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PROLEGOMENA TO ANY FUTURE MASHUPS
WITH THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

In this essay, I am going to discuss contemporary English-language philosophy of religion as a specialized discourse within the discipline of philosophy. I wish to consider whether that discourse is capable of working productively across disciplinary discourses – assumed here as something that it is worthwhile to do. Such substantive mashup philosophy of religion should go further than bringing together the discourse of analytic philosophy of religion with the discourse of continental philosophy of religion. Indeed, I think that English-language philosophy of religion, more broadly, is not capable of substantive mashups without a fundamental transformation of its scope of inquiry. Indeed, I think such a transformation would be for the scholastic betterment, *ceterus paribus,* of the discourse itself. My recommendation is based upon what I think can be reasonably expected of a specialization in philosophy that is "of religion," and my evaluation will be based on what represents the discourse of the specialization at its most basic level: the goings-on of the introductory classroom, the contents of introductory textbooks, and the contents of scholarly journals when considered in light of such introductory approaches.

Let's begin in the introductory classroom. According to Russell McCutcheon, the introductory religious studies classroom is, "the site of some of the most unsophisticated scholarship we collectively produce. It is the place where we often fail to live up to our responsibility of educating critical thinkers and future scholars and, instead, where we often act as trustees concerned for the general well-being of religion."[1] Most of these charges do not hold regarding the introductory philosophy of religion classroom. Firstly, McCutcheon's is the wrong "we." Where McCutcheon is speaking about teachers of religious studies, most of those who teach introductions to philosophy of religion regard themselves as members of a different discipline: philosophy. Introductory religious studies courses are typically introductions to world religions, and one of McCutcheon's talking points is that those courses – and their textbooks in particular – misrepresent that discipline in a way that lacks critical thinking, is methodologically-suspect, and is theoretically bereft compared to the contemporary work done in religious studies. In comparison, plenty of critical thinking takes place in classrooms that introduce students to the philosophy of religion. In the textbooks and the classrooms, students are exposed to elemental critical thinking such as basic logic, forms of argumentation, fallacious reasoning, and close reading of texts. Furthermore, the textbooks and readers used as introductions contain topics and work that have currency in the scholarship of the philosophy of religion.

There is a convergence between the philosophy of religion classroom and the

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[1] Russell McCutcheon, *Critics not Caretakers: Redescribing the Public Study of Religion* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001), 66.

religious studies classroom, however, in McCutcheon's final indictment that teachers too often act as trustees. In *Critics Not Caretakers*, he argues that religious studies scholars should be the former and not the latter. I think it safe to say that most introductions to the philosophy of religion do not explicitly concern themselves with the general well-being of religion. Indeed, many students might find their introduction to philosophy of religion as hostile to their prior understandings on the topic of religion. Harold Cronk's film *God's Not Dead*[2] has popularized that notion. Based on my review of the contents within introductory textbooks and leading journals, however, I contend there is a significant amount of caretaking and trusteeship occurring within the discourse of philosophy of religion as concerns the general well-being of a certain understanding of "religion." This widespread assumption about this understanding of "religion" within the discourse leads to a lack of critical thinking at its core. Not only are the students reading textbooks that propagate this understanding, but the scholarly discourse largely reproduces it as well. "Religion" in the discourse of the philosophy of religion, for various reasons to be examined here, is taken to be almost exclusively about belief in a supernatural being supposed by classical theism or one of its variants (open theism, process thought, etc.). The definition traces its lineage to E.B. Tylor's *Primitive Culture: Researches Into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Custom* (1871) and David Hume's *The Natural History of Religion* (1771). This essentialist understanding of "religion" finds currency in the philosophy of religion, but it lacks credibility outside the discourse in other human sciences (e.g. anthropology, sociology, political science, religious studies). The discourse has been working as the trustee of this understanding, which ultimately serves to undermine the potential for its mashup with other disciplinary discourses. The transformation needed for English-language philosophy of religion is of a Copernican scale. The entire constellation of topics and problems in the discourse focus on classical theism and its variants, and this focus unnecessarily restricts the scope of inquiry in philosophy of religion generally.

I think the situation is somewhat like Michael Behe's mousetrap analogy which supports a teleological argument for the existence of a theistic God on the basis of irreducible complexity as evidence of intelligent design. Behe's argument finds its way into newer introductory textbooks. Something irreducibly complex is "composed of several interacting parts that contribute to the basic function" such that "the removal of any one of the parts causes the system to effectively cease functioning."[3] The state of current philosophy of religion might have created an irreducibly complex mousetrap-system by restricting the understanding of "religion" to belief in a supernatural being supposed by classical theism and its variants. I suspect that the discourse as it currently stands would cease to function were one to remove contents related to "belief in classical theism" from the current contents of introductory textbooks and journals dedicated to the specialization. When a scholarly discourse takes on the nature of an irreducibly complex system, it has either achieved a high degree of elegant refinement or given way to a fundamental critical weakness. I will suggest that in the case of philosophy of religion, it is the latter. Such a discourse is, hence, incapable of mashups.

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[2] Harold Cronk, *God's Not Dead*, Film. Directed by Harold Cronk (2014; Peabody, MA: Pure Flix).
[3] Michael J. Behe, "Intelligent Design as an Alternative Explanation for the Existence of Biomolecular Machines," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* (Dec 1, 1998), 567.

An experiment can be performed to test whether the discourse of philosophy of religion is irreducibly complex by reviewing the most relevant and popular introductory textbooks to the philosophy of religion.[4] Upon removing theism and topics directly related theism from their contents, these contemporary textbooks, in nearly all cases, effectively cease to function.[5] As noted by Brian Rennie,[6] the topics within these textbooks are concerned either directly with or related to classical theism.[7] .Something of a "mousetrap problem" emerges for the philosophy of religion discourse, based on this review of introductory textbooks.

A similar experiment may be performed with the English-language journals that contain contemporary scholarship on the philosophy of religion. The discourse that emerges from these journals has a theism-centric orientation, too. A 1995 review article on the contents of the *International Journal of Philosophy of Religion*

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[4] For example, and in no particular order: Brian Davies, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford University Press, 2004), Michael J. Murray and Michael C. Rea, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), William L. Rowe, *Philosophy of Religion: an Introduction* (Wadsworth, 2006), Michael Peterson, William Hasker, Bruce Reichenbach and David Basinger, *Reason and Religious Belief: an Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford University Press, 2002), Linda Zagzebski, *The Philosophy of Religion: an Historical Introduction* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2007), Keith E. Yandell, *Philosophy of Religion: a Contemporary Introduction* (Routledge, 1999), James Kellenberger, *Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (Pearson, 2006), Roy Jackson, *The God of Philosophy: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion,* 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2014), Graham Oppy, *Reinventing Philosophy of Religion: an Opinionated Introduction* (Palgrave, 2014), Stuart Brown, *Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction with Readings* (Routledge, 2014), Beverly Clack and Brian R. Clack, *Philosophy of Religion: A Critical Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Polity, 2014).

[5] Those textbooks which are not completely emptied by this experiment include considerations religious diversity, which is usually posed as the grounds for posing a problem to be solved by such approaches as exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. Clack and Clack's textbook diverge from the typical philosophy of religion syllabus by adding a section on "philosophy of religion in an age of terror," where religious belief is considered in light of terrorism and a consideration of humanism. There are textbooks with a wider scope of inquiry, but Gary Kessler (*Philosophy of Religion: Toward a Global Perspective*, Wadsworth, 1998) and Steven Phillips and Robert Solomon (*Philosophy of Religion: A Global Approach*, Harcout Brace, 1996) seem to be out of print. These authors provide a wide range of sources and accessible considerations of key issues in philosophy of religion. Andrew Eshleman (*Readings in Philosophy of Religion: East Meets West*, Blackwell, 2008) edits an impressive sourcebook that provides readings from philosophers of religion from around the world. Arvind Sharma's series over the last 30 years has been the most impressive attempt to bring a global perspective to the philosophy of religion Sikh (*The Philosophy of Religion: A Sikh Perspective,* Rupa and Co., 2007), Primal (*A Primal Perspective on the Philosophy of Religion*, Springer, 2006), Jaina (*A Jaina Perspective on the Philosophy of Religion*, Motilal Banarasidass Publishers, 2001), Buddhist (*The Philosophy of Religion: A Buddhist Perspective*, Oxford, 1995), Advaita Vedanta (*The Philosophy of Religion and Adviaita Vedanta: A Comparative Study in Religion and Reason*, Penn State University Press, 1994) and Hindu (*A Hindu Perspective on the Philosophy of Religion*, Palgrave Macmillan, 1990) perspectives on the philosophy of religion.

[6] Bryan Rennie, "The History (and Philosophy) of Religions," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 41/1 (2012), 28.

[7] For example, and in no particular order: Concepts of god, (theistic) attributes of God, cosmological arguments, design arguments, ontological arguments, experience and god, religion and mystical experience, talking about god, divine simplicity, omnipotence and omniscience, god and evil, miracles, morality and religion, life after death, the triune and incarnate nature of God, faith and rationality, religion and belief, the problem of evil, predestination, divine foreknowledge and human freedom, theistic arguments, anti-theistic arguments, religion and science, mind, body and immortality, defining religion, defining the philosophy of religion, religious language (namely, how to speak meaningfully about the theistic God), and the new atheism.

since its first issue in 1970, found that the contents remained fixed upon topics related to theism.[8] The results of this experiment are almost identically confirmed by reviewing the three most recent available issues (Volume 76),[9] where there appears only one article unrelated to theism.[10] The previous volume (75) provides a similar situation, where, out of three issues and 14 articles, all deal with topics derivative of or directly related to theism. The trend continues in the earlier issues.[11] The experiment could likely be reproduced with similar results in journals such as *Faith and Philosophy*.[12]

There are several objections to this argument about the narrow scope of philosophy of religion that can be raised at this point. I will turn to objections regarding the nature of inquiry within the philosophy of religion at a later point. An objection to be dealt with immediately, however, is that the irreducibly-complex-mousetrap charge misses its mark. Perhaps the discourse overwhelmingly focuses on "religion" as the belief in classical theism or its variants in the same way that the specialization of quantum mechanics studies matter and energy microscopically, since functions of matter at that level are completely different from macroscopic objects studied within the discipline of physics. On the grounds of that objection, however, the specialized inquiry into topics related to theism and its variants might be due to a category distinction. This is not the case for the category of "religion," however. Following the reasoning of this objection, as a specialization within philosophy, the discourse is more aptly categorized along the lines of the "philosophy of theism and its variants." In such a case, there would be presumption of greater internal coherence as well as greater external coherence comparative to other "philosophy of…" specializations. Was this the case, the irreducibly-complex-

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[8] Robert Cummings Neville, "Religions, Philosophies, and Philosophy of Religion," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 38 (1995), 168.

[9] The three issues contain articles on evolution and theism, negative theology, theistic grounding of human rights, resurrection, heaven, sin, theism, the Trinity, the creation of freedom, Christ's atonement, divine hiddenness, creationism, God's existence (Anselm), divine grace, divine thoughts, phenomenological theology, and (Christian) religion and science.

[10] Max Baker-Hytch offers a critique of religious beliefs on the grounds of cultural contingency, "Religious Diversity and Epistemic Luck" (76/2, 171-191).

[11] Very few articles actucally deviate from concentrating upon theism or topics directly related to theism. A review of the contents provides these few examples of such deviations: In 74/2, (2013) there appears Mikel Burley's "Retributive Karma and the Problem of Blaming the Victim" (149-165). In 74/1 (2013), there appear three articles on disagreement as it applies to the "(religious) skeptic" (Tomas Bogardus, "Disagreeing with the (Religious) Skeptic" (5-17); Dennis Potter "Religious Disagreement: Internal and External" (21-31); David M. Holley "Religious Disagreements and Epistemic Rationality" (33-48)). In 72/2 (2011), Eric Steinhart discusses the metaphysical attractiveness of "ordinal polytheism" in "On the Number of Gods" (75-83). And in 71/3 (2010), Fred Dallmyr considers the works of Charles Taylor and Raimon Panikkar regarding modernity and secularism in "A Secular Age? Reflections on Taylor and Panikkar" (189-204).

[12] Published book series also demonstrate the existence of the mousetrap. Continuum's *Key Thinkers* series includes a volume on philosophy of religion. This book's chapters deal exclusively with the conception of theism. The introduction does not seem to offer any critical apology for this situation, instead an aspiration to a non-existent widespread applicability of the entries is implied: "Several of the historical religions of the world - think of Judaism, for example, or Christianity - are purported cases of revealed religion" (Jordan 2011, 4). Series editor Jonathan L. Kvanvig introduces each of the three new Oxford University Press volumes on philosophy of religion by stating that "[t]he time is thus ripe for a non-sectarian and non-partisan series." Kvanvig's words ring true in relative comparison with the Press's other series on Philosophical Theology; but in 34 entries, only Tomis Kapitan's essay on "Evaluating Religion" (Vol. 2, 80-104) deals with a topic without reference to theism.

mousetrap charge would miss its mark.

For example, a review of Rutgers University's "Philosophy Major Booklet"[13] describes the specializations in the philosophy of mind, science, law, art, and religion. Philosophy of mind does not study only one sort of mind and its variants, nor does the philosophy of law study one kind of law and its variants, nor does the philosophy of art study only one sort of art and its variants. Were the discourse in the philosophy of law almost singularly focused on feudalism or its variants, it would also introduce a "mousetrap problem" into its discourse. For example, therein, we might note that a legitimate question would be why not to include Asian feudalism and perhaps democracy? Or, were the discourse in the philosophy of art focused almost singularly upon Sumerian sculpture, it too would introduce a "mousetrap problem." In this case, it would be reasonable to wonder why the discourse would not consider the Deccan sculpture from ancient South Asia or the works of the Dutch Masters. One way for the philosophy of religion discourse to avoid "mousetrapping" itself would be to transform its understanding of "religion" and the correlative limits of scope for inquiry. Then, and I suggest only then, may there be substantive mashups with other human sciences such as religious studies.

Interactions between analytic and continental philosophy of religion, generally speaking, are unlikely, on their own, to create substantive mashups that save English-language philosophy of religion from mousetrapping itself. The focus on topics of classical theism or its variants does not put the practice of English-language philosophy of religion at sufficiently severe odds with the scope of inquiry set by most continental philosophy of religion. While continental philosophers of religion do not always concern themselves directly with exactly the same data, their orbit does not stray far from classical theism. Further, although continental philosophers neither present a similarly systematic program of investigation and sub-specializations, nor filter their discourses to exclude social, historical, and political analyses, their discourses nevertheless share a nearly exclusive treatment of conceptions and understandings related to variations on theism. For example, discussions of current political issues might focus on the legacy of Carl Schmitt and the theological embeddedness of European politics;[14] but those politics are for the most part concerned with monotheistic tropes, memes, topics, and themes. Moreover, even though Heidegger, for example, plays a prominent role in the thought of so many continental philosophers,[15] and recognizing that Heideggerian emphases do not make their way with regularity into analytic philosophy of religion discourse,

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[13] http://www.philosophy.rutgers.edu/program-description

[14] See Carl Schmitt's seminal works on the topic: *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (Cambridge University Press, 1985); as well as *The Concept of the Political* (Rutgers University Press, 1976). See also, Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law," in *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice,* eds. Drucilla Cornell, Michel Rosenfeld, and David Gray Carlson (Routledge, 1992), 3-67; *Politics of Friendship* (Verso, 1997); *Rogues* (Stanford University Press, 2005); *Sovereignties in Question* (Fordham University Press, 2005); as well as Giorgio Agamben's extensive treatments of Schmitt and political theology in *Homo Sacer* (Stanford University Press, 1998); *Potentialities* (Stanford University Press, 1999); and *State of Exception* (University of Chicago Press, 2005). In a forthcoming work, I use these and other texts to analyze what politics are ascribed and assumed by the English-language philosophy of religion's discourse on the problem of evil.

[15] E.g. Jacques Derrida, Emmanuel Lévinas, Phillipe Lacoue-Labarthe, Hent de Vries, Gianni Vattimo, Michel Henry, Jean-Luc Marion, and Peter Jonkers.

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these Heideggerian philosophers tend to discuss "religion" with almost exclusive reference to Christianity. As notable exceptions, Judaism appears at certain critical junctures in the work of such phenomenologists as Emmanuel Lévinas and Jacques Derrida, and Islam is sometimes set within discussions of contemporary political issues by philosophers such as Derrida, Hent de Vries and Giorgio Agamben.

Mashups between analytic and continental philosophy of religion would become substantive only when used as a tool to transform the scope of the discourse more broadly. For example, such mashups might help to demonstrate that "belief," where "religion" is concerned, is not necessarily a matter of individual choice.[16] Such productive work would also enable mashups between philosophy and other continentally oriented human science disciplines. A productive endeavor, indeed, would be a mashup that entails a cross-disciplinary approach to continental philosophy of religion. Doing so would require a substantive engagement with resources not typically engaged by the philosophy of religion, however (e.g. using Derrida's extensive reading in the history of European philosophy in several languages across several disciplines: in particular literary theory, sociology, anthropology, communications, and classical and modern languages).

Currently, I find that continental approaches merely accessorize philosophy of religion, or they provide a means for new scholars to distinguish their work from the already well-worn paths.[17] And, despite Clack and Clack's inclusion of politics in their chapter on "philosophy of religion in a time of terror,"[18] these considerations of emerging scholarship do not make their way to introductory textbooks. All of this occurs under very watchful eyes, and only when classical theism is only a few analytic steps away.[19]

The narrow scope of philosophy of religion also becomes problematic when considerations are given to what is reasonably expected from any discourse that is explicitly said to be "of religion." Mashups between philosophy of religion and cutting-edge work in religious studies, for example, are unlikely without a transformation in the scope of philosophy of religion. The critical religious studies discourse, of which McCutcheon's work is a noteworthy example,[20]

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[16] See the analytic work of Charles Taylor's "The Politics of Recognition," in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton University Press, 1994), 25-73; see also the work of Jean-François Bayart on identity (*The Illusion of Cultural Identity*, University of Chicago Press, 2005) or Mikhail Bakhtin on dialogue (Carolyn Emerson, ed., *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, University of Texas Press, 1986).

[17] For example, over 4,237 scholarly writings were produced between l960 and l991 on the problem of evil, according to Barry L. Whitney in *Theodicy: An Annotated Bibliography on the Problem of Evil, 1960 - 1991*, 2nd ed. (Bowling Green, OH : Philosophy Documentation Center, Bowling Green State University, 1998).

[18] To which Derrida could readily be applied, see "Autoimmunity : Real and Symbolic Suicides," trans, P.-A. & M. Nass, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror,* ed. Giovanna Borradori, (University of Chicago Press, 2003) 85-136.

[19] See James K.A. Smith, "Continental Philosophy of Religion: Prescriptions for a Healthy Subdiscipline," *Faith and Philosophy*, 26 (2009) 440-448.

[20] For a concise introduction to the critical approach to religious studies, see Craig Martin's *A Critical Introduction to the Study of Religion* (Routledge, 2014), or review the works of the authors listed in *Guide to the Study of Religion,* (eds. Russell McCutcheon and Willi Braun, (Bloomsbury Academic, 2000)), *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (ed. Mark C. Taylor (University of Chicago, 1998)), and *Religious Experience: a Reader* (eds., Craig Martin and Russell

sustains a self-reflexive critical investigation of how taxons such as 'religion' are used for the purposes of social formation. Those who lack scholarly acumen, such as most students within introductory courses, may reasonably expect that a discourse whose title is "of religion" should be able to speak relevantly about whatever forms their prior knowledge associates with the taxon 'religion'. Their non-academic expectation is not unlike the way that philosophical specializations in law, art, science, and mind are expected to apply to whatever variety of legal systems, art forms, practices of science, and minds do furnish the actual world. Indeed, sometimes philosophers in those specializations consider counterfactual forms that exist in possible worlds. Due to the restriction in scope, it is unlikely that the current discourse in philosophy of religion can speak relevantly to the various forms of "religion" circulating in the actual world.

Importantly, my concern, here, is not to understand what differentiates analytic and continental philosophy of religion and how these two discourses may be bridged,[21] nor is it that continental philosophy of religion, as its current discourse stands, offers a corrective to analytic approaches.[22] My interest is more specifically focused upon what I perceive to be a too narrow scope for the philosophy of religion. Even with the sub-fields and specializations within analytic philosophy of religion, the distribution of labor ranges over a very narrow scope of what could possibly provide legitimate data for analysis.

My proposed corrective to this problem of scope is not simply to find a "bigger tent."[23] The big tent approach arises from the fact that, "there is a growing recognition of the importance of the structure and content of actual religious traditions, both Western and non-Western."[24] Non-scholarly onlookers, ranging from students and university administrators to granting agencies and governments, may express the wish that an effort be made to "broaden philosophy of religion at an introductory level... to reflect a broadening that is taking place as we humans begin to realize that we belong to a global civilization."[25] The current discourse most often functions conversely to this impulse – whose merits should, albeit, be reconsidered – by taking religious diversity as a problem in need of a philosophical solution.

McCutcheon, Routledge, 2014).

[21] That issue was neatly summarized by Nick Trakakis in "Meta-Philosophy of Religion," *Ars Disputandi* (2007), http://www.ArsDisputandi.org.

[22] I think John Caputo's claim is incorrect: "The talk about God and religion in contemporary continental philosophy bears almost no resemblance to what passes for traditional 'philosophy of religion.' The latter has typically concerned itself with offering proofs for the immortality of the soul and for the existence of God. . . . This tradition, which goes back to the scholastic debates of the high middle ages, is largely perpetuated today in the works of contemporary Anglo-American philosophers, who offer the old wine of metaphysical theology in the new bottles of analytic philosophy. . . . We on the continental side of this divide have sworn off that sort of thing" (*The Religious* (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 1999), 2). At least in the case of his own work, Caputo has not substantially sworn his work very far from the orbit of "God" as an alternative variant to theism. A case in point is his book *The Weakness of God: a Theology of the Event,* (Minneapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006).

[23] "But such a narrow and monolithic construal of the field is debilitating for the conversation. Continental philosophers of religion should seek to encourage a bigger tent and foster a genuine pluralism within the field" (Smith 2009, 447-8).

[24] Frank Reynolds, "Introduction," *Myth and Philosophy*, eds. Frank Reynolds and David Tracy. (Albany, NY: State of New York University Press, 1990), 1

[25] Steven Phillips and Robert Solomon, *Philosophy of Religion: A Global Approach* (Forth Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1996), 1.

Nonetheless, the philosophy of religion discourse tends to approach religious diversity in a manner that invariably works its way to classical theism, a variant of such theism, or to an outright dismissal of all "religion." The impulse towards this approach hearkens back to the continental beginnings of *Religionswissenschaft*, which originally consisted of the history of religion, comparative religion, and philosophy of religion.[26] Indeed, as William Wainwright explains,

> The expression "philosophy of religion" did not come into general use until the nineteenth century, when it was employed to refer to the articulation and criticism of humanity's religious consciousness and its cultural expressions in thought, language, feeling, and practice [...] The most salient feature of this sort of philosophy of religion is its attempts to establish truths about God or the Absolute on the basis of unaided reason.[27]

News about the early Orientalist discoveries of Asian religions partly inspired Kant's critique of religion at the limits of reason and such news definitely provided substance for Hegel's proposal on Spirit in his lectures on the philosophy of religion. David Hume, alternatively, only needed variety of belief among Christians to construe "religion" as something not worthy of granting belief in *The Natural History of Religion*.

As inheritors of these figures, the contemporary philosophy of religion discourse treats the variety and diversity of religious beliefs as a contradiction in need of a solution. A set is created from a cursory overview of some distilled belief propositions about ultimate reality that are assumed to represent "religion."[28] The principle of noncontradiction is then applied with the correlative demand that a unified truth must obtain within the set. The reductive abstractions by which that set was arrived at help to rule out considerations beyond theism, not to mention critical reflection on the epistemological presumptions about how the propositions were arrived at and the ontological presumptions on the existence of something called "religion," or, the methodological presumptions about 'religion' as a taxon philosophically defensible as a second-order philosophical term. Whatever the solution to the "problem" of religious diversity, these legitimate concerns do not arise in mainstream philosophy of religion. Instead, particularly within introductory textbooks, a well-worn route is followed either towards theism or through classical theism in route to a unifying principle of non-religion or pan-religious unity.[29]

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[26] Tomoku Masuzawa, "Origin," in *Guide to the Study of Religion*, eds. Willi Braun and Russell McCutcheon (New York: Cassell, 2000), 215.

[27] William J. Wainwright, "Introduction," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Philosophy of Religion* (New York : Oxford University Press, 2007), 3.

[28] "Insofar as philosophy of religion assumes that what is essential is creeds (like those compiled by Jaroslav Pelikan), or theology, then they misunderstand what religion is. When they do this, philosophers disembody and deracinate religious beliefs from the practices, communities, and institutions that make up lived religion" in Kevin Schilbrack, "New Directions for Philosophy of Religion: Four Proposals," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 41/1 (2012), 49.

[29] Namely, some sort of exclusivism. Be it for one so-called religion or the denial of all beliefs associable with religion, or, be it the underlying unity hypotheses that underlie positions ranging from John Hick or Mark Heim, to Helena Blavatsky and the theosophical society

These putatively reasonable procedures enable the philosophy of religion discourse to mask concerns about the inheritance of colonialism and orientalism when a "bigger tent" is raised for consideration. These concerns and their pertinent questions for productive scholarly transformation are rarely asked within the philosophy of religion discourse. An exception, here, is Andrew B. Irvine and Purushottama Bilimoria's edited volume *Postcolonial Philosophy of Religion*,[30] wherein the challenge of decolonizing the philosophy of religion is posed. Such decolonizing could be a vibrant and constructive task to open new venues of inquiry: (1) to address the largely Eurocentric biases that affect the analyses done by philosophers of religion, and (2) to consider what constructive problems emerge in a decolonized philosophy of religion discourse. Although these inquiries would still include treatments of Christian traditions, elsewhere, Bilimoria asks: "what would an *after*-orientalist, postcolonial, gendered, and cross-cultural *Critique* look like if it were brought to bear on the comparative philosophy of religion in just the way in which this trend has triggered radical rethinking within the fields of comparative literature and history [...] where it concerns "writing about the other"?"[31] This is precisely the line of inquiry that could productively transform philosophy of religion such that it could be open to substantive mashups that are currently precluded by the existence of the "mousetrap problem."

Although comparative philosophy of religion does play a preparatory role in opening up the overall discourse of philosophy of religion to substantive mashups, further questions should be asked. For example, how may earlier arguments from English-language philosophy of religion be retooled and tested by using data other than theism and its variants? Doing so would open the way for scholarly and methodologically sound innovations to break open the scope of the discourse. Arvind Sharma stands out in his effort to think through "the philosophy of religion in…" reference to religions from South Asia and elsewhere.[32] His approach is to locate comparative topics and themes that correlate to the concepts and categories found within the philosophy of religion discourse. His work is useful to generate a comparative perspective, and it validates the claim that the problems considered by the current discourse are not exclusive to (Western) theism and its variants. The revelations contained within Sharma's work also helpfully demonstrate the exclusive focus on theistic topics as "something of an embarrassment" in an era historically aware of colonialism, imperialism, Eurocentrism, and empire.[33] Though promising, there are limits to the big tent approach of which Sharma's work is the epitome. If the aim is simply to deploy other first-order taxons in doing the work of the philosophy of religion or merely to proceed by unilaterally grafting theism-based categories onto data from other "religious" traditions, then the big tent approach does little to enable

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[30] Andrew B. Irvine and Purushottama Bilimoria, eds., *Postcolonial Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Springer, 2009).

[31] Purushottama Bilimoria, "What Is the "Subaltern" of the Comparative Philosophy of Religion?" *Philosophy East and West*, 53/3 (2003), 243.

[32] There are single-volume projects by Andrew Eshleman, *Readings on the Philosophy of Religion: East Meets West*, (Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), Michael C. Brannigan, *The Philosophies of India, China, and Japan,* 2nd ed. (Wadsworth, 2000), Gary E. Kessler, *Philosophy of Religion: Toward a Global Perspective*, (Cengage Learning, 1999), Phillips (1996), and Daniel Bonnevac and William Boon, *Beyond the Western Tradition: Readings in Moral and Political Philosophy*, Mayfield Publishing, 1992).

[33] Neville, 165.

substantive mashups with other disciplines. The important conclusion that works such as Sharma's should instead reveal is that taxons like 'religion' and even 'theism' have their own historical specificity. Accordingly, the use of these terms should be subjected to critical scrutiny. They are, after all, culturally and historically specific and attending to that specificity is crucial to any critical consideration of them.

Viable openings for substantive mashups, I think, appear upon questioning the certainty of the discourse in philosophy of religion such that it would no longer be philosophically acceptable to take for granted "belief in theism" or its variants as what counts as "religion." In other words, it would involve revisiting the Humean legacy of the specialization itself and the assumptions implied therein. In his essay "Religion, Religious, Religions," the religious studies scholar J.Z. Smith notes how, in *The Natural History of Religion*, Hume defines "religion" as "the belief of invisible, intelligent power."[34] Even given the problematically narrow construal of "religion," Smith finds a lesson to arise from Hume's argument: if Hume is right about "religion," then it can be neither universal nor natural. Smith rightly realizes that belief in an invisible, intelligent power is too easily altered by the accidents of history, geography, society, culture, and so on. Hume, himself, notes how such beliefs vary not only from nation to nation, but also from one person to the next. Outside the discourse of philosophy of religion, there is a host of scholarly evidence that these degrees of variance continue to proliferate even today.[35] Along with Hume, Smith suggests that scholars conclude "[t]here may well be a primary and valid human experience that gives rise to the secondary religious interpretation, but the truth of the experience is no guarantee of the validity of the interpretation."[36] The point here is that decolonizing the discourse on the philosophy of religion would be to face the challenges of realizing, along with Hume, that religion – not to mention theism and its variants – "is not a native term; it is a term created by scholars for their intellectual purposes and therefore is theirs to define. It is a second-order generic concept that plays the same role in establishing a disciplinary horizon that a concept such as 'language' plays in linguistics or 'culture' plays in anthropology."[37]

Smith's discussion of Hume demonstrates how to render questionable another defense for maintaining the *status quo* of the limited scope of inquiry within the current discourse in the philosophy of religion. Namely, that the present method and approach in the discourse *just happens* to revolve around topics related to theism or its variants. Although most introductory textbooks do not usually discuss these limits, Chad Meister nicely summarizes why his textbook almost exclusively deals with arguments about theism. Firstly, he appeals to the history of the field, and secondly, to the majority of recent and accessible scholarly work focused on debates concerning monotheistic religious arguments.[38] It may be argued that the limited scope, on these grounds, results from the exercise of a responsible and methodical program of investigation. Simply by virtue of

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[34] Jonathan Z. Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 273.

[35] For example, see Mark Juergensmeyer's edited volume, *Oxford Handbook to Global Religions* (New York : Oxford University Press, 2006).

[36] J.Z. Smith, 274.

[37] *Ibid.*, 281-2.

[38] Chad Meister, *Introducing Philosophy of Religion*, (New York: Routledge, 2009), 7-8.

training others in the specialization, philosophers of religion must rely upon the most ready-to-hand means available. The state of the field is what it is, and this current state is that to which emerging scholars should pay attention.[39] The process of producing a rigorous series of inquiries thereby requires original contributions that take account of earlier, relevant findings and indeed advance those particular findings. The effect explained here is reproduced in the journals, societies, meetings and the market demand for publications in the field. Scholars with a demonstrated expertise in the philosophy of religion as it stands create a basis of reference for the furtherance and reproduction of the discourse as it stands. Unfortunately, then, the responsible limits of inquiry, such as they happen to be, serve to limit its scope to topics about theism and its variants.

Two problematic points arise relative to this defense of the *status quo* in the philosophy of religion. On the one hand, the argument for the happenstance of these responsible limits is a "best of all possible worlds"-type theodicy.[40] Namely, this discourse happens to be the only discourse, and so it must be the best one. Such reasoning, as in the case of many theodicies, result from the prior commitments of whoever espouses the "best of all possible X" position. Surely, though, the limited scope of the field should be determined by critical scholarship and not merely curatorial trusteeship. On the other hand, we should ask whether there is warrant for the *status quo* of this discourse. The historically-critical awareness and post-colonial questioning above strongly suggest a negative answer to this question. The current "border controls"[41] for what scholarship currently makes its way into the discourse do not have adequate warrant when reviewed in the attempt to find possibilities for unexplored mashups.

Ultimately, then, I conclude that in order for there to be substantive mashups between the philosophy of religion and other disciplines, philosophy of religion itself requires a Copernican transformation that displaces classical theism and its constellation of variants from its center. I have also indicated that there should be a critical re-evaluation of the terminology utilized by philosophy of religion discourses and the scope of the debates within those discourses. By considering what has been left unthought-of, but might be productively explored via critical and post-colonial reviews of the philosophy of religion discourse, constructive openings for mashups become possible. Such work is, nonetheless, very much a philosophical task. Despite this critical assessment, I do believe that there is warrant for a thoroughgoing project from which there would emerge enlivened discourses with fresh scholarship exploring the potential for substantive mashups between philosophy of religion and the human sciences.

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[39] Morny Joy nicely summarizes the insularity of the discourse when she cites Grace Janzten's remark in her review of the philosophy of religion in an edited volume on new approaches to religion: "The same topics come up with predictable regularity: as Brian Davies says, philosophy of religion is about what philosophers of religion usually do!" ("Philosophy and Religion," in *New Approaches to the Study of Religion,* Vol. 1. eds. Peter Antes, Armin W. Geertz, and Randi R. Warne, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 189.

[40] To adapt the approach of Peter van Inwagen, "if the defender of [a discourse almost exclusively dedicated to] theism knew of a story that accounted for [it]… he would employ it as a theodicy." (Peter van Inwagen, "The Problem of Evil, Air and Silence," in *The Evidential Argument from Evil,* ed., Daniel Howard-Snyder (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996) 156.

[41] See Richard King, "Philosophy of Religion as Border Control: Globalization and the Decolonization of the "Love of Wisdom" (philosophia)," in *Postcolonial Philosophy of Religion*, eds., Andrew B. Irvine and Purushottama Bilimoria, (New York: Springer, 2009), 35-53.

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