Chapter 1

The Full Task of Philosophy of Religion

i. What is "Traditional Philosophy of Religion"?

In this book, I am arguing that philosophy of religion should expand the traditional understanding of its task and take a broader view. Here at the beginning, however, I want to put on the table what my alternative is an alternative *to*. "Traditional philosophy of religion" defines its task in terms of the rationality of theism and this is the primary focus found in most philosophy of religion journals, textbooks, and courses.[1] As I mentioned in the preface, my critique of traditional philosophy of religion is that it is it narrow, intellectualist, and insular. Despite that critique, I am not arguing that traditional philosophy of religion is not a rich and multifaceted discipline. Here is one way that one can organize the variety of the central debates in the traditional approach. (I use a flowchart to map these debates, and it may help to follow that chart in Figure 1.1)

First, the most basic division in the field comes between those theists who argue that there exists a being worthy of worship and those who argue that there does not (or that, if there does, we cannot know it). Some of the atheist or naturalist philosophers in this latter camp hold that belief in a God of perfect power and benevolence cannot be reconciled with experiences of gratuitous evil. They argue either that, given those painful and demoralizing experiences, the claim that a benevolent God is decisively disproven
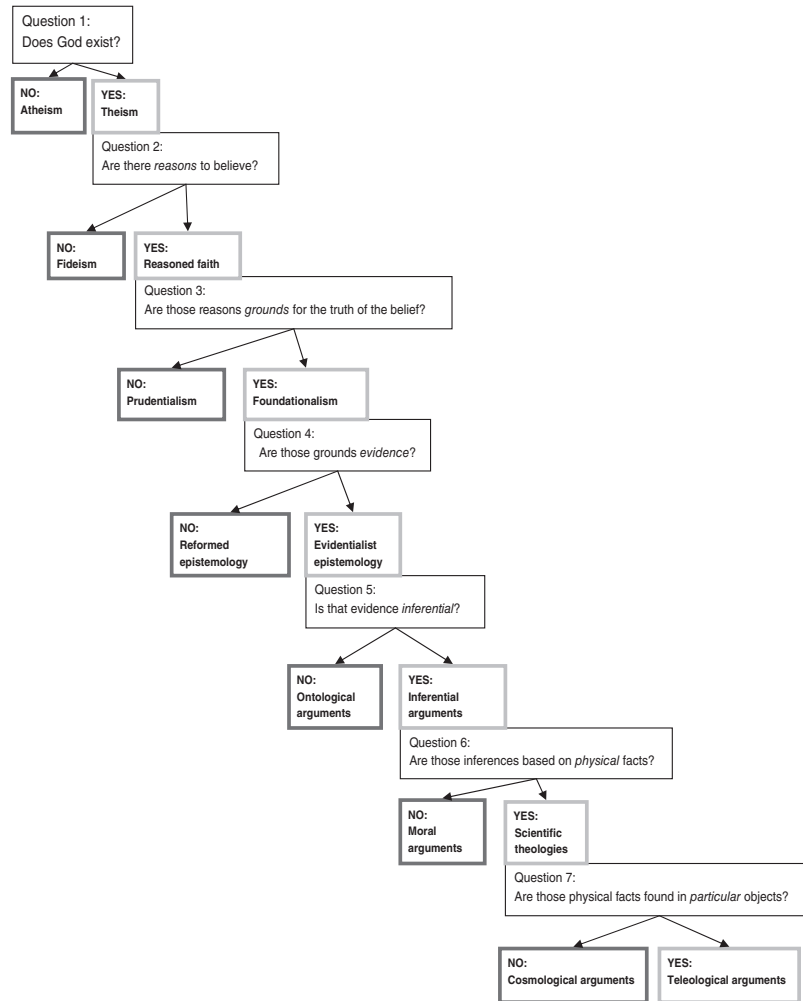
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Figure 1.1   Traditional Philosophy of Religion: A Flow Chart.

or at least that, given the amount of suffering in the world, the truth of the claim is unlikely. Other naturalists argue that we cannot make sense of the unusual idea of a being who knows the future or that is all-powerful or that exists necessarily. Others in this camp argue that the lack of a clear revelation or experience of God—what is sometimes called "divine hiddenness"—justifies skepticism about God's existence. Such views have been popularized

in bestselling books by the so-called New Atheists, and some atheist or naturalist philosophers of religion have developed their positions with great sophistication.

By contrast, the philosophers of religion who are theists hold that there does exist a being worthy of worship. I divide the theistic philosophers into two camps. The first maintains that the faith that God exists is the kind of commitment that can be supported by reasons, reasons intelligible to those who do not yet share that commitment. Let's call this commitment: reasoned faith. I will come back to this group. The other group of theists holds that faith in God, properly understood, is not the kind of commitment that can be supported by such reasons. These theists are persuaded, for example, by Søren Kierkegaard's account of faith as a passionate and subjective commitment, or by Richard Braithwaite's account of faith as an attitude about one's values and not about facts, or by Ludwig Wittgenstein's account of faith as drawing its sense from a set of ungrounded practices or form of life. Philosophers of religion in this camp hold that there are no criteria by which faith can be justified that are not internal to that commitment or way of looking at the world. Call these theists: fideists. As an illustration of fideism, consider the philosophers of religion who are inspired by Wittgenstein's observations about religion when he says, "The point [of belief in God] is that if there were evidence, this would in fact destroy the whole business. Anything that I would normally call evidence wouldn't in the slightest influence me."[2] From this perspective, what religious communities teach is not a set of opinions or hypotheses or truth claims that can be compared to facts about the world, but rather ways of living and speaking. To agree with the fideists that theistic beliefs are not held on the basis of reasons is not necessarily to consider religion *un*reasonable. As Wittgenstein says, those who believe in God "don't treat this as a matter of reasonability." Fideists therefore argue that one misinterprets theistic beliefs if one thinks that they are either warranted or unwarranted, and the task of philosophy of religion for those in this camp is not to assess the warrant or justification for belief in God. The task, instead, is to clarify what it means to live and speak as a believer.

Let me now return to those theists who do seek to marshal a reasoned faith. I also subdivide these philosophers of religion into two camps: on the one hand, there are those who argue that it is reasonable to believe in God because, they argue, one can provide some grounds that belief in God is true. Call these theists: foundationalists. I will come back to this group of philosophers in a moment. The other group of theists argues that although the belief that God exists, properly understood, is not the kind of belief that

one can prove true, or even probable, theism can nevertheless be reasonable. They make a prudential case that it is good to believe or that one ought to believe that God exists. Theism might be reasonable simply because, as Blaise Pascal famously argues, given the eternal stakes at play, it is in one's interest to believe. (As a billboard near my house similarly suggests: "If you are living as if God does not exist, you had better be right," and the bottom of the billboard is covered with flames.) William James also proposes a way of believing reasonably without grounds. In a trenchant analogy, he says: if a mountain climber becomes stuck on a precipice and, to get back home, she needs to make a jump that she has never made before and cannot prove that she can make, it is still reasonable for her to believe that she can (and must!) make the jump, and it is still reasonable for her to attempt the jump, rather than staying stuck on the mountain.[3] Such arguments don't offer grounds that theism is true, though they do offer reasons to believe it.

The foundationalists who argue that there are grounds for the belief that God exists I divide based on whether they hold that the grounds are direct or indirect. One example of direct grounds for belief is perception. To take an example, in a case when I am having a face to face talk with my brother, I would believe the proposition *this is my brother*, and I would be warranted in doing so, but we would not say that I believe because I have evidence or clues from which I was able to infer that this is my brother. If someone asked me afterwards, "How did you know that it was your brother you were talking to?," I could answer, "Because he was right there." My reason for belief is not indirect or via any other belief. Analogously, these theistic philosophers argue that those who believe in God do not do so because they have evidence or clues from which they are able to infer that God exists. Rather, they believe that God exists, and they do so justifiably, because they simply perceive God's presence. They point out that, in fact, we hold many beliefs in this direct way: the belief that *the world is more than five minutes old* and the belief that *other people are not robots* are not beliefs that we base on careful examination of the evidence. These philosophers argue that the theistic belief in God, like the memory belief that I had a grapefruit for breakfast or the perceptual belief that there is a cup in front of me right now, is grounded directly. It is a belief on which other beliefs can then come to be based. In this way, theism can structure the practices and values that make up one's life, but it is based in a foundational way on direct experience and not on other beliefs that are more basic.

Other theistic philosophers hold that apart from these claims of perceiving God directly, there is indirect evidence that God exists. Call this latter group:

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evidentialists. When we speak of "evidence," we typically mean something that points to a reality that is not present. For example, a fingerprint can be evidence left by the perpetrator or smoke from a window can be evidence that there is a fire inside. One infers from the evidence a cause that could have brought it about, and so evidence like this can be called inferential evidence. But some evidentialists argue that God is such a distinctive reality that God's existence can be demonstrated with evidence that is not inferential. They argue that if God is properly understood as a reality that is worthy of worship, a reality that is perfect, then God's mode of existence by definition cannot be limited or weak or contingent or dependent. If it is God about whom we are speaking, then we cannot be speaking about a reality that was brought into existence or a reality that might conceivably cease to exist. God therefore must exist not only in some places or some times, but always and everywhere, neither brought into existence by something else nor capable of not existing. If God by definition has every good quality, then God by definition has the quality of necessary, non-contingent existence. And if God's existence is necessary, contingent on nothing, then God exists under all conditions. And so God must exist. Though this argument is often dismissed on the grounds that one cannot simply define a reality so carefully that—poof—that reality must exist, there is no confusion in saying that a being worthy of worship would be one that exists under all conditions.

The theistic philosophers who argue for the existence of God based on inferential evidence claim that, just as smoke serves as a sign that there is a fire, there are realities in the world of human experience that point to the existence of a divine being. Some philosophers in this camp point at physical evidence that is external to the subject. More on them in a moment. Others, however, argue that the clues for God's existence are internal and non-physical. Some argue that the best evidence from which one can infer a divine reality is morality. C. S. Lewis is a philosopher who argues in this way, holding that when people look inside themselves, they find a moral law that is not a product of human imagination or social practices, "a real law which we did not invent and know that we ought to obey."[4] If the universe is the source of that law—the mailman who put that letter in our mental mailbox, to use Lewis's metaphor—then it must be or include something like a mind, at least in the sense that it gives instructions and cares about how human beings act. Immanuel Kant also uses the experience of a moral law as evidence for theism. Kant does not infer that God must be the source of the law that one finds in one's conscience. He argues, instead, that if the moral law is not incoherent, then the happiness one earns in one's life must

be proportioned to the virtue one develops. It seems painfully clear that such proportioning does not happen in this life, however, and therefore one must take as a practical hypothesis or "postulate" that God as a moral judge of the world and immortality are real.

Now consider those philosophers of religion who are theists, who hold that one can give reasons for one's faith, that these reasons serve as grounds that their beliefs are true, that the grounds are evidence, that the evidence is inferential, and that the inferences are based on facts about the physical world. These philosophers of religion argue that there are facts about the natural world from which one can infer a supernatural creator. Such arguments can be usefully distinguished into two general kinds: some of these arguments are based on *particular* objects or facts about the natural world, and others are based on facts about the *general* character of natural things. The classic example of the first strategy is William Paley's early nineteenth century argument that there are objects in the natural world whose purposeful functions can only be explained by an intelligent designer. The anatomy of the eye, for instance—including the cornea, the iris, the lens, the pupil, the chambers with their aqueous and vitreous humors, the retina, and so on, all working together to give sight to the creature—requires an explanation that the natural world alone cannot supply. Michael Behe has recently updated and strengthened this kind of argument for a supernatural designer. As complex as the anatomy of the eye is, Behe points out, it is nothing to the staggering complexity of the biochemistry of vision, the mechanisms of protein chains that respond to light by creating electrical nerve impulses. Such operations at the molecular level within the cells used to be a mystery, a "black box" to science. But now that the black box has been opened by biochemists, one can see that the mechanisms are irreducibly complex—in the crucial sense that if one part of the system were removed, the system would not function. Because they are irreducibly complex, the emergence of some parts of the natural world is inexplicable through blind chance and the gradual stages of natural selection; they therefore point to the existence of an intelligent designer.[5]

Those philosophers of religion who take up the second strategy base their arguments for God's existence not on the character of some particularly remarkable objects or states of affairs in the world, such as the eye or the apparently perfect adjustment of natural laws for intelligent life—but rather on facts about physical things in general. These are cosmological theistic arguments. One cosmological argument states that if every single physical thing is contingent, in the sense that it might not have existed, then it seems

that the same contingency equally applies to the set of all physical things. If we call this set of all physical things "the universe," then we can say that the universe as a whole is contingent and might not have existed. One might therefore legitimately wonder why anything exists at all. Why is there something rather than nothing? The only answer for that question would be some reality whose existence is not contingent—that is, a being that is different from the universe and everything in it because its existence is necessary. In another cosmological argument, theistic philosophers of religion argue that if every physical thing requires a cause, and the chain of causes stretches back through history of the cosmos, then at the beginning of time then there must be a first cause. They argue that the existence of God answers the question about the origin of the universe as a whole. For example, some theists hold that the scientific evidence that the world began roughly fifteen billion years ago in a Big Bang gives people reason to believe that the natural world must have a creator. The idea that the world has not always existed but rather began to exist a finite amount of time ago is a recent development in physics and, as William Lane Craig has pointed out, this remarkable, new scientific evidence lends support to those theists who believe that the world was created. Drawing on what is sometimes called the Kalam argument, after the Islamic philosophical theologians who first employed it, Craig argues that if everything that begins to exist is caused, and the universe began to exist (as the Big Bang theory holds), then these two truths together point to the need for a cause for the physical universe, a supernatural first cause of everything.

As one can see, the questions pursued in traditional philosophy of religion cover a very wide set of questions. Traditional philosophy of religion draws on debates in physics, biology, ethical theory, and modal logic. It also contributes to Christian theology and to Biblical studies. This fruitfulness notwithstanding, one can see that traditional philosophy of religion has focused on a relatively narrow topic: the rationality of belief in God. Even the philosophers of religion who are skeptics or atheists fit that description of the discipline.

There are some forms of philosophy of religion that do not focus on the kind of theistic and atheistic arguments that I have listed. For example, when we turn to philosophy of religion as it is practiced in non-Anglophone, Continental Europe, we find an approach quite different from the topics just listed. In Continental philosophy of religion, one does not find a focus on the characteristics that God must have or proofs for the existence of God. Instead, one finds a focus on religious experience, on the phenomenology of overflow experiences, and on overcoming ontotheology. Continental

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philosophy of religion primarily reflects on the limits of reason and on faith as a response to revelation. It is primarily concerned with the nature and limits of God-talk rather than with warrant for truth claims. Nevertheless, as one sees in John Caputo's definition of religion simply as "the love of God," Continental philosophers of religion predominantly share with analytic philosophers of religion the narrow focus on theism. In fact, as Christina Gschwandtner points out, almost all the Continental philosophers of religion from France—including Paul Ricoeur, Jean-Luc Marion, Michel Henry, Jean-Louis Chrétien, Jean-Yves Lacoste, and Emmanuel Falque—are apologists for the coherence of thought about God and for the viability of religious experience.[6] Another approach that does not pursue the theistic and atheistic arguments I listed is found in feminist philosophy of religion. Whether feminist philosophers of religion use the analytic approach or (more commonly) the Continental approach, they typically focus on the biases and distortions woven into traditional, masculine accounts of God and how these might be avoided. But the questions of theism are still usually central. Continental philosophy of religion and feminist philosophy of religion thus share a view of their task that is limited in the ways described in this chapter and to that extent they too should develop along the three axes I recommend in the rest of this chapter.

I begin this book with this enumeration of the variety of topics one finds in traditional philosophy of religion because I do not want to give the sense that traditional philosophy of religion is not already a complex and evolving discipline. As I mentioned, in one sense, the discipline is flourishing. Nevertheless, I think that the majority of Analytic, Continental, and feminist philosophers of religion operate with a narrow, intellectualist, and insular view of the task of the discipline and that therefore, as an understanding of what philosophy of religion can and should be, the traditional approach is incomplete.

ii.   The First Task of Philosophy of Religion

My critique of traditional philosophy of religion is that, despite its achievements, it operates with an inadequate understanding of the task of the discipline. To avoid narrowness, intellectualism, and insularity, philosophers of religion should understand their task as having three parts: it should exclude no religions, it should give proper recognition to the centrality of religious practice to religious communities, and it should expand its conversations

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with the other branches of philosophy and the other disciplines in religious studies. The task of philosophy of religion would then be composed of three sets of questions. Using a geometrical metaphor, one might think of each set of questions as an "axis." The first set of questions—the first "axis"—is intended to address the criticism of narrowness, and it is generated when philosophy of religion broadens its view to include the doctrines and arguments from religions globally and throughout history.

When one takes a global view of philosophy of religion, one uncovers a host of religious philosophies outside of theism. For example, the Hindu teacher Adi Śaṅkara (788–820 CE) developed what he called Non-dualist or Advaita Vedanta which taught that since the supreme reality (which he called Brahman) is infinite, it is misguided to think that Brahman is distinct from the world and is not present here, in our midst, in our minds and bodies. It is misguided to think that Brahman is not present everywhere. Śaṅkara holds that if the supreme reality cannot be distinguished from the world, then it is a mistake to imagine that Brahman is a person who has thoughts and plans and emotions. On this view, to use Śaṅkara's analogy, the supreme reality is more like an ocean of which we are but drops. Central questions for philosophers of religion to raise then are: what reasons does Śaṅkara give that this non-dualist view of the nature of things is correct? What reasons could one give? And what arguments against non-dualism were given by Śaṅkara's Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain opponents? What arguments could one give?

A second example of non-theistic religious philosophies can be drawn from Buddhism. The Japanese Soto Zen teacher Dōgen Kigen (1200–1253 CE) was responsible for the training of monks, and he taught them the classical Buddhist doctrine of dependent co-arising or origination: everything that exists is transient and impermanent. As a Mahayana Buddhist, however, Dōgen developed this doctrine in terms of emptiness, the claim that nothing that exists can exist without dependence on other realities. If Dōgen is right about emptiness, then he provides an alternative to most versions of theism. So the philosopher of religion should ask: what reasons does Dōgen give that this view of the nature of things is correct? What reasons could one give? What arguments against emptiness were given by his Buddhist, Confucian, and Shinto opponents? What arguments could one give?

These are Hindu and Buddhist examples, and there are several philosophers of religion who are working on religious philosophies from India and Japan. There are fewer, but still some, philosophers of religion working on

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Daoist and neo-Confucian religious philosophies of China and East Asia. There are almost no philosophers of religion working on African religions (despite the fact that, as described by Stephen Prothero, there may be 50 million people who practice Yoruba religion, which is to say that there are more Yoruba adherents than Jews, Sikhs, Jains, or Zoroastrians). There are next to zero philosophers of religion working on indigenous wisdom traditions of Australia, or North America, or South America. And there are next to zero working on the intellectual aspects of New Religious Movements.

What I am calling the first axis of philosophy of religion is the set of questions that are generated when one engages philosophically with the wisdom traditions that one finds all around the world that offer practices based on superempirical realities.[7] As the world shrinks, and global communication and immigration increase, philosophy of religion can play an important role in the interpretation and critical assessment of those teachings. I agree with Richard King: "engagement with the intellectual traditions of the nonwestern world has become the single most important task for the philosopher in an age of globalization."[8]

I have a friend who is a traditional philosopher of religion who agrees with this proposal in principle. He points out rightly, however, that no single philosopher of religion can master the philosophical intricacies of one religious tradition, let alone all of them. Scholarly expertise requires specialization. And so he asks: is there anything wrong from the perspective advocated in this book with specializing, as he does, solely in Christian philosophy of religion?

I have two answers. First, the proposal is not for a change in the work of any individual philosopher of religion, but rather in our understanding of the task of the discipline as a whole to which that work is meant to contribute. Insofar as philosophers of religion come to see the scope of their work as global, it may have an impact on their teaching and scholarship. But it would certainly have an impact on our understanding of what one should find in philosophy of religion journals, courses, and textbooks. It also means that my friend's department—which at present includes several philosophers of religion, all of whom specialize exclusively in Christian philosophy of religion—would see their present coverage in the discipline as one-sided and incomplete.

The second response is more critical. Many traditional philosophers of religion see their work as a defense of the truths that they find in their own religious traditions. From the perspective of this proposal, this is a legitimate goal. The flaw in their understanding of their task, however, is that they

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often assume a limited grasp of who their rivals are. Traditional philosophers of religion who are struck by the secular transformation of western states in modernity take it as their task to rebut philosophical naturalism. But to make the case for theism today requires engagement not only with late modern European challenges but also with the post-colonial return of religion. The flaw is the assumption that theism and naturalism are the only two "live" options. (Note that this choice is the first step on the flowchart of the positions in traditional philosophy of religion). Given that there are multiple religious traditions that offer philosophical defenses of their worldviews, to show the weaknesses of philosophical naturalism does not suffice to establish traditional theism, and those philosophers of religion who do want to demonstrate the superiority of their faith need to engage with rival religious philosophies. Simply put, one cannot make comparative claims about the superiority of one's position unless one actually compares. Consequently, those who want to defend their faith cannot succeed at their task if they do not take into account the full range of religious options, which is to say that they ought to agree to the proposal of this book.[9]

What should one call this alternative, more inclusive philosophy of religion? There are several proposals in the air. Some call it *comparative* philosophy of religion. This label, modeled on the comparative study of religion, gets at the idea that the object of philosophy of religion is multiple. And comparative philosophy of religion is cousin to the emerging disciplines of comparative religious ethics and comparative theology. But although comparison is an apt part of what alternative philosophy of religion involves, it is not a required part. Philosophers compare religions in order to identify what truths they teach; they do not try to identify truths in religions in order to compare them. This issue is avoided by the label *cross-cultural* philosophy of religion. That label might nevertheless also be misleading in that it may describe the western philosopher of religion who works on non-western philosophies, but it does not fit the non-western thinker who crosses cultures to operate on western religious thought.

To call it *global* philosophy of religion emphasizes the non-exclusivity of the project, though it may also suggest "globalization," the imposition of North Atlantic categories and values on the rest of the world. Others suggest *post-colonial* philosophy of religion, a label that foregrounds the resurgence of formerly colonized nations and their ability to speak as subjects. Similarly, to call it *post-secular* philosophy of religion gets at the failure of the secularization hypothesis and the resulting recognition that religious ways of living and thinking cannot be assumed to be irrational. Perhaps my favorite of the

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alternative labels is the relatively subtle: philosophy of *religions*. Adding the "s" indicates the inclusion of diverse religions. And since the word "of" can be either objective genitive or subjective genitive, this label can refer to an understanding both that religious thinkers are the object of philosophy— that is, they are what is studied philosophically—and that religious thinkers are the subjects of philosophy—that they themselves practice philosophy.

These different labels capture different emphases of this approach and one can use any of them or all of them to identify a philosophy of religion that does not exclude most of the religions of the world. Thus, one can call the view for which I am arguing in this book a post-secular, post-colonial, cross-cultural, comparative, global philosophy of religions. That said, none of the above terms is the label I prefer. The truth is that if philosophy of religion means the philosophical study of religion, then traditional philosophy of religion has simply not lived up to its name. It has become fixated on a fraction of its proper object; a more fitting name for the bulk of what one finds in philosophy of religion textbooks courses and journals would be "philosophical theology" or "philosophy of theism." To be sure, the philosophical study of theistic claims is a legitimate part of philosophy of religion. But it is a relatively narrow part and to identify the two is to confuse part with whole. Philosophy of religion properly means the philosophical study of religions in all their diversity, in all their aspects, and as a contributing part of a family of approaches in the study of religions. Thus the best name for the approach to the discipline proposed in this book is simply to reclaim the name, philosophy of religion.

iii.   The Second Task of Philosophy of Religion

In the previous section, I argued that although philosophy of religion has traditionally assumed that the subject matter of the discipline is God, the discipline should overcome that narrowness and come to understand its central task as philosophical engagement with all religious traditions, whether theistic or not. As limiting as the focus on theism has been, however, there is another assumption in traditional philosophy of religion, even less recognized, that has limited the discipline in a different way. This is the assumption that the proper objects of study by philosophers of religion are the products of religious intellectuals. Expanding the discipline to include not only the philosophies of Aquinas, Maimonides, and Averroes but also Śaṅkara and Dōgen would not change this. I therefore want to develop a view of the

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proper task of philosophy of religion in a second direction, along an axis that is, so to speak, perpendicular to the first. Here the question is: on what *aspects* of religions should philosophy of religion focus?

If the central task of philosophy of religion is philosophical engagement with all religious traditions, it is important to see that religious communities pursue and are organized around different kinds of interests. Some religious communities not only teach their path but also seek to regulate the ways in which their teachings are explicitly understood, confessed, and described by their members. They therefore produce explicit creeds, doctrines, and theologies and they use these devices to foster orthodoxy within their community, seeking unity within their own ranks. Some religious communities also seek to persuade those outside their ranks that the community's teachings are superior. In these cases, religious communities often develop a division of labor that permits the emergence of representative intellectuals or schools who then produce statements of faith, handbooks that articulate the coherence of the teachings, arguments that provide support for them, criticisms of rival views, and so on. Following Ninian Smart, we might call this aspect of religions—the creeds, doctrines, and theologies—the doctrinal dimension of religions.[10]

The doctrinal dimension of religions has received the lion's share of the attention from philosophers of religion. But the task of developing and defending religious doctrines tends to be the work of literate elites, typically from a leisured class and typically male. When traditional philosophers of religion take the task of their discipline to be the study of these writings, they limit the subject matter of philosophy of religion to a small subset of religious phenomena. As philosophers of religion enlarge the scope of their discipline along the first axis and include the teachings of traditions around the world, they will quickly see that not all religious communities give a central role to doctrines and arguments. Moreover, the interest in religious doctrines and arguments is a relatively small fraction of the lives of religious people, even in those communities that do make such issues central. Philosophers of religions should therefore move away from an exclusive focus on the intellectual work of literate elites to develop the tools necessary to study the full range of religious teachings. What do religious communities teach their members other than doctrines?

Some religious communities are not especially interested in developing and defending doctrines. What they primarily offer to their members are not arguments but rather certain feelings, emotions, and experiences that confirm the path. A nice example of how everyday religious experiences

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can be specific to a given religious community, tied to their teachings and practices and yet distinct from an interest in demonstrating the rationality of one's beliefs comes from Dennis Covington's account of the practices of a snake-handling church in Alabama. Covington describes a man whose wife had "gotten the Holy Ghost" at a service and who wanted to get it, finally, for himself. This desire for this experience is completely understood by the others in the congregation. So, a half dozen men pray over him and lay hands on him, and the man is "up and running from one end of the sanctuary to the other, now twirling, now swooning, now collapsing once again on the floor, his eyes like the eyes of a horse that smells smoke, the unknown tongue spewing from his mouth." After the service, however, as the man brushes sandwich crumbs from his lap, he admits to Covington that he had not had the experience that he had sought, that "it was a good service all right, but it sure would have been better if he'd only gotten the Holy Ghost." The goal was not reached.[11]

Philosophers of religion have not overlooked this experiential and affective dimension of religion. They have typically focused on accounts of extraordinary religious experiences, on numinous and mystical experiences, and on *mysterium tremendum* events. For most religious people, however, religious experiences are everyday events: the religious community promises, for example, a sense of release or forgiveness or equanimity, and the practices of the community provide a path to exactly that. To be sure, being able to have and properly identify the experience that a religious community offers typically depends on other teachings that they offer. For that reason, religious communities often teach that having the desired experience requires a process of training in discernment and regulation of desires. The pursuit of certain religious experiences is therefore inseparable from doctrines and practices. And religious experiences will therefore vary from one community to another: the racial pride felt by a Klansman at a cross-burning will differ from the enjoyment felt by an Eckist experiencing soul travel, and both will differ from the grief felt by a Shiite Muslim re-enacting the martyrdom of Hussein ibn Ali.

Other religious communities are not especially invested either in developing and defending doctrines or in cultivating certain experiences. What they primarily offer and seek to foster in their members is what they consider a morally proper life. They hold that, whether or not one is an intellectual who can articulate the religious philosophy and whether or not one experiences certain feelings, one can and ought to live rightly. They therefore take an interest in shaping behavior to be ethical. Some religious communities

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identify ethical behavior according to a holy law and they stress obedience to specific precepts, regulations, rules, or commandments. Others identify ethical behavior according to a specific role model and they emphasize the imitation of holy people. As with religious experiences, there is no reason to speak of religious ethics as a single type: some communities seek to develop martial virtues; others, peaceful ones. Some insist that tranquility is the highest virtue; others, passion.

Here is a fourth interest that we see in religious communities: some religious communities are interested in organizing society rightly. Their primary interest is in political practice. Take as a paradigmatic example a religious community that includes an elaborate ceremony like the Babylonian Akitu festival for installing the leader that they consider legitimate and then confirming his position by re-installing him every New Year. Many religious communities seek to organize society according to their vision of propriety. Some do this by separating men and women, some regulate the loaning of money or the payment of damages, some build monasteries, some issue definitions of marriage, and some train legal scholars who can make sure that people live according to God's revealed word. In all these ways, religious communities seek the proper ordering of society.

Fifth and finally, there are religious communities that are primarily interested in ritual practice. Take as paradigmatic examples the religious practices of circumcision, pilgrimage, or devotional worship. Some religious rituals like these are practiced explicitly for some instrumental benefit such as healing, divining the future, and protection from disease, bad luck, or enemies. Other rituals are said to be done because they are intrinsically good in themselves: "because God requires it" or "because it is right to do." Now, one cannot separate the religious practices that shape an individual's moral behavior from those political practices that organize society, and one cannot separate those interests from rituals of healing or worship. "Ethics" and "politics" and "ritual" are categories imposed on religious actions in this chapter in order better to see the diversity of religious interests. Nevertheless, it does seem that some or most religious practices—including the cultivation of virtue, the installation of a ruler, or circumcision—do not typically aim either at teaching doctrine or at having a certain experience. If this is right, then religious practices should not be seen as merely the expressions of doctrines or experiences. They embody religious interests of their own.

Any attempt to provide an "anatomy" of religion like this one will be somewhat artificial, but this particular way of dissecting the avowed interests

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of religious communities—in terms of doctrines, experiences, ethical practices, political practices, and ritual practices—is useful for philosophers of religion in at least two ways.

A first benefit of enumerating these multiple religious interests is that it lets us place the doctrines that serve as the object of study for traditional philosophy of religion into a richer, more multifaceted context. The five religious interests that I have listed support each other. The first interest in teaching certain truths and the second interest in teaching certain experiences—the cognitive and the affective—are distinguishable and yet intertwined, as distinguishable and intertwined as head and heart often are. But the three interests in teaching certain practices—ethics, politics, and ritual—are all ways in which religious people pursue the conative interest in shaping behavior. On my account, then, religious communities have cognitive, affective, and conative interests, and the conative interests include ethical, political, and ritual practices. This account makes the interest in developing doctrines only one of many. It thereby gives philosophers of religion a way to imagine a more inclusive task of their discipline. That is, if we conceive of these different religious interests as lying along another axis, perpendicular to the axis of different religious traditions, then we can imagine these two set of questions as forming a graph. That is, if we imagine the multiple religions as a list along the bottom (the X-axis) and the multiple interests of religious communities vertically (the Y-axis), then we create multiple boxes: Christian, Buddhist, Yoruba, and other doctrines lie along the bottom. The higher boxes would represent the Daoist rituals, Jewish ethics, Islamic politics, Navajo religious experience, and so on.

If one were to take the essays collected in philosophy of religion textbooks and put a check mark in the corresponding boxes on this graph that represent the different possible topics, almost all of the check marks would be in the box dealing with Christian doctrines. Very few checks would be found in the other boxes. The other aspects of religion—which is to say, the other interests that religious communities care about—have received very little philosophical attention. For those topics, philosophers of religion will need to develop new tools. Nevertheless, if the first axis is easy to state—the proper object of philosophy of religion is all religions—then the second axis is just as easy to state: the proper object of philosophy of religion is all aspects of those religions. On this understanding, it is the task of philosophy of religion to investigate all religious phenomena from a philosophical perspective, and not to investigate solely the work of religious philosophers.

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A second benefit of this anatomy of religions is that it highlights how deeply and broadly religious communities are invested in aspects of their traditions other than the products of their representative intellectuals. To the extent that this map of religious interests is apt, religion is *largely* a set of practices in which people engage in order to make their lives better: participating in the three kinds of religious practices provides the participants with rituals that heal, with disciplines that train their children in morality, and with structures for their communal lives that reflect a higher law. On this view, religious communities take people who see their lives (or are taught to see their lives) as lost or broken or disordered and they promise their members a therapy that leads to wholeness, harmony, and human flourishing. Although religious communities have sometimes developed the most elaborate philosophies, such communities seem pre-eminently interested in practical concerns, not speculative concerns.

As noted, philosophers of religion traditionally focus on religious doctrines and arguments. Some have also focused on religious experiences, usually to answer the question whether religious experiences can justify the doctrines. Philosophers of religion have given relatively less attention to religious ethics, and much less to political and ritual practices. In the next chapter of this book, I will argue that religious practices can be seen as occasions for religious inquiry. To the extent that the affective and conative aspects of religion are not simply vehicles for the cognitive but also contribute to it, philosophers of religion should expand this object of study along this second axis.

iv.   The Third Task of Philosophy of Religion

I now turn to the third and last set of questions that in my judgment should constitute the discipline of philosophy of religion, the third and last "axis." One can imagine this set of questions as the Z-axis, in the sense that the questions in this third set are not of the same kind as those in the other two. They run, so to speak, perpendicular to *both* the previous two lists of questions. Here is their focus.

Precisely because traditional philosophers of religion have shown little interest in religions other than traditional theism, ignoring the range of religions on my first "axis," and precisely because traditional philosophers of religion have shown little interest in aspects of religions other than doctrines, ignoring the range of concerns that religious communities actually

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have on my second "axis," philosophy of religion has become a relatively *insular* discipline. By this I mean that, intellectually speaking, traditional philosophers of religion keep to themselves. When it comes to the other disciplines in the academic study of religions, philosophers do not "play well with others."

I have a funny anecdote that illustrates this insularity: I have a friend who shares with me the view that philosophy of religion ought to evolve from its predominantly theistic focus to become a cross-cultural discipline that engages religions in all their variety and dimensions. He presented a paper at a conference in which he argued that unless philosophy of religion makes this shift, the discipline would continue to be of little use to the academic study of religions. In the audience was a well-known philosopher of religion who works in the traditional style, and that philosopher raised his hand immediately to ask the first question. He stood and objected: "You claim that traditional philosophy of religion should change because it is not of use to religious studies. But I can disprove your view very simply. Traditional philosophy of religion is of use to itself. Traditional philosophy of religion is in religious studies. Therefore, traditional philosophy of religion is of use to religious studies." And then he sat back down. To define one's scholarship in such a way that it is only of use to oneself is a good illustration of what I mean by "insular"!

The absence of philosophers who contribute to this set of questions is not unrelated to their absence on the other axes. Philosophers of religion do not generally read or write about pilgrimage, dietary rules, raising children, offering sacrifices, celebrating marriage, or speaking in tongues. They leave religious practice or lived religion for the anthropologists, historians, comparativists and other disciplines in the field of religious studies. It is also true that this is a two-way street: the anthropologists and other scholars of religion almost never read philosophy of religion texts about, for example, how to reconcile belief in omnipotence with the experiences of gratuitous evil or how modal logic makes the ontological proof for the existence of God a live option. But the problem is that, if the professors and students in anthropology and the other fields in religious studies *did* work their way through a book in philosophy of religion, it would not help their work. That is, traditional philosophy of religion defines its scholarly task so narrowly that it makes much of the contribution it offers irrelevant to the other ways of studying religion. My third axis is intended to address this problem by building bridges from philosophy to other disciplines involved in the study of religions.

I identify this third axis of questions in the following way. Philosophy classically seeks to provide critical reflection on the presuppositions at work in our practices. Philosophy of law involves critical reflection on the presuppositions of legal practices; for example, it asks about the nature of justice. Philosophy of art asks about the nature of beauty. Philosophy of science asks about the nature of causality. To generalize, philosophers inquire into what people presuppose as true and real and good when they engage in different practices. To use the ten-dollar words, philosophy asks epistemological, metaphysical, and axiological questions.

Now, in addition to law and art and science, there is another practice whose presuppositions philosophers might consider, namely, the practice of the academic study of religions. What discipline provides critical reflection on the metaphysical, epistemological, and axiological issues at work in that practice? At present, the answer is: none. But philosophy of religion could provide a home for such questions, in which case philosophy of religion would include reflection not only on the philosophies of the religions around the world (the first axis) and the aspects of those religions as they are lived (the second axis) but also on the philosophical questions involved in the study of religions. This would be the third axis of philosophy of religion. One could call this set of questions: philosophy of religious studies.

What questions make up this third axis?

Philosophical reflection on the study of religion should interrogate scholarly approaches by looking at the concepts that inform their work. For example, when scholars study ascetic disciplines, marriage, sacrifice, or other religious practices, philosophers of religion might engage this work by critical reflection on the concept of *practice*. Such an engagement might clarify what it means to say that a person is an agent, that an action is or is not rational, or that an action is performed by a collectivity. It might clarify the relationship between actors' intentions and other causes of their behavior. In these ways, philosophers connect the study of religion to philosophy of action. Similarly, when scholars study teachings about ecstatic states of consciousness, communication with invisible beings, life after death, or other instances of religious beliefs, then philosophers of religion can engage this work by critical reflection on the concept of *belief*. Such an engagement might clarify the ways in which knowledge depends on embodied habits, the relation of perception and introspection, or the dependence of thought on sociality. It might clarify the relationship between religious language and religious knowledge. In these ways, philosophers connect the study of

religion to philosophy of mind. And similarly, when scholars debate whether or not Theravada Buddhism and early Confucianism are properly categorized as religions or whether, given the emergence of the word "religion" in modern Europe, it is appropriate to speak of religion outside the modern west, philosophers of religion might engage this work by critical reflection on the concept of *religion*. Such an engagement might clarify the concept of "tradition," the difference between emic and etic labels, or the relation between social construction and reality. In these ways, philosophers connect the study of religion to philosophy of language. Answers to questions like these are presupposed by empirical studies of religions, but I would suggest that they are properly philosophical questions.

The three kinds of examples above have to do with the ways in which philosophers of religion might critically reflect on presuppositions regarding the subject matter (i.e., the content) of religious studies. But philosophers of religion might also critically reflect on presuppositions regarding the disciplinary methods (i.e., the form) of religious studies. First, what does it mean to *understand* religious texts, discourse, or behavior? Does understanding depend in some way on the perspective of the practitioners themselves? What is the relation between the practitioners' self-understanding and the interpretation or redescription accomplished by the scholar? Second, what does it mean to *explain* religious beliefs and practices? Does explanation replace understanding? Is explanation reductive? Does explanation assume that the beliefs in question are not true? And third, what does it mean to assess, critique, or evaluate religious beliefs and practices? From what sources, if any, do the criteria of assessment come? Must critique of religion be secular? These are live questions pursued in the study of religion, but at present they are largely pursued by historians, anthropologists, and others who are reflective about their own practices. It is rare that philosophers of religion contribute to these discussions.

Of course, when one is critically reflecting on the form and the content of religious studies, there are participants to the discussion who should be included other than the philosophical ones. There can be not only a philosophy of the study of religion but also a history of the study of religion, or a politics of the study of religion, and so on. Nevertheless, I suggest that philosophy brings a distinct set of questions to these topics, namely, the axiological questions about what is valuable, epistemological about what is knowable, and ontological questions about what is real. Developing this set of questions is especially important for the health of philosophy of religion itself, because

traditional philosophy of religion has been, I judge, the least reflexive discipline in religious studies. Philosophers of religion usually write not only as if the religious doctrines in which they are interested float in the air, deracinated from their particular histories and cultures, but also as if their own conceptual tools—their definition of what religion is and what philosophy is—have no history. The third axis addresses this by introducing reflexivity into philosophy of religion. It is common for philosophy to reflect on the nature of philosophy, but, strangely, this reflexivity is less common in philosophy of religion.

Traditional philosophy of religion asks metaphysical questions about reality, epistemological questions about knowledge, and axiological questions about value—in relation to traditional theism. Philosophers of religion who agree with the thesis of this book that the discipline should not exclude any religions (i.e., the first axis) would also ask those questions about conceptions of reality, knowledge, and value in Hindu, Daoist, Yoruba, or other traditions. But if *all* human practices involve presuppositions about what is real, what is true, and what is good, then it follows that the educational and scholarly practices that we do in the university—including the study of religions—also involve presuppositions about what is real, what is true, and what is good. What discipline gives us the tools to talk about these things? Many academics like to present their work as scientific or objective. But since our academic work involves presuppositions that what we teach is true and real and valuable, even the most scientific or objective scholarship is nevertheless philosophy-laden, in the sense that it presupposes answers to metaphysical, epistemological, and axiological questions. Scholars of religion therefore do not misspeak when we say that we are "devoting" our time and our energy to our academic subjects. What I described above as the first task of philosophy of religion asks: in what religions teach, what is good or real or true? But on this, the third task, the question is more personal. It is to ask: what is good or real or true in our own practices? Why do we do what we do? I want to suggest that this is a legitimate academic question, and it is a question that scholars should debate. The academic study of religion presupposes an answer to the question of what the academic study of religion is *for*. Critically reflecting on this question is a part of being a self-critical scholar, and I am proposing that this third axis is properly part of philosophy of religion.

To summarize the three axes in this proposal, then, philosophy of religion should take as its philosophical object not only the rationality of theism but

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also (i) the reason-giving found in all religious traditions, (ii) the full range of religious phenomena, and (iii) the study of religions itself.

v.   What is the Big Idea?

This book is meant as a way to identify a way to frame the different questions in the discipline, a way that is intended to be productive for future philosophical studies of religious phenomena. The book is in this sense programmatic. But it is not the only program on the table.

Among professional philosophers, a division has developed between two "cultures" in philosophy of religion. If one can generalize or speak in terms of ideal types, the "philosophy department" philosophers of religion tend to work with the goals and the tools of analytic philosophy, and the "religion department" philosophers of religion tend to work with the goals and the tools of hermeneutic or phenomenological philosophy. The former tend to foreground the philosophical aspects of theism, and they are more likely to argue about whether religious claims about God are true. The latter are more likely to see such arguments as Christian apologetics and they are more likely to approach religious beliefs in their historical and cultural context, or even to embrace a religious pluralism or a cultural relativism. In short, there are two styles of philosophy of religion. People outside academic circles may think that philosophy tends to undermine religious belief and that religion departments "teach religion," but the truth is that one is much more likely to hear an argument that God exists in the philosophy department philosophy of religion courses than in those from the religious studies department. But the emergence of these two styles is not surprising when one keeps in mind that the philosophers who work in philosophy departments have colleagues who take questions about the nature of knowledge and reality and value seriously, and the philosophers who work in religious studies department have colleagues who are historians and social scientists and comparativists who are, in their professional roles at least, uninterested in the question whether God exists.

In terms of this division, the present book is clearly the product of a philosopher of religion who works in the religious studies style. I do see my discipline as properly in conversation with the other disciplines in the academic study of religion. In fact, I see the location of philosophy of religion as one disciplinary approach among several in the academic study of religions simply as a feature of its location in the university—even when it is practiced

in a philosophy department. Moreover, I agree with other scholars of reli-
gion that the meaning of religious phenomena depends on its cultural and
historical context, and in this respect the work of philosophers of religion
is already dependent on the interpretive work of others. Nevertheless, like
the philosophers of religion in the philosophy department style, I also judge
that the distinctive contribution of philosophy of religion has to do with the
evaluation of truth claims, which means the assessment of reason-giving and
arguments. Thus, my aim is that this book can be read as a proposal for how
the two styles of philosophy of religion can be related without excluding
the value of either. Specifically, the proposal is that the religion department
style of philosophy of religion is the more inclusive model in the follow-
ing sense: given what I am calling the first task of philosophy of religion,
normative questions about theism are appropriate, but they are part of the
larger task of evaluating the truth claims of all religions. This first task is dis-
tinct from—though, again, part of—the philosophical study of all religious
phenomena which would include not only the philosophical study of doc-
trines and arguments but also what I call the second task of the discipline,
namely, the philosophical study of the experiential, practical, and institu-
tional aspects of religions. Then, finally, these two philosophical tasks (my
so-called X- and Y-axes) are distinct from though again part of an even more
inclusive, "three-dimensional" model that includes critical refection on the
categories of the study of religion itself. Thus, the overall aim of the book
is to provide a model that can serve as an ideal for an integrated or holistic
philosophical study of religions in way that that gives a coherent place to
every important question in the discipline.

Bibliographic Essay

The first chapter of the book contrasts what I call traditional philosophy of
religion—which I characterize as the focus on the rationality of theism—
with the three more inclusive tasks that I recommend for a more inclu-
sive philosophy of religion. I discuss several options for how to label the
more inclusive view. The most popular label is "comparative philosophy
of religion" (Reynolds and Tracy 1990, 1992, 1994; cf. Neville 2000a,
2000b, 2000c; Wildman 2010), a label that parallels the increasingly pop-
ular subfields of comparative religious ethics (see, e.g., Yearley 1990; Stal-
naker 2006; Fasching, deChant, and Lantiqua 2011) and comparative theol-
ogy (see, e.g., Thatamanil 2006; Roberts 2010; Clooney 2010; Nicholson

2011). Purushottama Bilimoria argues that philosophers of religion should avoid the term "comparative" because it has an imperial genealogy in that it emerged as a pseudo-scientific attempt to create a pseudo-evolutionary hierarchy of religions from the primitive to the higher (see Bilimoria 2009); the texts listed above, however, are not guilty of that charge. The other alternatives I mention are "cross-cultural philosophy of religion" (Dean 1995); "global philosophy of religion" (Runzo 2001; cf. Phillips 1995, Kessler 1998); "post-colonial philosophy of religion" (Bilimoria and Irvine 2009), and "post-secular philosophy of religion" (Blond 1999). Some of the best work embodying the first task of philosophy of religion that I recommend puts Buddhist philosophy into conversation with contemporary analytic philosophy; as examples, see Arnold (2005) and Siderits (2003).

I argue that to make the case for theism today requires engagement not only with naturalism but also other religious philosophies. Robert Neville has long championed this view, writing that "this discipline has almost incorrigibly insisted upon an eighteenth century angle of vision on religion, which sees little more than Christianity and through only epistemological perspectives. Ignoring the vast amount of information about other religions now available in English it is embarrassingly parochial, and innocent of so many other philosophical approaches to religion, many learned from other religio-philosophical traditions, that it is out of the loop for understanding religion in late modernity" (Neville 2002: 5–6; cf. Ch. 12).

The "anatomy" of religion I give in the chapter is similar to five of the seven dimensions on Ninian Smart's well-known map of religion: (i) the doctrinal dimension, (ii) the experiential or emotional dimension, (iii) the ethical and legal dimension, (iv) the ritual dimension, and (v) the social dimension (see Smart 1995, 1996). The primary differences are that I see all of the dimensions as "embodied and embedded" and I therefore see Smart's narrative and material dimensions as tools for teaching proper ethical, political, ritual behavior and not as distinct dimensions of religion in their own right. For alternative anatomies, see Livingston (2005) and Cannon (1995). As I mention in the chapter, there has been some interest among philosophers in religious experiences (e.g., Alston 1991) and there has been some interest in the practice of prayer (e.g., Phillips 1965). My suspicion that religious communities are preeminently interested in ethical, political, and ritual concerns, and not speculative concerns, is shared by John Cottingham who argues that "it is in the very nature of religious understanding that it characteristically stems from practical involvement rather than from intellectual analysis" (2005: 6).

Endnotes

1. It is intriguing to read the introductions to traditional philosophy of religion textbooks and to watch for the shift from an understanding of philosophy of religion as the philosophical study of religions in all their variety to philosophy of religion in the restricted sense as only the philosophical study of God. Usually this shift is unmarked and undefended. To take one illustrative example from many, on the first page of his long in print and widely used textbook, Louis Pojman speaks sweepingly of the Vedas, the Bhagavad Gita, the Bible, the Koran, and the Dhammapada. He refers to the pyramids of Egypt, the Parthenon in Greece, the Hindu Juggernaut, and the cathedral of Chartres. "What is the truth about religion?" he asks. But then in the very next paragraph he says: "At the heart of the great theistic religions—Judaism, Christianity and Islam—is the idea that the universe was created by an all-powerful, benevolent, and providential God" (Pojman and Rea 2008: xv), and once he has introduced God as a topic of discussion, he never looks back. Of the seventy-four essays included in the anthology, seventy-one are on theism. The other three include Plato on the existence of an eternal and immaterial soul and the Dalai Lama on what Buddhists think of the possibility of Christian truth. There is one chapter on Hindu philosophy, and the rest of the religions of the world are not included.

2. The two quotes from Ludwig Wittgenstein in this paragraph come from Wittgenstein (1966: 56, 48).

3. This example is found in James' essay, "The Sentiment of Rationality" (1956: 96).

4. This idea is the theme of the first section of Lewis 1952.

5. See Paley (1819: esp. 16–28) and Behe (1996). In addition to his own sub-cellular examples, Behe discusses the biochemistry of vision (18–22) and the strengths and weaknesses of Paley's case (211–6).

6. For Caputo's definition of religion, see Caputo (2001:1). For Gschwandtner's argument about French philosophy of religion, see Gschwandtner (2013).

7. I develop this definition of religion, along with the idea of "superempirical" realities, in Ch. 5.

8. See Richard King (2009: 40).

9. Another way to put this is to say that the series of arguments between theism and atheism over the *existence* of a reality worthy of worship is half of philosophy of religion. The other half, now emerging, is the engagement between religions over the *nature* of a reality worthy of worship.

10. An interesting question concerns the extent to which religions develop this doctrinal interest not simply as a result of speculation about the nature of things but rather a response to challenges, alternatives, and doubts that come from rival religious paths. In other words, the dimension of religions that has

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traditionally been the central object of study for philosophy of religion may not be the "essence" or even a necessary dimension of religion but rather a method employed by some religious communities to respond to religious diversity and conflict. Of course, this does not make doctrines any less a religious phenomenon, but it underlines that there are other religious interests and that those interests, though slighted in traditional philosophy of religion, may be more central to religions globally.

11. These quotes can be found in Covington (1995: 167, 168).