faith. The rationality of religious faith is often challenged on the grounds that it involves belief without sufficient evidence. McKaughan responds by distinguishing alternative accounts of faith that emphasize trust and hope rather than belief. He argues that these models suggest that, while the truth of the content of faith still matters, our appraisal of whether faith is appropriate need not rely solely on epistemic considerations—practical considerations can also legitimately play a role. Since the publication of this article, there has been a growing body of literature on the analysis of faith in the philosophy of religion. In 2023, we published a special issue devoted to the normative appraisal of faith, guest edited by McKaughan and Daniel Howard-Snyder.

We are still only halfway through the 2020s, but so far the most oft-cited contribution of the decade has been Jonathan O. Chimakonam and Amara Esther Chimakonam’s article, ‘Examining the Logical Argument of the Problem of Evil from an African Perspective.’ In recent years, one of *Religious Studies*’ key priorities has been to encourage submissions that contribute to the healthy globalization of the field. We are pleased to see a growing number of submissions from countries that were previously underrepresented in our journal as well as contributions engaging with underexplored religious and cultural traditions. In this article, the authors reframe the problem of evil through an African philosophical lens. Traditionally, the problem of evil relies on a binary

opposition between good and evil. Drawing on Ezumezu logic, a trivalent logical system rooted in African thought, the authors challenge this binary framework. They argue that, within the African harmony-God paradigm, good and evil are not merely opposites but complementary forces. From this perspective, they conclude, the logical problem of evil dissolves, as the coexistence of good and evil is viewed as a balance rather than a contradiction.

References

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