

Review of Anthony Paul Smith and Daniel Whistler, eds., *After the Postsecular and the Postmodern: New Essays in Continental Philosophy of Religion*. Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010.

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There is an unresolved and perhaps inevitable tension at the heart of *After the Postsecular and the Postmodern: New Essays in Continental Philosophy of Religion*, edited by Anthony Paul Smith and Daniel Whistler, hinted at in the title. The whole of this alternately brilliant and maddening anthology is caught in a bind between a dedication to the history of European philosophy and a desire to move into the future and address new questions. Moreover, as is so often the case with books dealing with the philosophy of religion, it concerns the philosophy of *Christianity*, and of Christian monotheism in particular, with a few nods towards Jewish monotheism. Even Islam is given extremely short shrift in this rhetoric of the philosophy of religion in European contexts, despite the not inconsiderable role that European-born Islamic thinkers like Ibn Rushd (Averroes) played in the development of modern rationalism.

This myopia, in which religious traditions other than Christianity are almost entirely absent, is not so much a fault of this book (more on this later) as of its subject matter; Continental philosophy of religion has always been and continues to be marked by this bias towards organised, deity- and belief-centred forms of religion. For much of its history, this made perfect sense, given that for centuries, Hebrew and Greek monotheisms formed an important part of the dominant intellectual structures of European philosophy. However, in the centuries since the great voyages of discovery and conquest that helped define the modern era, this particular blindness in the “philosophy of religion” has become less natural, and less forgivable. Some more thorough engagement with non-European religious traditions or a more systematic engagement with the generic concept of religion itself would doubtless have made this collection a more interesting one, and would have offered thinkers looking for new ways to drive Continental philosophy of religion into the future a way to break more cleanly and productively with the past.

Many of the contributors continue to grapple with age-old monotheistic questions that have been debated for centuries. Indeed, on the very first page of the Foreword, Pamela Sue Anderson equates the entire practice of the philosophy of religion with arguments for or against the existence of God (xi). Anderson also warns the reader that these authors refuse to pull punches, that they indulge in heresy and in the liberation of thought. The editors are clearly aware of the tension revealed in these two statements, as they write in their introduction that “philosophy of religion’s neglect of the speculative possibilities of diverse cultural materials is shocking” (16). Despite this recognition, the volume rarely engages with the true diversity of cultural and religious materials available to contemporary philosophers. These two things—the slavish devotion to ancient questions and the desire to move in new philosophical directions—are in some ways incompatible, which sets the book off on a shaky and uneven footing, especially when Anderson enthuses that “the volume could generate a storm of free thinking, which not only challenges one’s own constraints in writing in this field, but opens us to what feels extremely novel here (to me at least), that is, both the secular and the speculative” (xi). That Anderson can find “the secular” a novel idea says a good deal about how deeply this collection is rooted, even mired, in the narrowly confined intellectual worlds of the past.

Smith and Whistler’s introduction, “What is Continental Philosophy of Religion Now?” cleanly and clearly lays out the book’s background and its purpose. They open with an instructive discussion of

contamination, particularly the ways in which theology and theological thinking have contaminated Continental philosophy in recent decades. This theologisation of philosophy has been both destructive and productive, although they clearly find the scales heavily weighted towards the former:

Both the postmodern and the postsecular contamination are two sides of the same coin: a one-way injection of theology into philosophy until what is proper to philosophy becomes indiscernible. The deconstruction of the philosophy/theology binary has resulted, not in a true democracy of thought between philosophy and theology, but in the humiliation and debasement of philosophy before the Queen of the sciences, theology. (3)

Rather than simply despair, as would be the natural reaction for anyone concerned with the fate of serious thought, the pair turn this contamination into a challenge that offers a twofold strategy for philosophy of religion: “liberation or automutation” (2). Smith and Whistler view their anthology as a direct response to this challenge, in which a group of thinkers gather with a definitive purpose but follow “no school of thought” nor propound any single orthodoxy (4).

The editors organise this lengthy book around Gilles Deleuze’s focus on “the *modernity*, the *secularity* and the *speculative intent* of philosophy of religion” (6). The volume is thus divided into three parts that work directly against this one-sided contamination from three different angles. Part one, “The Contribution of Modernity,” works subtly against the facile notion that the intellectual revolutions of modernity are merely humanist transformation of Christian—and largely Protestant—concepts. The editors paint this as a *recovery* of the original intent of modern philosophy: “Such was the impulse to speculation in modern philosophy of religion—a joyful and exuberant creation of new concepts” (7). This is in no small degree a reaction against the Radical Orthodoxy movement, which “has constructed an all-embracing genealogy of the history of ideas that attempts to undermine modernity’s claims to be a ‘legitimate’ tradition of thought, in favour of the claims of pre-secular traditions such as Thomism and Augustinianism” (10). The seven essays comprising the second part of the book, “Reinterpreting the Secular,” approach the matter from another direction by interrogating the historically contingent creation of the concept of the secular, which fatally undermines its claims to universality. Again, the editors paint this as an intervention against narrow theological appropriations and distortions of the idea and language of the secular: “what is required in the face of the postsecular event is a philosophy which takes up the modern emancipation of philosophy in the service of a new speculative construction of a true secular” (15). The final part, “Contemporary Speculative Philosophy and Religion,” comprises five essays and an idiosyncratic “Afterword” by Philip Goodchild and a group of mysterious interlocutors known only as “N. Others.” These final essays, which take a broad view of speculative philosophers as both those who engage in metaphysical thought and those “who have situated themselves as heirs to modernity” (18), make explicit the tendency towards speculation that characterises much of the work in this volume.

The first chapter, Rocco Gangle’s “Theology of the Chimera: Spinoza, Immanence, Practice,” discusses in some detail Baruch Spinoza’s concept/strategy of the chimera as a distinctive element of modern thought, a form of performed immanence. His immanence, Gangle argues, is part of his revolutionary spirit: “Spinoza’s shift to affective individuation modifies the philosophical enterprise as such by disorienting philosophy away from the transcendental presupposition that has governed it in one way or another throughout its entire tradition, namely the very presupposition that thought is itself governed transcendently” (38). Perhaps counter-intuitively, Gangle argues further that the practice of Spinoza’s immanence should properly be called “theology” in an attempt to uncover the hidden duality of all theological forms of thinking. This act of re-deploying the label of theology is a way to throw “into relief how limited in scope and yet ubiquitous such subservience traditionally has been” (42).

Next, “John Toland’s *Letters to Serena: From the Critique of Religion to the Metaphysics of Materialism*,” by James C. Brown, takes on a figure rather less known than the ubiquitous Spinoza,

who makes an appearance in almost all of these essays. Brown focuses on Toland's 1704 work *Letters to Serena* and its critique of theological orthodoxy in the light of then-emerging trends towards immanence in philosophy. Toland's pantheism was a way of freeing himself from the dominance of mediaeval theology: "As a former student of theology and ecclesiology, he forged the concept of pantheism as someone who knew and previously adhered to the premises of theological discourse, but who eventually desired to free himself entirely from its influence" (45). For those unfamiliar with Toland, Brown helpfully lays out the historical background of the *Letters* in considerable detail. The essay also subtly shows just how far ahead of his time Toland really was. When Brown notes that Toland argued that "one's understanding is handicapped by the superstitions and prejudices transmitted by parents and one's own immediate social environment" (51), it is difficult not to see the early flowering of ideas that would not be fully realised until the development of the discipline of sociology almost two centuries later. Here Brown points to the larger point of this section of the book: early modern continental philosophy of religion was, as some theologians have sought to deny in recent decades, a radical innovation, even if it never totally liberated itself from its theological roots.

Ashley U. Vaught's "Pantheism and Atheism in Schelling's *Freiheitschrift*" is far less explicitly addressed to this goal. The opening sentence gives the whole of the essay an insular character: "In this essay I argue that Schelling's *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* (1809) constitutes his response to F. H. Jacobi's critique of philosophy during the *Pantheismusstreit*, but that while his response effectively undermined the presuppositions of that critique, he inadvertently confirmed Jacobi's conclusions" (64). Regardless of what one makes of Vaught's reading of Schelling's reading of Jacobi, there is a subtle point to take from this entry in the anthology: the innovations of modernity were not achieved without struggle, without error, or without self-deception. This, however, does not undermine these innovations but rather grounds them more firmly in the messy world of human beings and their limitations.

Michael Kolkman's "A Philosophy of Life: Bergson's *Creative Evolution*" delves into the work of another thinker with whom many more casual readers of continental thought may be less familiar. Building on the earlier innovations of Spinoza, Kant, and others, Henri Bergson's early-twentieth-century metaphysics, rooted in conceptions of time and duration, worked to undermine both traditional theistic cosmologies and the raft of materialisms that emerged in early modern thought. Bergson posited what Kolkman calls "a monism of substance" (81) that disrupted many binary models of the cosmos: "Although Bergson speaks of the difference between the spiritual and the material, the spiritual is not immaterial and the material is not aspiritual. Rather, both exist as tendencies and not as separate worlds" (88). To return to one of the central criticisms of this review, it is worth noting that Kolkman makes a glancing reference to Buddhism in this essay: "For Buddhism individuality is tantamount to suffering and only a return to the Whole can bring true joy" (93). Despite a reference to his "years at the Warwick Buddhist Society" (93, n. 54), there is no getting around the fact that this represents a rather narrow and very Westernised understanding of Buddhist philosophical anthropology, which seeks, in many of its forms, not to perfect the self or lead it towards joy, but to *annihilate* the concept of self altogether as a harmful illusion. While Bergson's ideas may share some elements with some forms of Buddhist thought, as Kolkman argues, the way forward for a more inclusive philosophy of religion must be more critical, aware, and specific than this; there is no room for such facile parallelisms, all too familiar from books like Fritjof Capra's bestselling *The Tao of Physics* (1975).

The next chapter, Karin Nisenbaum's "From the Revolution in Thinking to the Renewal of Thinking: The Systematic Task of *The Star of Redemption*," moves ever closer to the present by examining Franz Rosenzweig's *The Star of Redemption*, first published in 1921. She examines *The Star of Redemption* by way of Kant's dualism, and the monism of Spinoza by way of Jacobi. Rosenzweig strove, above all, to find a "genuinely presupposition-less starting point" for a philosophical system, a common theme for many thinkers in the continental philosophy of religion

and Nisenbaum takes heart in this drive for innovation: “Although Rosenzweig insists that *The Star of Redemption* is not in any straightforward sense a ‘Jewish book,’ nor a book on the ‘philosophy of religion,’ perhaps we can let him lead us to a renewed understanding of the significance of leading an observant life, and to a renewed understanding of the reasons that still compel us to ‘struggle for religion’ in the twenty-first century” (126).

The last essay in the first section, George Pattison’s “Existence, Anxiety and the Moment of Vision: Fundamental Ontology and Existentiell Faith Revisited,” takes on another crucial twentieth-century figure, again working with tools and perspectives borrowed from earlier thinkers, this time examining Kierkegaard’s presence in Heidegger’s *Being and Time*. Although Martin Heidegger makes only three passing references to the great Danish existentialist in *Being and Time*, Pattison argues, as others have before him, that the influence of Søren Kierkegaard on Heidegger’s masterwork is far more comprehensive than this might suggest. This is a fascinating and highly technical examination of a work crucial to any serious exploration of European philosophy of religion. Pattison finishes off the first section with what could be viewed as a call to arms for the entire collection: “As so often, when the path ahead is blocked, it is often necessary to retrace our steps in order to move forward ... The textual deposit bequeathed to us from the past is also to be read in the light of our concern for the present and the future” (147).

Kicking off the second part, “Secularism, Immanence, and the Philosophy of Religion,” by Daniel Colucciello Barber, is from a number of perspectives the standout contribution to the volume. In it, he addresses the fundamental theoretical and discursive blindness of using of the generic label of “religion” when referring almost exclusively to Christianity. In doing this, in asking, in the first sentence of the essay, “What is religion?” Barber provokes an uncomfortable corollary question: why does it take more than 150 pages for any of these authors to ask this? Following the work of Daniel Boyarin, Barber argues simply that “the concept of religion is a Christian invention” and that “the secular must be seen in many ways as a continuation of rather than a departure from the conditions set by the Christian invention of religion” (152). Barber points out, as have a number of scholars in the disciplines characterised as “religious studies” before him (Wilfred Cantwell Smith, for one, made this argument as long ago as 1962), that this invention has had far-reaching consequences for the study of religion, particularly in that using Christianity as a model for what makes a religion a religion puts a focus on *belief*. The invention of religion also invents other things as well, including what Barber calls a “transcendent universal plane” (161) within human society, the secular. Working also with the philosophical anthropology of Talal Asad, Barber makes a central point, one too often ignored; as a by-product of Christian discourse, the idea of the secular is not ahistorical, nor is it universal, though it likes to make these claims about itself: “It is as if the secular says, we don’t want you to become like us, we simply want you to become secular—you do not need to obey us, you need to obey the universal that we are obeying” (161). Building on all of this, Barber again uses Spinoza to argue for a philosophy of religion based on immanence, this time an immanence that works against the transcendental of the universal secular plane.

Though in a very different way, chapter eight, John Mullarkey’s “A Bellicose Democracy: Bergson on the Open Soul (or Unthinking the Thought of Equality),” likewise examines the way our religious past haunts a present that many wish to believe is unproblematically secular. He does this by tackling the classical philosophical question of equality. Bergson’s equality, Mullarkey argues, was unique, more a process than a political ideal: “Equality, to be equal to itself, must be invented (or thought) anew within each and every situation, immanently” (174). He also takes on Peter Singer’s reading of equality and its necessary relationship to universality. The conclusions he takes from this analysis are far reaching: “What we need is another, processual, metaphysics, and, with that, another *kind* of discourse, advocacy, or metaphysical thinking to enact or perform this new politics of equality” (182).

The next essay, “The Problem of the Middle in Gillian Rose’s Reading of Hegel: Political Consequences for the Theology of John Milbank,” by Clare Greer, brings together a decidedly unlikely pair. Where Rose sees the relationship of religion and state to be dialectical, Milbank sees the two as directly opposed, in that the state is a “historically specific fiction,” over and against the absolute and timeless truth of Milbank’s Catholic *ecclesia*; however, “both are interested in defining the ‘middle’ of modernity” (189). This middle is broken, something Rose traces back to Kant, who proposed a duality between the legal and the moral. Greer quite rightly argues that Rose’s work on the broken middle points to a return to totalitarianism and domination inherent in Milbank’s call for an end to secular reason. Milbank’s theology merely replaces one system of oppression for another, as have so many of the revolutions of the modern age. This is a very serious criticism, precisely the sort of thinking that needs to take place when attempting to redefine what it means to be secular.

Adam Kotsko, in “Dismantling the Theo-Political Machine: On Agamben’s Messianic Nihilism,” begins his analysis with a strikingly simple observation: that many of the “European investigators of theology are looking for a way *out of* Christianity” (210). The turn *to* religion is thus also a turn *from* religion, a re-visiting of the central goal of secularism with an eye cast firmly on the fact that the idea of the secular is a by-product of the idea of Christianity, as Barber notes earlier in the volume. Kotsko argues that Giorgio Agamben has made a thorough study of the Christian heritage of modernity as a way to solve thorny political questions of the day, for Euro-American politics is “a vast machine that attempts to capture and control life ... Agamben’s analysis in the *Homo Sacer* books aims to locate those points at which the machine presses its claim too far and to trace out the destructive consequences of its overreach” (212). Agamben point to a way out of the totalising logic of the political in way that Kotsko intriguingly argues can be understood as messianic.

Alberto Toscano, in his “Fanaticism, Revolt and the Spiritualisation of Politics,” brings a refreshingly grounded perspective as the book moves past its midpoint. Like Barber, he traces the ways in which the religious has worked to create the secular (and vice versa), and does so with reference to fanaticism, a subject which he later developed into a monograph:

Fanaticism is an abiding object of horrified fascination, but also, more generally, its invocation is often a symptom of poverty of analysis and imagination, bound to the wish to remain within a closed horizon defined by the mastery of differences and finite possibilities afforded by our political common sense ... Fanaticism, when ascribed to singular subjects or movements, is a political and historical judgment, a judgment that incorporates the idea that an egalitarian politics of truth is in some sense a-historical and therefore anti-political (226) .

Moving through a far-ranging discussion that touches upon the sixteenth-century peasant rebellion of Thomas Müntzer and the recent “spiritualisation” of politics in places like Iran, Toscano again places the assertion of an uncomplicated secularism under fire.

Nina Power’s “Historical Naturalism and Political Humanism: Ludwig Feuerbach and Paolo Virno” stays in the realm of the political, though taking the discussion in a very different direction. Power argues that “Feuerbach’s influence, however underplayed in the literature, remains central in some contemporary political theorists,” in particular in the work of Paolo Virno (244). Along with some very astute remarks about the self-defeating illogic of much of the discussion about environmental reform (248), Power locates Feuerbach’s continuing influence in his work on naturalism and all that this implies: “Paolo Virno’s updated version of Feuerbach’s historical naturalism shifts the object from Christianity to capitalism: our question today thus becomes what do we do when our natural capacities—to speak, to think, to communicate—are alienated from us?” (255). This is a particularly valuable question when read in the light of Kotsko’s earlier argument that some of the central ideas of capitalism, particularly that of the “invisible hand,” are deeply indebted to Christian theological concepts.

“Sovereign Autoimmunity: Hägglund, Bataille and the Secular,” by Alex Andrews, delves again into the work of writers with which non-specialists might be less familiar. What Andrews does is to examine Martin Hägglund and Georges Bataille on an equal footing and to ask what they can teach us together rather than separately: “What then does such a combination yield that the two uncombined lack?” (271). This is precisely what such an essay—and by extension, such a collection—ought to do when placing two thinkers in dialogue; that is, use each to temper the extremity and fill the blind spots of the other. For Andrews, secularism, like the Christianity that yielded at least in part to it, suffers from an active autoimmunity, in that it contains within itself the potential seeds of its destruction.

Part three, dedicated to newer speculative continental philosophy of religion, commences with Smith’s “What Can Be Done with Religion? Non-Philosophy and the Future of Philosophy of Religion,” which reminds me at least rather uncomfortably of the labyrinthine ramblings of Mark C. Taylor’s “a/theology” from the early 1980s. This first essay throws light on an interesting problematic within the conception of the book itself. Smith and Whistler explicitly seek to define and defend a practical side of speculative thought, writing simply that “We see no contradiction between stressing philosophy of religion’s critical and its speculative intent” (7-8). In the introduction, they do nothing to justify this comment, and little in this final section gives the reader any real reason to place credence in this assertion; speculative thought remains just that. Smith begins his essay by asking “What can done with religion?,” acknowledging the frequent intersections of religion and violence, but the answer he gives, following the “non-philosophy” of François Laruelle, particularly as articulated in his *Le Christ futur* (2002), is so obscure as to be largely non-sensical, at least in terms of something that is translatable into real-world action: “The goal here is not to change the World, for the World is always the specular golem of Man, but to struggle immanently within the World using it to construct a future that is no longer worldly” (281). He attempts to articulate a “non-theology,” which “should begin with the same axioms as non-philosophy” (294) and which has echoes of earlier forms of marginalised religious thought:

Non-theology thus follows Gnosticism in rejecting the so-called paradoxical dialectic of faith and knowledge, which always obscures the real dialectic of echo and control. It posits a radical gnosis in Man-in-person, but in so doing it subjects this gnosis of the real-One to the non-theological ultimatum that non-philosophy remain generic ... This remaining generic means that a unified non-theology and non-philosophy constitutes a real secularity (of) thought open to further mutations of non-philosophy’s axioms. In short, for non-philosophy to transform the practice of philosophy of religion, Laruelle must become as if a Church Father, but within a discursive field where there are only Church Fathers and where anyone may be a Future Christ (297).

Smith here clearly articulates the central tension of this whole book in that he wishes to open up new forms of speculation but feels bound to do this in relation to older ideas and structures of thought. By trying so diligently to say nothing that is problematic, by qualifying everything while still insisting on using categories like theology, philosophy, Church, and Christ, Smith—like Taylor before him—ends up saying nothing at all.

Clayton Crockett’s “The Plasticity of Continental Philosophy of Religion” takes on the work of another contemporary French thinker, Catherine Malabou, particularly her notion of plasticity, or “the ability to give and receive form, as well as the annihilation of form itself” (299). Crockett very helpfully grounds Malabou’s work in the context of the larger movement of continental philosophy of religion, including the works of Slavoj Žižek, Alain Badiou, and Antonio Negri, all of whom “argue for a Christian and/or Jewish exceptionalism, despite their evident atheism” (299). Malabou shows the way around this very real contradiction, and Crockett concludes that her notion of “plasticity is a better concept with which to think about religion than the messianism that pervades discussions of

Levinas and Derrida, and it avoids the temporal prejudice that privileges Christian (and sometimes Jewish) exceptionalism in terms of the West” (307).

Michael O’Neill Burns’ “The Hope of Speculative Materialism” takes on the Speculative Materialism movement, associated with thinkers like Iain Hamilton Grant and Quentin Meillassoux, to whom Burns dedicates his attention, in particular to his idea of “essential mourning.” Burns clearly sees real practical possibilities in this work:

[A]ny materialist project which hopes to provide an account of socio-political change and transformation must necessarily provide an account of hope, and ... this account must be grounded in a thought that recognizes the primacy of justice over the crassly bio-political conception of survival ... Unless it holds onto its potential to offer a radical ideological critique grounded in the potential to think the possibility of “another world,” religious thought will have little to offer twenty-first century materialist philosophy (317).

For both Meillassoux and Burns, God becomes “the very name of possibility itself” (328). His conclusion, while intriguing, promises the possibility of a new world on an abstract theoretical level but does nothing to show how such a world could be built, nor how it should look, nor why it must retain some notion or use of God.

In “Language After Philosophy of Nature: Schelling’s Geology of Divine Names,” Whistler sets out to answer two specific questions he believes are interrelated: “*What happens to language after the post-linguistic turn? In what does a speculative approach to religion consist?*” (335). Noting the recent turn towards the speculative in continental thought, Whistler again takes on Meillassoux, but expends more effort on Grant’s reading of Schelling, which yields a Schelling “who rejects the somatism and phenomenism of more dominant strands of philosophy by looking to the empirically inaccessible forces which generate the phenomenal world; a Schelling who—through the concept of non-linear recapitulation—provides a dynamics which includes both the idea and the geological” (344). At the end, he demands that a true speculative philosophy of religion be both fearless and “genuinely unconditioned” (357).

In “Making All Things New: Kant and Rancière on the Unintentional Intentional Practice of Aesthetics,” Bradley A. Johnson argues that Jacques Rancière is the inheritor of Kant’s aesthetic project and tries to articulate an aesthetics without resorting to the sublime, focusing rather on matters of rupture “between imagination and understanding” (366). Returning to the figure of the non-philosopher, Johnson concludes again with a concern for the fate of the world, though one that again shows little if any concern with tracing any coherent way forward save for that of the most rarefied and speculative of philosophies: “the world is made new, not by the teleology or phenomenology of the promise or progress, nor by any kind of messianism. The world would be made new, rather, through an active ethics of thinking embodied by the attention paid to that which is unthinkable *in the thinkable*—that which is/those who are constitutively silence, the count of which there is no count” (378).

The volume closes with an Afterword simply titled “Hypocrisy,” which presents a dialogue between Philip Goodchild and several unnamed interlocutors. Beginning by asking if the philosophy of religion can be approached and practiced as a conversation, the Afterword underlines the central themes of the volume, and brings out, perhaps inadvertently, the central tension between innovation and classicism that underpins the whole project. In what is clearly the weakest of all of these contributions, Goodchild states boldly early on that his “central concern here is analogous to an old chestnut of philosophy of religion: if God is ultimately mysterious and unknowable, in what sense is it possible to believe in, worship, or love such a God?” (380). This is a theological question, not a philosophical one. His first interlocutor, Anonymous, makes far more of an impression with the assertion: “Our world is full of thoughtless chatter” (380), which leads him to a bold statement of philosophy’s essential uselessness on the social plane: “Philosophy is hypocritical not because its

judgements are wrong, but because they are abstract. They have no purport. They are like empty, whitewashed tombs" (382).

The response to these charges, by one Eryximachus (borrowed from Plato's *Symposium*), is far less convincing, as it rambles off on thought experiments—drawn from both stories of the supernatural and science fiction—to illustrate "the difficulty of engaging with what is meaningful in a human life" (388). Eryximachus concludes: "Drawing upon Wittgenstein and Derrida, we may suggest that philosophy is a way of working on and through meaning and language so as to enable one to see meanings. So if experience, or activity, or language are not bearers of meaning in and of themselves, then this would imply that the decisive factor is that they should be formed, worked on, animated, and inhabited" (391). Though the author later admits that such thoughts are among "the blindest of observations" (392), he goes on to write of conversation, seeing, and paying attention as the "institutions of the soul." At the end of this long and complex collection, are we to learn that human life and meaning are processes inhabited in relationship with other lives in process? Has the volume come to culminate in such a trite, New-Age-tinted truism? Goodchild's response to his interlocutors is, if anything, even less compelling; indeed, it is downright disheartening in that it not only states its conclusions using undefined and ultimately meaningless terms like "heart" and "spiritual connection" but also reverts to the unqualified equation of religion with Christianity:

[T]he task of philosophy is changed: to find grounds or reasons is now to find the meaning produced by the heart. Instead of seeking the universal idea, one seeks a singular point of view. Perhaps all philosophers of religion should be equipped with stethoscopes. Perhaps it is necessary to redefine the Christian concept of God as the one who sees in secret into all hearts (395).

If we are going to be truly post-anything, we need to demand far more than this of our elite thinkers. Philosophy can indeed be imagined as a relational act, but it must also remain an act of intellect and logic. Anything less is a betrayal of the long tradition of thought that constitutes the philosophy of religion, on the Continent or anywhere else.

Rather than remain shackled to the idea of God as articulated variously within the Continental tradition, why not simply turn elsewhere for conversation partners? Surely, a more instructive way forward in the philosophy of religion can be found elsewhere: in the Vedas; in the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*; in the work of Averroes, al-Ghazali, and Avicenna; in the vast Buddhist canon in Pali, Sanskrit, Chinese, Tibetan, and Japanese; in the voluminous Rabbinic literature; and/or in any of those non-Christian works so systematically ignored in the Continental tradition. Rather than revisit the same questions and the same ways of thinking, why not instead delve into the myriad religious texts that have never been translated, to say nothing of receiving systematic study, in European circles? If we believe that the general categories of "religion" and "philosophy of religion" have any viability, then there are innumerable unexplored and underexplored alleys lying just off the main square of Christian monotheism, innumerable new problems deserving of more time and consideration than the age-old questions we find in this book. Why not simply acknowledge the great power and influence of Continental thought and at the same time move off the Continent for wider shores?

There is doubtless value in being always conscious of the past, of the blindness and strengths of one's own historical and intellectual inheritance, but there is equal value in not being beholden to this inheritance. At its best, *After the Postsecular and the Postmodern* shows us the value of continuing to look to the past for understanding the present and articulating the future. Such work is not only stimulating; it can work to undermine the claims of those, like the theologians who comprise the Radical Orthodoxy movement, who wish to misappropriate the past to shape the future towards narrowly defined ends. However, this book also inadvertently shows us how far we've yet to go and how little guidance we have to get there, especially if we remain determined to look only at the ground nearest our own feet.



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