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October 19, 2012: Is There A Difference Between Religion and Philosophy?

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Title: Is There A Difference Between Religion and Philosophy?

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10/19/2012—Speaking of the human being in Contributions to Philosophy, Martin Heidegger writes, “the essence of being as such, not the essence of the human being, contains in itself a call to humans, as a call destining them to history.” He also writes, “The most proper ‘being’ of humans is therefore grounded in a belonging to the truth of being as such... .” Now what is that? Even if the secular materialist finds the terms obscure—as in “what the hell is being?”—one cannot reject it as “merely religious.” I often come back to the McConnell-Feldman debate over religious exemptions and the meaning of religion (see December 13, 2011). But in that debate, Noah Feldman wanted very much to distinguish between religion and philosophy to show that they are equivalent. Michael McConnell wanted to show that they are different but that often what is called philosophy is actually religion. But what if there is no difference at all? What if there are just different kinds of religion? Here is how Bradley Lewis, a defender of religious exemptions and a pretty conservative Catholic, defines religion: “By ‘religion’ I mean the good of bringing one’s life into harmony, conformity or unity with what one takes to be the true order of the whole and its greater-than-human cause and the virtue that has this harmony as its object.” Now, since we did not cause ourselves to be, I presume the most fanatical atheist is quite religious under this definition. And if you believe that existence is a cosmic joke, think of harmony here as coming to terms with the true order of the whole.