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A NOTE ON PRE-POSITIONS: METHODOLOGY IN THE
CONTINENTAL PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

While the authors' perspectives and approaches vary in these essays, each scholar broadly characterizes their effort as an attempt to philosophize *with* rather than *about* religion. What difference does a preposition make? As all good Derrideans know, what's at stake here is none other than a battle over (of, for, or about) pre-positions. To philosophize *about* religion means to remain safely on its outskirts, to stand about it and to look on from without. In this model, "philosophy" occupies a place categorically separate from and even superior to "religion," which is merely one possible object of analysis among others—the philosophy of (*insert noun here*). This philosophy, in its alleged capacity as the "neutral onlooker," takes the measure of religion, evaluates it, even arbitrates the truth and value of different religious systems

On the contrary, to philosophize *with* religion means exploring the resonances and tensions between the two in order to complicate and enrich our conceptions of both by illuminating each's often hidden and/or disavowed relations to the "other." The authors of these essays, then, take as both their point of departure and their object of inquiry precisely this discomfiting historical entanglement of philosophy and religion. Their work does not attempt to uncover such relations between philosophical and religious traditions in order either to purge philosophy (the "rational") of its religious ("irrational") vestiges or to normalize certain religious frameworks over others based on their conformity to philosophical norms in an implicitly secularist quest—norms which themselves are not extricable from the religious traditions in relation to which they develop. These scholars seek to complicate our understandings of philosophy as an areligious or super-religious enterprise by offering genealogical analyses of certain philosophical traditions, individual thinkers, or particular concepts. Furthermore, in so doing, they illuminate philosophical problems anew in light of their relations to the religious sources, concepts, or cultural contexts from which they arise or to which they bear striking resemblances.

Turning Points in the Philosophy of Religion

Over the latter decades of the 20th century, Anglophone philosophers, theologians, and scholars of religion have peered across the water at their Francophone counterparts and have observed a surprising development in their thinking: the "turn to religion." This "turn" meant a renewed interest in religion among continental philosophers such as Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-Luc Marion, Paul Ricoeur, and others. For those who saw secular progress in Europe's movement from the Enlightenment to Existentialism, philosophy's turn to religion signaled a re-turn, that is, a regression—not only intellectually, as a violation of phenomenology's "methodological atheism," but also culturally, as a trespass of France's institutional *laïcité*. For others,

however, this renewed focus on religion offered an opportunity to forge anew the relationship between philosophy and religion.

Jacques Derrida played a decisive role in how the American academy has received the "turn to religion" across the Atlantic. Anglophone philosophers of religion such as Mark Taylor, John Caputo, Thomas Altizer, Hent de Vries, and Kevin Hart critically engaged Derrida's insights and generated new approaches to religious studies and theology. Over time, the emphasis shifted from a dual focus on religious studies and theology to the prevalence of theologically inclined interpretations of Derridean deconstruction. John Caputo and continental philosophical theologians like him became representative of the fledgling field of the continental philosophy of religion. Caputo's *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida* (1997) blazed a paradoxical path of repurposing avowedly atheistic philosophies for theological ends.

In *Prayers and Tears*, Caputo claims that, despite Derrida's confessed atheism, "Jacques Derrida has religion, a certain religion, his religion...but without religion and without religion's God."[1] Caputo, then, attempts "to understand the 'religion' [without religion] of Jacques Derrida, about which no one understands anything, not even his mother."[2] The heart of Derrida's "religion without religion," asserts Caputo, is radical hope:

> [Derrida] has his whole life been 'hoping sighing dreaming' over the arrival of something 'wholly other', *tout autre*, praying and weeping over, waiting and longing for, calling upon and being called by something to come. [...] [D]econstruction is set in motion by an overarching aspiration, which on a certain analysis can be called a religious or prophetic aspiration, what would have been called, in the plodding language of the tradition...a movement of 'transcendence'.[3]

For Caputo, deconstruction is not merely a useful tool for improving traditional theology; more profoundly, it is a new form thereof. Deconstruction does not allow for a postmodern revision of religion but is (*a* or *the*?) "postmodern religion" itself. In short, deconstruction is not a theological means, but the end of theology. "Derrida's religion...is announced in this book, along with the name of the God of his religion."[4]

Both the irreligiosity and religiosity of Derrida's thinking, according to Caputo, consists in this hope against hope. On the one hand, Derrida's hope is not a "particular messianism" in that it neither relies on traditional theistic conceptions of God, as Derrida "passes for an atheist...relative to [the classical Judeo-Christian] God," nor proclaims a concrete salvific vision to be realized at some indefinite future present.[5] Insofar as one takes theism and messianism to be constitutive of "religion" as such, deconstruction is therefore "without religion." On the other hand, "the path of deconstruction swings off in an unmistakably prophetico-messianic direction" in that it represents "the call for a justice, a democracy, a just one to come, a call for peace among the concrete messianisms."[6] In Caputo's view, this "passion for the beyond, *au-delà*, the *tout autre*, *the* impossible, the unimaginable, un-

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[1] John Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), xviii.

[2] Caputo, *The Prayers and tears of Jacques Derrida,* xviii.

[3] Caputo, xix.

[4] Ibid., 287.

[5] Ibid., 288.

[6] Ibid., xxviii.

foreseeable, un-believable ab-solute surprise" marks deconstruction as "religious," but in a new, postmodern way. In short, deconstruction offers "religion without religion" by offering "a messianic *sans* any particular messianism"—an atheist's prayer.[7]

Scholars of religion operating with the assumption that works like *Prayers and Tears* represent the unique possibility of the continental philosophy of religion have recently become suspicious of continental philosophy's ability to contribute to the field of religious studies. As Timothy Knepper says, "the content of reflection in philosophy of religion is usually either a fictionalized and rarefied theism or the latest critical notion of some continental philosopher, not the historical religions of the world in their localized complexity and comparative diversity."[8] As a result, he observes that "philosophy of religion can look more like philosophical theology—not a (relatively) religiously neutral examination of reason-giving in the religions of the world, but an apologetic for (or against) the reasonableness or value of some particular kind of religion."[9] His grievance is twofold: (a) The philosophy of religion is contextually unmoored—that is, it largely fails to ground itself in any concrete objects of study, be they sacred texts, ritual practices, material dynamics of religious communities, etc., and the circumstances that inform them; and (b) it aims to advance one religion over others and therefore does not belong in the academy, which (ideally) offers a non-confessional space in which to study religion(s). Thus, per Knepper, philosophy's re-turn to religion has indeed marked a regress to a speculative apologetics that now uses Heidegger and Derrida instead of Plato and Aristotle to legitimize idiosyncratic revisions of Christianity—in other words, an academically illegitimate "cryptotheology."

Echoing Knepper, Kevin Schilbrack's *Philosophy and the Study of Religions: A Manifesto* argues that "as one sees in Caputo…Continental philosophers of religion predominantly share with analytic philosophers of religion the narrow focus on theism." Hence, Schilbrack maintains that "the majority of…philosophers of religion operate within 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."[10] The fact that Schilbrack, like Knepper, grounds his critique of the continental philosophy of religion in Caputo's approach evidences the earlier claim that what is properly continental philosophical theology has come to represent the sub-field in its entirety.

If philosophy of religion is to contribute to the academic study of religion, they argue, it must catch up with lessons already learned by the field's other constitutive sub-disciplines regarding the historical mediation of the very conceptualization of religion through a Eurocentric, Christocentric, and patriarchal lens and, thus, the need to diversify scholarly inquiries both methodologically and topically. Philosophers must, first and foremost, address a more diverse array of religious phenomena rather than merely hashing and rehashing Christian, or at least theistic, metaphysical problems *ad infinitum* such as God's existence and the possibility of revelation. Furthermore, they must historicize these analyses instead of examining

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[7] Ibid., 78.

[8] Timothy Knepper, *Ends of Philosophy of Religion: Telos and Terminus* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 9.

[9] Knepper, *Ends of Philosophy of Religion*, 9.

[10] Kevin Schilbrack, *Philosophy and the Study of Religion: A Manifesto* (Wiley Blackwell: West Sussex, UK, 2014), ?.

"religion," which is often a stand-in for (Protestant) Christianity, in a contextual vacuum, which, as such, offers little insight into "lived religion" beyond the elite, demographically homogenous minorities within these traditions that produce such problematics; or, at the very least, they must consider these traditional problems from marginalized perspectives. In effect, philosophy of religion's fixation on a small range of metaphysical issues raised within literally and quasi-canonical texts, which have typically been produced by a similarly limited range of practitioners within the given tradition, has meant that much philosophical work is out of touch with "actual" religion, that is, as practiced out in the world by concrete individuals and communities. Hence, what Schilbrack calls "traditional philosophy of religion" has, according to Knepper, "very little to contribute to its parent field: religious studies.[11]" As a counterproposal, Knepper asserts that the ultimate end of the philosophy of religion should be "to offer judgments of the significance, worth, or quality of general types of religious reason-giving" on the basis of "its truth or value." To make such judgments, the philosopher of religion would evaluate, first, the truth of religious claims according to "a broad set of epistemic criteria…something, perhaps, in the way of Thomas Kuhn's 'shared standards' of accuracy, consistency, scope, simplicity, and fruitfulness"; then, the philosopher would assess "how personally, socially, and religiously valuable some instance of type of religious reason-giving is both in terms of its intrinsic significance and its extrinsic use."[12]

As an alternative, I would like to call attention to another vein of philosophical work that has been underway since deconstruction made landfall on American shores in the 1980s—one that neither "cryptically" advances a theological agenda nor acts as the voice of "reason" calling to order the religious cacophony. Mark Taylor's *Erring* (1984) carved a markedly different path than Caputo's *Prayers and Tears*, despite their mutual reliance on Derridean thought, yet it equally resists the evaluative project proposed by Knepper. Taylor saw deconstruction as a novel philosophical approach to the study of religion:

> In recent years there has been a philosophical development of major proportions that has yet to make a significant impact on philosophy of religion and theology. In France, a 'movement' of thought known as *deconstruction* has emerged. […] In many ways, deconstruction might seem an unlikely partner for religious reflection. As a form of thought it appears avowedly atheistic. Derrida…adamantly maintains that deconstruction 'blocks every relationship to theology'. Paradoxically, it is just this antithetical association with theology that lends deconstruction its 'religious' significance for marginal thinkers.[13]

For Taylor, deconstruction is "religiously significant" in that it provides new and surprising, often paradoxical, approaches to reading religious texts, interpreting religious phenomena, and illuminating the "religious" features of secular life. In other words, Taylor saw deconstruction as a radical philosophical approach to understanding the ways religious traditions have woven themselves into ostensibly secular aspects of life, and vice versa: "The

[11] Knepper, 9.
[12] Ibid., 121 and 125.
[13] Mark C. Taylor, *Erring* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 6. Citing Jacques Derrida, *Positions,* Trans. by A. Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 77.

insights released by deconstructive criticism suggest the ramifications of the death of God for areas as apparently distinct as contemporary psychology, linguistics, and historical analysis." Deconstruction serves as "*the 'hermeneutic' of the death of God*" through which one might study religious phenomena anew.[14]

Taylor's goal in *Erring* is twofold. He first aims to elucidate the interdependences among "God, self, history, and book" within both the Western theological *and* philosophical traditions. He then demonstrates that and how the death of God generates aftershocks within our contemporary philosophical accounts of self, history, and writing:

> God, self, history, and book are…bound in an intricate relationship in which each mirrors the other. No single concept can be changed without altering all of the others. As a result of this thorough interdependence, the news of the death of God cannot really reach our ears until its reverberations are traced in the notions of self, history, and book.[15]

As a sort of philosophical genealogy, *Erring* seeks "to unravel this web of conceptual relations" by uncovering the subterranean effects the death of God has had on postmodern notions of time, self, and history and the ways we graphically represent them. This unraveling, however, is not a way of normatively straightening things out. Taylor argues that modern humanistic atheism "denies God [or murders him, as Nietzsche puts it] in the name of self by transferring the attributes of the divine Creator to the human creature," which "results in the…inversion of classical theology into modern anthropology." However, Taylor claims, because "knowledge of self [was] mediated by knowledge of God" during "a period that extends roughly from Augustine's *Confessions* to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*," this inversion of theology and anthropology instituted by the death of God represents a crisis in the Western thinking of selfhood and, relatedly, of social history.

To demonstrate the implications of this crisis, Taylor examines textual forms of self-representation—autobiographical and historical narrative. The former, he says, "presents an ordered account of an individual self," and the latter "strives to uncover the coherence of time as a whole."[16] Both "I" and "we,"

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[14] Taylor, *Erring*, 6. Along these lines, as Thomas Carlson suggested at the 2018 A.A.R. panel on University Chicago Press' *Religion and Postmodernism* series' closing, Taylor's atheology might be interpreted as a radical outworking not only of Nietzsche's "death of God" proclamation, Heidegger's detheologization, and Derrida's deconstruction, but also of Paul Tillich's 'theology of culture." In *Theology of Culture*, Tillich claims that "religion is the substance of culture, [and] culture is the form of religion" [*Theology of Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), 42.]. Hence, for Tillich, "[e]very religious act…is culturally formed," and therefore, conversely, every cultural formation is religiously enacted. If one accepts Tillich's thesis, then the most incisive analysis of cultural formations, or institutions, is, as such, a form of theology—a study of their "religious enactment"; likewise, good theology must take cultural formations as its basic object. In this light, Taylor's religious studies approach to information technologies, the stock market, voting populations, theme parks, architecture, and visual art could be seen as the necessary form theology takes in our "secular" age—a theology, though, after the death of God, hence, an a/theology. Tillich's "theology of culture" as taken up by Taylor becomes a way of locating not so much the ties, but the "(k)nots" that bind religion and culture over time.

[15] Taylor, 8.

[16] Ibid., 14.

represented narratively by autobiography and social history, respectively, are therefore envisioned as "plotted along a line that stretches from a definite beginning through an identifiable middle to an expected end"—a conception of time which "is bound to the notion of a providential creator God."[17] Hence, the "death" of this God problematizes narratively construed "providential" time and, thus, the very ideas of self and history as coherent totalities progressing towards fulfillment—each of which "appear to be more a literary creation than a literal fact."[18] For Taylor, God's death marks the "disappearance of the self," "the end of history," and "the closure of the book." Facing these philosophical crises, *Erring* thinks through new forms of selfhood, history, and writing no longer rooted in traditional theology but nonetheless emerging from its ruins. Ultimately, this forward-looking genealogical analysis "calls into question the coherence, integrity, and intelligibility of this network of oppositions" that characterizes our intellectual inheritance—the overarching of which being theology vs. philosophy. For this reason, Taylor describes his work as "neither *properly* theological nor nontheological, theistic nor atheistic, religious nor secular, believing nor nonbelieving."[19] *Erring*'s subtitle succinctly captures the liminality of its approach: a postmodern a/theology.

At first glance, Taylor's "a/theology" appears consonant with Caputo's "religion without religion," but the subtitles' similarity belies their methodological difference. Taylor does not wish to resurrect Christianity after the death of its God, but to conduct a postmortem report on the state of Western accounts of self and history. To make a disciplinary distinction, deconstruction in the hands of Caputo becomes continental philosophical theology, and in the hands of Taylor it becomes the continental philosophy of religion. In brief, Taylor offers a new approach to religious studies rather than a new religion, since Taylor's *Erring* eludes the antinomy set up between Caputo and Knepper—being neither an undercover theology, nor a supervising philosophy. In Taylor's wake, other philosophers of religion have developed this approach in their own ways.

Thomas Carlson's *Indiscretion: Finitude and the Naming of God*, published only two years after Caputo's *Prayers and Tears*, demonstrates that and how apophatic theology and Heideggerian thanatology paradoxically parallel one another in the ways they treat God and death, respectively, as the absolute limits or horizons that constitute human finitude. Carlson terms this parallel the "apophatic analogy," which, he clarifies, "is [an analogy] of relation, not attribution: the relation of Dasein to its impossible death in Heidegger is likened to the relation of the created soul to its unnamable God in Dionysius."[20] For Heidegger, "Death marks the ultimate possibility of Dasein that undoes Dasein of all possibility. It constitutes a final possibility that can never be made actual. 'There' where death is, Dasein is not and cannot be precisely because death would erase or collapse the 'there' that defines Dasein."[21] In the mystical tradition, "unknowing remain[s] beyond experience in the precise sense that [it] mark[s] a limit at which the thinking and speaking being who is capable of experience would be dissolved or undone as such. [...] There where mystical union would be achieved, the soul is carried

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[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid., 45.

[19] Ibid., 12.

[20] Thomas A. Carlson, *Indiscretion: Finitude and the Naming of God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1999), 16.

[21] Carlson, *Indiscretion: Finitude and the Naming of God,* 245.

beyond its own being, thought, and language."[22] In both Heideggerian thanatology and mystical theology, the human confronts a boundary beyond which thought and language cannot pass, yet whose actual impossibility or impossible actuality constitutes the ultimate possibility of human life—"the possibility that ever remains to be thought, spoken, or desired (the possibility of the impossible)."[23]

Demonstrating this "indiscretion" between the theological and thanatological serves to open a new mode of interrogation for both "sides" of the analogy—each into itself by way of the other. In other words, given the analogous relation, theological reflections on the individual soul's naming and thinking of an unnamable and unthinkable God might, paradoxically, offer critical inroads into Heideggerian thought concerning Dasein's relation to the impossibility of its death, though without converting it; likewise, Heidegger's Dasein analytic might offer new ways of understanding apophatic texts from a phenomenological point of view without secularizing them.

Carlson pursues such possibilities in his following book, *The Indiscrete Image: Infinitude and the Creation of the Human*. Herein, he elucidates "the intimate linkages" between Heidegger's critique of ontotheology and his anxieties regarding an increasingly techno-scientific modernity. The primary conceptual linkage is that of "the technological subject of scientific modernity to a Christian theology that interprets all being as made, as *ens creatum*, and God the Creator as the maker and thus as 'highest being', a certain and extant cause, which, according to the logic of efficient causality or sufficient reason, provides a first principle on which one counts to make all other being intelligible."[24] The Enlightenment quest of freeing humanity to be the measure of its own being, to become the maker of the world, does not exactly liberate the human from God but confers to the human the ontological primacy once held by God—to be the creator of the world, whose creativity resides, first, in rational representation:

> Just as the Creator God represents in his mind that which he creates, such that the truth of creation consists in its correspondence to the divine archetype, so the modern subject, by means of its representational activity, turns productive in a technological sense, within a metaphysics counting truth as correspondence.[25]

In this way, the calculatively thinking modern subject, "who frames being in mathematical terms by projecting the ground plan according to which alone beings might appear," becomes, like the ontotheological God, the basis of the world's existence and intelligibility. For Heidegger, this will to mastery through calculative thinking and technological productivity threatens to alienate humanity from itself by breeding an industrious busy-ness and distraction in and through which the questionability of self and world become concealed and the human being falls into an anonymous "they."

In response to Heidegger's concerns, Carlson engages apophatic theologians to develop a counter-reading of technological modernity. To cite one such instance, "Gregory [of Nyssa]'s account of the apophatic likeness between God and the human traces man's creative capacity to an original deficiency at

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[22] Carlson, 247.
[23] Ibid., 250.
[24] Carlson, *The Indiscrete Image* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 40.
[25] Carlson, *The Indiscrete Image,* 41.

the organic or natural level…which becomes the condition of a creative, technological potential."[26] Being made in the image and likeness of an incomprehensible God, the human's ability to create and recreate itself—exemplified now by genetic technologies and posthumanist projects—such that its *esse* can never be finally known to it marks an intimate estrangement proper to humanity, rather than the alienating familiarity criticized by Heidegger. Applying this apophatic theological insight to Heidegger's secular anthropology, Carlson sees technological productivity not necessarily as the blindly raging industriousness of the "they" but perhaps as the "authentic" outworking of the human's irreducible possibility, whereby the human, precisely as a result of its technological creativity, remains constitutively unfinished rather than "enframed" and reduced.

Overall, *The Indiscrete Image* demonstrates the type of work *Indiscretion* makes possible by using its "apophatic analogy" as a hermeneutic through which, first, to discern the ontotheological basis of Heidegger's existential critique of technology and, then, on that basis, to appropriate sources from the same theological tradition as means of interrogating the secular anthropology at stake in his anxieties over technology—yet in a way that does not overcome its secularity but clears a new path forward. To use Taylor's description, one might locate the indiscretion of Carlson's work, then, in its being "neither *properly* theological nor nontheological, theistic nor atheistic, religious nor secular, believing nor nonbelieving." After all, an indiscretion is a form of erring.

Applying a similar method, Mary-Jane Rubenstein's *Worlds without End: The Many Lives of the Multiverse* sets a fourfold task:

> [F]irst, to give a historical account of the ebbs and flows of multiple-world cosmologies; second, to map contemporary models of the multiverse in relation to their philosophical, mythological, and even theological precedents; third, to ask how, why, and to whom the multiverse has become a particularly attractive hypothesis at this historical juncture; and fourth, to mark multiverse cosmologies as the site of a constructive reconfiguration of the boundaries between 'science' and 'religion'.[27]

Rubenstein's project extends Taylor's a/theological approach in two ways: (a) It assumes a genealogical task that, as such, aims not simply to identify the multiple strains of multiverse cosmology but to trace their historical interweaving from Plato to now, through various philosophical, theological, and scientific paradigms; and (b) this multiverse genealogy ultimately stages anew "the debate over the scientific status of multiverse cosmologies: How far can physics speculate about other universes without colliding with 'mad philosophy'—or, worse, with theology?"[28] In the posing of this question resonates a "call[ing] into question the coherence, integrity, and intelligibility of this network of oppositions"—in this case, physics, philosophy, and theology. Specifically, Rubenstein shows that "even after the death of God, the devotion to some purportedly external, extraworldly truth has not disappeared; to the contrary, the search for it has only intensified in the hands of [modern science]"; hence, she argues along Nietzschean lines, "Christianity

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[26] Carlson, 78.

[27] Mary-Jane Rubenstein, *Worlds without End: The Many Lives of the Multiverse* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 3.

[28] Rubenstein, *Worlds without End: The Many Lives of the Multiverse,* 20.

produces modern science, in a staggering gesture of self-sabotage, as its consummation and its destruction." However, the echo of Christian problematics within modern science reverberate back upon it: "[I]t is a remarkable sign of the entanglement of Western science and religion that when science finally had a creation story to tell [the "big bang" hypothesis], it told such a familiar one."[29] Rubenstein thus asks, "If science can be regarded as the self-overcoming of a particular form of religion, might multiverse cosmologies be something like the self-overcoming of *science*? […] the end of a fantasy that 'science' has wrested itself free from 'religion'…?"[30]

Rubenstein's revealing this "persistent entanglement of all the disciplines" again, does not culminate in a normative conclusion whereby the questions she strives to open would be just as quickly closed but foregrounds the necessity for "renewed engagement among them."[31] Addressing this exact issue in her Kierkegaardian "Unscientific Postscribble," she confesses her reluctance to arbitrate among the cosmologies discussed:

> "Okay…," you might be wondering, "but does the multiverse *exist*?" And if so, which model is the right one? […] A security and well-being in existence, not to mention a degree in physics, a relationship with the angels, and a telescope that travels faster than the speed of light—I imagine that one would need all these things in order to construct an opinion about the existence of the multiverse. So…on this matter I have no opinion.[32]

Immediately hereafter, Rubenstein admits that, while having no "opinion," she does "have a hunch"; however, her hunch only redoubles the anxieties brought on by her genealogical work. "Just as light will behave as a wave or a particle, depending on the question you ask it, and just as chemical and biological and psychological experiments help produce the phenomena they measure," she hypothesizes, "so will the universe appear to be one or many, or linear or cyclical, or infinite or finite, depending on the theoretical and experimental configuration that examines it."[33] As humble as it seems, Rubenstein's "hunch" represents a further outworking of the death of God—one that interprets the death of God as the failure of all concepts that would serve to replace God, that is, to stand in God's (conceptual) place, and thus to see from the God's-eye-view, including Science—no matter the power of its telescopes. In this way, *Worlds without End* advances the project undertaken by Taylor: to examine the echoes of God's death knell in contemporary culture, not unlike the radio astronomers who study the thermal echoes of the Big Bang in order to understand the physical cosmos. Like Taylor and Carlson, Rubenstein grabs a single question, multiverse cosmology, by the root and pulls up an entire rhizome of ideas, connected in intricate ways—an uncovering that provides new paths of entry into an ongoing struggle.

Jeffrey Kosky's *Arts of Wonder: Enchanting Secularity* is another significant contribution in this a/theological vein of scholarship. It reflects critically on the Weberian diagnosis that "we moderns (those moderns?) are jaded or bored, lacking in ideals or commitment, frustrated or disappointed—in short,

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[29] Rubenstein, 232.
[30] Ibid., 234.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid., 235.
[33] Ibid.

that we are (they are?) a disenchanted lot."[34] Such a diagnosis itself, Kosky observes, reflects "a decision about the nature, or lack thereof, of the world and what counts as real."[35] The cosmologies and anthropologies on which this diagnosis (or doctrine?) of disenchantment depends, explains Kosky, claims that "[m]ysteries having been banished, the world that remains is one we can *count on*, reliably and predictably, precisely because it is one we can *count up*, measure and compute in a calculative science."[36] *Arts of Wonder*, then, attempts to diagnose the diagnosis of modern disenchantment in order, as a form of treatment, to offer "new models of the human being, the world, and the relation of each to the other."[37]

To broach these "new models," Kosky paradoxically looks to (actually, at) works of art from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries that "are most often thought to be representative of secular modernity and therefore to share in the disenchantment of the world." These artworks serve as means of staging encounters with that very disenchantment in its artistic representation such that we might, in and through those confrontations, interrogate disenchantment and "the calculative thinking that dominates modern economic, scientific, and philosophical logic."[38]

Kosky's meditation on Walter De Maria's *The Lightning Field* offers an instructive example of his approach. In a parcel of the New Mexican plains slightly larger than one-half square mile, four hundred polished and sharpened steel poles, spaced at uniform intervals of 220 feet, rise from the ground to an equal height, forming a grid twenty-five poles wide by sixteen poles long. Effectively, *The Lightning Field* forms a coordinate plane that turns the New Mexican plain into a perspectival grid through its organized and organizing network. "The presence of the grid here, on a plain that extends some thirty miles beyond to the Datil Mountains, make this place one where we encounter…the emergence of the organization of space into a human world."[39] The measured placement of the poles transforms the barren earth, through a perspectival ordering, into a graspable world-picture; it frames the world such that it appears not as an inchoate desert but as the very image of rational organization. Thinking back to Heidegger's critique of modern techno-science, *The Lightning Field* appears to represent the mathematical "ground plan" of human machination according to which alone the earth appears intelligible, which is to say, as world.

And yet, in this place, en-lightenment depends not on calculative mastery, but on an irreducible unpredictability—lightning must strike from the clouds.

> Yes, of course, we know, even if you or I do not, the circumstances that occasion a flash of lighting: electrical charges of such and such a disposition in the atmosphere, humidity and moisture at certain levels, a darkening of the skies, and so on. But the knowledge that conditions might be suitable could not assure us that our desire would that night be satisfied. We were in love with an occult cause,

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[34] Jeffrey L. Kosky, *Arts of Wonder: Enchanting Secularity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), xi.
[35] Kosky, *Arts of Wonder*, xi.
[36] Kosky, xii.
[37] Ibid., xi.
[38] Ibid., xii.
[39] Ibid., 17.

the cause of events that was occluded in the still law-governed world.[40]

In this disenchanted lot, otherwise "good moderns" hope, with no shortage of fear and trembling, for an unforeseeable revelatory event, a flash of light from above, an answer to the "[f]our hundred stainless-steel supplications: 'Come!'"[41] "We wait," confesses Kosky, "abandoned, shipwrecked on a sea of shifting desert sands blown by an empty wind. We wait for a light that cannot be turned on an off by our own doing, a light that, when it comes, if it comes, threatens our very destruction."[42] The coordinate plane, then, does not simply enframe the world such that it appears as a graspable picture; "the technology of the poles does not secure and shelter us." To the contrary, "the poles keep open the distance in which things might come to befall us…hold us out into the open, keeping us dangling, there where we take the risk of meeting something capricious and slippery, like the light, which they let go of even as they grab it from the sky."[43] *The Lightning Field*, the picture of disenchantment, paradoxically occasions an experience "like the mystics and ascetics of the Dionysian universe [who] go to the desert in search of the angelic light"—a penetration to earth by fire from the heavens (*seraphim* deriving from "fire"). "Just because modernity is, as some say, the age without angels," Kosky concludes, "does not mean that these moderns do not beseech their light."[44]

As we can see in his account of *The Lightning Field*, Kosky speaks in a traditional(ly) theological register to describe the experiences these artistic manifestations of a supposedly disenchanted world induce(d):

> I was surprised to find myself invoking a vocabulary that I had long kept at a distance. These works of art work, I found, make places where we might encounter mystery and wonder, hopes for redemption and revelation, transcendence and creation—longings traditionally cultivated and addressed in religious traditions, but that, when developed through the encounter with these works of art, are nevertheless crucial aspects of enchanting secularity.[45]

Kosky, disenchanted as he is with disenchantment, looks for ways that and, perhaps more importantly, places where mystery still enchants our demystified modernity. He does so, however, not by returning to the churches (the tombs and sepulchers of God, says Nietzsche) where he might reopen lines of communication with God but by taking a bus into New Mexico and talking with strangers about the weather. By wandering into this desert, he takes the risk of *Erring*. "Insofar as my engagement with religious texts and practices is not simply critical," he observes, "I risk being taken by strident defenders of a purely secular and disenchanted modern art as a leftover from a supposedly religious past." Yet, at the same time, "insofar as my response to our disenchantment with modern disenchantment is elaborated through secular works and not religious traditions, I risk being taken by the traditionally religious or religiously traditional as irrelevant, insignificant, or even profane."[46] Here again, like Taylor's errancy, Carlson's

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[40] Ibid., 50.
[41] Ibid., 53.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid., 57.
[44] Ibid., 53.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid., xiii.

"indiscrete" thesis, and Rubenstein's inconclusive "hunch," Kosky simply says: "Let the reader read…. I leave it to him or her to decide."[47]

Elliot Wolfson and Ryan Coyne also exemplify such an approach. Wolfson's *The Duplicity of Philosophy's Shadow: Heidegger, Nazism, and the Jewish Other* excavates Heidegger's corpus in an attempt to understand the ambivalent relation between his philosophy and his infamous political affiliation and, ultimately, to venture a response regarding how that relation bears upon the lasting value of Heidegger's work. In so doing, Wolfson demonstrates how key aspects of Heidegger's philosophy, which undergird his Nazism, paradoxically bear unsettling affinities to certain elements of Jewish thought. Wolfson argues, for one, that while Heidegger's "triangulation of the concepts of groundedness (*Bodenstädigkeit*), homeland (*Heimat*), and peoplehood (*Volkstum*)" played into his National Socialism, his related "emphasis on the unhomeliness of the human condition in the face of the nothingness of being" nevertheless resonates with "[Franz] Rosenzweig's sense of Jewish existence as an exilic state of spatiotemporal ungroundedness."[48] Among other uncanny congruences, Wolfson identifies Heideggerrian analogues to Jewish messianism and notions of historical time as "the perpetuation of the identical in a manner that is always different" and Kabbalistic treatments of the status of the other and the problem of evil.[49] Overall, Wolfson sees his project as "shedding new light on the vexing labyrinth of issues by approach it not as a member of the Heideggerian guild…or as an intellectual historian…, but as a scholar of Jewish mysticism, albeit one whose work has been deeply informed…by Heidegger."[50]

In similar fashion, Coyne's *Heidegger's Confessions: The Remains of Saint Augustine in Being and Time and Beyond* "set[s] out to reconstitute the intricate and often serpentine paths by which concepts deemed to be 'Augustinian' by Heidegger himself made their way into Heidegger's texts" in order:

> not to compare in depth the works of Heidegger and Augustine, but rather to analyze Heidegger's own portrayals of Augustinian concepts—what they contributed to his philosophical formation; the tensions they generated in his work; how they resurfaced over time; the often inapparent ways in which Heidegger dealt with their recurrence; and finally, what these recurrences reveal about Heidegger's critique of modern metaphysics.[51]

While previous scholarship has demonstrated the "detheologized" presence of Augustine's *Confessions* in *Being and Time*, Coyne shows that Heidegger's appropriation of Augustinian thought continues throughout his later work and proves critical to the "turn" in his thinking. Heidegger reads Augustine later in his career as a way of critiquing his own notions of care (*Sorge*) and ecstatic temporality as the fundamental modes of Dasein—elements of *Being and Time*'s existential analytic which Heidegger ironically derived from Augustine (and Paul) in the first place. This study reveals that there exist multiple "detheologized" resignifications of Augustine within Heidegger's oeuvre that work at cross purposes with each other.

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[47] Ibid.

[48] Eliot Wolfson, *The Duplicity of Philosophy's Shadow: Heidegger, Nazism, and the Jewish Other*, 43 and 76.

[49] Wolfson, *The Duplicity of Philosophy's Shadow,* 101.

[50] Wolfson, xi.

[51] Ryan Coyne, *Heidegger's Confessions: The Remains of Saint Augustine in Being and Time and Beyond* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 2-3.

In Taylor, Carlson, Rubenstein, Kosky, Wolfson, and Coyne, we see a continental philosophy of religion that neither apologizes for "a fictionalized and rarefied theism" nor "evaluat[es] the truth and value of religious reason-giving."[52] Each of these thinkers takes up issues salient not only to the field of religious studies but to numerous disciplines—spanning from art and architecture to genetic engineering and quantum physics—and traces their living pasts to illuminate new paths forward that do not pretend to solve the questions in question but pose them anew in creative and constructive ways. Such is the philosophy of religion proposed and undertaken by the scholars here—each in their own way.

Conversation: Between Conversion and Controversion (or How to Speak to the Religious)

In these essays, continental philosophers of religion seek to philosophize *with* religion, neither *for* nor *against* it. The essays here see the potential for a symbiotic relationship wherein philosophy negotiates its tense and often subterranean relation to religion, and, on that basis, learns from it without defending or superseding it. While each author makes a unique contribution, this shared methodology generates something of a bipartite unifying thread that weaves its way, with varying degrees of emphasis, through this these essays as well as the works previously discussed: storytelling and translation. Whether it be Taylor's demonstrating the theological underpinning of autobiographical and historical grammars, Carlson's identification of the analogous relation between theological and thanatological discourses on human finitude, or Kosky's recourse to a theological vocabulary to describe supposedly disenchanted works of art, this approach to the study of religion deals intimately with the mediation of certain conceptual languages as they move through various religious and philosophical traditions and are mutated by the presuppositions, power, and purposes of each. Hence, each essay to follow demonstrates a sensitivity to the compounding effects of our ongoing acts of translation between confessional and secular registers as certain inherited stories—by which I mean the often nonexplicit constellations of specific anthropologies, cosmologies, theologies, and thanatologies that define communities, confer identity to individuals, inform practice, and generate persistent anxieties within and across these traditions—are rejected, revised, and/or repurposed by thinkers on both "sides."

However, in tracing the ways these stories pass back and forth, piecemeal and unseen, through different philosophical and religious paradigms and how those transpositions create ripple-effects, these authors are telling their own stories. These genealogical analyses each present their own philosophical accounts of truth, reality, and the human condition through their encounters with religion. In so doing, they venture into the very same labyrinths which they attempt to see from above, for they do not extricate themselves from the story by narrating it. To borrow Kosky's words, they are (we are?) seeking new stories to tell by re-narrating the selves, the worlds, and the histories we inherit.

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[52] Knepper, 120.