

Supporting Constructive Research on the Existence of God in Portuguese-Speaking Latin America

The resurgence of English-speaking philosophy of religion and philosophical theology has been lightly felt in the parts of the scholarly world outside of the US and Commonwealth countries. However, thanks to the funding efforts of the John Templeton Foundation, there is a small, but growing number of scholars in Latin America interested in *constructive* research in philosophy of religion and philosophical theology. Constructive research in philosophy of religion and philosophical theology is understood as research that doesn't merely discuss the past contributions to philosophy of religion or philosophical theology by seminal historical figures, but seeks to propose new ideas, concepts, arguments, questions and claims to ongoing debates in philosophy of religion and philosophical theology. Latin American scholars interested in such research want to engage with the cutting-edge of research from English-speaking philosophy of religion and philosophical theology, and supplement the dominant modes of scholarship in Latin American philosophy of religion and philosophical theology—which tend to focus on the history of ideas and the views of great historical thinkers—with research that aims at making progress on the Big Questions of philosophy of religion and philosophical theology themselves, as opposed to just on what previous thinkers have argued and claimed.

Brazil is the largest country in Latin America and has the biggest philosophical community in the region. With the decisive help of the John Templeton Foundation, philosophy of religion is becoming an area of growing interest among Brazilian philosophers. Since one of the previous projects the Foundation supported in the area in the country was in the analytic philosophy of religion, the model of a creative way of doing philosophy is being increasingly associated with this field. Given the importance of Brazil in Latin America, the growth of philosophy of religion in this country and the increasing role played by analytic philosophy in the field in it, the support of the John Templeton Foundation can make a considerable difference to the way of doing philosophy of religion in the Latin American subcontinent.

The Associação Brasileira de Filosofia da Religião (ABFR) wishes to partner with the John Templeton Foundation (JTF) to support constructive research in philosophy of religion and philosophical theology among Portuguese-speaking philosophers in Latin America, on Big Questions concerning the nature and existence of God. Such Big Questions include:

- Does God exist or not? What are the best arguments for and against the existence of God?
- How should we conceive of God? What are the attributes or properties of divinity? What are the merits and demerits of so-called “alternative” conceptions of God, e.g., pantheistic, panentheistic, axiarchic etc.?
- How does information from science inform our conceptions of God, or our evaluation of arguments for or against the existence of God?

To stimulate constructive research on these questions about the nature and existence of God, the ABFR proposes the following activities:

1. A small-scale funding competition for awards to support research on the nature and existence of God;
2. A mid-project workshop for award winners to present their research and receive feedback from other award winners;
3. Provision of copy-editing and, if necessary, translation services, for award winners to prepare any draft research manuscripts they produce for publication in an English-language philosophy of religion or philosophical theology journal.

We provide additional details on each of these activities below.

Research Award Funding Competition

The ABFR aims to award \$168,000 in total for research grants of between \$10,000 and \$20,000 each, to be used to support individual researchers or teams of researchers in investigating Big Questions concerning the nature and existence of God. We anticipate making between 8-15 awards, though the final number will depend on the pool of applications received. These research funds can be used to support course buyouts, summer salary, short-term research visits to leading Anglophone departments in philosophy of religion (e.g., Notre Dame, Baylor, Rutgers, Birmingham, Oxford), research group meetings, research supplies like books, journal subscriptions, or journal articles, or similar activities. Each award will be expected to result in at least two article manuscripts on the project's Big Questions, with at least one-third of the total article manuscripts produced being suitable—with additional work, perhaps—for publication in an English-language philosophy of religion or philosophical theology journal. (For more on this, see the section on copy-editing and translation services below.)

In September 2019, the ABFR will solicit applications for the funding competition with deadline in December 2019. During the 8th ABFR Conference in October 2019, the project will be explained to the participants, so that we can encourage participation and emphasize its innovative character.

- Applicants must either be enrolled in a graduate program at an accredited university or college in Brazil, or else employed as a faculty member or researchers at an accredited Brazilian university or college.
- Applicants will submit:
 - a current CV
 - a budget and budget narrative
 - a 1000-word statement (preferably in English, but Portuguese submissions will be accepted and translated into English for review) that describes (a) the particular question the applicant is interested in; (b) the approach the applicant intends to take in investigating the question; and (c) the activities the applicant will undertake to investigate the question.
- Applicants whose research statement indicates a primary interest in a survey of a thinker's ideas, or the history of a particular debate, or exegesis of a thinker's ideas, are not eligible for a research award.

The application material will be reviewed by a judging panel consisting of Professor Yujin Nagasawa (University of Birmingham), Professor Kelly Clark (Grand Valley State University) and Dr. Luis Oliveira (University of Houston), who have already accepted to take part in the project. Since members of the judging panel should not be eligible to receive a research award, we propose that they are all not working in a Brazilian academic institution. The project leader will serve as a secretary/advisor in the project, with the function of organizing the application material, providing information, answering questions about the applicants etc. Working with less people is easier, and their job can be quicker and more profitable if it is well supported. The judging panel will take between 4-6 weeks to review the applications, with funding decisions announced in early February 2020. Ideally, awards will be made, and research start, by May 2020.

In addition to the award funding, the ABFR will give each awardee¹ the choice of two of the following books on the nature and existence of God:

- *The Existence of God: A Philosophical Introduction* by Yujin Nagasawa (Routledge, 2011)
- *The Existence of God*, 2nd ed. by Richard Swinburne (Oxford University Press, 2004)
- *Two Dozen (or so) Arguments for God: The Plantinga Project*, eds. Jerry Walls and Trent Dougherty (Oxford University Press, 2018)
- *Alternative Concepts of God*, eds. Andrei Buckareff and Yujin Nagasawa (Oxford University Press, 2016)
- *Describing Gods: An Investigation of Divine Attributes* by Graham Oppy (Cambridge University Press, 2014)
- *Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, eds. William Lane Craig and J.P. Moreland (Blackwell, 2012)
- *The Hiddenness Argument: Philosophy's New Challenge to Belief in God* by J.L. Schellenberg (Oxford University Press, 2017)
- *The Problem of Evil* by Peter van Inwagen (Oxford University Press, 2006).

When the funding competition is initially advertised, we will also include information about this small book prize for awardees. The rationale behind awarding books in addition to research funding is twofold: first, to give applicants a sense for the kind of research we aim to support; second, to equip awardees with some “springboard” material from which to conduct their research. We aim to send the books to the awardees by March 2020.

Awardee Workshop

Towards the end of the project, sometime in November 2020, we will hold a workshop/mini-conference for awardees to present their research to one another and get

¹ In the case of a research team of multiple individuals receiving an award, the team will receive two books as a whole; not every individual team member will receive their choice of two books.

feedback. We will also invite a distinguished philosopher of religion to serve as a plenary speaker at this workshop. Possible candidates include Yujin Nagasawa, Robert Koons, Kelly Clark, Joshua Rasmussen, Alexander Pruss, or Richard Swinburne.

This workshop will be held in English, with papers distributed prior to the conference and read beforehand. This will free up the bulk of the workshop for discussion and feedback.

Copy-Editing and Translation Services

Since many Latin American scholars have limited facility with written, academic English, we have requested funds to mitigate this.

First, at the application stage, we will offer on a first-come, first-served basis translation services for the 1,000-word research statement that applicants will submit, up to 20 applicants.

Second, if any awardees have produced a draft article manuscript in Portuguese and believes that it has a good chance at publication in an English-language philosophy of religion/philosophical theology journal, we have reserved funds to translate and copyedit up to ten 5,000-word article manuscripts from Portuguese into English.

One goal of the project is to facilitate the publication of Brazilian philosophers of religion in English-language philosophy of religion journals. We estimate that, assuming that 12 awards are given, and each results in two article manuscripts, the project will result in 24 article manuscripts. We estimate that around one-third of these will be good enough to consider submitting for publication. The venues we will target include *Faith and Philosophy*, *Religious Studies*, *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, *The Journal of Analytic Theology*, *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* and *Philosophia Christi*.

We have had preliminary discussions with Professor Yujin Nagasawa, editor of *Religious Studies* about the possibility of either a special issue for award winner research, or a fast-track review process for award winners. All award winners will have to pass the usual peer-review process.

In summary, we propose the following schedule for the project:

- Call for applications: September, 2019
- Exposition and explanation of the project at the 8^o ABRF Conference: October, 2019
- Projects submission deadline: December, 2019
- Decisions announcement: early February, 2020
- Books sent to the awardees: March, 2020
- Awards made: May, 2020
- Research start: June, 2020 (academic visits in the US or UK could be scheduled for September/October 2020)

- Receive the draft papers for distribution to participants in the workshop: October 2020
- Workshop: November, 2020.
- Articles done or ready for either translation or English editing: February, 2021.
- Publication of some of the best articles in international philosophy of religion journals: by October 2021.