

Philosophy of Religion

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

Philosophy. Religion. If you put in a preposition, you identify a relationship between the two. This would possibly be a subject-predicate relationship that needs some exploration and investigation. This lesson points you in that direction by defining the philosophy of religion. You will be provided with a bit of history and some brief explanations of how the philosophy of religion can and has been applied to the study of religion. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. History

2. Multi-Disciplinary View

1. History

The questions and concerns of religion also concern philosophy. They've always been good friends in this endeavor, however, the term **philosophy of religion** wasn't officially used until the 17th century. And it wasn't until the 18th and 19th centuries really that it became an official discipline of academic study.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel in Germany was one of the most well-known philosophers of religion (philosophers who approached the philosophy of religion and really helped define it as a field of study) and had a strong religious background himself. His work was part of the inspired movement of German idealism, a period when many philosophers and philosopher theologians were wrestling with the issues of faith and reason.

Hegel was a theologian to begin with, and he really energized the field of philosophy of religion because of his prior religious commitments, curiosity, intrigue, and fascination with the complex dynamism between faith and reason. He was particularly interested in the advance and movements of modern science. If you're interested in philosophy of religion, just check out his lectures. They're very inspiring, and will give you an idea of the historical evolution of some of the religions of the world.

At this time the discovery and advances of modern science were happening, such as the discoveries of Newton and Newtonian science. Hegel applied the structure of metaphysical and historical thought to his understanding of the religions and religious experience. You can find it in his lectures on the philosophy of religion.



TERM TO KNOW

Philosophy of Religion

An academic discipline that considers religious questions from a broad, scholarly standpoint.

2. Multi-Disciplinary View

Philosophy of religion asks questions about many different things, such as religious pluralism and its place and significance for society. It also looks at how religions deal with questions such as good and evil, the existence and non-existence of God, and all of these questions within their respective traditions. It's interested in the nature of religious experience and its potential relevance or not for the individual and for the individual within society.

Unlike religious philosophy and theology, however—which might be closely tied to a specific religious worldview and grounded in the commitments of faith—philosophy of religion tries to do its work outside any particular set of religious beliefs. In this way, you might say, it's more objective and, therefore, offers fresh insight that could potentially complement religious or secular views regarding similar questions about religion, life, death, and the human condition in general.

Because philosophy of religion is interested in religion as a social and individual practice, it engages with other disciplines, such as sociology, science, linguistics, et cetera. All of these complementary fields have their own interaction with religion, and philosophy of religion wants to know about this as well.

IN CONTEXT

The individual and collective experiences concerning ultimate questions, history of religions, religious behavior, custom, and various forms of religious experience are all important elements for philosophy of religion.

Take a look at mysticism as an example of one type of religious experience. A philosopher of religion might incorporate other disciplines in his or her study and analysis, such as psychology and neuroscience. Certainly, this interplay between the rational, the non-rational, and the extra-rational, the realm of transcendence for a mystical experience, would be of interest to the philosopher of religion as well as the religious mystic. Rational, non-rational, extra-rational—they're all within the field of religion for the philosopher of religion.

Since its subject matter is not exclusively about philosophy, it's found to be important for many practical concerns, such as **exegesis**, or textual analysis.



DID YOU KNOW

Exegesis was applied for critical studies of religious texts, such as the Nag Hammadi library, which was found in Egypt in 1945.

This kind of analysis could be useful for understanding certain historical elements of the Jewish and Christian traditions, which in turn could have a direct influence on how these religions might be understood and practiced in the modern-day.



TERM TO KNOW

Exegesis

The process and methodology of accurately determining and interpreting the meaning of texts.



SUMMARY

History, philosophy, and religion have gone together for a long time. Philosophy of religion, however, is a relatively new field in terms of being an academic discipline. It really got its start in the 17th century and grew mostly in the 18th and 19th centuries. The work of Hegel was a motivating force for the discipline of philosophy of religion. The German idealist movement and the German Enlightenment brought philosophy and religion closer together. It is a field that one can engage with from either within a particular religious commitment or from without. Philosophy of religion is a fairly broad and open-ended field that incorporates a **multi-disciplinary view** because it's interested in religious experience, the history of religions, and the philosophical and existential questions that religion also wants to explore.

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