

PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHICAL THEOLOGY: SOME IDEAS ON DRAWING THE DEMARCATION

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Abstract. In this paper I consider two books by Vladimir Shokhin, a distinguished philosopher in Russia, on philosophy of religion (2010) and philosophical theology (2018) as one project aimed at drawing the demarcation between these two disciplines. In what follows I will present Shokhin's project and show briefly how it fits in with the current discussion on the topic, then, draw some consequences from his position, and make some critical notes, and at the end I will briefly present some my views on the problem of drawing clear lines of demarcation between philosophy of religion and philosophical theology on the basis of the following questions: (1) what is the topic of the disciplines, (2) what are their methods, (3) what are their guiding lines, and (4) who may exercise them?

I. INTRODUCTION

In the mid of 2018 appeared a new book by Vladimir Shokhin, a distinguished professor of philosophy in Russia, *Philosophical Theology: the Canon and the Variability*¹. This was a remarkable event for the Russian philosophical community for two, as I see it, reasons. First, theology makes a comeback in both intellectual and educational spheres in Russia. Theology became a separate branch of sciences a couple of years ago in Russia, which means that secular universities may open theological departments. Hence it became possible to open post-graduate courses on theology, write dissertations and get secular, i.e. state, candidates and doctorate degrees² in theology. It was a revolutionary move, since traditionally theology was taught at spiritual seminaries and academies. So, formally speaking, theology became a respected branch of humanities and sciences as philosophy, history, biology, physics etc. Second, this book is the first systematic attempt to consider the curriculum of philosophical theology since the times of the Russian Empire. Thus, the book is an endeavour in constituting and promoting theology as a branch of humanities, not only as an intellectual puzzle.

In 2010 professor Shokhin published another book entitled *Philosophy of Religion and its Historical Forms (from Antiquity to the end of the Eighteenth Century)*³. It is a massive critical research (of 784 pages), first, on the subject matter of philosophy of religion both in analytic and continental thought (Shokhin through this analysis identifies initial subject-matter and primary goals of philosophy of religion), and, second, on its origins in the history of the European thought (in the light of this identification Shokhin reconstructs the history of Philosophy of religion from Xenophanes of Colophon up to Friedrich Schleiermacher's *Über die Religion. Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern* and its critics by Göthe, Schelling and Friedrich Samuel Gottfried Sack).

1 Vladimir K. Shokhin, *Philosophical Theology: The Canon and the Variability* (Nestor-history, 2018).

2 There is a two-level system of scientific and scholar degrees in Russia: candidate and doctorate. The former is a following step after MA and might be received only after finishing a post-graduate course, the latter is usually necessary to get a senior position (the head of department, for instance) in a university or academic institution.

3 Vladimir K. Shokhin, *Philosophy of Religion and its Historical Forms (Antiquity — the End of XVIII Century)* (Alpha-M, 2010).

In what follows I will consider both books as one big project, which main aim is to introduce philosophy of religion and philosophical theology into the Russian philosophical community and distinguish their discourses. The task, I ought to state this distinctly, is of vital importance for Russia, since philosophy of religion became a part of the curriculum at philosophical departments only a decade ago and theology, as I mentioned, entered recently the curriculum in secular universities. However, the papers might be of some interest for analytic philosophers of religion and theologians, since with the advent of analytic philosophical theology the self-reflection of both philosophers and theologians on questions about the differences of their disciplines is growing. So, the paper consists of three main parts. In section II I will present Shokhin's project and show briefly how it fits in with the current discussion on the topic, then (section III) draw some consequences from his position, and make some critical notes, and at the end (section IV) I will briefly present some of my views on the problem of drawing clear lines of demarcation between philosophy of religion and philosophical theology.

II. VLADIMIR SHOKHIN ON THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHICAL THEOLOGY

II.1 Philosophy of religion

I will not devote much time here for clarifying professor Shokhin's ideas about the subject-matter of philosophy of religion, as I have already presented them in comparison with other approaches within contemporary Russian thought⁴. Below are the most important points related to the present discussion.

- (1) Shokhin considers philosophy of religion as a form of *Genetiv Philosophie*, which means that: "... its object should be neither God nor even "God", nor the logical verification of religious beliefs (general or particular), but rather religion that it has to study by non-empirical methods"⁵.
- (2) As I said Shokhin stresses the fact that a philosopher of religion studies religion in a different way than a theologian or someone specializing in an area of religious studies does, since philosophers rely on purely philosophical (which means for him, nonempirical) methods.
- (3) Based on this understanding Shokhin distinguishes 13 tasks of philosophy of religion. Here are those important for the present discussion. (a) Philosophy of religion has to study the phenomenon of religiosity based on Rudolph Otto's phenomenology of religion. This also includes the questions of whether or not religiosity can be reduced to other sides of human existence and experience, and of the genesis of religion. From this follows that (b) philosophy of religion examines the generic concept of *religion*, and (c) its essential properties. (d) The last task requires taking a further issue into account — establishing religious universals, such as "deity", "cult", "community", etc., there are also universals pertaining to the worldviews of a given religion such as "creation", "emanation", "fall from grace", "salvation." etc. (e) A philosopher of religion should clarify such characteristics of religious worldviews as "theism", "pantheism", "panentheism" and "polytheism" and "atheism". (f) Philosophy of religion also deals with "meta-theoretical questions" related to theology and religious studies.

II.2 Philosophical theology

The recently published book *Philosophical Theology: the Canon and the Variability* consists of *Introduction* (7–17), *History of the Notion* (18–30) and two Sections — *I. Focal Perspective* (31–340), and *II. Inverted Perspective* (341–470), *Bibliography* (471–489) and *Index of names* (490–495). The canon in the title relates to analytic philosophical theology, which Shokhin considers as the most viable form of philosophi-

4 K. V. Karpov and T. V. Malevich, "Philosophy of Religion and Religious Studies in Modern-Day Russia", *Studies in East European Thought* 66, no. 3–4 (2014). See 227–235.

5 Shokhin, *Philosophy of Religion and its Historical Forms (Antiquity — the End of XVIII Century)*, 210–211.

cal theology.⁶ The first section is descriptive; it depicts the development of analytic (Anglo-American) philosophical theology. In the second section Shokhin evaluates the basic lines indicated in the first section and gives his own reflections on arguments for the existence of God, atheism as a part of philosophy of religion, problem of evil and Revelation. So, the most part of the book is an analysis of the questions what analytic philosophical theology in particular is and what philosophical theology as such is.

What is the proper subject-matter of philosophical theology according to professor Shokhin? The core of the answer is a scheme of competences of *theistic reason*. A believing person has three sources of beliefs, which directly corresponds to the three levels of competence of the reason in religious matters. (A) *Through Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition*, we may acquire such dogma as that God is Triune. Here reason is not able to attain such truths by itself but may try to find proper analogies in order to grasp and interpret such deliverances of faith. (B) *When Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition is accompanied by reason* in the questions of nature of Revelation, atonement. (C) *Reason along* may deduce important religious beliefs, such as of God's existence and omnipotence for instance, from its 'natural light'⁷. Hence philosophical theology has three functions.

- (1) It is a function on grounding and explaining beliefs which is traditionally associated with systematic theology.
- (2) It is a role of a guard from competing systems of beliefs, which realized in apologetics. These two functions are related to levels B and C of the scheme of the competence of reason and sources of beliefs.
- (3) Finally, there is a special function of self-reflection. Theological self-reflection of the human reason is the capacity to exercise introspection in the light of the revealed 'truths-above-the-reason' in order to find the natural boundaries of the reason in the matters of faith and religious beliefs. This capacity totally corresponds to the level A and is a distinctive trait of the philosophical theology distinguishing it from other forms of reason's activities in religion such as revealed and natural theology.

Let's summarize professor Shokhin's position on the proper subject-matters of philosophy of religion and philosophical theology by introducing in the argument his analogy, applied to all *Genetiv Philosophien*. Shokhin distinguishes two possible relations between philosophy and religion — *philosophy-on-religion* and *philosophy-in-religion*⁸. He presents his idea through the analogy to the philosophy of science. Philosophy of science is concerned with the foundations, methods, and implications of science studying the criteria of what could be counted as scientific theory, the reliability of scientific theories, the change of the paradigms in scientific theories and the ultimate purpose(s) of science. Hence *philosophy-on-science* is distinct from concrete scientific disciplines like physics and mathematics. It would be desirable if a philosopher of science were involved in studying and solving concrete scientific problems or participating in scientific inquiry, but this is not a necessary condition for being a philosopher of science. The same concerns philosophy of religion. Philosopher of religion seeks how the religion in general works, what the differences between different forms of religious consciousness are, but does not solve the concrete problems within religions which is a task for theologians. Philosophical theology along with natural theology and religious philosophy belongs to the domain of *philosophy-in-religion*. It concerns both traditional topics (such arguments for the existence of God), thus performing functions 2 and 3, and evaluating topics (such as comparison of these arguments, evaluation of theodicies and defenses), thus performing function 3 which is, as I mentioned, according to Shokhin is a unique and proper function of philosophical theology. Hence, philosophy of religion and philosophical theology seem to be two completely distinct disciplines. Their subject-matters, their role with respect to religion, their goals are completely different.

6 Shokhin, *Philosophical Theology*, 7.

7 Ibid., 344–49.

8 Shokhin, *Philosophy of Religion and its Historical Forms (Antiquity — the End of XVIII Century)*, 204; Shokhin, *Philosophical Theology*, 350–51.

III. CONSEQUENCES

To my mind, from this approach follow some results so revolutionary and extremely shocking for the philosophy of religion to which one would hardly assent.

First, as we saw, Vladimir Shokhin asserts that philosophy of religion is something which is done from *a priori* presuppositions. This means that I am totally justified in holding any conception of religion and its development in the history of human society regardless any empirical data from anthropology, cognitive and (or) religious studies. The examples of such approach are famous enough — the ‘original theism’ (*Urmonotheismus*) conception or Humean idea of ‘flux and reflux’, that is religion started as polytheistic and polytheism through fear gives way to monotheism. However, I wonder if it is possible in contemporary world to cover oneself from any empirical science data? Shall we consider such covering as an absolute advantage of a research program? Philosophy of religion may come into conflict with results of empirical researches, since it carries out the function of metatheory for religious studies, it may well occur that the initial accepted theory is not proved by empirical data, what actually occurred with *Urmonotheismus*-theory. It seems that concordance of nonempirical and empirical methods, deduction a theory of religion based on empirical data aligns much better with that goal of philosophy of religion. I should admit that this is exactly what was suggested by the founders of ‘science of religion’ — Cornelis Tiele and Pierre Daniel Chantepie de la Saussaye⁹.

Second, if we continue reasoning along the lines of the first consequence, we will admit philosophy of religion to be a part of religious studies being both dependent and independent of the latter. It is independent, because any study of religion requires an antecedent worldview, such as materialism, theism, phenomenology, pragmatism, psychoanalysis, hermeneutics etc. It is dependent, because it should construct a metatheory of religion on the basis of data provided by religious studies. As far as I understand Shokhin’s point of view, he admits only independent role. If we, following Shokhin, assume that philosophy of religion is an independent to religious studies and that philosophy of religion presupposes one or the other worldview, we should ask if philosophy of religion (and, which is more important, even religious studies) is possible at all in the sense of not being a product of more broad philosophical system?

Third, analytic philosophical theology is often considered as an outgrowth of analytic philosophy of religion and both terms are often used interchangeably indicating thus the resemblance of their research programs. What is more important, it is extremely difficult to see how analytic philosophy of religion differs from analytic philosophical theology in an important way. I think that the fact of coincidence of the topics usually considered within both disciplines is a consequence of this difficulty. Shokhin in order to escape such a mixture suggests a very precise method to draw the demarcation. However, the result of the procedure is surprising in that traditional topics of philosophy of religion, such as epistemology of religious beliefs, analysis of arguments for the existence of God, problem of evil, religious diversity move to the domain of philosophical theology. However, such a move could be justified only if those questions considered in both disciplines from the same points of view applying the same methods. Is it so in reality? And, which is more important, is it so according to Shokhin’s view? This leads us to the following questions — Who may exercise philosophy of religion and philosophical theology? And how she is supposed to do so in both cases?

Fourth, it is explicitly stated in recent publications that the clear demarcation between philosophy of religion and philosophical theology could be made on the basis who is involved in developing each of the discourses or in what manner one is involved. The distinction is clear: philosopher of religion investigates questions related to religion as a worldview (e.g. to theism) in the general or secular way whereas theologian

9 Cornelis Petrus Tiele, Georg Gehrlich, *Grundzüge der Religionswissenschaft: Eine kurzgefasste Einführung in das Studium der Religion und ihrer Geschichte* (Mohr Siebeck Verlag, 1904), 3–5; Chantepie de la Saussaye, Pierre Daniel, *Lehrbuch der Religionsgeschichte* (Mohr Siebeck Verlag, 1897), 5.

investigates questions related to specific religious tradition (e.g. Christianity) as a worldview¹⁰. Or put it another way, following Gerald O'Collins SJ, exercising theology “entails personally sharing in faith and seeking to understand it... Exponents of the philosophy of religion, however, know *about* faith and theology, but do not necessarily share the vision of faith”¹¹. Philosophers apply to logic, metaphysics, epistemology and ethics, whereas theologians add to this list Scripture and Sacred Tradition, restricting the former to the later, as it is philosophy that is a handmaiden of theology and not v.v. And that is what exactly states Shokhin when he is speaking about three competences of the reason within theology. Theologian in position (A) is fully relies on supernatural revelation, in position (B) it co-works with revealed truth in order to explain them, and, finally, in position (C) it may produce truth on its own that are in concordance or coincide with revealed ones. And here we come to the point of which Shokhin is not completely precise: he admits that apologetics is one of the functions of philosophical theology, but philosophers of religion do not develop atheistic critics anymore according to his views, as they are work on the general notion of religion. So, I wonder, what is the person who is proposing atheistic critics? To what domain should we ascribe atheistic ideas of Mackie, Rowe, Schellenberg? Clearly, if they are not philosophers, they must be theologians. However, I suppose most of our colleagues will not call them so. Moreover, I believe Shokhin wouldn't call them theologians either, since theological reason, according to his scheme, is directed by faith, Scripture and Tradition, and if he considers Mackie's famous atheistic argument from evil to be theological work, then he has to admit that this work is written in accordance with faith, Scripture and Tradition.

The next point against confessional approach to demarcation is that argumentative discussion between a believer (theist) and an atheist, or sceptic, would not be possible on the questions of the arguments for the existence of God or justification of religious beliefs. This is so because they are initially involved in different scholar practices, or disciplines. What is the sense of such a discussion?

Finally, fifth, I am not sure in the correctness of the analogy that philosophy of religion relates to religion(s) as philosophy of science to sciences. The proposed relation has two parts: the subject (i.e. philosophy) and object (i.e. the subject-matter of corresponding 'philosophy'). What Shokhin and O'Collins suggest is focused, to my mind, on the subject, since both philosophers underline the role philosophy bears to its possible object (science, literature and education, we may add also law, art, history). However, a true proportion requires not only the similarity in the first part (subject), but also in the second (object of inquiry). And my point is that there is no parity of the objects of inquiry in the *Genetiv Philosophien* in general, and between religion and science in particular. I do not have here a lot of space for a broad and explicit discussion of these differences, however some points should be stated. First, obviously, 'science' and 'religion' are not eternally unchanging terms with unambiguous meanings, their meanings vary through times and cultures. And, hence, second, 'science' and 'religion' could hardly be defined, so that the discussion of what is 'science' in general and what is 'religion' in general may be meaningless. That is why we may sensibly discuss only a specific claim of a particular religion (such as Islamic understandings of divine providence or Buddhist views of the dharma). When the two conditions of the proportion ('philosophy' and 'religion') are met, we will see that 'philosophy of religion' discusses 'religion' in general relying on particular statements. If one accepts the proposed brief analysis of the proportion, she will see that philosophy of religion may analyze the central religious concepts and may establish or modify theological statements in the light of philosophy¹².

Obviously, this correction to the Shokhin's views do not exclude or substitute in any other way that philosophy of religion should be a general 'theory of religion'.

10 Max Baker-Hytch, "Analytic Theology and Analytic Philosophy of Religion: What's the difference?", *Journal of Analytic Theology* 4, no. 1 (2016), 350.

11 Gerald G. O'Collins, "Review Article: Philosophical Theology, Philosophy of Religion, and Fundamental Theology", *Irish Theological Quarterly* 75, no. 2 (2010), 223.

12 I am aware of this approach to be widespread among analytic philosophers of religion. Here I would like to relate to analysis of demarcation between philosophy of religion and philosophical theology by Andrew Moore in his review on Plantinga's *Warranted Christian Belief* and Marshall's *Trinity and Truth*: Andrew Moore, "Philosophy of Religion or Philosophical Theology?", *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 3, no. 3 (2001). See his thesis on p. 310.

IV. CONCLUSION

By way of conclusion, I will introduce my view on the essence of philosophy or religion and its relation to philosophical theology. Here is the thesis, Philosophy of religion is a discourse on nature and rationality of religious belief of both secular and religious perspectives, whereas Philosophical theology is an approach to clarification on the tenets of a particular religion, developed mainly from the perspective of a believer¹³. In order to provide a precise demarcation between philosophy of religion and philosophical theology, we have to concentrate on four questions: (1) what is the topic of the disciplines, (2) what are their methods, (3) what are their guiding lines, and (4) who may exercise them?

- (1) The main motif of philosophy of religion is analysis of consistency and reasonableness of religious belief, in general, and theism, if we consider the European religious traditions. Indeed, let's have a look at one of the first treatises dealing with the analysis of religious beliefs — Cicero's *De natura deorum*. The whole book is organized around presentation, critics and defenses of stoic, epicurean and platonic religious views. Even the famous Cicero's definition of religion is given within this discussion. I do not have enough space here to analyze numerous examples provided by history of philosophy and theology, nevertheless I insist that the topics concerning arguments for and against God's existence, atheistic critics from the problem of evil and religious diversity, are related to the question of consistency and reasonableness of religious belief. Thus, I see philosophy of religion as a long-time project of origin, development, critics, defenses and modifications of theistic worldview. I also insist that the various attempts to provide a definition for the phenomenon of religion, to find its core, or minimum, are lying within the context of building the versions of philosophical theism. Hence, philosophy of religion deals primarily with establishing, critics and further developing of theism.
- (2) What are the methods of this philosophical endeavor? They could be various actually. Initially, main methods of such understood philosophy of religion are of the following sort: reasoning by analogy, analysis in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions, refining analysis by counterexamples. All these methods are included among typical methods of analytic philosophers. In this regard analytic philosophers of religion tend to see such historical figures as Anselm, Aquinas, Duns Scotus, Ockham, Descartes, Lock, Hume, Reid, Leibniz, Kant as their predecessors and they look to their writings as a source of arguments and theories for advancement of contemporary debates. Contemporary analytic philosophers of religion add to this methodology those of analytic metaphysics and epistemology — thought experiments, appealing to possible worlds and sets, analysis of probabilities, using predicate and modal logics¹⁴. Then, beginning, perhaps, with Schleiermacher, and beyond any doubt with Rudolf Otto, we see how phenomenological analysis may contribute to the analysis of both the core of religious belief and important components of it (e.g. prayer).
- (3) From (2) it is quite clear that the guiding line for philosophy of religion is reason. Here is the principle difference with philosophical theology, since for the later the guiding line are Scripture (or Revelation, generally speaking), Tradition. Here I am fully agreeing with Shokhin, and since it was said enough in sec. II, I will not explicate it any further.
- (4) The answer to the last question is obvious either. Philosophical theology may be exercised only by believers, or put it more precisely, by one from the standpoint of belief and faith in Revelation. Philosophers of religion, on the contrary, occupy philosophical position, which means that they are inclined to analyze arguments being directed by the reason along. To put it simpler, philosophers of religion are philosophers, whereas those who exercise philosophical theology are theologians.

13 Philosophical theology is not necessarily done by believers. However, I do not see any substantial reason why an atheist, or a sceptic, should be interested in developing the dogma of a particular religion (of the doctrine that Christ is one person who possesses two natures, for instance).

14 Baker-Hytch, "Analytic Theology and Analytic Philosophy of Religion", 348–49.

At the very end I should consider the one obvious argument against my account. I will call it “Warranted Christian belief-objection”; it may be formulated as follows. Philosophy of religion considers the topic of justification of religious beliefs, in accordance with that Plantinga’s project belongs to philosophy of religion. However, philosophy of religion is not a confessional, but philosophical theology is exercised within that or other confession. Hence, Plantinga’s project simultaneously belongs to philosophy of religion and does not belong to it. Moreover, it seems to be a project of philosophical theology.

This short objection highlights an important feature of the interaction between philosophical theology and philosophy of religion — namely, their overlapping to a considerable degree. That means, it is extremely difficult to draw a clear demarcation between them in every particular case. However, I believe that my try of demarcation solves the problem with considerably low losses. When Plantinga considers the reasonableness of theistic beliefs, refutes objections *de jure* and *de facto*, and even when he is proposing his famous conception of the *sensus divinitatis* he is clearly doing philosophy, since he is concerned with question of how religious knowledge could be possible at all. This is philosophical question from the domain of epistemology applied to religious matters. When Plantinga proposes the Aquinas/Calvin model to ground the possibility the knowledge of God and reasonableness of theistic beliefs, he is involved in philosophical theology, since he is using the resources of a concrete religion, namely, Christianity, and arguing in favour of Christian system of beliefs. So that the difference in accordance with (1) is decisive one. To sum up, philosophy speaks about theism in general, whereas theology develops conceptions from the name of specific religious tradition.

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