

“The Philosophy of Religion Past and Present: Philosophical Theology or the Critical Cross-Examination of Institutionalized Ritual and Belief?”¹

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Abstract

The disciplinary or “traditional” philosophy of religion has come under increasing attacks that claim that it is unacceptably focused on specifically monotheist, and even specifically Christian, issues to such an extent that it does not merit the appellation “philosophy of religion.” It should, it has been claimed, more honestly and accurately be termed “philosophical theology.” A discipline more reasonably entitled “philosophy of religion” or perhaps “philosophy of religions” should expand its focus to include the traditionally philosophical questions of ontology, epistemology, and ethics raised not only by the history of the Christian, or even the other Abrahamic, traditions but by all such institutionalized systems of ritual and belief. Contemporary movements in both Philosophy and the Study of Religion have begun to raise this point with increasing emphasis. What might such a reformed philosophy of religion(s) look like, and what role might it play in the future of the academy?

What Do I Mean by “Philosophy”?

At the outset it behooves me to make some attempt to clarify what I mean by (Western) philosophy. The word, of course, has a plurality of senses, and one is never justified in claiming that any given singular sense is the “right” one. Philosophy *does* mean a personal, possibly very

¹ The following paper draws heavily on previously published work, especially Rennie 2006, 2010, and 2012.

loose, system of beliefs relative to some identifiable class, as in “my philosophy of life.” It can also mean speculative metaphysics, as in “The subject of the attributes of deity was until recent times reserved for the speculations of theology and philosophy” (Pettazzoni 1956: 1). The *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) suggests as many as nine distinguishable definitions for the word:

1. “The love, study, or pursuit of wisdom, or of knowledge of things and their causes, whether theoretical or practical.”
2. “That more advanced knowledge or study, to which, in the medieval universities, the seven liberal arts were recognized as introductory.”
3. “Natural philosophy” is “the knowledge or study of nature, or of natural objects and phenomena; ‘natural knowledge’: now usually called science.”
4. “Moral philosophy” is “the knowledge of study of the principles of human action or conduct; ethics.”
5. “Metaphysical philosophy” is “that department of knowledge or study which deals with ultimate reality, or with the most general causes and principles of things.”
6. “Sometimes used especially of knowledge obtained by natural reason, in contrast with revealed knowledge.”
7. “ ‘Philosophy of . . . ’ is the study of the general principles of some particular branch of knowledge, experience, or activity.”
8. “A particular system of ideas relating to the general scheme of the universe; a philosophical system or theory. Also, more generally, a set of opinions, ideas, or principles; a basic theory; a view or outlook.”

9. “The system which a person forms for the conduct of life. . . . the mental attitude or habit of a philosopher.”

These are simply lexical definitions—that is, they accurately record the way that various people have in fact used the word. It would simply be wrong to deny any of these senses of the word.

However, allowing one word to imply all of these homonyms without clarification encourages all sorts of fallacies of equivocation that disable the sound reasoning that is, I would insist, one of the hallmarks of the discourse known to ancient and medieval thinkers as philosophy. One can, and one must, distinguish what one intends by the word, and stick to that singular meaning unless otherwise indicated. That is, one needs to apply a stipulative definition in the hope of attaining an acceptable theoretical definition. In such a case any proposed understanding of philosophy must pay careful attention to the historical and cultural milieu from which both the term and the practices identified by it, have come.

The specific tradition of Western philosophy indicated by the OED’s second definition—“That more advanced knowledge or study, to which, in the medieval universities, the seven liberal arts were recognized as introductory,” is importantly connected to the OED’s sixth definition—“knowledge obtained by natural reason, in contrast with revealed knowledge.” These are the two senses of philosophy on which I focus: I will refer to OED #2 as Western Philosophy, and OED #6 as Philosophical Method. Both need to be clarified.

A standard reference work on Western Philosophy is W. K. C. Guthrie’s *A History of Greek Philosophy* (1962), in which the description of philosophy makes religion and philosophy inimical or fundamentally opposed from the outset. Guthrie defines philosophy in binary opposition to (poly)theism, as does Charles Sanders Peirce in the much anthologized “Four Ways of Doing Philosophy” (originally 1877). It is true that this needs to be very carefully related to

recent critiques (such as those of Ivan Strenski 2009 and Ananda Abeysekara 2009), which, from a variety of perspectives, regard the contemporary Western “secular” academy as an outgrowth, a legacy, and thus in a way a continuation of the Christian tradition. Such observations imply that Western philosophy is inextricably intertwined with Christianity, but perhaps it is more accurate that it is inextricably intertwined with theological monotheism in contradistinction to mythic polytheism. The Italian Historian (and, I would argue, philosopher) of Religion, Raffaele Pettazzoni (see Rennie 2013a), in the 1940s argued that monotheism most accurately can be seen as the opposition to polytheism. In fact, in its earliest stages there was a connection between philosophical discourse and polytheism, as with Parmenides and the gods who guided him (or even, possibly, Socrates *daimon*?), but Parmenides appears to have been a transitional figure, for whom the mythical realities of Homer and Hesiod were combined with the rationalism of the new philosophy prior to their “separation.”

One might reasonably argue that Western Philosophy cannot claim its real identity until its consanguinity with religion is properly recognized.² For Guthrie the key element of philosophy is the perception of the “world as an ordered whole” (28), which is precisely what American philosopher, psychologist, and scholar of religion, William James, identified as the defining feature of religion (“Religious life consists of the belief that there is an unseen order and that our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves thereto”—1902, 69) so the simple opposition of Western philosophy and religion cannot be assumed as axiomatic. A clearer insight into Guthrie’s understanding of philosophy can be derived from his words:

The birth of philosophy in Europe, then, consisted in the abandonment, at the level of conscious thought, of mythological solutions to problems concerning the origin and nature of the universe and the processes that go on within it. For

² It was Tertullian (c. 160 -225) who asked “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem,” and the separation of religion from philosophy was engineered by the religious and has long suited their purposes. It is time that both the connections and the distinctions were both closely considered.

religious faith there is substituted the faith that was and remains the basis of scientific thought with all its triumphs and all its limitations: that is, the faith that the visible world conceals a rational and intelligible order, that the causes of the natural world are to be sought within its boundaries, and that autonomous human reason is our sole and sufficient instrument for the search (Guthrie 1962: 29).

Immediately thereafter Guthrie goes on to employ the standard practice of characterizing philosophy by enumerating its recognized practitioners and their texts: Thales, Anaximander, *et al* and so leaves us to tease out the implications of his thought for ourselves.

Clearly, though, one implication is that philosophical method is distinct from religious discourse as rational thought is distinct from “mythical” thought. That is, religion and philosophy are respectively aligned with mythological and logical solutions, with *mythos* and *logos*. This, however, is another difficult area, fraught with baggage and it, too, cannot be taken to be a self-evident distinction as Bruce Lincoln’s 1999 book, *Theorizing Myth* indicates. Lincoln, an Historian of Religions at the University of Chicago and, in my eyes, a good philosopher of religions, is inclined to conclude that *logos* is *mythos* with footnotes (his actual words are—“I now respond: ‘If myth is ideology in narrative form, then scholarship is myth with footnotes,’” Lincoln 1999: 209). Following Guthrie’s classical *mythos/logos* divide, this distinction can be extremely enlightening in developing an understanding of philosophical method as concerning “knowledge obtained by natural reason, in contrast with revealed knowledge” (OED #6).

Lincoln repeatedly has had to answer questions like, “Isn’t *logos* just a repackaged *mythos*?” and he recognizes that he may never have answered them successfully (Lincoln 1999: 207). Both *logos* and *mythos* are narrative forms. What appears to be at work here is a Romantic/postmodern/non-Western recognition of “non-duality.” This was invoked frequently by the Romanian Historian and Philosopher of religions, Mircea Eliade, about whom I will say more later, in his use of the phrase: “il n’y a pas un solution de la continuité entre . . .” (“there is

no resolution to the continuity of . . .”). The idea that “il n’y a pas un solution de la continuité entre . . .”; there is no resolution of the continuity of two apparently discrete entities appears as a constant theme in Eliade’s writing. In the *History of Religion* this is most familiar as the yin/yang non-duality of Chinese thought and the advaita Vedānta (literally the non-dual end of the Veda) of Hinduism. It implies both the absence of a break in the continuity between the two and also the absence of a solution to the riddle of the exact nature of that continuity. The two things do not stand in a simple relationship of continuity with one, for example, evolving out of or causing the other. Rather, they are not discontinuous, the double negative serving to remind us of the complexity of their simultaneous distinction and connection.³ They are distinct modalities of the same form, different species of the same genus. In the case of mythos and logos the genus is the narrative legitimation of discourse, the location and identification of the authority of the discourse. Just as mythos is not fully distinct from logos, Western philosophy is not fully distinct from religion and I take Strenski’s and Abeysekara’s arguments to be evidence of a growing awareness of that fact. (That Strenski and Abeysekara are only a small tip of a large iceberg is further indicated by, for example, Mandair 2009 and De Vries 2007.) Nonetheless, as I say, the two remain distinguishable—especially if one is pedantically precise about what one means by each. In the end one can see, so to speak, what difference is made to mythos by the addition of “footnotes.”⁴ What Lincoln (good philosopher that he is) does is logos rather than mythos. It is that “critical cross-examination” (Lincoln 1999: 208), which Lincoln calls “scholarship” and which (following that distinction assumed by the likes of Guthrie) is characteristic of

³ I have made some attempt to explicate some of this in Rennie 2002.

⁴ I fully recognize that footnotes per se are a relatively recent piece of scholarly apparatus, I am using them, as I believe Lincoln did, in a more or less symbolic role.

philosophical method. So we can distinguish the *method* of philosophy (implied in OED's 6th definition) with the *product*—some kind of “system” (OED's 8th and 9th definitions).

Lincoln finds it “essential” to maintain that, no, logos is *not* just repackaged mythos. He “not only grant[s] but insist[s] that scholarship—like human speech in general—is interested, perspectival, and partial and that its ideological dimensions must be acknowledged, ferreted out where necessary, and critically cross-examined” (Lincoln 1999: 208). It is that process of critical cross-examination that is characteristic of Western Philosophy and renders scholarship distinct, and one of the things that empowers and is symbolic of this process is the humble footnote:

Ideally, footnotes mark the fact that a scholarly text is not a discourse of free invention, wherein ideological interests escape all controls. Rather, they serve as a visible reminder that scholarly texts result from a dialectic encounter between an interested inquirer, a body of evidence, and a community of other competent and interested researchers, past, present, and future. All who participate are committed to a sustained engagement with the data and also with one another, their engagements being mediated by shared principles of theory and method, which—like the evidence and its interpretation—are subject to renegotiation in the space of their texts and conversations. Scholarship implies and depends upon debate wherein one experiences the scrutiny and criticism of others who are able to point to data and invoke established principles of method. In so doing, they act as a check on ideological manipulation. This check is important, even though it is never entirely effective, since critics also have their ideological interests and themselves must be subject to scrutiny and critique (Lincoln 1999: 208).

That is, the process of critical cross-examination does more than restricting the authority of the discourse to a limited community of the competent, it:

go[es] beyond offering their results to an audience of consumers. They also *display the processes* through which they arrived at those results for an audience of would-be critics, whom they accept as peers and superiors consistent with their control over the knowledge and principles that constitute the field ... [and] agree that if any challenges are forthcoming to their data, methods, or results, they will consider them thoroughly, defending or revising their positions as necessary, learning and/or teaching in the process (Lincoln 1999: 209, emphasis added).

This aspect of “displaying the processes” is intimately connected with the development of literacy—which was roughly coterminous with the development of Western philosophy—and

which made the processes of discourse more readily available for display and interrogation than in oral traditions. The same dynamic can be seen again, later, in the triumph of the algebraists (who chose Arabic numbering) over the abacists (who stuck to Latin numbers and the use of the abacus). This, likewise, made the recorded *processes* of calculation available for display. That the constitutive features of rational, logos-style, discourse may themselves have been worked into a mythos which sought to legitimate the hegemony of a particular discourse community (scholastic philosophers and their heirs) is a legitimate caveat. The inner processes of even written discourse are never completely transparent, nor entirely self-contained, nor ever fully displayed to the reader.

As I said, logos is not, in the end, of a different order than mythos but is a constrained modality of the same thing and liable to similar abuse—there is no solution to their continuity. Nevertheless, the creativity and effectiveness of that discourse community and the power of the method they used (even if they abused it) must be recognized. Sustained inspection of the internal processes of discourse is the chief source of that scholarship that Lincoln rightly prizes, as well as of modern science. Lincoln’s analysis tellingly reveals that the authority of the mythos is *external to the discourse itself*—a man of power, a source of revelation, a divine voice, the hawk rather than the nightingale, give voice to the myth. These Lincoln refers to as “extralinguistic factors” (Lincoln 1999: 26), which cannot be critically crss-examined. Logos, on the other hand, is empowered solely (or, to be more accurate, mainly) by its internal characteristics, its intralinguistic factors, which are precisely what can be subject to critical scrutiny. No matter the relative weakness of its source, logos must be convincing (or not) in and of itself (and this was initially thought of as its vice rather than its virtue—it allowed even those of no personal authority or rhetorical talent to produce authoritative discourse—the weaker

argument to appear the stronger). This point of insisting the source of authority be inherent in the discourse itself is crucial in distinguishing the philosophical approach as a viable method distinct from the mythic, although it remains unspecified by any more precise paradigm. It is what distinguishes “knowledge obtained by natural reason [from] ... revealed knowledge.” During a conversation on the topic, Ann Taves, a former president of the American Academy of Religion suggested that, in this way:

the “method” of Western philosophy could be seen as a means of transferring the propositional functions to the conscious mind in the form of verbalized rules of behavior (especially in Aristotelian logic) so as to maintain discursive coherence while encouraging the free play of implicational subsystems, that is, to maximize “good guessing” in terms of pre-paradigmatic theorizing that might lead to productive paradigms, which themselves would be seen as primarily behavioral rather than epistemological. (Personal correspondence 2009)

“Footnoted discourse” can triumph over myth because it permits, encourages, demands, the kind of inspection for error and the interrogation of the internal coherence of the text which are the identifying characteristics of logos/scholarship/philosophical method and constitute the effective interrogation that assures the “good guess.” The characteristics of fallibilism and constant cross-checking are the very constitutive factors of logos and Western Philosophy, and the history of Western Philosophy (including its undeniable contribution to the development of Western science) is at the root of all our “scholarship.”⁵ This is what I mean by Philosophical Method and it is the most valuable—although occasionally neglected—characteristic of that specific cultural tradition to which I am referring as Western Philosophy. It also characterizes Western Philosophy by its *method*, a procedural *style* of discourse, rather than a specific discourse or theory. This is what enables the various “philosophies of ...” science, language,

⁵ There seems to be a common misrepresentation of the generative properties of philosophical discourse based on a fallacious argument by analogy; as if philosophy may have been the “grandparent” or “ancestor” of current scientific methodology but, like a biological grandparent, it must now be spent and infertile. However, as an epistemology or methodology, philosophy itself does not “age” and does not outlive its own fertility but is more durable than biological organisms. It is capable of renewal with every new generation that chooses to apply it.

mind, and, it is to be hoped, philosophy of religion(s). Students and scholars carefully trained in that method, familiar with the pre-existing results of the application of that method, familiar also with the “body of evidence” that is constituted by the global history of religion, should constitute the heart and basis of the study of religion, without restriction on the ability to focus on more specialized study.

The Problem in “Philosophy of Religion”

It is some such (as yet non-existent) integrated and extended discipline, to which I refer as Philosophy of Religions, plural, which I seek to contrast with the “Traditional or Disciplinary Philosophy of Religion,” by which I refer to the academic discipline of long standing and consistent structure. This customarily focuses on questions such as: is there evidence to warrant belief in God or in the existence or immortality of the soul? Is it rational to believe in God? Does the evil in the world support or discourage such belief? Can belief in miracles and life after death be rationally sustained in the light of modern science? What is the nature of God? Etc. This bears little or no resemblance either to the work of contemporary philosophers or to that of historians of religion, who are not interested in presenting the claims of some particular tradition of revelation in a philosophically articulate and justifiable way, but of coming to an articulate and justifiable understanding of the nature and function of such claims. Historically speaking, it can be readily seen that this “Traditional Philosophy of Religion” came into being in the earliest stages of the Western academy and, perhaps because historians of religion have never taken the discipline out of the hands of specialist academic “Philosophers of Religion” (most of whom are not well-informed concerning the global history of religion nor concerned about more recent philosophical critiques of metaphysics) it has remained essentially focused upon the role of

philosophical argumentation as it has been employed in conjunction with (at its narrowest) the Christian Church and (at its broadest) Western monotheism. This situation has provoked comment before. Mark D. Jordan, (formerly of the University of Notre Dame, now Andrew W. Mellon Professor of Christian Thought at Harvard Divinity School) for example, wrote in 1995:

Medieval religious thinkers knew what “philosophy” meant to the ancients, who had invented the word and the thing. They admired and appropriated the ancient legacy, but they also held that the aims of ancient philosophy had been met and decisively superseded in divine revelation. To apply the name “philosophy” to the writings of those medieval thinkers is thus to ignore or undo what they made clear with such emphasis. Most medieval writing about God, nature, human knowledge, and human living is both philosophical and deeply religious, *but it is self-consciously not a philosophy of religion* (Jordan 1995: 761, emphasis added)

Yet it is precisely those medieval thinkers whose work constitutes the core of what now calls itself “the Philosophy of Religion.” No doubt there are exceptions, but that this is the rule can be seen from any cursory inspection of major publishers in the field. The Blackwell series *Exploring the Philosophy of Religion* advertises itself as treating “some of the most important topics in the dynamic and growing field of philosophy of religion.” The catalog includes: *Philosophical Theology and Christian Doctrine* by Brian Hebblethwaite, and *The Divine Attributes* by Joshua Hoffman and Gary Rosenkrantz. The Routledge series *Studies in the Philosophy of Religion* indicates that its aim “is to publish high quality research monographs in the philosophy of religion.” This includes: *Metaphysics and God*, edited by Kevin Timpe; *Theism and Explanation*, by Gregory W. Dawes; *The Metaphysics of Perfect Beings*, by Michael J. Almeida; and *Divinity and Maximal Greatness*, by Daniel Hill. Although the titles of these last two might appear promising, the “perfect beings” and “divinity” they discuss never include Buddhas, devas, or immortal sages. This is an adherence to Western Theological interests that reflects neither the contemporary academy of religion nor any desire to comprehend religion as a global human phenomenon—which it observably is. A more recent volume by Kevin Timpe

(2009) is another excellent example of this discouraging pattern. The Routledge series *Arguing about ...* dedicates a volume to religion. One might reasonably expect it to address arguments about religion in general, but the “volume is divided into 6 parts, helping the student get to grips with classic and core arguments. Topics covered include: methodological issues in philosophy of religion, God’s nature and existence, evil and divine hiddenness, providence and interaction, the afterlife, religion and contemporary life,” and, although Timpe’s volume makes some effort to improve upon its predecessors, it nonetheless can be seen to exercise the same Western Christian Theological focus that characterizes the “Philosophy of Religion” as a whole. Jordan’s point certainly seems to be borne out: this is primarily the philosophical theology of the Western monotheist tradition, which did not even *itself* consider itself philosophy. Although *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology* (Flint and Rea 2009) includes a section on “Non-Christian Philosophical Theology,” one reviewer says that the volume might as well have been called “Christian Philosophical Theology” and that “a similar collection in the same series (Wainwright 2008) is *The Oxford Handbook of the Philosophy of Religion*” (Moser 2009). Some texts are quite open about their exclusively Christian bias, for example, *Philosophy of Religion: Thinking About Faith* is subtitled *Contours of Christian Philosophy* (Evans and Manis 2009). Louis Pojman’s *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology* (Pojman and Rea 2011) is an excellent example of the less overt type: 630 pages of traditional material such as “The Concept of God” and “Arguments for the Existence of God,” “The Problem of Evil,” “Death and Immortality,” “Faith and Reason,” and “Intelligent Design” are supplemented by a summary 50 page section devoted to the question of “Religious Pluralism,” which has only one non-Western contributor (none other than the Dalai Lama) and a four-page article by a Hindu, Prasannatma Das, on “A Hindu

Theory of Life, Death and Reincarnation,” included in the section on “Death and Immortality.” The seventh edition (Pojman and Rea 2014) simply re-arranges the same material.

I could go on. However, I believe that this is enough to substantiate my claim: the so-called “Philosophy of Religion” has simply failed to distinguish itself from philosophical theology. It assumes the Western Monotheist tradition to be somehow authoritative on “extra-linguistic factors” and so fails to distinguish itself from mythos and religion, and, on that assumption, it does not deal with “religion,” which is a global phenomenon, but with Western Monotheism, which is not. Thus it is neither “philosophy” nor “of religion.” It is as if the contemporary philosophy of mind were to concern itself exclusively with arguments concerning Cartesian substance dualism.

In the American Academy of Religion, to give another example, there are six meetings of the “Philosophy of Religion” section at their annual conference: the program of the forthcoming 2014 conference has just appeared, its sessions are 1) on “Divine Hiddenness”; 2) on “Literature and the Philosophy of Religion,” with contributions on Hannah Arendt, Marilynne Robinson, and David Foster Wallace; 3) on “What is ‘Theological’ about Theology?”; 4) on “A Conversation with Mary-Jane Rubenstein about her new book, *Worlds without End*”; 5) “On the Architecture of Christian Ethics”; and lastly 6) on “Philosophy and the Study of Religion.” At last, some recognition of the potential relationship between the two! This session includes a paper from Kevin Schilbrack, author of the recent *Philosophy and the Study of Religion: A Manifesto*, which makes many of the same points as do I. The previous year, however, the sessions focused on “Atheist (Religious) Experience”; “Genealogies of Religious Philosophies” (with contributions on Freud, Wittgenstein, Whitehead, and William James); “Emanuel Levinas: History and Messianism”; “Eichmann in Jerusalem, Fifty Years Later”; “Kant’s Philosophy of

Religion as Critical and Constructive”; and “Freedom and Necessity on the Augustinian Tradition.” All very interesting and no doubt worthwhile, but devoid of recognition that any real Philosophy of Religion must be applied to Religion outside the Western, Judeo-Christian sphere (hemi-demi-sphere!) of culture. I argue that the absence of that recognition alone invalidates the whole enterprise as Philosophy of Religion. One significant result of this situation is that the journal *Religion*, one of the most innovative and sophisticated of the journals in the general study of religion, simultaneously published on both sides of the Atlantic, “accepts papers on all religious studies topics, including the history, literature, thought, practice, material culture, and institutions of particular religious traditions and communities from a variety of perspectives such as social scientific, cultural, cognitive, ethnographic, economic, ecological, and geographic (*but excluding theology or philosophy of religion*).”⁶ It would be hard to imagine a comparable journal on, say, neuroscience, excluding neurophilosophy or lumping neurophilosophy together with theology.

How, then do we open the door to a philosophy of religion (without scare quotes) that looks very different from the conventional discipline and that might yield a greater inter-cultural understanding of religion than any currently available. It is, of course, already going on, in some cases in the camouflage of “Method and Theory in the Study of Religion” or “Critical Theory and Discourses in Religion.” One issue of *Numen*, the primary organ of the International Association for the History of Religion (2001 #48), for example, was devoted entirely to the question of universals. Nonetheless, the forthright application of philosophy as a method to the global history of religion as data could be of much greater scope than that currently seen in “Philosophy of Religion” and could help considerably to clarify discourse on theories in the

⁶ <http://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?show=aimsScopeandjournalCode=rrel20#.VEamMofY790> emphasis added.

history of religion. At present, the academic study of religion is in such methodological disarray that several scholars are arguing that there is no such thing as religion and the only thing that we can study is why some people insist that there is (I mean Russell McCutcheon and his cohort, see Rennie 2013b, 2014). Meanwhile, other scholars beaver away in areas as disparate as “Women and Religion” and “Religion in South Asia” (both “sections” of the AAR, their largest organizational units) or “African Diaspora Religions” and “Cognitive Science of Religion” (AAR “groups” the next smaller unit) with little or no connection between them and without having established basic definitions of their terms. A properly constituted Philosophy of Religions could, I believe, constitute a central paradigm, both launching pad and clearing-house for the study, where all data is grist to the mill and the mill is the (Western) philosophical method. As specific areas produce taxonomies of their own and methodologies corresponding to them they certainly can become independent units, with a specialized community of the competent, as did the various sciences did when they calved off from philosophy.

ELIADE, Mircea (1907-1986)

I had not, initially, intended to make any reference to what is normally regarded as my chief area of specialization, the Romanian Historian of Religion, Mircea Eliade, mentioned already.

However, when I saw his familiar face appear on the program for this event I realized that I really did need to refer to him, in part to introduce him to an audience to whom he is probably unfamiliar, but mainly to acknowledge that my own position on the philosophy of religion has been considerably influenced by his. Although he is normally considered (if he is considered at all) a Historian of Religion I am prepared to argue that he was, in fact, a Philosopher of Religion

of a type that could teach us a considerable amount and possibly change the relationship of philosophy and the study of religion (for the better, I might add).

Eliade was born in Bucharest, Romania in 1907 and died in 1986 in Chicago, Illinois. At school in Bucharest he had an interest in the natural sciences, particularly entomology and botany, but failed courses in Romanian, French, and German. This failure seems to have spurred him to greater effort and he became a voracious reader. He began to write imaginative fiction at the age of 12, and his first published work of imaginative fiction, "How I Found the Philosopher's Stone," came at the age of 14. By the end of high school his interests had moved from natural science to literature and philosophy and he determined to study philology and philosophy at university. His autobiographical fiction reveals a youth of a modernist, scientific bent, convinced of the importance of both traditional religions and folk traditions but unable to accept mysteries or dogmas surpassing rational explanation. His American biographer, M.L. Ricketts, suggests that "Perhaps Eliade's real 'religion' at this time could be said to have been faith in the unlimited power of the disciplined will ... Although he has denied being influenced at this time by Nietzsche ... Eliade nourished a deep, secret wish to become a kind of 'superman,' to control his own will" (Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, p. 72).

This passion for self-discipline must have been active when Eliade read the five-volume *Geschichte des Altertums* by Edward Meyer, despite his high school difficulty with German, and again during his seventeenth or eighteenth year when he encountered Raffaele Pettazzoni and James George Frazer, and he taught himself both Italian and English so as to read them in the original. In 1925 Eliade enrolled in the department of philosophy of the University of Bucharest. There he was greatly influenced by Nae Ionescu (1890-1940), an assistant professor of logic and metaphysics and an active journalist with a keen interest in both science and religion. One of

Ionescu's principle tenets was the "separation of planes," in which the theological, metaphysical, and scientific planes were seen, not as hierarchical, as by Auguste Comte, but as mutually exclusive and irreducible one to another. Ionescu's tenet may well be the source of Eliade's infamous and much misunderstood "irreducibility of the sacred," but the latter may also be related to Immanuel Kant's non-reductionistic philosophy of pure reason, practical reason, and aesthetic judgment.

Eliade's Master's thesis of 1928 examined "Contributions to Renaissance Philosophy" including Marcilio Ficino, Pico della Mirandola, and Giordano Bruno, and the influence of Renaissance Humanism seem to have been at work in his turn to India to "universalize" the "provincial" philosophy of Western Europe. Having earned his licentiate degree and a grant from the Maharaja of Kassimbazar to study in India Eliade sailed east. He studied Sanskrit and philosophy at the University of Calcutta under Surendranath Dasgupta (1885-1952), a Cambridge educated Bengali, author of the five-volume, *History of Indian Philosophy* (Calcutta, 1922-55). In 1930, however, Eliade was expelled from Dasgupta's home under suspicion of romantic designs on Dasgupta's daughter, Maitreyi. He traveled around India, visiting sites of religious interest, attending the famous Kumbh-Mela festival at Allahabad, and staying for three months at the Svarga ashram at Rishikesh, at the time headed by swami Shivananda.

Eliade returned to Bucharest in 1932 and the publication of his novel, *Maitreyi*, in 1933 assured his status as a best-selling novelist. *Maitreyi* was Eliade's third novel and he was to publish a total of ten novels by 1940. He also successfully submitted his analysis of Yoga as his doctoral thesis at the Philosophy department in 1933. Published in French as *Yoga: Essai sur les origines de la mystique Indienne* (Paris, 1936) this was revised and became one of his major

works, *Yoga, Immortality, and Freedom* (1954). It is surely no coincidence that the title echoes Kant's postulates of practical reason: God, Immortality, and Freedom.

In 1945, Eliade moved to Paris where George Dumézil, a scholar of comparative mythology, found him a part-time post at the Sorbonne teaching comparative religion. From this time on most of Eliade's scholarly work was composed in French and concerned the history of religions. At the prompting of Joachim Wach, a scholar of religion at the University of Chicago, Eliade was invited to give the 1956 Haskell Lectures at that institution on "Patterns of Initiation" (published as *Birth and Rebirth* in 1958). On Wach's death in 1958 Eliade was invited to assume the chair of the History of Religions Department in Chicago. There he stayed until his death in 1986. At Chicago Eliade was a member of the committee on social thought, he launched the journals *History of Religions* and *The Journal of Religion*, and he was editor-in-chief of the first edition of Macmillan's *Encyclopedia of Religion*. Through these activities as well as his continued publication in the history of religions and his tuition of a generation of successful scholars of religion, he was, from the early 1960s through the mid 1970s, the most influential single figure in establishing the History of Religions as an academic discipline in the United States.

Despite this focus on the history of religions—assured by the success of his books in that area, rather than in philosophy—Eliade maintained a philosophical agenda, although he never explicitly systematized a philosophy of religion. There has been considerable disagreement over the value of his thought, some seeing it as a crucial contribution to our understanding of religion, and some seeing him as an obscurantist, proposing unacceptable normative assumptions. In *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return* (1949), a book he considered subtitled *Introduction to a Philosophy of History*, Eliade differentiated between religious and non-

religious humanity by applying Henri Bergson's distinction between perceptions of time (from *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*, 1889). Eliade contended that the perception of time as a homogenous, linear, and unrepeatable medium is a peculiarity of "modern," non-religious humanity. "Archaic" or religious humanity (*homo religiosus*), in comparison, apprehends time as heterogenous, divided between linear, profane time and cyclical and reactualizable, sacred time, called by Eliade, *illud tempus* (Latin for "that time"). Myths and rituals give repeated existential access to this sacred time (Eliade's "eternal return"—quite distinct from Nietzsche's) and thus protect humanity against the "terror of history," a form of existential anxiety in which the absolute "givenness" of historical time causes helplessness. However, Eliade undermined his own distinction to some extent, insisting that non-religious humanity in any pure sense is non-existent and that religiousness, understood in this way, is ubiquitous. Myth and *illud tempus*, the temporal continuum of mythic event, still exist, although concealed, in the world of "non-religious" humanity and there is no "solution of the continuity" between the archaic mind and scientific ideologies of the nineteenth century" (*Quest*, p. 41 n.2). Eliade set himself against "the historicistic position, in all its varieties and shapes—from Nietzsche's 'destiny' to Heidegger's 'temporality'" (*Myth of the Eternal Return*, p. 152). That is, he regarded the attempt to restrict "real" time to historical time alone as an unacceptable reduction and he considered, for example, the atheistic existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre, to be arid and hopeless.

The philosophical influences on Eliade from Renaissance Humanism through Kant through Rudof Otto and others are yet to be traced with any real precision since he is studied almost exclusively by historian of religion rather than philosophers. Eliade's *The Sacred and the Profane*, first published in German as *Das Heilige und das Profane* (Hamburg, 1957), was

explicitly written in response to Otto's *Das Heilige* (Breslau, 1918; *The Idea of the Holy*, London, 1926), but Eliade goes beyond Otto in describing the dialectic of the sacred and the profane. He insists that believers—and he explicitly makes no distinction between believers of monotheism or polytheism, Christianity or Buddhism, priestly or prophetic traditions—are prepared by their lived experience and religious background to experience hierophany, the apprehension of the real/sacred in the historical/profane. In Eliade's analysis any historical experience *could* be apprehended as such a hierophany with appropriate preparation, and all hierophany must be mediated by historical realities. His conclusion is that all beings reveal, but at the same time conceal, the nature of Being.

In Eliade's quest to recover the meanings of hierophanies for those who apprehend them he attempts to analyze and understand religious data by applying concepts from the German hermeneutical tradition going back to Freidrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Dilthey and continued by Joachim Wach and Gerardus van der Leeuw. Eliade agrees with them that religious data are intelligible because, as human expressions, they are in accord with human experience. Although he is most often identified as a phenomenologist of religion he frequently insisted that he was a phenomenologist only insofar as he sought to discover the *meanings* of religious data. His hermeneutical phenomenology is most evident in his morphological approach in *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (1949), where he groups religious phenomena ahistorically by structural themes such as water symbolism or the symbolism of the center. Later, he attempted to complement that methodology with the chronological organization of his *History of Religious Ideas* (1976-83). However, in considering Eliade's sources and influences, one must bear in mind that he considered, to give just one example, the Indian Buddhist, Nāgārjuna (150 – c. 250 CE), to have produced “one of the most original ontological creations known to the history of

thought” (*History of Religious Ideas*, vol. II, p. 225). Eliade’s openness to the influence of Asian philosophy cannot be ignored, nor should his origins in an Eastern Orthodox Christian environment, which also clearly influences his understanding. Eliade’s greatest—and as yet largely unrecognized—contribution to the contemporary understanding of religions may be his combining all of these influences in a pluralistic philosophy of religions that manages to take all religious traditions seriously as genuine expressions of real existential situations.

Despite Eliade’s signal failure to establish anything identified as philosophy of religions his “creative hermeneutics” and “new humanism” are close approaches to that as-yet-only-imagined discipline. I began publishing on Eliade in 1993, initially in defense of his politics, but I had already written my PhD thesis in defense of his philosophical analyses of religion. More recently, however, I have found it more effective to drop direct reference to Eliade and concentrate on legitimating the philosophical method in general as significant to the study of religion. I first organized two sessions at the XIXth IAHR Quinquennial Congress in Tokyo in 2005 on “The Philosophy of Science and the Study of Religion.” Papers issuing from those sessions were published in a 2009 issue of the journal *Religion* (39/4), which I guest edited. The papers were by myself, Armin Geertz, David Goldberg, Jeppe Sinding Jensen, Benson Saler, Robert Segal, Peter Machamer, and Thomas Ryba. Papers given in Tokyo by Donald Wiebe and co-authored by Steven Engler and Mark Gardiner were not included in the journal. The former remaining unfinished and the latter being published solo in a later edition (Gardiner and Engler 2010).

That same year, an academic roundtable was jointly-sponsored by the North American Association for the Study of Religion (NAASR represented by myself) and the Critical Theory and Discourses in Religion Group of the American Academy of Religion (CTDR represented by

Ipsita Chatterjea) at the American Academy of Religion (AAR) conference in Montréal. The purpose of the session was to consider theoretical-critical issues in the study of religion, with the more specific intention to reflect on the current state of methodological and theoretical activity in the field with a regard to

- (i) reconciling our fields' origins with contemporary practices;
- (ii) diversifying the people engaged in and the perspectives brought to bear upon the analysis of religious phenomena; and
- (iii) identifying potential new modes of collaboration between the academic study of religion and other disciplines.

A significant element in the collective goal was to initiate a conversation that would exert some influence on how future research in religion might be conducted. Participants were encouraged to make concrete suggestions for implementations to integrate the discipline, to inculcate best practices through greater attention to data collection, representation, and interdisciplinary work, and to appropriate structures and practices from other disciplines. The proceedings of these roundtables were published in the journal *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion (MTSR)* in 2010 (22/2-3), included my own paper on "Method and Theory and the Philosophy of Religion(s)" (*MTSR* 22/2-3: 116-135) and papers from Hans Kippenberg, Ivan Strenski, Kocku von Stuckrad, Ann Taves, Robert Yelle, and Gustavo Benavides.

In 2010 the XXth Congress of the IAHR in Toronto hosted another panel, again, which I organized, on "Possible Futures for the Philosophy of Religion." The proceedings of that panel were published in a special issue of *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* (41/1) with papers from Ivan Strenski, Greg Alles, Bryan Rennie, Marsha Hewitt and a response from Kevin Schilbrack. I guest edited that, too, but 2010 also saw Wesley Wildman, Professor of Philosophy, Theology, and Ethics at Boston University, founding director of LiberalEvangelical.org and co-founder of the Institute for the Bio-Cultural Study of Religion publish *Religious Philosophy as*

Multidisciplinary Comparative Inquiry: Envisioning a Future for the Philosophy of Religion.

The Society for Philosophy of Religion, USA met in Savannah, Georgia in 2012 and one of the sessions at that meeting was on Wildman's book. Panel members were Richard Amesbury (Claremont School of Theology), Timothy Knepper (Drake University), and Kevin Schilbrack (then at Western Carolina University), with Wildman responding. In Wildman's words,

The point of *Religious Philosophy as Multidisciplinary Comparative Inquiry* is to describe philosophy of religion not as a discipline but as a suite of related disciplinary inquiries that work both across cultures and across academic disciplines—thus, multidisciplinary, comparative inquiry. This vision of the philosophy of religion places it squarely in the secular academy rather than as an explicit adjunct or a surreptitious affiliate of any religious institution or movement. Religious philosophy, so conceived, has a future, both conceptually and institutionally, but it is one that needs to be articulated and defended, as well as contrasted with more common but intellectually less reputable forms of philosophy of religion that effectively promote particular institutionally borne religious ideologies without due concern for their rational standing in relation to the wider words of philosophy and religious studies.

(<http://www.wesleywildman.com/?p=123>)

In 2013 McGill University in Montreal hosted a symposium on the future of philosophy of religion, organized by Jim Kanaris, a McGill philosopher of religion particularly interested in how the field is responding to and interacting with religious studies. The papers and speakers at the McGill colloquium were as follows.

“The Future of Philosophy of Religion” by Morny Joy (University of Calgary, AB)

“Towards a New Paradigm for Philosophy of Religion” by Maurice Boutin, Professor Emeritus (McGill University, QC)

“After the End: Retractions and Reaffirmations of The End of Philosophy of Religion” by N.N. Trakakis (Australian Catholic University, Melbourne)

“From PostColonial Paralysis to PostCorrectional Progress: The Future of Philosophy of Religion as Multidisciplinary Comparative Inquiry” by Wesley J. Wildman, (Boston University, MA)

“What Can NonPhilosophy do for Continental Philosophy of Religion?” by Clayton Crockett (University of Central Arkansas, AR)

“The Enecstatic Jig: Personalizing Philosophy of Religion” by Jim Kanaris (McGill University, QC)

“Philosophy, Religion, and the Question of Genre” by Jin Y. Park (American University, Washington, DC)

“Signs Outdistancing the Times: How Globalization and PostColonial Theory Is Redefining Contemporary Philosophy of Religion” by Carl Raschke (University of Denver, CO)

“Reverence and Criticism in Philosophy of Religion” by Tyler Roberts (Grinnell College, IA)

“Where Can Radical Theology Find a Home?” by John D. Caputo, Professor Emeritus (Syracuse University, NY and Villanova University, PA)

“Revisioning ‘life’ in Philosophy of Religion” by Pamela Sue Anderson (University of Oxford, UK).

This year (2014) has seen the publication of Kevin Schilbrack’s *Philosophy and the Study of Religion: A Manifesto*, and will see two working groups on Philosophy and the Study of Religion at the sessions organized by NAASR at the annual meeting of the AAR in San Diego. One will be on truth functional semantics in the study of religions, and another on reactions to Schilbrack’s book. There will also be a review symposium on that book in a forthcoming issue of MTSR. These working groups hope to issue in carefully planned session on Philosophy and the Study of Religion at the quinquennial Congress of the IAHR in Erfurt in 2015. Further, as we have already seen, one of the six meetings of the Philosophy of Religion section of the AAR at the same conference will, at last, focus on “Philosophy and the Study of Religion” and includes a paper from Schilbrack on “The Academic Study of Religion and the ‘Truth Question’.”

From within the traditional philosophy of religion itself, John Schellenberg, professor of philosophy at Mount Saint Vincent University in Canada and author of the significant volume, *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason* is currently co-editing with Paul Draper, a Purdue philosopher of religion, a volume called *Renewing Philosophy of Religion*, which collects the

invited essays of some 18 philosophers from around the world who share this interest in revitalizing a moribund philosophy of religion. They recognize that, although the discipline has grown enormously in the past thirty years, it has done so primarily by attracting committed Christians to the study of philosophy, hampering its operation as the practice of truly critical inquiry.

Tim Knepper, a Philosopher of Religion at Drake has been offering a public program in comparative/religiously-diverse philosophy of religion at Drake for the last two-and-a-half years (called The Comparison Project). In their inaugural year (2012-13) they investigated religious responses to suffering (as a way of doing “theodicy” more broadly). Last year and this year they are looking at claims of ineffability in religion and other related discourses (poetry, music, art, literature) and they hope to publish these lectures and their comparative-evaluative conclusions sometime after 2015.

Clearly, there much remains to be done. But in the immortal words of Sherlock Holmes, “The Game’s afoot!”

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