

## Introduction

These are invigorating times for the philosophy of religion. Over the past decade or so, a growing number of voices have been calling for innovation within this area of philosophical inquiry, with regard both to methodology and to the range of topics that are discussed. It has been observed by several commentators that in the past, and to some extent in the present, the field of philosophy of religion has been overly conservative in its sphere of predominant interests, gravitating towards a core repertoire of debates concerning the rationality of theism or of a pared-down Christian theism in particular. Such critical voices include, *inter alia*, those of Knepper (2013), Schilbrack (2014), Draper and Schellenberg (2017), plus, on occasions, my own (e.g. Burley (2020)). Although the traditional debates continue to generate novel contributions, there is also space for discussion of a wider array both of religious traditions and of the forms that religiosity takes within and across those traditions, and such discussion is likely to require a degree of methodological experimentation. As a previous editor of this journal remarked, ‘We should make efforts to offer a new agenda. That is, not simply new thoughts about familiar questions, but new questions, or new methodologies’ (Le Poidevin (2012), 2). It is this vision of ongoing innovation and experimentation, echoed by subsequent editors of the journal, to which the present special issue makes a further contribution, not as a dramatic break with traditional approaches, but as a continuation of the subdiscipline’s expansive engagement with religious diversity.

It is thus an honour and a privilege to be editing this special issue on the theme of cross-cultural and multi-religious approaches to the philosophy of religions. The idea for the special issue evolved out of a conference that I convened on the same theme at the University of Leeds in July 2018 (see: <https://philosophyfreligions.leeds.ac.uk/>). The two-day conference (which was generously sponsored by Cambridge University Press and the Spalding Trust as well as by the Centre for Philosophy of Religion at the University of Leeds) was an opportunity for philosophers of religion with an interest in cross-cultural and multi-religious approaches to get together and share ideas, in an environment that was both cordial and critically robust. Having gone through the journal’s usual rigorous peer-review process, the eight articles that constitute this special issue have all been submitted by participants in that conference.

As readers will see, the topics covered by the articles are varied, and yet there is a common aspiration to extend the scope of inquiry beyond the gravitational pull of

standard issues relating to theism. In some instances, a topic has been selected that is pertinent to multiple religions, such as the concept of belief (Arif Ahmed), ineffability (David Cheetham) or how adherents of one religion ought to respond to the beliefs and practices of other religions (Kevin Schilbrack). The topic of spiritual exemplars, too, is of this kind, and Ian Kidd's article demonstrates how it can be discussed in illuminating ways with a particular eye on examples from Daoism. Meanwhile, the respective contributions by Victoria Harrison, Jessica Frazier and Tim Knepper advance comprehensive conceptions of how the philosophical study of religions might become both increasingly representative of religious diversity and, at the same time, methodologically more imaginative. And Richard Amesbury (in this issue's opening article) fruitfully interrogates the concept of religion itself, drawing upon his extensive familiarity with debates in the broader field of religious studies – debates that ought to be of considerable interest to anyone who wishes to study religious matters.

The title of this special issue foregrounds plurality: pursuing a variety of *approaches* (not merely one approach) to philosophize about *religions* (not merely about one religion or about abstract issues that have only a tenuous connection with actual religions). The approaches are cross-cultural inasmuch as they make a deliberate effort to deal with issues whose relevance is not confined to any specific cultural domain, and they are multi-religious inasmuch as, both individually and taken as a whole, they involve discussion that bears upon multiple religious traditions. Far from being narrowly prescriptive, the special issue is exemplary and exploratory – exemplifying and exploring cross-cultural or trans-cultural or comparative or interdisciplinary modes of philosophizing. Not only do the approaches range across diverse cultural and religious traditions: a number of them also illustrate ways of bringing continental European philosophy into productive dialogue (both constructive and critical) with ideas of a broadly analytic flavour. Thus, for instance, Cheetham brings the phenomenology of Jean-Luc Marion into critical engagement with the religious pluralisms of figures such as John Hick and Perry Schmidt-Leukel, Schilbrack contrasts his own proposal for 'conditional hospitality' towards other religions with Jacques Derrida's unconditional version, Amesbury draws upon ideas from Michel Foucault in developing his historically informed perspective on the concept of religion, and Frazier builds upon ideas from Hans-Georg Gadamer and Gilles Deleuze in developing her far-reaching vision of comparative philosophizing.

The articles in this special issue thus exhibit an adventurous spirit, a willingness to extend the parameters, to try out ideas. It is unlikely that the approaches will appeal to all readers, but that is not the primary aim. The aim is to provide further impetus to the continuing expansion of the philosophical investigation of religions in all their rich and fascinating, and often puzzling and troubling, forms.

## Acknowledgements

I am grateful both to the present editor of this journal, Yujin Nagasawa, and to the previous editor, Mark Wynn, each of whom has been extremely helpful in enabling this special issue to come to fruition. I also wish to reiterate my thanks to Cambridge University Press and the Spalding Trust for financial assistance with the conference out of which this collection of articles has grown.

## References

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