



Radio mast or jammer?

The role of religion in moral issues

Prof.dr Henk Jochemsen

Farewell address upon retiring as Special Professor of Christian
Philosophy at Wageningen University & Research on 21 June 2018



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Esteemed Rector Magnificus,

Distinguished colleagues, dear students, dear family and friends, ladies and gentlemen,

Jammer

A few days before April 27, 2018, when the historic meeting between the leaders of South and North Korea, Kim Jong-un and Moon Jae-in, took place, the Guardian of April 23 reported that South Korea silenced loudspeakers that blast cross-border propaganda to North Korea, as a gesture of good will. South and North Korea have been annoying one another with jammers for many years. Jammers are radio masts that emit loud noises to disturb radio communication or broadcast propaganda from the other side. North Korea above all emitted just noise; South Korea also loud pop music and propaganda. In any case, jammers mostly do not emit intelligible, meaningful messages.

In light of this example, are religious people and organisations like a radio mast communicating intelligible and meaningful messages, or like such a kind of jammer disturbing intelligible and meaningful communication, in particular when we have to deal with moral issues? This is the starting question of this lecture. More generally and philosophically formulated: how do religion and morality relate to one another? Can in our secularized society with people from a variety of cultural and religious backgrounds, religion still fulfil a meaningful role in public debate on moral issues? How can this be legitimized and how would that relation work? These are the questions I will try to answer in this address – be it in a preliminary way.

Critics of religion

But for a moment I go back to the first question: is religion like the noise of a jammer or an intelligible radio message? In our Western late modern culture there are a few outspoken voices that argue for the first answer. I give a few notable examples.

Paul Cliteur, professor of jurisprudence at Leiden University argues in his book

‘Het monotheistic dilemma’ (2010) that the three monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, hold a strong potential for violence.¹

The well-known (or notorious?) Richard Dawkins in his book, ‘The God delusion’ (2006), asserts that “... belief in a personal god qualifies as a delusion”. Dawkins sees religion as subverting science, fostering fanaticism,and as a “divisive force” and a “label for in-group/out-group enmity and vendetta”.²

As a third example I mention Sam Harris (1967), an American author, philosopher, neuroscientist, critic of religion. In an interview in the New Scientist about his book ‘The moral landscape’ (2010) he contends that as regards morality ‘We can send religion to the scrap heap.’³

We see that high-profile intellectuals in Western countries criticize religion’s role in morality with an almost religious zeal. Most people are more moderate. But especially the activities of violent extremist religious groups have given religion a rather negative press among many in our publicly secular societies. So, the relation between religion and morality, or a bit more specific, between religion and moral issues, continues to be an issue for reflection and debate!

Today I am formally stepping down as special professor of Christian philosophy at Wageningen University. In this position I have dedicated a significant part of my time to ethical issues in life sciences. This to me seems a good moment to reflect on the role of religion in dealing with moral issues. Philosophy at Wageningen University has the character of practical philosophy, or applied philosophy; so the focus of my contribution will be on the role of religion in dealing with issues.

Outline

What I intend to do in this lecture is

1. Discuss the relation religion – morality from a philosophical perspective as well as from the perspective of social and biological sciences
2. Explain how it works in practice in dealing with moral issues
3. Work out the findings for two moral issues

On each of the various parts of my paper I will choose one main thinker as a witness, as a resource person. This leads to the following outline of my exposition on the relation between religion and morality.

¹ Dirk Verhofstadt, in *Humanistische Canon*; <https://humanistischecanon.nl/venster/levensbeschouwing-politiek/paul-cliteur-het-monotheistisch-dilemma/>

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_God_Delusion

³ *New Scientist* 13 Oct 2010; <https://www.newscientist.com/article/mg20827822-100-morality-we-can-send-religion-to-the-scrap-heap/>

Perspective	Resource person
Philosophy	John Hare (Princeton)
Social and biological sciences	Ryan McKay (London University) and Harvey Whitehouse (Oxford University)
Christian philosophy / anthropology	H. Dooyeweerd and G. Glas (VU University)
Meta-ethics	J.A. van der Ven (Radboud University Nijmegen)

In the final part of this paper I will elaborate the model of Van der Ven for two issues on which I have worked as special professor, the creation of human-animal chimera and cooperation in development (poverty elimination).

Philosophical perspective

A scholar who thoroughly studied the relationship between religion and morality is John Hare. He wrote a book on it and a summary for the online Stanford Encyclopaedia of philosophy.⁴ An important issue that is central in the discussion on the relation between religion and morality is the question whether a religionless morality is possible.⁵ Hare does not directly enter into this debate but investigates how philosophers have conceptualized the relation between religion and morality. After his succinct tour through the history of Western philosophy, he comes up with some interesting conclusions. I briefly render those that to me seem most pertinent for my topic.

1. The variousforms of foundationalism (*Enlightenment thinking trying to ground morality in reason, HJ*) have not yet succeeded, in making natural sciences foundational for all human knowledge (incl. moral knowledge).
2. The secularization hypothesis (*roughly stating that modernization will lead to decline in religious adherence, HJ*) seemsfalse.

⁴ Hare, John (2004), "Religion and Morality", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2014/entries/religion-morality/>>.

⁵ For a quick introduction into the arguments in favour of this position see Swan, Thomas (2018), *What Is the Relationship Between Religion and Morality*, <https://owlcation.com/humanities/What-is-the-relationship-between-religion-and-morality>. For a 'classic' theological essay arguing that morality needs religion, see Pfleiderer, O. (1894), *Religion and Morality*, see <https://www.giffordlectures.org/books/philosophy-and-development-religion-vol-1/lecture-2-religion-and-morality>

3. The liberal idea (present from the time of the religious wars in Europe) that we need a moral discourse based on reason and not religion in order to avoid the hatred and bloodshed that religion seems to bring with it – is empirically disproven.
4. There is evidence that “....the attempt to connect morality closely to religion is undergoing a robust recovery within professional philosophy.”
5. Modernist project of disentanglement of morality and religion failed, and this disentanglement is not meaningful for morality in public policy and even within modern philosophy there has been a continuous resistance to this disentanglement.

I conclude that from a philosophical perspective investigating the way morality relates to religion is meaningful; in other words, there is no overriding philosophical argument against considering that relation relevant for moral debates on life sciences.

Psychology and biology

Now we turn to a more empirical approach of the relation between religion and morality in the fields of psychology and biology. My main witnesses here are McKay and Whitehouse with their review paper in *Psychological Bulletin*.⁶ This interesting review of literature is based on an evolutionary account of mankind. A summary of the whole article is beyond the scope of this lecture and I again will come up with some of their main conclusions. They argue that “....debates ... on the relation between religion and morality..... have frequently been marred by a series of conceptual confusions and limitations.” According to these authors, many scientific investigations have failed to decompose “religion” and “morality” into theoretically grounded elements; have adopted parochial conceptions of key concepts—in particular, sanitized conceptions of “prosocial” behaviour; and have neglected to consider the complex interplay between cognition and culture.⁷ The authors contend that “to make progress, the categories “religion” and “morality” must be fractionated into a set of biologically and psychologically cogent traits, revealing the cognitive foundations that shape and constrain relevant cultural variants of religion and morality”.

⁶ McKay, R., & Whitehouse, H. (2015), *Religion and morality*. *Psychological Bulletin* 141(2), pp. 447-473.

⁷ *Prosocial behavior occurs when people act to benefit others rather than themselves. Altruism, cooperation, and caregiving are a few examples of prosocial behavior. Prosocial behavior is a central part of morality.*

This is what they do in their paper. They adopt this fractionating strategy, setting out an encompassing evolutionary framework within which to situate and evaluate relevant evidence. They want “to produce a detailed picture of the current state of the field, and to provide a road map for future research on the relationship between religion and morality”.

They first present a fractionation of morality. They use the moral foundations theory as a basis. This theory asserts that morality has several core moral concerns, not just one to which all others could be related. This is debated in the literature but according to McKay and Whitehouse the moral foundations theory is prevailing. The state of the art of this theory is that in morality of mankind five ‘pan human’ moral principles can be distinguished. These are:

- a) care–harm: harming others is wrong, whereas treating others with kindness and compassion is right. According to those who think that in morality just one principle is central from which all other principles could be derived, this is the central moral principle. However, I follow the view of McKay and Whitehouse mentioned above.
- b) Fairness–cheating: people should reap what they sow and not take more than they deserve; related to retributive justice.
- c) in-group loyalty–betrayal: what is good for the community comes above selfish interests;
- d) respect for authority–subversion: we should accept and respect the authority of our elders and betters and respect tradition; and
- e) purity–degradation: the body is a temple and can be desecrated by immoral actions and contaminants. (Note, by the way, the religious language in this secular paper).

The moral foundations theory does not hold that these five key moral principles are equally important in all human communities. In mainstream morality of our (post) modern western culture the principles a - c are much more prominent than the principles d and e, whereas in some minority cultures these principles are relatively important.

Religion can also be fractionated. In my view, this fractionation is more difficult to grasp than the fractionating of morality that *a prima vista* has a certain plausibility. The background theory of the fractionation of religion is that “....dogmas and practices that have been collectively labelled ‘religion’ are shaped and constrained by a finite but disparate set of evolved cognitive predispositions—what we might call ‘religious foundations’.”⁸

⁸ MacKay and Whitehouse, *ibid*, p.454

Let me explain: In the process of evolution those beings survived that had brain structures that enable certain behavioural patterns that led to what we now call religion. In other words, in the course of evolution human brains have been wired for religious experiences and notions since these experiences and notions enhanced fitness in the struggle for life (the theory of natural selection).

The literature review of McKay and Whitehouse leads them to identify five strong candidates for religious foundationhood:

- a) a system specialized for the detection of agents;
- b) a system devoted to representing, inferring, and predicting the mental states of intentional agents; (theory of mind)
- c) a system geared toward producing teleofunctional explanations of objects and events;
- d) a system specialized for affiliating with groups through the imitation of causally opaque action sequences; and
- e) a system specialized for the detection of genetic kinship.

I will briefly explain these 'religious foundations', that is, behavioural patterns based on brain structures that evolved in communities due to enhancing fitness of those that had them.

Ad a) Agent detection: natural selection would have selected for 'hyperactive agent-detection devices' (HADDs); this means that humans tend to attribute agency to all kinds of events and phenomena. Notably spiritual agency to all kinds of inanimate objects (trees, rocks, clouds, etc.). The evolutionary reason would be that it is more dangerous *not* to see an agent where there was one than the other way around. So those beings survived who tended to see agents all over.

Ad b) People *can* represent, infer and predict mental states of others (this capacity is called theory of mind⁹). This capacity is helpful for survival because it helps to manoeuvre in communities. It is argued that a side effect of this capacity has been the surge of 'afterlife' beliefs, which are a characteristic of many religions. The argument is that theory of mind makes it difficult for people to imagine that minds stop existing after bodily death. It has been suggested, for example, that people spontaneously infer that dead relatives and friends are still present.

⁹ Frith, Chris, & Frith, Uta (2005), *Theory of mind*. *Current Biology* 15 (17), pp. R644-645;
see [https://www.cell.com/current-biology/pdf/S0960-9822\(05\)00960-7.pdf](https://www.cell.com/current-biology/pdf/S0960-9822(05)00960-7.pdf)

Ad c) People are inclined to view objects and behaviours – including features of natural world – as existing for a purpose; this is referred to as teleofunctional explanations. This inclination is found to be stronger when information (understood as scientific information) processing capacity is limited, e.g. in children and in people from premodern cultures. This tendency may render notions of intelligent supernatural designers, who have created the world and everything in it for a purpose, especially compelling. In this way this tendency contributed to the rise of religion among hominids that evolved into homo sapiens – so is the theory. It is not clear why this inclination would have enhanced fitness as it seems to compete with rational (scientific) information processing. As in this evolutionary approach, teleofunctional explanations largely refer to fictional ‘purposes’, information processing capacity would have contributed more to fitness enhancement. Yet, evolution ‘produced’ the former.

Ad d) Systems for affiliating with groups – living on groups enhances fitness of people

From an evolutionary perspective, deriving the benefits of group living requires a means of identifying ingroup members, (the ones you should cooperate with) and out-groups (people you should avoid or compete with). One solution is to have a distinctive set of group conventions or rituals. So religious rituals would have their origin in strengthening groups by helping to distinguish between ingroup and out group members.

Ad e) Kinship recognition. Inclusive fitness theory predicts that organisms will behave in ways that preferentially benefit kin, i.e. genetically related people. Here also religious rituals may have helped in distinguishing between kin and ‘others’, explaining why evolution led to the survival of those hominids that developed those rituals that became part of religion.

In the view of the authors, the most plausible cases of biologically evolved connections between the religious and moral foundations involve agency-detection mechanisms and ToM. To me this seems a reasonable suggestion since for the other mechanisms the evolutionary benefit is not so obvious - at least so far. At the same time, I note that in the literature there is a lot of discussion on the understanding of the HADDs. In an extensive recent paper Neil Van Leeuwen & Michiel van Elk¹⁰ discuss how human agency-detection capacities and other socio-cognitive biases are involved in forming religious beliefs. They focus on the HADD concept and argue that there is no empirical evidence that agency-detection *causes* supernatural beliefs.

¹⁰ Van Leeuwen, Neil & Van Elk Michiel (2018), *Seeking the supernatural: the Interactive Religious Experience*

They propose a more nuanced model, the Interactive religious Experience Model (IREM) in which the cultural environment fulfils a more important role in transmitting general religious beliefs in people. They change the HADD concept into Hyperactive agency-detection capacities (HADC), since they find it unlikely there is one specific cognitive device that is leading to agency detection and would have led to supernatural beliefs. Though they focus on HADC, they state that their model extends to include intuitions and experiences resulting from teleological thinking, magical thinking, meaningful coincidence and other systems.¹¹ It is noteworthy that in their paper they do not discuss the evolutionary origins of general religious beliefs in culture. My interpretation of the state of the discussion is that both the conceptual framework and the empirical evidence for the evolutionary origin of religion (in the sense the evolutionary process generated religions) is at best weak.

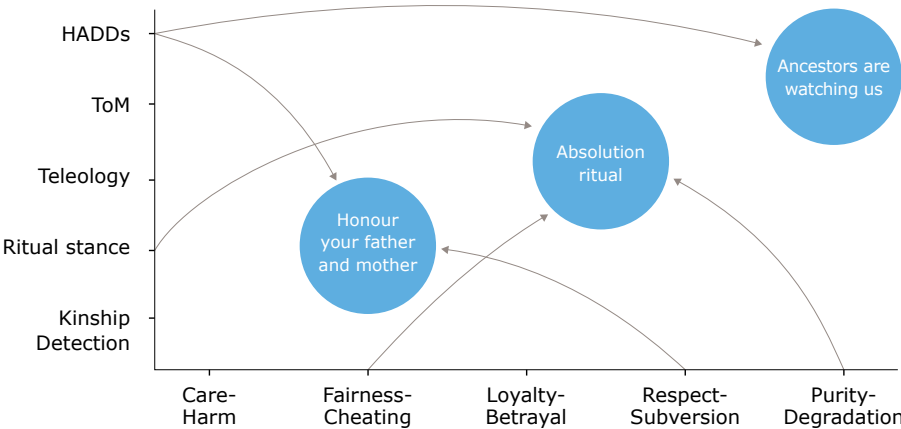


Figure 1: Cultural representations (e.g., propositions, prescriptions, and practices [blue circles] are triggered and constrained (arrows) by foundational cognitive systems (“religious foundations”, on the y axis) and “moral foundations” [on the x axis). For instance, the proposition ‘honour your father and your mother’ may resonate with intuitions of observing, intentional agents, and concerns about respect-subversion. The examples demonstrated here are just a few illustrations. (Adapted from MacKay and Whitehouse, 2015, *ibid.*)

Continuing with the review of MacKay and Whitehouse, after presenting the religious foundations and the moral foundations they construct a matrix consisting of two axes. The y-axis of religious foundations (foundational cognitive systems) and the x-axis of moral foundations form a matrix of moral positions/ customs that form

part of a culture (see Figure 1).

The ovals in the box represent cultural representations (e.g., propositions, prescriptions, and practices, that are the result of interactions between one or more religious and moral foundation). In other words, the message is that specific moral customs and convictions in a culture have roots in both religious foundations and in moral foundations prevalent in that culture, in some form of interaction between any of those religious and moral foundations. Cultural representations are triggered and constrained (arrows; blue) by foundational cognitive systems (“religious foundations” [on the y axis] and “moral foundations” [on the x axis]). For instance, the proposition that “God will punish rapists” may resonate with intuitions of observing intentional (spiritual) agents, and concerns about harm and purity. The relations depicted here are intended to be illustrative rather than exhaustive. For the sake of time I will not further discuss this approach but will now draw a few preliminary conclusions before I come to elaborate the influence religion may have on dealing with moral issues.

Conclusions from this part

- The study of the anthropological and cultural ‘substrate’ for religious experience is an interesting field.
- To me it sounds plausible that certain elements of morality and of ‘foundational cognitive systems that relate to human religiosity’ have served the survival of groups of people in the course of human history
- The causal or developmental relations between moral and religious foundations and the content of religious concepts and experiences remains (totally) unexplained.
- “The confident pronouncements of public commentators – on the relation between religion and morality- belie the bewildering theoretical and methodological complexity of the issues.”¹²(p.28)
- The presupposition of much of the work in this field seems to start from the presupposition that spiritual agents (God, spirits) do not really exist. Philosophically this presupposition is not compulsory, see the work of Hare above. And this choice, like any other presupposition in this matter, like ‘spirits do exist’, is informed if not rooted in a world view that is prescientific.

What I like to find is a model that can do justice to the biological and psychological rootedness of morality and religion and at the same time can accommodate a relation with ‘the sacred’. This leads me to my third witness, or resource, a philosophical

¹² MacKay and Whitehouse, *ibid*, p. 465.

approach of the human being asking what insight that gives in human religiosity. The approach I take is the perspective of Christian Reformational philosophy - not surprisingly for those who know the background of this special chair.

Reformational anthropology

The Reformational philosophy school of H. Dooyeweerd recognizes an intertwinement and coherence of several substructures or layers in human beings (see figure 2).¹³ These substructures do not refer to physically recognisable subsystems or parts but rather represent some of the modes of being, or aspects that can be distinguished in reality.

The first substructure is the physicochemical: the molecules of which the body is made. Secondly, there is the biotic substructure, expression of the irreducible mode of being called life. The third substructure that can be distinguished in humans is the sensitive, the psychic, relating to awareness, feelings, perceptions. In the human being a fourth substructure can be observed, the so-called normative act-structure that qualifies and opens up the before-mentioned substructures. This act-structure manifests itself in all human actions that can be ordered according to the different normative perspectives corresponding to the 15 modal aspects Dooyeweerd distinguished in reality. This act-structure and the underlying substructures finds its centre in what Dooyeweerd calls the heart, metaphor for the unifying root of the human being that relates to what it perceives as the origin of meaning. The heart is the dynamical source from which all human activity originates. Dooyeweerd pointed out that the heart can only be understood in a religious sense. Here, terms like 'religious' and 'religion' do not refer to something 'outside us', something we can choose for or not. This view emphasizes that we cannot distance ourselves from our own religion since we cannot 'distance us from our 'religiosity'. The term religiosity, in this context refers to an essential characteristic and fundamental longing of existence itself.

What are implications of this view for our subject ?

Human existence in all its richness and complexities can be understood as a disclosure and sometimes a foreclosure of the act-structure, that includes morality and religion. But as we just saw, this act-structure has a substrate in the physical and biotic and psychic substructures. All kinds of interactions can be investigated, including the relations between brain structure, cognitive abilities and the functioning of morality and religion. This view of humans would expect that such identifiable relations would exist. But this view denies the possibility of an exhaustive explanation of morality and religion from the lower substructures.

¹³ For a good presentation and discussion, see Glas, G. (2010), *Christian philosophical anthropology. A Reformational perspective*. *Philosophia Reformata* 75, pp. 141-189.

Anthropology of Reformational philosophy
Human being: Intertwined Substructures
Courtesy Gerrit Glas

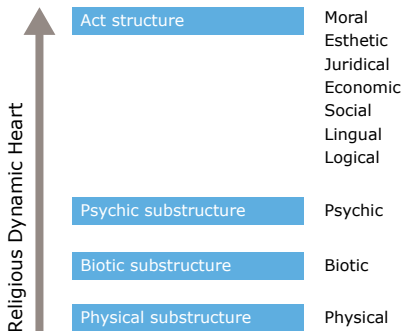


Figure 2: Schematic representation of Reformational anthropology

The disclosure of the act-structure is guided by the deepest, ultimately religious beliefs in a culture, communities, and individuals. In the heart, the human being always relates to that which is considered 'unconditionally non-dependent reality', the sacred.¹⁴ From this perspective, atheists, secular people, are also 'religious' in this anthropological sense. A secular-humanist worldview is not a kind of religiously neutral position from which one can 'independently' judge religions, but that worldview itself embodies a 'religious' position among others.

As you will have noted I now distinguish between religion and religiosity (spirituality). Many in our society do not consider themselves religious, meaning adhering to an identifiable religion with typical characteristics of religions like certain ideas, experiences, rituals, organisational structures. But *religiosity* is a characteristic of every human being independent of that person's religion or fundamental concerns and convictions. This leads to the question: how do manifestations of religiosity in religions, affect morality? Can we formulate that relation in generic terms? To answer this question I draw on my fourth witness.

Religion and moral issues

Now I come to the focus of my address, the relation between religion and moral issues: a meta-ethical perspective. (Meta-ethics deals with the nature and foundations of moral convictions).

First of all, I'd like to stress that religion entails more than morality. Yet, moral concerns are part of (most) religions, certainly of Christianity. But how does religion affect morality?

I introduce one more set of theoretical distinctions that I derive from J.A. van der Ven, my fourth witness, c.q. resource person. He distinguishes two perspectives on that relationship: an immanent and a transcendent perspective.¹⁵ The first perspective is called *immanent* because its functions exercise their influence at the same level as

¹⁴ Clouser, Roy (1995), *The Myth of Religious Neutrality*. Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, p. 23

¹⁵ Van der Ven, J.A. (1996), 'Ter inleiding. Botsende culturen: een morele en religieuze uitdaging', in: J.A. van der Ven (red.), *Botsende culturen in Nederland?* Kampen: Kok, pp. 3-15.

morality itself. In this perspective religion functions as a world view framework that can *motivate, integrate, and criticise* actual morality.

The *motivating* function of religion is based on the notions, images, and convictions that are part of religion and give a view of the good life and wholeness. Because religion *connects* those motives, views, and opinions in an *integrating framework*, it can also fulfil an integrating function. The *critical function* of religion relates to the prophetic protest that may arise from the religious community in case of contrast experiences. Due to its notions of wholeness and redemption, religion can identify evil in those experiences as well as the individual and collective guilt associated with it. In his protest against Nazism, Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a good example of this. A recent example could be the protest of Christians and churches against excesses in the policy of ejection of refugees.

The second main perspective is the *transcendent perspective*. This perspective is called transcendent because it comes from outside the moral discourse itself, from another position. In the transcendent perspective religion transforms and recapitulates morality and brings it to a higher level. Again, three functions are distinguished.

Premoral function: religion can give human beings insight into fundamental characteristics of their existence that precede morality and ethics. Here we can situate elements of the religious foundations and the pan-human moral principles as mentioned in the section 'Psychology and biology'. As said before they can be seen as structures in the lower three substructures of the human being that form the substrate for the act-structure including moral and religious functioning of human beings.

The *radical-moral function*: the meaning of religion consists of overthrowing the morality of certain established conventions and cultural practices. The establishment is interrogated on its religiosity and social ethics. For example, Christian (and other) movements that protest against the caste system in India or other forms of exploitations of people and nature that is a consequence of our economic order. This radical-moral meaning rests in the pre-moral meaning.

The *meta-moral* meaning of religion, according to Van der Ven, manifests itself in situations in which ethics meets its limits and is confronted with the finiteness and the contingencies of human existence. Van der Ven connects this insight with Levinas's notion of the epiphany of the countenance of the Other who commands me: respect me as a human being with invaluable worth and dignity.

Application to two issues

In the next major section of this treatise I will illustrate briefly these functions of religion in morality for two issues. I will do that very briefly, in a kind of charcoal sketch, more as an illustration of the type of consideration these religious perspectives may offer than as full treatment of the issues. The issues are:

- a) Human-animal chimera, about which I wrote an advice for the Ministry of Health, and
- b) Development cooperation, about which on June 21, 2018 a book was presented, edited by me.

a) Research with human –animal chimera

What are we actually talking about, when we speak about human-animal chimera? Put simply: growing human organs in (genetically modified) animals by injecting human stem cells into animal (pig) embryo's; and this in view of organ shortage for transplantation to patients.

In addition to questions about risk and feasibility, other ethical questions can be raised.

First from the *immanent religious perspective*. Since religions differ, below I will give an interpretation of the different religious perspectives for a Christian point of view as understood broadly within the movement of Christian Reformational philosophy. This is not to deny that from other religious perspectives similar lines of reasoning could be put forward.

Motivating meaning: Christianity emphasizes the value of human life and of helping patients, so developing new treatments for patients at first sight is valued positively.

Integrative meaning: put the issue in a broader view of the good life and the respect this requires for fundamental normative structures of human existence. In general, organ transplantation is viewed positively because it saves human lives and/or maintains a higher quality of life. At the same time, transplantation medicine holds some deep anthropological questions. Its underlying view of mankind is a rather mechanistic view of the human being as consisting of renewable parts. And its concept of death is complex. An extension of transplantation medicine to organs grown in animals could undermine an integral view of the human being as an embodied being that seems required to resist a strongly instrumental view of the body.¹⁷

Critical meaning: this could entail a protest against not wanting to be a donor. For if everybody would in principle be willing to be a donor, the urgency for more organs would be less, even though the demand would still surpass the availability. Another element in this function of Christianity could also be a protest against crossing the border between humans and animals. The human-animal distinction is crucial in our society if only because a lot of legislation is based on that distinction. A third notion could be a protest against a further instrumentalization of animals.

¹⁷ These are just a few remarks to illustrate the possible role of a religious perspective; see also: Jochemsen, H. (2004), *De morele betekenis van het toestemmingsbeginsel bij orgaandonatie. Pro Vita Humana* 11, nr.1, pp. 12-15.

From the **transcendent religious perspective**, we will consider the three functions of religion for morality mentioned earlier

Pre-moral meaning: Research has indicated that many people experience an uneasiness with such radical interventions in 'nature'.¹⁸ People express their reticence also in terms of naturalness, wholeness. These notions cannot easily be articulated, but they should be addressed in any serious ethical discussion. Here again, elements of the before-mentioned religious foundations and pan-human principles may play a role; e.g. teleofunctional thinking (goal-orientedness and naturalness seem to be closely related in people's perception) and the purity-degradation moral principle (that would oppose mixing human and animal tissues and organs in one being). These notions do not constitute a moral argument in themselves (naturalistic fallacy) but as part of a certain view of reality and mankind they can get a moral meaning that does constitute an argument for those who adhere to that world view.

Radical-moral meaning: from this perspective critical questions can be raised that challenge the established moral order. Examples are: are health and survival not becoming absolutes in our culture, leading to a situation in which all means are allowed to promote them? If so, where will the instrumentalization of animals and human beings, incl. bodies of deceased people and pre-born human life, end? Should we not invest in possible treatments that do not have this radical instrumentalization, e.g. organ growth in vitro, of 'organ printing'?

Meta-moral function of religion. From this perspective questions can be raised like: can we deal with human finiteness and mortality other than by technical interventions? Can we integrate our mortality in our view of life? Is there hope beyond death?

I'd like to elaborate this a little using thoughts of Heidegger in his 'The question concerning technology' (1954).¹⁹ I will try to formulate the thoughts in my own words, otherwise I would need time to explain the difficult specific language of Heidegger. So, what I will say will be a simplification of Heidegger, but yet insightful, I hope.

In Heidegger's view we can understand reality only if we grant things the opportunity to reveal themselves, to show their secret. This requires an attitude of openness, of abstaining from a goal-rational frame. Think of a work of art that can be understood only if we let it speak to us in an attitude of receptivity. According to Heidegger technique is called to realize the selfrevealing, the unconcealment of

¹⁸ Macnaghten, Phil, Davies, S. R., & Kearnes, M. (2015, 06), *Understanding Public Responses to Emerging Technologies: A Narrative Approach*. *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning*, pp.1-19. doi:10.1080/1523908x.2015.1053110

¹⁹ To be found e.g. at https://monoskop.org/images/4/44/Heidegger_Martin_The_Question_Concerning_Technology_and_Other_Essays.pdf.

reality. However, modern technology mostly does the opposite: it reveals things in an enframing, a demanding manner. In an attitude my predecessor, prof. Egbert Schuurman, called technicism, technology is used as an instrument of power by which reality is reduced to useful raw materials. This approach to the world denies and distorts both a truthful engagement with this world and mankind's true being and calling. For according to Heidegger, mankind is called to be the pastor, not the master of the world. And technology truthfully understood, should make that possible.

This would be a technology - and now I switch to my own discourse again - that would connect things to the source of meaning, that will put them in a religious context and respect the related values. An example would be modern imaging techniques in medicine that enable a very precise diagnosis which enhances the quality of decision-making with respect to effective surgery, respecting as much as possible the principle of integrity of the body. In my view constructing human-animal chimera with all the manipulations and genetic modifications that are involved, resembles more a mastering than a pastoring of things.

I realize that these remarks from the various religious perspectives raise more questions than answers. But one role of these perspectives precisely is to prevent that we too easily are satisfied with the customary answers from mainstream medical ethics that tends to bypass those broader anthropological and medical philosophical questions as they strongly relate to world view.

b) Development cooperation

The second topic I will discuss briefly is *development cooperation*, in general. I again just follow the systematics of Van der Ven.

The *immanent religious perspective*:

Motivating meaning: Living in a global village, the ethical challenge 'love your neighbour as yourself' applies to people globally – close by and far off.

Integrative meaning: A view on development cooperation is part of an integral view on the good life, society and dealings with our natural environment. It should not be reduced to a separate technical or economic problem. The issue of severe poverty and development is an issue of ideology, of ethics and justice and it should be debated on the level of politics, business and civil society (including NGOs).

Critical meaning: From this perspective a protest may be put forward against a political and economic system that continues to exclude groups of people from 'decent' work and life and exploits natural resources; this cannot be justified, though at the same time it should be acknowledged that there are no simple answers. Another possible critical (not a rhetorical) question from this perspective is: are NGOs, in spite of and maybe because of all the good work they are doing,

maintaining dependency of beneficiaries?

And thirdly from this perspective, religious views can be very critical towards any intervention in the sphere of sexuality and procreation acknowledging that sometimes those views in certain cultures can be quite deleterious, e.g. when female genital mutilation is defended with religious arguments (where in fact it is a cultural rather than a religious custom).

A glance at development cooperation from the *transcendent religious perspective* on the role of religion on morality leads to the following remarks.

Pre-moral meaning: Here we can put the notion of Human dignity (in a Christian perspective based on the imago Dei) and fundamental equality of all people, which means that structural degrading poverty is intolerable. Fighting and preventing severe poverty is not just charity but a matter of justice.

Radical-moral meaning: This perspective may give religious people a reference point outside the sector to criticize the lack of political courage to transform quickly enough an exploitative economy into a life-promoting economy. And also criticize the often-one-sided focus on technical and economic means in development cooperation at the expense of moral, juridical and political aspects.

Meta-moral meaning: The confrontation with severe poverty leads to a strong contrast experience. Yet the world is complex: what should and can be done? Sometimes people take existential decisions in such a situation (which are not necessarily the wisest decisions). Examples are helping people in imminent danger even if that does benefit terrorist groups or caring for people with a dangerous infection with direct personal risk. One need not be an adherent of an organised religion to hold such views or demonstrate such behaviour. But such moral views will only *be lived* if supported by a fundamental, more encompassing view of human life and the world; by a view that I have called religious in an anthropological sense.

Conclusions

I will conclude this lecture on the role of religion in moral issues with a few general conclusions.

1. Role of religion in public morality is contested
2. Large majority of people in the world adhere to some religion; hold common but also contradicting positions
3. Both morality and religion have cultural and cognitive substrates that influence core moral principles and religious experience; straightforward relationship with content of religion difficult to demonstrate empirically

4. Religiosity can be seen as an anthropological structure: world view and moral positions always relate to that which is considered as 'unconditionally non-dependent reality' ('the sacred'); a 'neutral' position re religion does not exist
5. In public debate on moral issues it is a matter of inclusive democracy to *a priori* respect each one's contribution, irrespective of religious position
6. All participants should attempt to formulate one's position in a way intelligible for all
7. Religion provides content for moral positions and a point of reference from which predominant moral positions can be critically evaluated and new approaches can be proposed
8. For two examples, human-animal chimera and development cooperation, this interaction is briefly illustrated

Words of thanksgiving

Having come to the end of this address and to the formal end of my appointment as special professor of Christian Philosophy at Wageningen University, it is proper to thank a number of people. And I am really thankful!

First, all of you who came to this lecture; thank you!

I thank the board and the director of the Foundation for Reformational Philosophy for the confidence they put in me as one of their special professors, and for good relations and cooperation.

To the board of Wageningen University, I am grateful for accepting my appointment and my activities as special professor, at this, in a special sense, special university!

I thank the colleagues of the philosophy group, including of course all those involved in supportive services, for their kind and cooperative collegiality. I am especially thankful to the head of the group, prof. Marcel Verweij, for his openness and appreciation of special chairs like the one I have held for 10 years now. The times I could participate, I very much appreciated the exchange of ideas and experiences in the academic sessions of the group. I am still overseeing the work of a few PhD students so we will continue to meet and cooperate.

I also want to thank the past and present members of the local curatorium (academic committee) and of the national curatorium of the foundation for their helpful advice and support!

I thank the students who followed my lectures or asked me to oversee an internship or PhD thesis, for their interest in this philosophical approach to several issues relevant in life sciences and for their questions and engagement in an exchange of thoughts and experiences. It gives great satisfaction to see young people grow in mastering a topic, but also in self-awareness as a professional, and critical reflection on actual practices. I thank my colleagues in Reformational philosophy for supportive relationships and for engaging and enriching discussions through the years.

To our children and their husbands, I am grateful for their love and support all through the years, in spite of everything I did not do.

Most of all, I want to thank my spouse Marieke for her unwavering loving support. What you mean for me is beyond words; in any case beyond words fit for this context. So, for now I keep silent on this.

Finally: I formally resign as special professor Christian, Reformational philosophy. A professorship is an office. In Christianity an office is somehow a calling to serve God in human context. I am grateful to Him that, in spite of many shortcomings, I have been granted the honour and privilege of occupying this office.

The time to speak is over for now, the time to be silent has come. In a moment the music will take over....

I thank you for your attention!



Prof.dr Henk Jochemsen

'In our late modern society the role of religion in public debate on moral issues is contested. Yet many people are religious in one way or another, also in our predominantly secular societies. In this farewell address the relation between religion (in a generic sense) and morality is examined from a philosophical, a psychological, Reformational philosophical and meta-ethical perspective. It is concluded that religion can contribute meaningfully to the debate of moral issues. This is briefly illustrated by two moral issues, human-animal chimera and development cooperation.'