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From the Chief Editor

The International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences (IJHSS) is a peer-reviewed and refereed journal published by Al Mustafa University, Sri Lanka Branch. The main aim of IJHSS is to provide an intellectual platform for local and international scholars in order to promote interdisciplinary studies in the humanities and social sciences and become a leading journal in this field.

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This, the 2nd volume of the IJHSS, follows up on the topic of inter-religious dialogue among the major world religions, which was also the topic of our inaugural issue. This volume contains ten articles, written by scholars from around the world.

This volume begins with Adam L. Barborich's proposal that inter-religious dialogues focus on the philosophical dilemmas, such as existential suffering, that underlie the soteriological / theological elements of religious practice. It is claimed that inter-religious dialogue focused on philosophical themes is able to bypass potential conflicts over theological / soteriological doctrines while also avoiding relativism and respecting the distinct religious identities of participants. Colonel Barborich contends that a focus on philosophy, rather than secular and socio-political concerns, offers a potentially fruitful area of common ground for inter-religious dialogue.

In contrast, S. Ratnajeevan H. Hoole contends that inter-religious dialogue should primarily be concerned with social action in the secular sphere due to his objections to "inter-religious worship". Hoole contends that a common commitment to universal human rights provides for a more tolerant and secular approach to inter-religious dialogue. Hoole makes many excellent points in his article, but it could be argued that the differentiation between inter-religious dialogue and inter-religious worship needs to be clearer. Hoole's solution also leaves an open question for scholars as to whether "universal human rights", which are themselves derived from a Christian world-view, are an adequate basis for ethics and inter-religious dialogue?

Mohammad-Ali Savadi addresses the political dimensions of inter-religious dialogue, with special attention paid to the intrinsic nature of mankind (fitrah) and how a religious state, alluding to the Islamic Republic of Iran, can provide the foundation for a society in which this intrinsic human nature may best flourish. Interestingly, Savadi points out that there does not seem to be a great deal of work in the area of an Islamic philosophical anthropology. This is available insight that serves to

direct scholars towards this valuable area of research and to further the development of Islamic political philosophy.

Amini Golestani and Rahim Dehghan provide the reader with an overview of the position of inter-religious dialogue in the Holy Qur'an. Golestani details the historical relationship between inter-faith dialogue as da'wah in Islam and the place of inter-faith dialogue in Christian-Muslim relations, particularly in the 7th century CE. Deghan provides a detailed analysis of the principles and methods for inter-religious dialogue found in the Qur'an, and both Golestani and Deghan open up a valuable avenue of enquiry by illustrating that Qur'anic inter-faith dialogue involves an invitation to Islam and is always directed towards people of the book in the Qur'an itself. Deghan puts forth the idea that this perspective should be expanded to other faiths, particularly Eastern religions and New Religious Movements (NRM), yet we do not have a model for how this type of inter-faith dialogue can best be translated into inter-religious dialogue with the non-Abrahamic religions, or if inter-religious dialogue ultimately consists of anything other than *da'wah* from an Islamic perspective. These are potentially valuable areas of exploration to be taken up by other scholars in the future.

Moussa Serge Traore provides a detailed analysis of the God of Islam from a Catholic theological perspective and notes that in spite of theological differences between the two faiths, from a Catholic perspective, both can be said to worship the same God. Robert Catalano also takes a look at dialogue from a Catholic perspective by situating Pope Francis' *Evangelii Gaudium* in the context of papal doctrine since Vatican II. These articles are very helpful for helping one understand contemporary Catholic approaches to inter-religious and inter-faith dialogue.

Moragaswewe Vijitha gives an account of what the primary sources have to say about a Buddhist perspective on religious diversity and how the teaching of comparative religion may aid Sri Lanka in its post-war recovery, but his argument for how this constitutes a Buddhist approach to post-war reconciliation is under-developed. Likewise, Mohamed Shareef Asees' article addresses a very interesting and important topic that needs to be discussed in present-day Sri Lanka, but it is written in an editorial style and many of the arguments lack supporting evidence. Nevertheless, both subjects are worthy of further discussion and it is hoped that these ideas are taken up by the academic community in future.

This volume closes with a book review by Laksiri Fernando of Douglas Pratt's *Religion and Extremism: Rejecting Diversity*, a 2018 release from Bloomsbury Publishing.

We would like to invite you to submit your papers for the next volume and we can be reached at journal@miu.lk or http://ijhss.miu.lk/

[1] Common Ground in Inter-Religious Dialogue: A brief analysis of religion as a response to existential suffering

Adam L. Barborich

Abstract

Philosophy of religion, approached from a comparative perspective, can be a valuable tool for advancing inter-religious dialogue. Unfortunately, “comparative religion” today is usually characterised by two extreme positions:

1) Comparing religions in order to come to the conclusion that one's own religion is superior

2) Arguing for a type of “religious pluralism” that relativises all religious truth claims.

The former approach reduces religion to a confrontational form of apologetics, theatrical “debates” and polemics, while the latter reduces religion to a mere acceptance of pragmatically useful perspectivist narratives devoid of absolute reality or truth.

Inter-religious dialogue should follow a middle path between these two extremes by engaging with underlying philosophical themes that are common to all religious traditions instead of emphasising the comparison of theological and soteriological arguments that may depend on justifications that are exclusive to a particular religious practice. The philosophical theme explored here is that of dissatisfaction and existential suffering in an imperfect world, a theme found in all “world religions”. Indeed, the diagnosis of this existential predicament and the hope that religious practice may allow one to overcome it appears to be universal, while its causes and the prescribed remedies differ considerably among religious traditions. Nevertheless, inter-religious dialogue beginning from a conviction that all religious practitioners strive for truth and salvation in response to a common existential experience may lead to a more compassionate and productive dialogue between religious communities. This type of inter-religious dialogue avoids accusations of falling into religious syncretism or relativism while encouraging diverse religious communities to address contemporary issues from areas of philosophical common ground. This allows for a more fruitful type of inter-religious dialogue and comparative study of religion that can be pursued while maintaining one's own distinct religious identities and particular religious truths.

Keywords: Philosophy of religion, comparative religion, Inter-religious dialogue, religious existentialism, the problem of existential suffering

In order to be fruitful, inter-religious dialogue must further both religion and dialogue simultaneously, not one, the other or neither. It is therefore essential to find common ground among religious traditions while maintaining respect for the places in which there are divergences among the religious. This is usually accomplished by focusing on dialogue about common areas of public interest in which various religions have a common, often political, goal towards which they can work together. This type of engagement is undoubtedly beneficial **[2]** and its focus on shared action is commendable. However, it tends to follow the traditional Anglo-Protestant model of trying to create a separate private sphere for religious activity as opposed to a secular public sphere of engagement with the community. It also reduces the process to dialogue about the shared interests of the religious rather than a dialogue about what their religions mean to religious practitioners and what their traditions have to offer the world. We contend that it is the latter type of dialogue, one that puts the religious at the centre of inter-religious dialogue, that is best suited to advance meaningful human relationships between people of different religions as well as the relationship between people and God, or the transcendent. This type of engagement will advance the goal of fostering respect, rather than mere tolerance of different religious traditions, love of one's neighbour and peace.

Philosophy of religion, approached from a comparative perspective, can be a valuable tool for inter-religious dialogue. Unfortunately, “comparative religion” today is often characterised by attempts at comparing religions in order to come to the conclusion that one's own religion is superior to all others or arguing that all religions are ultimately “the same thing”. The former approach reduces inter-religious dialogue to a confrontational form of apologetics, theatrical “debates” and polemics, while the latter relativises and reduces religion to a mere acceptance of pragmatically useful perspectivist narratives devoid of absolute reality or truth.

These approaches are unsuccessful and often counter-productive. We contend that comparative philosophy of religion can lead inter-religious dialogue in a more fruitful direction by engaging with underlying *philosophical* themes that are common to all religious traditions instead of emphasising the comparison of *theological* and *soteriological* arguments that may depend on justifications that are exclusive to a particular religious practice. This approach emphasises the aspect of philosophical dialogue in inter-religious dialogue, while at the same time addressing issues that are primarily religious rather than common social aims in the secular environment.

This is not a new approach. In the Indian tradition, there was much interaction between the predecessors of the orthodox Ãstika schools of Hinduism and the heterodox Nāstika traditions of the śramaṇa schools. The texts of the Buddhists and the Jains attest to the interactions between their followers and those of other śramaṇa traditions, as personified by the six heretics in the Sāmañ̃ñaphala Sutta of the Buddhist Pāli Canon. This engagement continued for centuries, and is found in the writings of Ãdi Śaṅkarācārya and the legends of his debates throughout the subcontinent. Among the ancient Greek philosophers, particularly Pythagoras and Plato, one can also find an emphasis on religious concerns.

> What makes Plato a philosopher, and not merely the founder of a quasi-religious sect, is that his metaphysics with its theory of Forms is based on logical argumentation. But the hypostatizing of the Forms, the bold assertion that there is another world in which they have their being, the depreciation of the world of sense in favor of this other world—all this is not required by logic... There must be another world: the world of the soul, **[3]** where the soul

> has its being before birth and after death. And having fallen back on these ancient religious ideas, Plato had made room for a world in which absolute justice and absolute beauty could have real existence instead of being mere concepts. His more strictly logical inquiries had convinced him of the crucial importance of these concepts, but the postulation of another world in which these "Ideas" were at home was not necessitated by logic. This theory had religious roots; but it was probably the impression that Socrates had made on him that led him to it. (Kaufmann, 1961)

The followers of Plato pressed forward with the religious aspects of his work. Aristotle's metaphysics and natural theology, as well as the work of the neo-Platonists, grounded the religious views of classical and medieval philosophers in Christianity, Judaism and Islam. An inter-religious dialogue of sorts took place between Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, Augustine, Boethius, Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd, Maimonides, Aquinas, etc. This “dialogue” took place through their texts over centuries and greatly influenced each of their respective faiths. It is also highly likely that there was some interaction, possibly reciprocal, between the Indo-Greek Kingdoms in South Asia and the Indian philosophical and religious traditions. We contend that this is the model that should be followed in inter-religious dialogue today. It is easy to imagine these great philosophers and teachers seated around a table engaging in philosophical dialogue. It seems unlikely that any of these philosophers would have risen from the table as a convert to another religion, but from the way in which they incorporated the philosophy of others into their own systems it does seem likely that all of them would have taken something from the others to enhance their own religions. Each would have been likely to leave the table with a great respect for the traditions of his companions as well. Here lies the real promise of comparative philosophy of religion in inter-religious dialogue.

This is unsurprising given that throughout the world philosophy has traditionally never been about mere speculative articulation and the critique of various views. Instead, it was vitally concerned with coming to know the nature of all things and how the knowledge acquired in this investigation serves to unveil the mysteries of lived experience and inform human conduct.

> Philosophy is the enterprise of constructing and assessing categorial systems. Much of Ancient, Medieval, and Modern philosophy was deliberately pursued systematically. Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Descartes, Leibniz, Spinoza, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, and Kant all constructed complex systems of philosophy. Their intent was, as a later philosopher put it, “to see things, and see them whole” – to develop an integrated account of things, of knowledge, and of ethics. (Yandell, 1999)

When approached in this holistic and systematic way, the artificially drawn lines between philosophy, religion and a “way of life” become exceedingly blurred. We shall explore this relationship by using two definitions of religion put forth by Yandell (1999). The first is essential and substantive: **[4]**

> Religion makes use of the notions of diagnosis and cure. A religion proposes a diagnosis (an account of what it takes the basic problem facing human beings to be) and a cure (a way of permanently and desirably solving that problem).

In this definition, religion offers a diagnosis of and solution to man's existential predicament. As religious practices geared towards each particular diagnosis and cure develop, they become increasingly rationalised and subjected to opposing arguments. This results in each religious tradition continually refining and logically defending its positions. The resulting philosophical doctrine, rooted in the original religious diagnosis of and solution to man's existential predicament, is then incorporated by the religious practitioners of each tradition into their individual and communal “way of life”. This is in keeping with Yandell's (1999) second, functional, definition of religion:

> A religion is a conceptual system that provides an interpretation of the world and the place of human beings in it, bases an account of how life should be lived given that interpretation, and expresses this interpretation and lifestyle in a set of rituals, institutions, and practices.

The primary conceptual systems found in religions are exemplified in their metaphysical accounts of the eternity of the world / creation, divine revelation, the ultimate nature of reality, the nature of the God / the metadivine realm (Kaufmann, 1960), the grounding of morals and moral responsibility, the problem of free will, the problem of evil and the afterlife. These problems are common to all world religions and there is space here for inter-religious dialogue to engage with the underlying philosophical themes that are common to all. The philosophical theme explored in this article is that of dissatisfaction and existential suffering in a fallen or imperfect world, a theme found in all world religions. Indeed, the diagnosis of this existential predicament and the hope that religious practice may allow one to overcome it appear to be universal, while the causes of this predicament and the remedies prescribed for it differ considerably among religious traditions.

Buddhism diagnoses man's existential predicament as one of universal suffering, known in the Pāli language as *dukkha*. The word *dukkha* has a wide range of meanings and can be translated as angst, anxiety, distress, dread, insufficiency, pain, suffering, unease or unsatisfactoriness. Unsatisfactoriness is often used as the preferred translation today due to the fact that the common translation of dukkha as “suffering” in English is thought to carry with it a sense of extreme hardship and pain, whereas the word *dukkha* can refer to anything from excruciating physical pain to a seemingly trivial worry. In this work, we will speak of existential suffering, because it best conveys the range of feelings that arises from conscious human existence in an intrinsically unsatisfactory world that can never offer that which human beings most desire.

However, this same existential predicament lies at the heart of all religions. The substantial differences between religions lie in precisely where each locates the **[5]** source of the problem of existential suffering and the source of its solution. Nevertheless, each religion identifies the presence of a profound sense of dissatisfaction and unease in mortal life while offering different explanations and soteriologies as remedies for this existential predicament. These differences in approach to the problem of suffering among religions are amenable to clarification and exploration by way of comparative philosophy. This is the aim of our study here.

An example that demonstrates the overlap between ostensibly religious and philosophical goals and validates Yandell's definition of religion as diagnosis and cure is found in the oft-repeated comparisons of philosophy and religion with the art of medicine. One of the earliest comparisons between philosophy and medicine is attributed to Democritus [DK 31], “Medicine heals illnesses of

the body, wisdom removes passions from the soul" (Graham, 2010). According to Berges, Plato took this health analogy very seriously and we find many similar accounts where Plato draws an analogy between virtue and health (Berges, 2012). In *Gorgias* [475d] Socrates is presented as asking Polus to submit himself to the argument as if to a doctor. In *Phaedrus* [270b-e] Socrates likens the art of rhetoric to the healing art of the physician and assents to the method used by the famous physician Hippocrates for analysing the body being used to analyse the soul. In *Republic* [444c-e] Plato states:

> To act unjustly and be unjust and in turn to act justly the meaning of all these terms becomes at once plain and clear, since injustice and justice are so... these are in the soul what the healthful and the diseaseful are in the body; there is no difference... Healthful things surely engender health and diseaseful disease... Virtue, then, as it seems, would be a kind of health and beauty and good condition of the soul, and vice would be disease, ugliness, and weakness. (Plato, 1969)

The analogy between medicine and ethics was also used by Plato's student Aristotle. For Aristotle, ethics and medicine are both practical arts; he refers to the medical model throughout his *Nicomachean Ethics*. Jaeger (1957) states that Aristotle considers medicine to be the "paragon of the right method" for ethical discipline. The analogy appears to have gone both ways with the great physician Galen, as he titled one of his medical treatises *Quod optimus medicus sit quoque philosophus*, which is Latin for "that the best physician is also a philosopher".

The analogy between philosophy and medicine appears again in the work of the medieval Christian philosopher Boethius (1999). *In The Consolation of Philosophy*, Lady Philosophy appears as the personification of philosophy to comfort Boethius who is unjustly imprisoned. Boethius refers to her explicitly as "my physician" and "my nurse in whose house I had been cared for since my youth", after Lady Philosophy diagnosed him with "a touch of amnesia... the common disease of deluded minds". After making her diagnosis, Lady Philosophy refers to her teaching as medicines and remedies and refers to Boethius' forgetfulness of his true nature as the major cause of his illness.

[6] In Islam, the instruction of Allah is said to heal the hearts of believers (Qur'an 10:57; 26:80) and to serve as a cure for those who believe (Qur'an 41:44). The Hebrew Bible also ascribes the ultimate healing power to the law-giving God (Ex 15:26) and it is notable that some of the greatest philosophers of the medieval period, such as Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd and Maimonides, were also renowned physicians.

It is clear that philosophy, religion and medicine often share a model of diagnosis and healing and can be broadly categorised as therapeutic or salvific. Even the analytic philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1958) uses the medical model like his predecessors, stating in *Philosophical Investigations* [133] that the "philosopher's treatment of a question is like the treatment of an illness". He also compares philosophical methods to different therapies. Wittgenstein's therapies are similar to those of his ancient predecessors in that they seem to involve a soteriological dimension. These therapies are aimed at the complete liberation of the philosopher from philosophical problems [255]. Wittgenstein claims that his aim in philosophy is nothing short of salvation from philosophical problems; he wants to "show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle" [309].

In Wittgenstein's formulation, philosophy takes on a religious significance not only by offering a diagnosis and cure for the problem of existential suffering, but an escape from the problem itself. What is this way out offered by philosophy and philosophical religion an escape from? Among those who are opposed to religion, it is commonly thought that it is an escape from one's own mortality by way of wishful thinking. However, in fact, it is an answer to the recognition of one's own immortality and the attendant problem of existential suffering and terror in the face of that immortality.

> In his relation to death man is unique among the animal species, and indeed doubly unique. For alone among the animals he knows that he is going to die; and further, he not only knows it but – in an important sense – does not believe it! As far back as we are able to find traces of distinctively human life we find that man has done something which no other species does: he has buried the corpses of his own kind, or otherwise deliberately disposed of them, thus revealing a sense of the special significance of death. Further, these evidences show that he did not think of death as the cessation of existence. (Hick, 1994)

This conception of what the afterlife consisted of varied greatly among human beings. Among the most common eschatologies were continual cycles of reincarnation into one's own clan, one's own species and / or across innumerable realms of existence. Often these rebirth eschatologies were supplemented by an intermediate existence in shadowy realms, while other cultures pictured the afterlife as an eternally diminished existence in these same shadowy realms populated by the ghosts of the dead. Other cultures turned these underworlds into heavens and hells where the departed would be sent for reward or punishment in accordance with their earthly deeds. In spite of the variety of beliefs about the afterlife, belief in an afterlife has been universal throughout human history and “far from being a matter **[7]** of wish fulfillment, an afterlife, as pictured by ancient cultures, was not particularly desirable, just inevitable” (Baker, 2007).

Just as belief in the afterlife is universal among human beings, the attendant problem of existential suffering has been a part of philosophy and religion throughout human history and in this sense there is little to differentiate between the philosophical and religious sciences. However, we would regard the science of existential suffering and its cure, particularly in the context of eternity, primarily as religious philosophy.

The Buddhist account of existential suffering is both sophisticated and subtle. The Buddhist recognises that simply by existing, one is condemned to purposeless suffering by the inherently unsatisfactory nature of that conditioned existence. Of course, this can be said of all sentient beings and one does not have to struggle to imagine the suffering of animals who are threatened by predation, harassed by parasites, subjected to changes in weather, injury, hunger, thirst, etc. However, for animals, suffering is largely confined to the realm of ordinary suffering caused by painful sensations and the inability to attain what they need for sustenance. The animal suffers like all sentient beings, but it is only conscious of its immediate desires, which are geared towards the necessities needed for its continued survival. The animal likely does not dread future deprivation and is not aware of its impending mortality. The predator kills without compunction or remorse because it must. It is driven by instinct rather than volition. In the animal realm the weak are devoured by the strong without any regard for concepts such as right and wrong. Although animals

are conscious beings and many species may have a far more complex and nuanced thought life than they are usually credited with, it is unlikely that animals have any conception of a possible world in which life does not feed off death.

This state in which all life feeds off death is referred to in Indian philosophy as the “law of the fish” (Sanskrit. *matsyanyaya*). This is synonymous with the “law of the jungle” in English and refers to the state of nature in which the small fish is inevitably preyed upon by bigger fish that are in turn preyed upon by still bigger fish. This is a world in which the strong devour the weak as a matter of course. An animal in this situation may live what appears to a human to be a brutal life driven by blind instinct, but the predator that kills to ensure its own survival is apparently untroubled by this. If the predator is mortally injured, its suffering is very real, but it occurs at the level of sensation and with no apparent fear of its impending death or what will follow. The predator is aware only of its immediate situation and its comfort or discomfort. It does not appear to possess awareness of its existential predicament as a mortal creature. Its situation is comparable to that of Rabbi Soloveitchik's (1964) created, primordial “natural man”, in that the predator's existence “is unbounded, merging harmoniously with the general order of things and events”.

The self-evident existence of suffering becomes a matter of existential import in the complexity of human consciousness. Human beings have evolved beyond the state of pre-conscious “natural man”. The possession of complex higher-order **[8]** consciousness by “real man”, which “natural man” lacks, is what brings existential suffering to the forefront. With the possession of self-consciousness, man also becomes conscious of his own fragility and mortality. This leads to a recognition of the mortality of others and an understanding of the absolute impossibility of avoiding the destruction of other sentient beings in the course of ensuring one's own survival. This forces man to face the nature of the reality in which he is immersed and to contrast his conscious desire for life, immutability and permanence with his conscious perception of a world of change, death and impermanence. Merely by having come into existence, the man is trapped in this web of existential suffering.

“Natural man” becomes “real man” as soon as he becomes conscious of this grisly duty to kill other beings in order to ensure his own survival and as he becomes aware of his own vulnerability to being killed by others or by circumstances beyond his control. This creates in him both fear for his own life and a sense of disgust with the necessity of killing other living beings. The myth of the fall of man in the Garden of Eden attests to the disorientation that was brought about by the emergence of human consciousness and the primordial longing for a time in which “natural man” was not alienated from his environment. In eating the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, the first humans’ “eyes were opened” and they became like gods, “knowing good and evil” (Gn 3:5) while also coming to know death. This knowledge of good and evil can be likened to the fact that man comes to see himself as a subject and the external world as an object and he is forced to acknowledge the horrors he must perpetrate in order to secure his own survival. Man is able to know things in the same manner that a god would, but at the same time, the knowledge of his inevitable death demonstrates that his own nature is quite different from the nature of a god.

> Man, in his encounter with an objective world and in his assumption of the role of a subject who asks questions about something hitherto simple, forfeits his sense of serenity and peace. He is no longer happy, he begins to examine his station in this world and he finds himself suddenly assailed by perplexity and fear, and especially loneliness... The I-experience is a

> passional one and real man is born amid the pains of confrontation with an "angry" environment of which he had previously been an integral part. (Soloveitchik, 1964)

Man's confrontation with this newly alien world leads to an aspiration to transcend his own being, to reconcile himself with his environment and restore the harmony that was lost. At the same time, the recognition that this reconciliation may be unachievable leads to a sense of privation, a profound unhappiness, self-contempt and suffering. In this sense, the tale of the fall of man in the Garden of Eden can be read as a story of the origins of existential suffering in the emergence of self-consciousness, as an expression of man's yearning to return to a pre-conscious state and as a tale of the entry of moral responsibility into the human condition.

The concept of moral responsibility entering the world in the Genesis myth is often analysed in terms of guilt and sin, particularly in Christianity. Guilt and sin should be considered as technical terms rather than as theologically loaded or negative **[9]** concepts. Guilt is nothing more than the feeling of remorse and acceptance of responsibility for one's actions. The meaning of the Koine Greek word for sin ἁμαρτία, means something like “to miss the mark”, “to fail” or “to be in error”. In this sense, sin is inevitable for the human being, occurring whenever one falls into error or misses the mark in living up to a moral standard. Augustine's development of the concept of original sin in Latin Christianity sought an answer to the problem of the existence of sin in a world created by a omni-benevolent God. This is a very different perspective from that of the Indian thinkers who did not accept a creator deity. Nevertheless, original sin, like *dukkha*, is also an existential condition in which one simply finds oneself; the condition brings with it a sense of suffering, unease and dissatisfaction with the self-directed conscious life that seems to perpetually “miss the mark”. Augustine finds the main cause of existential suffering in the movement from a perfect human life that is “faultless and without sin” (Augustine, 1887) in the Garden of Eden, to an imperfect and unsatisfactory existence in thrall to disordered inclinations in much the same way that Indian thinkers trace the causes of existential suffering to ignorance and delusion.

Although his own religion rejects any notions of inherited sin or guilt on theological grounds, in *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Muhammad Iqbal (2013) also describes the state in which Adam and his wife lived in the Garden to be one in which “man is practically unrelated to his environment and consequently does not feel the sting of human wants”. Although the Islamic account of the Genesis myth differs in many ways from its presentation in Judaism and Christianity, the interpretive theme of the root of existential suffering being found in the development of a distinctive human self-consciousness remains the same.

> We see that the Qur'anic legend of the Fall has nothing to do with the first appearance of man on this planet. Its purpose is rather to indicate man's rise from a primitive state of instinctive appetite to the conscious possession of a free self, capable of doubt and disobedience. The Fall does not mean any moral depravity; it is man's transition from simple consciousness to the first flash of self-consciousness, a kind of waking from the dream of nature with a throb of personal causality in one's own being. (Iqbal, 2013)

In the same way that the Genesis myth is used by the Abrahamic religions to illustrate the origins of existential suffering, Kaufmann (1961) uses the pagan Greek tragedies to demonstrate the tragic inevitability of error and guilt in the world. Tragedy arises from “situations in which one cannot act,

nor abstain from action, without incurring guilt", even in cases where the situation is not caused by oneself. The inevitable occurrence of morally problematic situations leads to recognition of the fact that man's life in this world is a tragic predicament. This is especially true if such suffering is seen as essentially purposeless, rather than as part of a religious destiny playing out in the context of history. The latter cannot be tragic because the latter serves an "idea that will triumph eventually" and there can be no tragedy in such circumstances. This points towards a very distinct difference between the Abrahamic religions that unfold in the context of history and the ancient Greek and Indian religions which are practised in the context of an eternally existent cosmos. **[10]** It is therefore unsurprising that both Greek tragedy and Indian Buddhism acknowledge aimless suffering as the tragic condition in which human existence takes place.

However, in all of these accounts of existential suffering, man lives in a world that is unsatisfactory and he is perpetually inclined to fall into ignorance, forgetfulness and error. Man also aspires to escape this suffering and to transcend his finitude. It is clear that the development of self-consciousness and the "I-experience" are ultimately at the root of human suffering in an existential sense as well as being the root of man's religious nature. The foundation of all existential suffering is found in the inability of man to satisfy his cravings to either return to the pre-conscious state of "natural man" or to attain consciousness of the eternal, permanent and unchanging to which "real man" aspires.

We hope that by engaging with this foundational religious problem of existential suffering, we can point to one area of common ground that is fruitful for inter-religious dialogue through comparative study. In spite of the fact that the theological and soteriological differences between all of the world religions are quite substantial, it also is apparent that all are responding to the philosophical diagnosis of a universal problem (at least one, possibly more) and are seeking solutions in a universal religious impulse. Inter-religious dialogue beginning from the conviction that all religious practitioners strive for truth and salvation in response to a common existential experience may lead to a more compassionate and productive dialogue between religious communities.

Inter-religious dialogue focused on themes like existential suffering investigated by using philosophical methods is also able to bypass potential conflicts over theological / soteriological doctrines while avoiding relativism. The ability of each religious tradition to present its own diagnosis and cure to universal problems like that of existential suffering philosophically provides common ground for dialogue about a shared problem of religious concern without contributing to perceptions of syncretism or proselytisation. This may also help others to feel comfortable with engaging in inter-religious dialogue by making the environment less threatening.

Finally, addressing contemporary religious issues from areas of philosophical common ground may actually allow for a more truly religious type of inter-religious dialogue while respecting the distinct religious identities and particular religious truths of the participants due to its focus on more traditionally religious, rather than socio-political concerns. Whereas shared interests in the socio-political domain offers common ground for inter-religious dialogue it often has no use for concepts such as metaphysics and the immaterial that are central to most forms of religiously-oriented philosophical discourse. A philosophical approach to inter-religious dialogue may also serve to pave the way for more extensive comparative studies of religion and lead to new breakthroughs in the philosophy of religion while encouraging participants in inter-religious dialogue to better understand their own religion, increase their knowledge of the religions of their neighbours and

engage in important cross-cultural, as well as inter-religious, dialogue. **[11]**

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