

Introduction

In an age of increasing interactions among religions and of religiously motivated acts of violence, many seek ways of inspiring religious tolerance. This volume places under critical scrutiny a new proposal for avoiding religious intolerance.

Religious intolerance, defined as the practice of keeping others from acting in accordance with their religious beliefs, is not new. From the earliest record of human interaction to the present, we find an unbroken litany of attempts by the proponents of one religious perspective to keep adherents of other religious perspectives from practicing their faith.

Nor is the violent nature of such repression new. Again, history is replete with examples of brutality and subjugation motivated by differing religious perspectives. What is significant and troubling, though, is the *re-emerging prominence* of differing religious ideologies as a basis for major global tensions and conflicts. The age-old desires for wealth and power remain key factors. However, while it might reasonably be said that these were the major factors driving the interaction among nations, or major factions within nations, over the past few centuries, the desire by proponents of religious perspectives to shape a culture consistent with their religious views is clearly today also a significant factor. Moreover, there is renewed concern worldwide over the increasingly violent nature of this religiously motivated activity.

Accordingly, there is understandably a renewed interest in fostering religious tolerance – in establishing socio-political environments in which individuals with differing religious perspectives can practise their faiths unencumbered.

At the national and international level, political leaders argue that intolerant behaviour violates national and international laws, and often rely on force in an attempt to protect those whose legal rights are being violated. Ethicists sometimes attempt to ground tolerance – to ground the basic human right not to be subjected to intolerant religious behaviour – in rational moral principles they believe apply to all. Other academics use a more positive, sociological approach, focusing on the sense of personal and cultural enrichment unimpeded religious diversity can produce. And religious leaders – for example, prominent Muslims, Hindu and Christian leaders – often emphasize that within their own traditions and sacred texts are explicit and implicit mandates to treat those with differing religious perspectives in a tolerant manner.

While these responses to religious intolerance are all of value, this volume places under scrutiny a very different approach, one based on two essential claims. The first is that the serious consideration of religious diversity will lead to humility with respect to what one knows, or in other words, to what we will call ‘epistemic humility’. The word ‘epistemic’ in this context simply refers to epistemology, which is the study of the conditions that make knowledge possible. One condition has long been thought to be justification – that is, the support one has for thinking one’s belief is likely to be true. Most people, philosophers who study epistemology included, think a belief is not knowledge if it is not justified. A randomly attained belief is not

justified, and so it is not knowledge, even if true. Accordingly, to say that the serious consideration of religious diversity leads to epistemic humility is, in essence, to say that it will lead to a reduction in the justification of the religious beliefs in question.

The second claim is that epistemic humility will lead to religious tolerance. The following is a more explicit statement of this alleged pathway from diversity to religious tolerance:

1. Religious diversity seriously considered causes one to reflect on why one believes what one does in light of why others believe the alternatives.
2. Such reflection often uncovers the weakness of one's justification, whether understood on the internalist or externalist line of justification. On the internalist line, people tend not to be aware of reasons for their religious beliefs. On the externalist line, people tend to doubt the reliability or proper function of the relevant belief-forming process when the formative process of the alternative religious belief is seriously considered. Internalists think what justifies a belief must be mentally accessible to the subject; externalists reject the access requirement, and focus instead on the reliability or proper function of the belief-forming process.
3. The awareness of this weakness of justification tends to produce epistemic humility with respect to what one believes.
4. Epistemic humility tends to increase religious tolerance.

We can think of few better ways to focus and deepen the critical discussion of this pathway than by giving special attention to the late Philip Quinn's work in this area. Quinn maintained that those engaged in serious belief assessment as the result of acknowledged religious diversity would often find that the reasons for holding their beliefs are no better than the reasons others have for holding alternative beliefs, and that this epistemically humbling realization could well minimize intolerant behaviour.

Only a few of the contributors to this volume agree that acknowledged diversity offers a pathway to religious tolerance, and even fewer accept Quinn's reasons for believing this to be the case. But all agree that the epistemic issues raised by the consideration of this pathway are of great importance, and that a focused discussion on these issues – that thinking with Quinn on these issues – is a fitting tribute to his work and life. And the special attention given his work in this collection focuses and deepens this significant discussion.

One key issue considered is whether the alleged weakness of justification ought to be understood along internalist or externalist lines. The internalist thinks that justification, the support for a belief, requires that one be able to be aware of the support. For example, an internalist would claim that a woman who believes that her son is in the backyard must be aware of the reasons or evidence for this belief if the belief is to be justified. The externalist finds no use for this type of awareness requirement. The woman can be justified in her belief that her son is in the backyard whether she is aware of the reasons for such a belief or not. The belief is justified simply by the fact that it has been formed in her by a reliable or properly functioning process.

This distinction is significant when considering belief retention in the face of religious diversity. Internalists like Philip Quinn, as evidenced in Chapter 1 in this volume, think one must be able to show one has better reasons for one's own religious beliefs than the reasons for the alternatives if one is to have justification for retaining one's views.¹ Because he doesn't believe most people can meet this internalist criterion of justification, Quinn concludes that most honest, intellectually sophisticated theists will find themselves epistemically humbled by the serious consideration of religious diversity. Specifically, while advocates of other religions have excellent reasons for believing in what they believe, they cannot, he maintains, non-circularly establish their own viewpoint in light of the alternatives.

In Chapter 2, William Lane Craig challenges the claim that serious reflection on religious diversity requires this type of epistemic humility – that is, requires the proponent of any given religious perspective to acknowledge that she cannot on rational grounds establish the superiority of her perspective. Specifically, he challenges Quinn's claim that no religious perspective is self-authenticating, and that all such perspectives are epistemically equivalent. William Hasker offers a similar critique in Chapter 9.

Externalists in religious epistemology are critical of the alleged need to give reasons for religious belief. Justification is not essentially a matter of giving good reasons. The belief is justified by virtue of the fact that it is produced by a reliable or properly functioning process, whether or not the individual knows that the process is reliable or properly functioning. In Chapter 1, Quinn differentiates his own thought from that of his critic, Alvin Plantinga, who, as an externalist, doesn't think we need to know the proper function of our belief-forming faculties. It is enough that they are functioning properly, as not even God, says Plantinga, can know non-circularly the proper function of God's belief-forming process.² At one point in Chapter 2, Craig expresses his sympathy with Plantinga's externalist reliance on the witness of the Holy Spirit and the sense of the divine built into each person as sources of warrant for theistic beliefs, sources that can stand firm against any serious consideration of religious diversity.

In Chapter 3, David Basinger cautions against the potentially harmful and debilitating effects of what he sees as the complacency of Plantinga's externalist response to the challenge of religious diversity. Since Basinger believes that our basic religious beliefs have significant practical consequences, that reflection on our basic religious beliefs sometimes causes significant modification, and that our 'best' religious intuitions sometimes prove untrustworthy, he maintains it is always best to reflect seriously on the basis for one's beliefs in light of the fact of religious diversity.

Another related, central question is whether the acknowledged reality of epistemic peer conflict – an acknowledgement that equally intelligent, knowledgeable and

1 The following essay argues that Philip Quinn's epistemology is internalist: James Kraft, 'Philip Quinn's Contribution to the Epistemic Challenge of Religious Diversity', *Religious Studies* 42 (2006): 453–65.

2 Alvin Plantinga, 'Internalism, Externalism, Defeaters and Arguments for Christian Belief', *Philosophia Christi* 3, no. 2 (2001): 379–400.

sincere individuals hold differing perspectives on a given religious issue – reduces a proponent’s confidence in the superior justification of her position. A new focus within analytic epistemology, called the epistemology of disagreement, focuses on just this issue.

As we have seen, Quinn thinks one’s own confidence in one’s position is significantly reduced by epistemic peer conflict. Basinger gives a qualified endorsement of Quinn’s view. He argues that while the acknowledged reality of epistemic peer conflict does not necessarily lessen an individual’s justifiable confidence in the superiority of her own perspective, the serious belief assessment often fostered by acknowledged peer conflict will often increase her respect for her epistemic competitors and/or broaden her own perspective.

Jerome Gellman in Chapter 4, on the other hand, does not think epistemic peer conflict necessarily does or even should reduce one’s confidence in one’s belief. Nor does he believe such conflict necessarily produces tolerance, because people aren’t always swayed by the epistemic concern for justification. There are, he maintains, non-epistemic factors that drive people to be more or less confident in their beliefs or more or less tolerant of alternative religious orientations, and paramount among these are moral factors. Epistemology and morality are not segregated in real life.

In Chapter 5, John Greco offers a very different perspective on the epistemology of religious disagreement. He believes the epistemic situation of religious disagreement can be best understood from the viewpoint of two models, those of perception and of testimony, and he personally advocates what in the literature is called epistemic permissiveness, namely, that two individuals can both rationally hold conflicting views in the face of religious diversity seriously considered. According to Greco, the perception and testimony models not only show how disagreement is possible when two people each use the heterogeneous evidence that is available to them and neither is making a mistake about how to evaluate the evidence, but the two models even anticipate and predict the evidence and evidence-evaluation dimorphism at the heart of religious disagreement.

Unlike the picture of epistemic peer conflict Greco paints, James Kraft (Chapter 7) imagines a situation in which each of the opponents to a debate knows about all the relevant evidence, and each is just as good at evaluating the evidence. In this situation, Kraft maintains, one’s own confidence in one’s justification ought to be brought into question. If one’s peer knows about all the evidence and is just as good at evaluating the evidence, one should think the peer is just as likely to arrive at the right answer. Kraft asserts that most people lack the kind of vivid, religious experiences that allow them to differentiate their epistemic situation from their epistemic peers, and this means most people find themselves humbled in the face of religious diversity seriously considered.

Part Two of this volume considers the alleged connection between epistemic humility and religious tolerance. In Chapter 6, Quinn gives a strong formulation of the argument for this segment of the pathway.

A number of new issues come under consideration at this point. For example, is confidence in the superiority of tolerance-producing beliefs required in order to sustain tolerance and avoid intolerance? Craig thinks so. He argues that epistemic humility deflates the very confidence in the beliefs needed for inspiring tolerance.

Robert McKim in Chapter 8 shares Craig's concern, and therefore advocates that more attention be paid to building confidence in tolerance-producing practices within religions. In Chapter 11, Keith Yandell agrees with Craig and McKim on this point, arguing that the amount of violence prevented by possession of religious beliefs that are anti-violent in their implications is presumably enormous, and therefore that anything that removes or weakens these beliefs may well reduce the factors that restrain violence. And Yandell agrees with McKim that the most fruitful approach to increasing religious tolerance is the promotion of such behaviour within religions themselves. Basinger, on the other hand, does not think epistemic humility necessarily lowers one's confidence in moral principles. And while Kraft thinks such humility does generally lower confidence in moral principles and that this lowering reduces the likelihood of extreme religious acts of both kindness and violence, he doesn't believe this general reduction prevents individuals expressing extreme acts of kindness and violence, since some individuals have the kinds of uncommon and vivid experiences that allow them to counteract drives to epistemic humility.

In Chapter 9, Hasker adds that the pathway under consideration from religious diversity to religious tolerance through epistemic humility is not mindful enough of the defensiveness people often express when their beliefs are challenged or compared to other beliefs. In these situations, he claims, people often lash out in violent ways. On the other hand, while Basinger acknowledges this possibility, he thinks the advantages of self-reflection outweigh any problem of this sort.

Hasker also notes what he sees as a form of severe debilitation that can be caused by the type of epistemic humility advocated by Kantian-inspired pluralists like Hick and Quinn. Their contention that practitioners look at their beliefs and practices as representing not the ultimate, but merely the appearance of the ultimate, guts religions of their zest and efficacy in people's lives. And gutted religion, Hasker argues, isn't very useful for much of anything, let alone inspiring religious tolerance.

Another important question that arises in this part of the volume is whether any religion is essentially violent, or at least more violent than others. Many Americans and Europeans assume today that Islam is more prone to violence than Christianity. Craig seems to affirm some version of this assumption, while Kraft denies it.

Yet another interesting question is whether the goal should be 'mere tolerance'. McKim argues that it should not. Tolerance, he declares, is simply a stance of regretful allowance on the part of a person in the more powerful position. She doesn't have to allow the religious other to thrive; yet she, for whatever reason, regretfully allows the diversity to take place. This attitude toward the other is not enough, says McKim. A better goal for interaction among religious individuals, he concludes, is a 'respectful curiosity'.

Finally, Peter Byrne in Chapter 10 challenges the assumption of other contributors such as Basinger and Craig that tolerance hinges on the level of confidence one has in the justification of one's religious views. As Byrne sees it, associating tolerance with epistemic humility misses the real cause of intolerance. In fact, he believes that violence in our world is not primarily associated with religion at all. It is, rather, the outcome of 'social and ethnic groups in mutually destructive conflict'. Accordingly, Byrne offers a strategy for tolerance that draws from the liberal tradition of the intrinsic worth of every individual.

It is important in closing this introduction to highlight again a key purpose for this volume. It is not meant simply to be a tribute to Philip Quinn, although it is unapologetically that. Nor is it meant simply to be a collection of academic essays on a topic of increasing philosophical interest: the alleged pathway from religious diversity through epistemic humility to religious tolerance. In an age of increasing interactions among religions and of religiously motivated acts of violence, many grope for ways to foster religious tolerance. And it is hoped that discussions of the type found in this volume can contribute in practical ways to this important end we all desire.