



The Relevance of Philosophy in Christianity: An Analysis of Philosophy's Contribution to Theological Understanding and Faith Practice

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ABSTRACT

The role of philosophy in Christianity has been a topic of intense discussion since the Patristic era. Philosophy is often viewed as ambiguous in its contributions to theological understanding and the practice of faith. This study aims to analyze the relevance of philosophy in Christianity, particularly as a support for theological reflection and the practical life of Christians. Using a qualitative approach, the research integrates an in-depth literature review of the works of major Christian philosophers such as Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Karl Rahner, while also exploring the interaction between philosophy and theology in a contemporary context. The findings reveal that philosophy plays a significant role in three main aspects: (1) providing a rational framework for understanding and communicating theological doctrines, (2) serving as a tool for critical thinking in addressing modern intellectual challenges to faith, and (3) acting as an ethical foundation supporting Christian life practices. These results also indicate that the integration of philosophy with theology enriches the experience of faith and opens constructive interdisciplinary dialogue. In conclusion, philosophy is not only relevant but also essential in strengthening the foundations of Christian theology while advancing a more reflective life of faith. This study makes a significant contribution to the development of interdisciplinary studies between philosophy and theology, offering new insights for church leaders, academics, and Christians in exploring faith rationally and holistically.

Keywords: philosophy, Christian theology, faith practice, interdisciplinary, theological reflection

Research Contribution

This study provides a significant contribution to bridging philosophy and theology through an interdisciplinary approach. The findings enrich academic discourse while offering a rational framework relevant to addressing modern challenges to Christian faith. Furthermore, this research opens new opportunities in theological education, emphasizing the importance of cross-disciplinary dialogue to foster critical, inclusive, and reflective thinking.

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INTRODUCTION

It is undeniable that philosophy in the 20th century played a remarkable intellectual role in advancing human intellectual awareness and significantly impacted various disciplines, such as physics, sociology, law, political science, and theology (Franz Magnis, 2005). The term "philosophy" originates from the Greek words *philos*, meaning "deep love," and *sophia*, meaning "wisdom" or "knowledge" (Khoe Yao Tung, 2013). Simply put,

philosophy can be understood as a love for wisdom or truth, a deep desire to seek knowledge, and an aspiration to become wise.

Philosophy is an intellectual discipline closely related to wisdom (P. Kristen, 2023). Wisdom represents an ideal way of life for humans, enabling them to become more self-aware and recognize their limitations. According to John Chaffee, philosophy encompasses three essential aspects: Wonder (the curiosity to question due to admiration for something), Wisdom (the pursuit of the essence of things, truth, and the creation of wisdom), and Truth (considering ultimate truths) (Ibid, p.4). This inquisitive attitude demonstrates that philosophy encourages systematic, radical, and critical thinking about challenges, including those within Christianity, so believers are not easily swayed by every "wind of teaching" (Ephesians 4:14): "Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming."

Knowledge has its limits. As Paul expressed in 1 Corinthians 1:23, humans cannot independently attain the ultimate truth about God. While human reason can explore many things, it is ultimately limited in many aspects (Nataatmadja, n.d.). Christian philosophy is also the church's endeavor to utilize philosophical knowledge as a tool to engage all sciences. It aims to integrate philosophy into knowledge so that all disciplines recognize God as the ultimate truth.

Philosophy is often criticized for lacking a concrete foundation. Some view it as an outdated discipline, despite its pervasive presence in nearly every field of knowledge (Filosofis, 2014). Even in theology, philosophy plays a role, although Christian philosophy differs from secular philosophies. Among clergy and theologians, some reduce philosophy to merely an ancilla theologiae a servant of theology. Colin Brown notes that the early church had a love-hate relationship with philosophy. For instance, Tertullian (160–220 AD), an influential early church father, dismissed philosophy as the source of all heresies, claiming that worldly wisdom without faith is futile (Supriadi, 2019). This perception is erroneous, as it suggests that philosophy serves only as a problem-solving tool for Christianity or a subordinate to theology, and even labels it as the root of all heresies.

In some Christian circles, philosophy is viewed as a tool of the devil or as an opponent of Christian theology (P.A. Kristen & Sidabutar, 2022). Some preachers question the need to study philosophy, branding it as a misleading discipline. Tertullian, for example, famously questioned, "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" (Novalia, 2020). In this context, Tertullian equated Jerusalem with Christian theology and Athens with philosophy, arguing that the two were incompatible. Athens, often considered the cradle of Western civilization (Putrawan, Sugianto, & Kadang, 2020), represents a worldview that frequently contradicts the Bible due to its lack of grounding in God's Word.

Bejo Lee highlights that some Christians view philosophy as a worldly wisdom inherently at odds with biblical truth, much like oil and water (Supriadi, 2019). However, such an extreme perspective ignores the historical contributions of philosophy. Christians should understand and study Christian philosophy to deepen their faith and critical thinking. As stated in Matthew 7:24: "Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock." This verse underscores the importance of grounding one's understanding of faith on a firm foundation. Christian philosophy differs from worldly philosophy in its reliance on an absolute, biblically based worldview characterized by permanence, consistency, and alignment with Scripture (Bilo, 2020).

Martin Luther often criticized philosophy, referring to it as “the devil’s whore” for its inconsistency and tendency to challenge God’s truth (Stern, 2023). Despite this, philosophy sharpens the Christian perspective, enabling believers to evaluate their faith more critically.

Given these debates, one central question arises: What is the significance of philosophy for theological knowledge? Philosophy is crucial as it systematically, radically, and critically enables humans to understand their beliefs. It serves as a tool for deepening one’s understanding of faith, grounded in Scripture. Scholars, theologians, and philosophers have extensively researched the interplay between faith and reason, showing that logic complements faith rather than contradicts it (Josep et al., 2021). Philosophical reasoning provides a foundation for addressing theological issues thoughtfully and comprehensively.

This research aims to provide a foundation for developing a robust intellectual framework, fostering a broad understanding of philosophy’s positive impact on knowledge and faith. By doing so, Christians can confidently question their beliefs without being swayed by misleading doctrines. The study explores the relationship between philosophy and Christianity, addressing whether these two domains are inherently contradictory or complementary. The findings will demonstrate that philosophy plays a vital role in helping Christians analyze their worldview, understand the world around them, and deepen their faith. Ultimately, Christian philosophy offers a holistic and analytical perspective on Christian beliefs and truths.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a design based on library research. This approach was chosen to deeply explore the role of philosophy in Christianity by examining key relevant texts and constructing a conceptual synthesis from the available data. The following is a detailed explanation of the methodology used: The research is descriptive-analytical in nature and employs qualitative methods to understand the relevance of philosophy in Christianity. Its focus lies on analyzing the works of major Christian philosophers and reviewing literature that discusses the interaction between philosophy and theology in both historical and contemporary contexts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The History of the Relationship Between Faith and Knowledge

In the medieval era, the issue of faith and reason began to be viewed more sharply. Up until the 12th century, European spirituality was dominated by Platonic thinking, in which faith and reason seemed unified. However, in the 13th century, European thought was revitalized by Aristotelianism, which entered through figures such as Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd, and Simon Maimonides. Aristotle’s analytical, worldly, empirical, and rational approach initially startled European theologians. Some rejected Aristotle’s teachings as heretical.

Two great thinkers, Albertus Magnus (1193–1280) and Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), succeeded in transforming Aristotle’s intellectual wealth into a cornerstone of European philosophy. The secular approach of Aristotle, which appeared to conflict with Christian theology, posed challenges that some medieval theologians sought to resolve. For instance, Siger of Brabant (c. 1282) proposed the idea of “double truth,” suggesting that what is philosophically true might be theologically false.

Thomas Aquinas rejected this doctrine, arguing that truth is singular, as both human reason and divine revelation originate from the same Creator. In line with Aquinas’s perspective, the Catholic tradition inherited the

belief that there can be no contradiction between science and faith. If such a contradiction appears to exist, it must indicate a misunderstanding in one domain or the other, necessitating reflection on both faith and science (Müller, 2005).

This historical discourse reveals two contrasting perspectives:

1. **Fides quaerens intellectum** ("faith seeking understanding") emphasizes that faith is not blind but involves a desire and need to understand what one believes.
2. **Credo quia absurdum** ("I believe because it is absurd") was rejected by the Catholic Church. While the divine essence may be beyond human comprehension, faith is not blind. It is rational and non-contradictory, rooted in the belief that both faith and knowledge come from the same Creator and cannot conflict with each other.

Philo of Alexandria (20 BCE–50 CE) held the view that there is a connection between faith and logic, as both derive from God as the sole source of eternal truth (Hardiman, 2002). This underscores the notion that what God has created for humanity cannot contradict itself, affirming that the relationship between faith and reason cannot be mutually exclusive or antagonistic.

Definition of Christian Philosophy

Many people wonder what philosophy truly is. When someone raises serious questions, even if unintentionally, they exhibit signs of engaging in philosophy. Philosophy begins as an attitude: a stance of questioning, doubting, and seeking ultimate truth by evaluating everything or anything. In other words, philosophy is a kind of reasoning system or practical method used to pose questions and formulate solutions by reflecting on the past (Dua, 2001). Philosophy is also understood as an effort, process, method, approach, or aspiration to continuously search for truth (ibid., p. 15, n.d.). The search for truth is grounded in the human desire to know, endowed by God with logic to contemplate all things.

Curiosity about many things is closely linked to the experience of awe or wonder at what is encountered. As Plato noted (Sudarminta, 2002), this reality is fundamental to all pursuits of knowledge. A person's act of questioning reveals that they know something but simultaneously do not fully know and desire to understand what remains unknown, seeking answers regardless of their acceptability.

Defining philosophy comprehensively is an ongoing task, as individuals hold diverse perspectives on its meaning. A sarcastic individual might define it as "everything and/or nothing." Unlike other sciences, philosophy seeks to provide an overarching view of human thought as a whole, and even of reality, if that is believed to be possible. The term "philosopher" originally meant "lover of wisdom" and stems from an answer given by Pythagoras (Ewing, 2003). When he was called wise, he humbly replied that his wisdom only reflected his awareness of his ignorance, and thus he should not be called wise but a lover of wisdom.

Philosophy has been associated with both practical and theoretical wisdom, as seen in the phrase "to know all things philosophically." However, success in theoretical philosophy does not guarantee philosophical behavior in practical situations or the ability to act and feel appropriately. Socrates famously asserted that if we truly understand what is good, we must act upon it (ibid., p. 26, n.d.). This does not mean philosophy ensures correct behavior or emotional alignment with philosophical convictions; rather, it emphasizes that the goodness of any knowledge is realized only when it is practiced.

Misunderstandings About Philosophy

Philosophy emerged in human life when people began questioning, thinking, discussing, and debating the universe. It was developed to find solutions to the challenges of the natural world. The presence of philosophy is vital, especially in shaping scientific knowledge. However, philosophy is often misunderstood by many.

For instance, as previously mentioned, certain prominent Christian figures have dismissed philosophy's relevance to Christianity. This rejection is not unique to Christianity; philosophy has also faced opposition in Islamic contexts. Some conservative groups have deemed the study of philosophy haram (forbidden), claiming it opens the door to heresy (Raya & Raya, 2021). Such misconceptions, if left unaddressed, could shape future generations' thinking negatively. They risk perpetuating a flawed understanding of philosophy, despite its role in teaching critical thinking.

During the medieval period (476–1492), some writers described this era as the "Dark Ages." Historical records indicate that the church emphasized morality in human life but was also accused of stifling intellectual freedom. The church allegedly restricted rational inquiry into religion, insisting instead on adherence to its decrees (Ramon, 2012). While the church wielded significant influence during this time, Christian thinkers who held power often misunderstood philosophy.

When related to religion, philosophy is sometimes seen as incompatible with spiritual matters. Many view philosophy and religion as contradictory, overlooking the fact that many philosophers were religious. Numerous philosophical thinkers have supported religious understanding, including in Christianity.

Religious knowledge is rooted in faith and revelation, considered absolute and mandatory for its followers.

However, this knowledge often possesses a mystical quality, beyond the simple comprehension of human senses.

Philosophical knowledge, on the other hand, is speculative, derived from deep contemplation and grounded in rational, critical, and radical inquiry (Octaviana & Ramadhani, 2021).

Considering this, philosophy and religion are not oppositional but complementary. Philosophy helps uncover the divine meaning of God's revelation through critical thinking. It enables a careful examination of new ideas, preventing hasty acceptance without thoughtful deliberation. Decision-making, therefore, becomes a process of mature consideration, supported by observation, reflection on personal values, and an understanding of the consequences of each choice.

The Role of Philosophy in Christianity

Philosophy is understood as the love of wisdom, implying that it plays a significant role in Christianity because it aligns with the Bible. This alignment is seen in the connection between wisdom and understanding, often referred to as divine wisdom. Intellectual capacity holds a critical position in Christian professionalism. All spiritual growth is based on reasoning and willful decisions guided by intellect, as reflected in Romans 12:2: *"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing, and perfect will."* Here, the apostle Paul encourages readers to renew their minds to perceive everything from a Christian perspective, discerning what is good, true, and pleasing to God.

In Romans 8, Paul contrasts the flesh with the spirit. The "flesh" represents worldly thinking, while the "spirit" embodies the Christian mindset led by the Holy Spirit. Human and spiritual wisdom are fundamentally distinct. Human wisdom begins inductively, through observations of the surrounding world, while faith starts deductively, with submission to God enabling believers to evaluate sensory input based on His Word.

Philosophy is deeply connected to the pursuit of logical, critical analysis of human thinking, perspectives, and knowledge about the world, both physical and non-physical (spiritual). The book of Ecclesiastes is inherently philosophical, emphasizing that the ultimate faith is in God and the obedience to His commandments: "*Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind*" (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

Some Christians believe the Bible answers all human questions, while others disagree. Both perspectives can be unbalanced. Assuming the Bible alone addresses every human issue negates the value of learning other forms of knowledge. For instance, one might read the Bible yet still face unresolved life challenges. Even devout Bible readers must take action and apply effort to meet their needs. Christian faith does not disregard or belittle secular knowledge, recognizing that intellect is a divine gift enabling humanity to think critically.

On the other hand, many Christians hesitate to study philosophy, perceiving it as a tool of the devil. Such concerns arise from the belief that relying on human logic as the ultimate source of wisdom leads people away from true divine understanding. Philosophy books are often filled with ideas from unregenerate minds, requiring Christians to approach them cautiously. This perception discourages many Christians from exploring philosophy. However, philosophy, when grounded in divine revelation, can be a valuable tool for constructing compelling arguments and clarifying truths.

The Relationship Between Logic and Faith

The relationship between logic and faith in Christianity is often debated within Christian circles. Many theologians and philosophers have sought to explain how the two can coexist harmoniously. Saint Anselm famously stated, "*Faith seeking understanding*," emphasizing that faith is not the endpoint but the starting point of seeking knowledge and understanding. Thomas Aquinas, a renowned philosopher and theologian, argued that logic and faith are not mutually exclusive. In his *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas used reason and logic to discuss various Christian doctrines, such as the existence and attributes of God. He viewed logic as a tool to strengthen and deepen understanding of Christian faith.

Aquinas identified two primary methods for defending Christian faith through logic:

1. **Deductive Reasoning:** Developing rational arguments to support church teachings.
2. **Socio-Empirical Approach:** Combining theology and philosophy with empirical observation and natural reasoning.

He believed that logic and faith complement each other and that rational knowledge serves as a foundation for deeper spiritual insights. For Aquinas, there are two sources of knowledge: human reason centered on God and faith as divine revelation. This dual approach highlights that intellect and faith are interdependent in the pursuit of knowledge. While philosophy encourages critical thinking, Christianity emphasizes human limitations compared to God's boundless wisdom.

Some argue that logic has limits when addressing matters of faith, as certain aspects of faith transcend human understanding. Personal spiritual experience becomes crucial in such cases. Conversely, some Christian thinkers, such as C.S. Lewis, utilized logic to defend their faith. In *Mere Christianity*, Lewis used logical arguments and rational analysis to demonstrate the validity of Christianity. One notable example is his moral argument, where he posited that universal moral values like truth, justice, and love point to a purposeful design behind the universe.

In conclusion, philosophy and logic, when rooted in God's truth, can enrich and support Christian faith, serving as tools to illuminate and articulate the wisdom found in divine revelation.

According to him, the source of moral values is God. Lewis also utilized logic to address challenges to faith and doubts about Christian belief. He employed reasoning and rational analysis to explore issues such as the existence of suffering, human free will, and the existence of God (Marsden, 2016).

On the other hand, Lewis regarded faith as something deeper than mere logical arguments. For him, logic and faith complement each other: logic provides a rational foundation, while faith adds a spiritual and personal dimension to belief.

This demonstrates that Lewis sought to strengthen and defend his faith by integrating reason and spirituality, highlighting the harmony between the two in his understanding of Christian faith. In their perspective, logic and Christian faith are not two separate or opposing entities. Instead, logic is utilized to understand and defend Christian faith. Both perspectives agree that logic is a vital tool for comprehending the truths of faith and for helping individuals strengthen their beliefs. Logic and faith work collaboratively to rationally defend Christian beliefs, while faith provides deeper meaning and purpose to our reasoning. Ultimately, the pinnacle of truth lies in God alone, and the Bible, as God's Word, serves as the primary source of that truth. A correct way of thinking, as guided by the Bible, leads to understanding, and understanding produces faith (Romans 10:17).

Faith is indeed a gift, and all Christians agree on this. However, faith must be cultivated, and one way to develop faith is through critical thinking questioning and doubting to uncover the ultimate truth. When someone errs in their thinking, the fault does not lie in the process of reasoning itself but in a greater power influencing the mind. This power must be addressed to transform one's thinking toward positivity.

The Application of Philosophy in Christianity

The application of philosophy in Christianity involves using philosophical thought to understand and develop Christian beliefs and practices. This application encompasses several aspects, including:

1. **Apologetics:** The term comes from the Greek word *apologia* (απολογία), meaning "a justification" or "a defense." *Apologia* or apologetics can be understood as a defense of our views, positions, or actions. In the context of faith, apologetics refers to defending what we believe as Christians—our creeds, confessions of faith, and doctrines (Matalu, 2018).

Philosophy can play a significant role in apologetics by providing a means to defend and explain Christian beliefs. In apologetics, philosophy is used to understand and articulate the rationality and truth of Christian faith to others. It offers a framework and analytical tools necessary to examine and understand the intellectual foundations of these beliefs.

Philosophy contributes to understanding the rationality of Christian faith through logical analysis. It employs logic to evaluate arguments supporting Christian beliefs, including identifying premises that underpin conclusions, assessing the validity and strength of arguments, and examining the internal consistency of these arguments. Sound logic fosters critical thinking, enabling individuals to approach all matters thoughtfully and to seek solutions to every problem encountered. By integrating philosophy and Christianity, believers can strengthen their faith and engage effectively in meaningful dialogue about their convictions.

Second, Philosophical Theology.

Philosophy can be utilized to study and develop Christian theology. Philosophy is defined as “a love for wisdom,” and wisdom also implies pure truth. Based on this interpretation, philosophy aligns with the Word of God, as written in Proverbs 4:6: “*Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you.*” This verse indirectly advocates for philosophical thought. Therefore, Christians should evaluate philosophy appropriately.

Philosophy and theology share similar foundations:

1. Humanity plays a central role by positioning itself as a thinker.
2. Philosophy and theology both discuss God and His works.
3. Both seek ultimate truth, sourced from God, through general and special revelation, to find true solutions to life's problems (Putrawan, Sugianto, and Kadang, 2020).

These shared principles illustrate the correlation between philosophy and theology, showing how they complement each other.

Third, Christian Ethics.

Ethical philosophy can be used to understand and apply moral principles in Christian life. This involves reflecting on concepts such as justice, love, social responsibility, and daily ethical living. Stoic philosophy upholds essential principles for human life. The role of Stoicism includes shaping human thought to exercise self-control in achieving happiness according to its standards. Self-control enables individuals to explore intellectual, moral, exemplary, ethical, responsible, and disciplined aspects (Pandie, 2023). This approach leads to the principle that a truly happy person is one who can manage their emotions in times of joy or hardship.

Metaphysics.

Philosophical metaphysics can be used to understand the nature and essence of God, the universe, and spiritual reality. It aids in comprehending concepts such as God, existence, reality, and the universe. In Christian faith, metaphysics focuses on understanding the Trinity, a central concept in Christian theology. For instance, in Christian education, metaphysics can help explain and understand concepts like creation and the philosophical foundations of Christian education (*Filsafat Pendidikan Kristen*, n.d.). This reality demonstrates that philosophy has made significant intellectual contributions to Christianity.

Epistemology.

Philosophical epistemology can be employed to understand the nature of knowledge and belief in the context of Christianity. This involves exploring the sources of knowledge, belief, and how one acquires knowledge about God and religious truth. In Christian faith, epistemology concerns how one understands what they believe and how they are convinced of a particular truth. It relates to understanding divine revelation and Scripture, as well as how one can be assured of the truth of Christian faith. Epistemology emphasizes that knowledge about God and His truth is not solely derived from human reason but also from divine revelation, highlighting the importance of both. Additionally, it underscores the role of faith in attaining knowledge. Here, faith is not merely seen as belief without evidence but as trust based on strong evidence and reason (Sulistio, 2012).

The Purpose of Philosophy in Christianity

The purpose of philosophy is to cultivate wisdom in daily life, enabling individuals to evaluate all matters with a broader perspective and avoid egocentric attitudes and behaviors that place themselves at the center of everything. Philosophy encourages intellectual growth, equipping individuals with extensive knowledge. It significantly supports church ministry, inspiring fresh enthusiasm in serving God, surpassing traditional forms of service. Philosophy provides direction regarding the foundational purpose of ministry, emphasizing that Christians need a well-grounded philosophy of service (Marbun and Saragih, 2022).

This reality highlights the positive goals of philosophy within Christianity, and negative perceptions of philosophy should therefore be dismissed. Thinking is a God-given gift that must be developed to fulfill the cultural mandate to manage and govern all of God's creation. This ability to think enables humans to steward creation and glorify God through their intellectual capacities.

Philosophy helps individuals refine their thinking, enabling rational evaluation of all aspects of the universe created by God. Christian philosophy aids people in engaging critically and analytically with fundamental questions about faith, beliefs, and values within Christianity. Philosophical reflection allows one to gain deeper, more contemplative insights into understanding the Christian faith (Sidabutar, 2020).

History shows us the contributions of Christian philosophers, as discussed earlier, demonstrating their significant role in interpreting and explaining Christian teachings through philosophical approaches. Reading and understanding their thoughts can help us gain a better understanding of Christianity.

One renowned philosopher in history, Plato, defined philosophy as a means of discovering genuine and pure truth. His view reveals that not all knowledge is valid. This perspective reminds us that not all truths presented through the pulpit are authentic or pure. Only through proper interpretation (homiletics) can God's Word be conveyed accurately.

Pure truth is untainted by negative or harmful influences. In Plato's view, philosophy is also a method of investigating all things by seeking their causes ("Exploring Deep: Plato's Philosophical Thought and Its Influence," 2023, <https://dialocal.com/menggali-dalam-pemikiran-filsafat-plato/>).

CONCLUSION

Based on the study of the importance of philosophy in Christianity, it is evident that philosophy helps individuals develop wisdom in thinking, acting, and behaving. Philosophy is essential in Christianity because it assists Christians in defending and questioning their beliefs through a foundation of critical thinking. Extreme views toward philosophy can negatively impact future Christian generations by influencing their evaluation of their faith.

Addressing this issue, it is crucial to eliminate misconceptions about philosophy. This effort aims to help Christians critically view the universe and all of God's creation, preventing them from being easily swayed by various forms of false teachings that have persisted throughout history. When false truths are taught, philosophy provides the tools to critically evaluate them, grounded in the Bible as the ultimate source of truth.

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