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*Ivan Platovnjak and Arto Mutanen***On Religious Knowledge*****O verskem védenju***

Abstract: The paper is a philosophical analysis of religious knowledge. The article examines religious knowledge by comparing it to scientific and mathematical knowledge as well as moral knowledge. Scientific knowledge is based on perceptions, whether these are direct perceptions or perceptions produced by a scientific experiment. We analyze religious perception by comparing it to perceptions in science and in moral epistemology in which perceptions are called moral perceptions. In moral epistemology and religious epistemology, the interpretation of perceptions takes place in a certain atmosphere which is not static and given but developing. All these perceptions have a similar methodical role in knowledge acquisition. The paper gives a methodical-conceptual analysis of religious knowledge, but at the same, it shows that the real option is the path of permanent discipleship.

Keywords: Moral perception, religious perception, moral knowledge, religious knowledge, moral and religious atmosphere

Povzetek: Za vernika je vera v Boga trden temelj življenja. S filozofskega vidika je pomembno temelje verovanja sistematično proučiti. V prispevku sta avtorja opravila filozofsko analizo verskega védenja. Versko percepcijo sta analizirala tako, da sta jo primerjala s percepcijami v znanosti in moralni epistemologiji – v tej se imenujejo moralne percepcije. V moralni in religiozni epistemologiji njihova razlaga poteka v določeni atmosferi, ki ni statična in dana, temveč se razvija. Vse te percepcije imajo pri pridobivanju védenja podobno metodično vlogo. Na koncu metodično-konceptualne analize verskega védenja sta avtorja pokazala, da je prava možnost pot trajnega učenčevstva.

Ključne besede: Moralna percepcija, verska percepcija, moralno védenje, versko védenje, moralna in verska atmosfera

1. Introduction¹

Faith in God is an essential part of religious life. In fact, for a believer faith in God is the firm foundation of life. It is philosophically important to systematically examine the foundations of religious faith. In this paper, we will focus our attention on the epistemology of faith. Basically, there are three different approaches to religious epistemology, namely: fideism, reformed epistemology, and evidentialism (Dougherty and Tweedt 2015). According to fideism, there is no need to have any supporting evidence for religious belief. Such a non-supported religious belief is a rational one. Evidentialists assume that religious beliefs need to be supported as usual beliefs. Of course, it is a problem to know what kind of evidence is needed to justify religious beliefs. Specification of what kind of evidence is needed gives a different kind of evidentialism. Reformed evidentialists are between fideists and evidentialists. They do not assume fideists' assumption that religious beliefs, in general, have a specific status which entails that there is no need for evidence, but, at the same, they accept that some religious beliefs, which might be called basic religious beliefs, need no evidence. (Dougherty and Tweedt 2015)

Religious epistemology is an important specific topic which has different aspects (Oviedo 2022). The problem connected to the question between fideism, revised evidentialism and evidentialism brings forth the general epistemological problem. However, there are important epistemological questions that need to be discussed in order to understand religious epistemology properly. In the following, we will consider questions about the phenomenology of religious epistemology and reflect these both to the general problems of epistemology as well as to more specific areas in epistemology, such as moral epistemology (Campbell 2019), the epistemology of mathematics (Hintikka 1973) and the philosophy of science (Hintikka 2007; Niiniluoto 2018).

2. Phenomenology of Religious Perception

In the phenomenological analysis of religious epistemology, a fundamental notion is religious perception. Religious perception is not a specific perception but a class of perceptions with varying epistemological roles. Such a diversity of religious perceptions enables the analysis of the growth of religious knowledge. However, the analysis of the growth of religious knowledge is extremely complex. To do such an analysis we will use more general epistemological theories as indicated above.

A good basic example of religious perception is the eating habits of Christians.² People usually prepare and eat their food quickly. They do not think about the

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² A similar practice is also present in Islam. Muslims thank God for the gift of food and ask for His blessing before and after meals (some only after). In this way, they show their awareness that all food is a gift from God. It is also recommended for believers to eat slowly and in peace. It is also important that they eat in a moderate way (Jeglič 2022a, 154). A good example of religious perception is the eating habits of Jews (righteous Israelite) too. For example, see the Book of Tobit, which tells a story of a righteous

food or eating, but rather the think about many other things, often listening to the radio or watching TV or something on their smart phone while they eat. But eating is a special kind of everyday practice that can connect us to something transcendental. Christians, on the basis of their faith in God the Creator and Father, who has revealed himself fully through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, are called to a deeper awareness of how eating can also connect them to God and, through him, to all creation and humanity. To do this, they are invited to prepare, in peace and in the presence of the Triune God, the food they are about to eat and everything else that is necessary before the meal. After preparing the meal and placing it on the table, they sit down. They calm themselves before they eat and drink. They become aware of what is in front of them and of their desire for food. They also become aware of the presence of the Triune God at this meal and through all that they will consume. As they begin to eat, they surrender themselves to the smell, touch and taste of the food in their mouths and in their swallowing. They allow themselves to be moved by the grace of the Holy Spirit as God the Father gives them the food to nourish and satisfy them (Mt 5:6,45), “dying” for them (Jn 12:24) so that they might live. They are moved by His care for them (Mt 6:25-34) and by His ministry to them through food (Mt 20:28). (Platovnjak 2021) Thus the meal is not only a meal, but it enables them to perceive that which is not perceptible.

When Christians approach eating and food open to contemplation, which in the broadest sense means “to look for a long time with admiration and wonder” (Her-raiz 1998, 338–339), they arrive at religious perception. This is not simply looking in the everyday sense, but is an awareness of God, not as He is in Himself, but as He is present through His grace in man and all creation, and through the endowed virtues of faith, hope and love (Aumann 2003; Jeglič 2022b). Contemplation, which involves man’s faculty of imagination and all of his external and internal senses, enables Christians to gaze, taste and perceive each thing more deeply, and to inwardly taste the active presence of the triune God in them and the goodness and beauty with which He pervades them (*Spiritual Exercises* 230–237; Tomlinson 2011; Platovnjak 2018). The presence of the transcendent can thus be perceived by Christians if they are open to the awareness that is made possible by their connection to their religious tradition and through attentiveness and focus with all their bodily and spiritual senses on all things. Such a Christian religious perception is not, of course, limited to food, but is possible in relation to everything that exists, to all of nature, to every human being, to all events, to all forms of art, and so on.

Eventually, this generates deeper religious knowledge as can be seen in how the Bible understands food: “The Bible does not say much about food, but it makes it clear that it plays a very important role in man’s life, in his relationships with others and with God: man cannot live without food, nor can he live on food alone. So, God instructs Adam and Eve to eat.” (Platovnjak 2021, 83)

Israelite, who was especially known because of his acts of charity in connection with food (Skralovnik 2022a, 278–290).

Alston (1991, 13) gives examples which demonstrate the religious perceptions that take place in reality. "One day when I was at prayer /.../ I saw Christ at my side – or, to put it better, I was conscious of Him, for I saw nothing with the eyes of the body or the eyes of the soul /.../." Even if such perception is not a usual sense perception, Alston characterizes "the awareness is experiential in the way it contrasts with thinking about God, calling up mental images, entertaining propositions, reasoning, engaging in overt or covert conversation, remembering."

3. On Epistemology

In epistemology the fundamental question is "What is knowledge?" or "What does the sentence 'A knows that p' mean?" The basic answer is known as the classical notion of knowledge which says that knowledge is well justified true belief which is rooted in Plato's dialogue *Theaetetus*. In 1963 Gettier published a short paper which demonstrated that there are essential mistakes in the classical notion of knowledge. The paper restarted intensive research in epistemology which has changed our understanding of the character of knowledge. (Hendricks 2006)

To tackle the so-called Gettier cases some epistemologists have emphasized reliability over justifiability. However, reliability refers to methods of knowledge acquisition which is studied systematically in the philosophy of science (Hintikka 2007; Hendricks 2006). So, the philosophy of science has a deeper connection to epistemology than is usually recognized in epistemology. This observation is important for us since we are primarily interested in an analysis of the construction of religious knowledge or the acquisition of religious knowledge.

In the philosophy of science, it is generally accepted that at least some of the observations are theory-laden which means that these observations are based on some theory. The analysis of the theory-ladenness has shown that the notion of theory-ladenness is a scaled notion meaning that some observations are more deeply theory-laden than others. There are some observations called direct observations which presuppose only some conceptual skills together with some kind of common-sense theoretical framework. Other observations are more deeply theory dependent such as the observation of electrons. However, the detailed analysis of the problem of theory-ladenness of observations is still under discussion. (Hintikka 2007; Halvorson 2018)

The problem of knowledge acquisition has been an important problem in the philosophy of science since the 1960s. The problem has been formulated as whether there can be a logic of discovery, but also directly as a problem of the logic of scientific inquiry (Popper 1959; Simon 1973; Hintikka 2007; Hendricks 2001). According to Hintikka (2007), the existence of the logic of discovery is not a problem because scientific practice demonstrates the existence of logic. The problem of philosophers is to explicate the logic. There is no consensus on what the logic of scientific inquiry is, but modern science has been based on the devel-

opment of experimental science. (Hintikka 2007; Hendricks 2001)

Hintikka has developed a model of scientific inquiry which he calls the Interrogative model of inquiry which is rooted in the Socratic questioning method. The foundational idea is extremely simple: the logic of knowledge acquisition is just the logic of questioning and answering. That is, the logic of scientific inquiry is the method of Socratic questioning. Aristotelean logic developed the theory of the Socratic questioning method. (Hintikka, Halonen and Mutanen 2002) The logic Hintikka develops has a close connection to the well-known method of analysis and synthesis (Niiniluoto 2018; Hintikka and Remes 1974).

The fundamental idea of the Interrogative model is that questions search for new information in the reasoning process. The strategy of questioning shows the inquirer what information is needed in the reasoning process. The inquirer decides the question and the nature, or the object of inquiry decides the answer. The evaluation of the reasonability of certain questions can be evaluated only on the level of the whole reasoning process, i.e., evaluation is based on the strategy of the whole process.

The strategy is based on the analysis of the object of inquiry which is a certain phenomenon. The analysis is seeking the essential factors of the phenomenon and the known relationships between the factors. In natural science, these relationships are generally formulated in mathematical language, but it is also possible to have only qualitative analysis of the phenomenon as the examples of thought experiments in different fields of sciences demonstrate. For example, in philosophy, such thought experiments are commonly used. In ethics Foot (1967) introduces so-called trolley examples which are used in generating a better understanding of ethics. Especially the trolley examples open the dialogue on the foundations of ethical knowledge (Taurek 1977).

Thought experiments cannot be interpreted in a vacuum. The Interrogative model explicates the role of theory in rational reasoning. Moreover, if epistemic questions are taken explicitly into the Interrogative model, then the logic of knowledge acquisition become explicated (Hintikka, Halonen and Mutanen 2002). It is especially important to recognize that the role of theory is changing during the reasoning process. The theory which is needed in interpreting the observational and experimental additional information varies depending on the question to be solved. The same also takes place in moral epistemology in which the basic moral observations are simple and direct reactive attitudes which are connected to “practices of punishing and blaming” (Strawson 1962, 1). The practices include some moral attitudes or generate a certain moral atmosphere in which the morality of individuals might come into force (Blackburn 2002). The moral atmosphere refers to a certain kind of moral sensitivity and hence it does not presuppose a strong theoretical foundation. The moral atmosphere can be built up via emotions which constitutes moral seemings (Kauppinen 2015, 181).

Kauppinen takes the notion of moral intuition as a central notion in moral philosophy. The notion of intuition has several different kinds of interpretations in

philosophy. However, Kauppinen gives a very important interpretation which can be seen as a key notion in the acquisition of moral knowledge. The interpretation can be understood in a Kantian way. Kant interpreted intuition which is connected to constructive thinking: Construction is the transition of a formal general notion to a singular case of it; in the transition there is no reference to experience. In fact, this has the same logic as in an experiment or in a thought experiment in science. (Hintikka 1973; 2007)

Moral knowledge is not just knowledge of facts even if moral knowledge considers how to live well and hence moral knowledge is of practical value. Morality is something which is present but not factual. The Kantian notion of transcendence characterizes morality in a deep sense. Pihlström (2014, 54; 59) speaks about transcendental guilt which characterizes moral freedom and responsibility in the contingent reality. So, moral perception, or moral seemings, refers to some transcendental facts.

4. From Phenomenal Analysis to Religious Knowledge

As we saw above when we analysed it from the perspective of the Christian faith, eating is no longer something mundane that involves nothing special. Thus, focusing our attention on eating opens a new worldview.³ While preparing the food we allow ourselves to see the food as a gift. The religious interpretation of what happens at the meal does not presuppose a strong theological theoretical framework. It is good enough that we allow a religious atmosphere to be present in the moment.⁴ Similarly, as a moral atmosphere religious atmosphere does not presuppose a strong theoretical foundation; it refers to religious sensitivity which makes religious perception possible. Even if the moral atmosphere is a collective notion, the sensitivity of it varies from person to person. Some people might need some specific environment, such as a church or forest, to receive it. Religious perception supposes that the mind is open to a religious atmosphere. However, this openness is not something which we have or have not, but it is also a skill-based ability which can be trained via some exercises such as contemplation. (Platovnjak 2021)

Contemplation makes it possible to recognise the presence of the transcendent. However, even if contemplation is theoretically or conceptually primary it is epistemically secondary which is a basic idea behind the method of analysis and synthesis: the epistemic order of the things we encounter is opposed to the theoretical order as already Aristotle recognized.

Contemplation, which can be learned, can enable anyone to learn religious seeing and perceiving in ever greater depth. This learning can begin with a deep-

³ About the biblical connection between food (eating) and knowledge see Skralovnik 2022b, 77–82.

⁴ The human need for food is a natural desire, which is not sinful, but it must not become the criterion and goal of human life. If such a desire becomes a guideline in life, it leads to (religious) death. A desire such as this, which tricks life into succumbing to physical influences rather than obeying God's will, must be understood as apostasy (idolatry) (Skralovnik and Matjaž 2020, 505–518).

er perception and knowledge of the body, which is an external object, but also something internal, its parts and its workings (e.g., breathing, heartbeat, feeding, walking, etc.). Our existence is limited to the body, but we are not just physical beings. Every human being transcends his or her body because he or she has within him or herself a capacity of spirit that enables him or her to transcend him or herself. (Globokar 2019)

Christians believe, on the basis of the Bible, that every human being is created according to the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26) and is thus able to believe in Him and enter into a personal relationship with God. God, as Creator and Father, gives every person everything he or she needs to live his or her life fully, even if he or she does not believe in Him (Mt 5:44-48), because each one is a product of His infinite love and is His child (1 Jn 4). In the same way, He gives His Spirit to all, so that they may be able to recognize His presence and action and freely and consciously choose to live with faith in Him and with all their brothers and sisters and all creation (Rom 1–2).

There is a danger that if one does not accept the religious atmosphere then the exercises in perceiving things remain merely empty rituals. So, religious perceptions are “theory dependent” at least in the same sense as moral perceptions. Of course, in moral theory, there are some theorists who suppose that the theory dependence is deeper. For example, Harman (1977) gives the well-known cat example whose interpretation according to Harman presupposes the whole of our theoretical repertoire. We will not agree with Harman here. We will rely on the general theory of human reasoning, which is explicated by Hintikka’s Interrogative model, in which there is no need to make such strong assumptions.

The idea is that religious knowledge is, as is true of usual human knowledge, developing and fallible. In fact, the fallibility is also in moral epistemology quite generally accepted. Already Moore (1903, x) said that moral intuition is fallible. Moore said that moral intuitions are not possible to prove or disprove but intuitions might be either true or false. That is, our moral intuition might give mistaken information. The role of moral intuitions in the growth of moral knowledge is thus in need of further analysis.

Intuitions are sometimes said to be self-evident. This might entail that, at the same, they are assumed to be self-evident truths. However, here the problem is the notion of self-evidence. Pure, or naked, observations are assumed as self-evident truths by a naïve realistic interpretation of perception. However, today it is generally accepted that direct observations also might be false (Forrester 2017). In the philosophy of science, this means that there is no firm basis of our knowledge; the methodology has to take the uncertainty seriously (Hintikka, Halonen and Mutanen 2002). In fact, logical positivists assumed that observations were true and hence, gave a firm basis for scientific knowledge.

The idea of moral knowledge is similar: moral knowledge must be able to be constructed in uncertainty. The self-evidency remains the self-evidency in logic and in mathematics. They are not self-evident in the sense that everyone recog-

nizes the truth or falsity of mathematical or logical propositions, but that the truth or falsity can, in principle, be guaranteed independently of empirical evidence. In moral philosophy the situation is similar: the method of thought experiments plays a constructive role in the construction of moral knowledge.

In religious knowledge the situation is similar. There are no direct and truthful observations of God or of religious facts. They are, more or less, theory dependent. The theory is not well formulated theory as in natural sciences or mathematics, but a deliberated and experiential view of life, which begins with a religious atmosphere and ends with deep religious faith as the fundament of life and reality and even theological knowledge. The deep religious faith recalls the atmosphere of ancient Greek in which there was no immanent tension between values and facts: human intellect was looking at the good of the human being which was in balance with the macrocosms.

It is possible to exercise the skill of religious perception. The mere perception is not good enough, there is a need for deeper understanding (Horvat and Roszak 2020). However, exercising perceptual skills is not just learning to perceive, it is also learning to interpret. The interpretative skills are developed by analyzing different kinds of situations which is the case in experimental science, in analyzing different kinds of thought experiments in moral philosophy (Brown and Fehige 2019), and in religious epistemology (Platovnjak 2021; Alston 1991).

5. Identification

Let us consider the following everyday example. An agent perceives that there is a book on the table. Basically, we interpret this such that the perceiver is standing next to the table, and he/she has a direct perception which demonstrates that there is a book on the table. A Wittgensteinian interpretation of this could be that the agent sees the object as a book. However, it is not easy to say what it precisely means to say that someone sees something “as F” (where F is some qualifier). Hintikka (1969) gives the following interpretation of seeing. Saarinen (1983) gives the following example which gives the precise meaning of perceptions:

The sentence “Johns sees that Mary runs” is interpreted as follows: In all possible worlds which are compatible with what John (actually) saw, Mary runs. The interpretation might sound unimportant. But it tells that in fact John sees that Mary runs, and at the same it does not mean that the observation implies that the observed is true. The observed thing need not be a factual thing. The fundamental fact in observation, according to Hintikka’s interpretation, is that the object observed is identified perceptually. The perceptual identification need not be anchored to factual truth but to the observational space of the observer. This allows us to understand how observational errors take place. However, this makes it possible to methodically take into account the uncertainty of perception in the construction of knowledge.

The identification of running Mary takes place perceptually. To construct proper knowledge from the perception one has to methodically transform from the perceptual truth to factual truth which is identified factually (Hintikka 1969). However, there is no infallible way to make such a transition. Of course, scientific practices are reliable means to do such a transition. Here we face the problem of realism which has been discussed in the philosophy of science for decades or even millennia (Niiniluoto 1999).

In religious perception the situation is similar. The perception is, as perception in general, uncertain. However, the logical structure of religious perception is like the logic of seeing. Hence a structurally similar argument can be applied to justify religious perception. As we have seen, the theory dependence of religious perception is similar to that in experimental science: the theory dependency increases when the perceptions become more complex. At the same time, this means that religious epistemology is not a closed system, but it can be justified rationally in a reasonable human community. Of course, as in science, also in religious life the deeper truths become more and more complex which supposes deeper (theological) knowledge. However, as in art, the religious community is open. All humans can become members of a religious community. Experiencing religious reality supposes only an open mind and deepening faith. So, in religious epistemology, there is no need for radical relativism. However, a certain moderate relativism must be accepted, but in this way an open dialogue between different human communities is maintained.

Usually, the identification of the perceptual object considers so-called "direct perception." However, we have to discuss perception more closely. In the philosophy of science, it was usual to consider theoretical language and observational language. The objects referred by observational language were thought to be able to be perceived directly. Theoretical objects, by definition, are theory dependent and hence not directly perceivable. (Suppe 1977) Hintikka's Interrogative model allows us to consider the topic more flexibly: The distinction between observational and theoretical language is not any more categorial but a practical distinction in which the role of the entity or the property determines its theory dependence.

Alston (1991) has a similar classification. He says that an observation might be absolutely immediate, mediately immediate, or mediated. The first is some kind of direct awareness of the object. The second is like usual direct perception. The third is perception in which the perceiver perceives something from which he or she perceives the object itself. As an example, Alston gives the following: "as when I take a vapor trail across the sky as an indication that a jet plane has flown by." In the philosophy of science there has been a similar discussion (Suppe 1977; 1987). Hintikka's Interrogative model allows us to have a much more flexible interpretation in which the perception is relativized to its role in the interrogative process. The Interrogative model has three theoretically different kinds of perception. The first is direct perception in which the perception is not at all theory dependent. Only the conceptual dependency of perception holds which is specified

by the model relative to which perception is made. The second is the identification which means that the perceived predicate or object is defined relative to some theory and relative to some perceptual parameters. The third is usual theory dependency in which perception is relative to the underlying theory and scientific inquiry. (Mutanen and Halonen 2018)

We have analysed religious perception such that there is no need to assume strong theory dependency. It is enough that the perceiver accepts the religious atmosphere which means that his or her worldview is religious. Hence according to Hintikka's model, the religious perception is direct perception. Of course, as we have recognized, the deeper religious perceptions might be strongly theory dependent – in principle, there is no upper bound of theory dependency.

6. Closing Words

We have analyzed religious perception and religious epistemology as a parallel process with general epistemology and perception and with moral perception and moral epistemology. The analysis shows several important aspects which are worth further study, especially the question of religious realism which opens new questions for further study. In the analysis of religious realism, the notion of imagination might be used more systematically. "The idea being: if you can do it in imagination, you can do it in reality. If you can imagine exchanging identities, then you can imagine doing that in real life." (Kearney in Marcelo 2017, 788) However, the study of religious epistemology and religious realism must not take the form of proud self-confidence. Believers must recognize "the fragility of their faith" (Platovnjak and Svetelj 2018, 381) which entails that religious knowledge is never ready-made and certain. Hence the real option is "to take the path of permanent 'discipleship'" (381) which allows us not to take the seemings as self-evident but be "aware that what he sees and hears is not only what he 'sees at first sight'" (382) is not all that there is.

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