How to philosophize about religion globally and critically . . . with undergraduates

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Abstract: **This article explores some critical issues pertinent to the practice of 'global-critical' philosophy of religion. Here, I focus on two general issues, especially as they have arisen in the production of a textbook and other pedagogical materials for an undergraduate course in philosophy of religion that is globally diverse and critically engaged: (1) how to restructure philosophy of religion with topics and questions suitable for 'global' enquiry; (2) how to philosophize about (global) religion in a manner that is 'critically' aware of theoretical and methodological issues in the academic study of religion, yet also pursues philosophical questions of meaning, value, and truth.**

The origins of this article lie in a five-year seminar at the American Academy of Religion in 'Global-Critical Philosophy of Religion'. Established in 2015, the primary aim of the seminar has been to produce an undergraduate textbook in global-critical philosophy of religion. Over the five years, the project has grown to include a multi-entry teaching manual, four volumes of critical essays, and a primary-source anthology. While I myself have taken on the responsibility of writing the textbook, others have headed up and helped out with these other initiatives. Nevertheless, the project as a whole remains thoroughly collaborative, constituted by scholars of the diverse religious philosophies of the world, as well as traditional philosophy of religion, and method and theory in the study of religion.[1]

Why an undergraduate textbook in global-critical philosophy of religion? With few, perhaps no, exceptions there simply are no undergraduate textbooks that are both inclusive of the religious philosophies of the globe and engaged in critical issues in the method and theory of religious studies.[2] Many members of the seminar therefore felt that, no matter how many specialist essays and monographs we published, we would not effect real change in the field until we began producing undergraduate textbooks to compete with those of traditional philosophy of religion.

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The primary objective of my presentation at the July 2018 colloquium at the University of Leeds on 'Philosophy of Religions: Cross-Cultural, Multi-Religious Approaches', whose papers fill this volume, was to survey the content of all fourteen chapters of my textbook in the hopes of receiving critical feedback about it. Thanks to the members of the colloquium, that objective was met. There is no need to reproduce that presentation and discussion here. Instead, I would like to use this opportunity to examine more closely some of the critical issues encountered during the course of our project (some of which were raised at the colloquium). I focus particularly on two general issues: (1) how to restructure philosophy of religion with topics and questions suitable for 'global' enquiry; (2) how to philosophize about (global) religion in a manner that is 'critically' engaged in theoretical and methodological issues in the academic study of religion yet also pursues philosophical questions of meaning, value, and truth.[3] These issues map, more or less, onto the twin foci of our seminar: *global* and *critical* philosophy of religion.

Global: how to restructure the topics and questions of (global-critical) philosophy of religion

The preliminary question here is: why rethink or restructure philosophy of religion at all? For me, the answer to this question is obvious: the topics of traditional philosophy of religion are thoroughly unsuitable to the inclusion of most of the religious philosophies of South Asia, East Asia, Africa, Oceania, and the Americas. Take, for example, the 'three teachings' (*sanjiao*) of China: Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. Questions about the attributes of God, proofs for the existence of God, and the problem of evil for an omni-predicated God have no relevance to any of these teachings.[4] For any philosophy of religion that attempts to extend the reach of traditional topics to these teachings, then, these teachings appear inferior or weird. And so I argue that if philosophy of religion is to be globally relevant, it must be rethought from the ground up, not merely expanded or enlarged.

How, though, does one do this rethinking? One way involves simply employing the chief issues and themes from some other religious philosophy – for example, how to live in harmony with the natural, social, and spiritual worlds; how to organize states that are conducive to flourishing and balance, especially in relationship to 'heaven/nature' (*Tian*); how to actualize and return to states of non-differentiated unity. Although this might have one desired effect – that of making theistic philosophy of religion look inferior or weird – it does not help much in restructuring the topics of philosophy of religion to make it global or cross-cultural or comparative.

Another way to rethink the fundamental topics of global-critical philosophy of religion involves the method that we tried to employ during the first meeting of our American Academy of Religion seminar – to make a list of all the topics and

questions of all the different religious philosophies and see where there is significant overlap. In case there is concern that this procedure smacks of 'perennial philosophy', let me say that I do not find such a concern warranted – for we are looking only for an overlap of topics that are addressed or questions that are asked, not of answers that are provided. Still, I have two legitimate concerns about this procedure. First, it is laborious in its process, involving several iterations of ascension from 'lower-level' local categories to 'higher-order' vague categories. (Indeed, the seminar was never able to pull it off.) Second, this process tends to 'kick out' topics and questions that do not have significant representation with other religious philosophies, and thereby risks overlooking the fact that a religious philosophy's apparent silence about some topic or question might be of significant philosophical interest and importance. (Indeed, theistic philosophy of religion is in danger here insofar as attributes, proofs, and evil are not major foci for many religious philosophies.)

A third way to rethink the fundamental topics of global-critical philosophy of religion is simply to propose a set of topics and test them against the religious philosophies of the world.[5] But which set of topics? I have at times wondered about the viability of looking to the three main branches of western philosophy for such topics: metaphysics, epistemology, and axiology. I would also one day like to make good on my promissory note to use so-called 'panhuman conceptual behaviors' as the fundamental categories for global-critical philosophy of religion.[6] However, for a bevy of reasons – personal, contextual, rhetorical, aesthetic, epistemic, pragmatic, and existential – the seminar agreed to pursue my suggestion to use the *journey metaphor* to generate the basic questions and topics of global-critical philosophy of religion. At the end of this section, I will come back to the issue of justifying the use the journey metaphor to restructure philosophy of religion. First, though, I must explain how I use this metaphor, raising and responding to some critical issues along the way.

With regard to metaphor theory in general, I draw on the cognitive metaphor theory of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, which provides an account of how human thinking is structured by metaphors, especially those drawn from concrete bodily experience. At the heart of this account are two claims: humans draw on concrete bodily experience in understanding and expressing abstract concepts, and humans do so by systematically structuring abstract concepts in accordance with bodily experiences. For Lakoff and Johnson, this systematic structuring is performed by 'primary metaphors', which map sensorimotor experiences to subjective experiences. Given Lakoff and Johnson's neuro-psychological theory of how these primary metaphors get neuro-physiologically imprinted in early childhood experience, they maintain that primary metaphors are 'widespread', if not universal (Lakoff & Johnson (1999), 57). This is not to say that all metaphors are quasi-universal since most metaphors are not primary metaphors. Still, primary metaphors function as the atomic building blocks for the more numerous, molecular, 'complex metaphor'. Even the complex metaphor therefore receives an indirect

grounding in sensorimotor experience. It is for this reason that Lakoff and Johnson maintain that '[m]any, if not all, of our abstract concepts are defined in significant part by conceptual metaphor' (*ibid.*, 128).

There is one metaphor in particular that is especially well suited to provide a new framework for philosophy of religion: the journey metaphor. The version of this metaphor that you are probably most familiar with is *life is a journey*, which uses the conceptual structure of a journey to help us understand and express our lives. By use of this metaphor, we sometimes think of our lives as going somewhere, as following a path, as encountering obstacles on that path, as walking down that path with co-travellers, and so forth. But the journey metaphor is also used to conceptualize and articulate *religious lives*, more specifically religious growth, progress, maturation, cultivation, salvation, enlightenment, and so forth. In fact, the journey metaphor is ubiquitous in the diverse languages, cultures, and religions of the world – a common and ready means by which humans think about and talk about those aspects of our lives that have religious dimensions.[7]

To show how this metaphor can be used to provide a new starting point for philosophy of religion, I turn now to its internal structure. According to Lakoff and Johnson, *life is a journey* is a complex or molecular metaphor composed of the cultural belief that everyone is supposed to have a purpose in life, the primary metaphors *purposes are destinations* and *actions are motions*, and the fact that a long trip to a series of destinations is a journey (*ibid.*, 52–53, 61–62). This complex metaphor also encompasses four sub-metaphors: *a purposeful life is a journey*, *a person living a life is a traveller*, *life goals are destinations*, and *a life plan is an itinerary* (*ibid.*, 61–62). Finally, the journey metaphor has several entailments or conceptual implications, among which are that one should plan one's route, anticipate obstacles, be prepared, and have an itinerary (*ibid.*).

Drawing from this internal structure and external entailments, I identify several core constitutive parts of the journey metaphor: journeys have a point of origin and destination, a route that is planned, and obstacles and sights that are encountered along the way. Of course, these constituent parts are not themselves philosophical questions or topics. We still need to take two more steps: first, to use these constituent parts to frame vague questions; second, to use these vague questions to specify precise topics and questions for global-critical philosophy of religion.

Step one

Here is my initial set of questions that I find productive for global-critical philosophy of religion:

(1)   Who am I (as traveller)?
(2)   Where do I come from?
(3)   Where am I going?
(4)   How do I get there?
(5)   What obstacles lie in my way?

These questions are obviously vague in ways that make them difficult to answer as stated. They must therefore be specified vis-à-vis some of the content of some of the religious philosophies of the world. This is an involved, perhaps interminable, dialogical process, one that I have only really begun. Nevertheless, in hopes of critical feedback, I briefly sketch how I have carried out this process thus far with respect to the five questions above, through six 'traditions' of philosophizing about religion: South Asian, East Asian, West Asian (Abrahamic), African (Yorùbá), Native American (Lakota), and Euro-American philosophy of religion from the Enlightenment to the present, especially (in the last case) with regard to its entanglements with science and philosophy more broadly.[8]

Step two

Question 1. In looking at understandings of the 'self' in these six traditions, one thing that stood out to us was that the question 'Who am I?' could be rephrased as 'Am I?' in a manner that challenges the Cartesian self as individual, substantial, and autonomous. What we find in our six traditions of philosophizing about religion are many examples of 'selves' that are reduced to internal processes, dispersed into social networks, constructed by social processes, or absorbed into cosmic realities. Our specified question/topic in this case is therefore this: is the 'self' individual and substantial, or are humans better understood differently?

Question 2. Strictly speaking, the question 'Where do I come from?' might produce the answer 'God' in some religious philosophies. I contend, however, that it does so in a manner that is neither very conducive for comparative philosophy of religion nor very precise: is God my origin *qua* creator of the cosmos in general, creator of my soul in particular, ground of being in general, ground of my being in particular? Rather, the more interesting and important question for religious philosophies has been this: Do I have an 'original' human 'nature'? Or to elaborate a bit: Am I 'originally' good or free or enlightened or divine (etc.)? About these questions, many, perhaps all, religious philosophies have had something to say.[9]

Question 3. The third question, 'What is my destination?', has at least two possible types of answers, one of which involves post-mortem destinations; the other, this-worldly destinations. I take up the first one under Q3, asking whether the 'self' survives death, and if so how? Despite a panoply of answers to this question, the question itself seems to be a fairly stable one. (More on the second question below under Q4 and Q5.)

Question 4. At first glance, the question of paths or practices seems hopelessly complex and voluminous, permitting a seemingly countless number of specifications, such as bodily paths and mental paths, 'cat' paths and 'monkey' paths, paths that lead to other-worldly destinations and paths that emphasize this-worldly destinations, paths that take one lifetime or many, and so forth. I suggest, however, that the most philosophically interesting and important question about religious

paths takes up the relationship between religious destinations and moral means (and in doing so also attends to the topic of 'this-worldly' destinations mentioned above under Q3). Are religious destinations reached by means of obedience to moral norms and rules or do they require going beyond morality? This is of course a very Protestant-Kierkegaardian question (if not also a Socratic one). I submit, however, that it is not without comparative partners from each of our six traditions of philosophizing about religion.[10] Moreover, it invites critical reflection about what seems to be a fundamental assumption of undergraduate students – that the whole point of religion is to reinforce moral norms and rules.

Question 5. Given the ways in which Q3 and Q4 have been specified, the question of 'obstacles' can now be specified as 'What prevents us from reaching our destination, be it other-worldly or this-worldly?'. In fact, though, answers to this question usually involve the this-worldly side of religious destinations – destinations such as salvation, enlightenment, harmony, attunement, obedience, submission, health, flourishing, and so forth. What prevents us from achieving these destinations? What prevents us from living the way we should? This reconnects us to the previous question of morality (Q4), as well as with the earlier question of origins (Q2): what is it about our 'original condition' or the behaviour of ourselves or others that keeps us from living the way we should?

With these specifications in place, I again want to remind the reader that they are not fixed, given that the dialectical process that produces them is ongoing. As we continue to test these philosophical questions and topics vis-à-vis the vastly diverse data of our six 'traditions' of philosophizing about religion (not to mention all the traditions I have neglected), our specifications no doubt will change, one hopes in ways that render them better suited for productive cross-cultural philosophy of religion. Nevertheless, there are three issues to be addressed here and now, the third of which will carry us into a second set of vague and specified questions.

The first issue involves Lakoff and Johnson's claim that one component of the *life is a journey* metaphor is the cultural belief that *every individual person* has a unique purpose in life. Surely it is not the case that every culture has this belief. Moreover, we would not want to impose this belief upon the religious traditions, texts, and thinkers of the globe, especially not in a manner that compels their religious philosophies to answer questions underwritten by it. I hope that my specifications have showed that I do not do this. Rather, I use the *life is a journey* metaphor to generate constituent parts of the metaphor, which are then used to specify precise philosophical questions about whether humans are individual and substantial, whether they are originally free or good or enlightened or divine, whether they survive death and if so how, whether they must observe moral norms to attain religious goals, and what conditions, behaviours, and beings prevent them from attaining these goals. More to the point, if it is true that not all cultures or religions think of the self as an individual (as the answers to Q1 reveal), then it is true that not all cultures or religions think that every

individual has a purpose in life. More elaborately, just as the first question does not presuppose that there is a 'self' that is individual, substantial, and autonomous – but rather registers that view as one possible response to the question – so none of the five questions presupposes that every single individual person has a unique purpose in life.

The second issue is related to the first. It is not the case that a religious philosophy has to have a positive or explicit answer to the five questions above to have an answer to them at all. Put differently, religious philosophies can return a 'null result' to these questions and do so in philosophically interesting and important ways. As I have suggested, many religious philosophies respond to a variation of the first question – what is the 'self'? – by rejecting the notion of an individual, substantial, autonomous self. The same holds true for the other four questions. Some religious philosophies hold, whether explicitly or implicitly, that we do not come from anything and are not going anywhere, that there is no path for us to follow, and that no obstacles truly exist.[11] These are among the most interesting and important ways of answering the five questions above, since these answers challenge typical modern-western preconceptions, allow us to see the phenomena of religion more widely, and inspire us to think differently.[12]

The third issue now takes us into new terrain. Although the five questions above are important and interesting questions for philosophy of religion, questions that have been neglected by theistic philosophy of religion, they are also questions that neglect the topics of theistic philosophy of religion, since they entirely miss the core problems of theistic philosophy of religion: the attributes of God, the existence of God, and the problem of evil. My solution to this problem is simple and elegant, even if a bit rhetorically awkward (at least with regard to the vague questions). It begins with the acknowledgement that in some philosophies of religion it is not only humans in particular but also the cosmos in general that can be thought of as journeying (in the sense of having an origin, destination, path, and obstacles). It then notes that in some philosophies of religion, the crucial relationship is that between humans as microcosm and cosmos as macrocosm. Finally, it shows how reduplicating our five questions with regard to the cosmos yields a second set of productive and inclusive questions and topics for philosophy of religion:

(6)   What is the cosmos?
(7)   Where does the cosmos come from?
(8)   Where is the cosmos going?
(9)   How does the cosmos get there?
(10)   What obstacles lie in the way of the cosmos?

Before specifying these vague questions, I want to begin by responding to two critical issues about them: they assume a lineal-teleological world-view; therefore, they do not have answers in many religious philosophies. To date, these issues have produced the most vigorous critique of the project, hence the urgency of

identifying them before undertaking my specifications. However, it is only with the specifications that I can fully demonstrate how a teleological world-view is not being assumed or privileged. This demonstration turns again on the power of the 'null result' – implicit or explicit rejection of the question – which once again provides one of the more interesting and important answers to our questions. To show how this works, I turn now to my specifications.

Question 6. In the case of this first question – what is the cosmos? – we need not worry about null results, since every tradition of philosophizing about religion has something to say about what the cosmos is. We focus or specify this question by looking at the following issues: whether/how traditional cosmologies are at odds with scientific cosmologies that take the cosmos to exist in a manner that is fully independent and real, whether/how traditional cosmologies serve soteriological ends, whether/how traditional cosmologies can continue to serve soteriological ends within scientific cosmological paradigms, and whether/how scientific cosmologies can serve their own soteriological ends.

Question 7. We specify the question of origins by asking whether the cosmos has an origin, and what it is. These are two of the 'big three' topics of theistic philosophy of religion: the nature of God, and proofs for the existence of God. Nevertheless, these questions encompass a variety of views about how and from what the cosmos came to be, as well as the view that the cosmos does not come from anything because it always was.

Question 8. This is the question that would seem most to embed teleological assumptions, not to mention the question that seems least suited to philosophizing about religion. Not so, though. We specify Q8 similarly to Q7: does the cosmos have an end, and if so what happens after that? In some cases, the answer is simply 'no', with compelling reasons why one should think that the cosmos does not have an end but rather is eternal (or cyclical). In other cases, there is the religiously fascinating terrain of apocalyptic and eschatological scenarios, which are usually propounded during times of intense and widespread suffering. And in all cases, scientific models of the end (such as Big Crunch, Big Freeze, and Big Rip) hold intriguing ramifications for traditional religious cosmologies, anthropologies, and soteriologies.

Question 9. This and the next question are worded most awkwardly, for the cosmos is not on a path per se, nor does it face obstacles per se. I specify Q9 by asking about the function or operation of the cosmos, which for many 'moderns' is simply answered by science: the cosmos operates according to 'natural laws'. And yet, religious traditions tend to value the occurrence of phenomena that would appear to run contrary to how science says the cosmos operates: miracles and other extraordinary events, appearances of what is sacred or divine, and exceptional religious and mystical experiences. One issue here concerns what exactly a natural law is. But the thornier issue for global-critical philosophy of religion is this: 'natural law' for whom? Given the *global* nature of my philosophy of religion, I advocate the context-sensitive understanding of

apparently anomalous or exceptional experience vis-à-vis what are considered to be the natural regularities and patterns of some culture and tradition. However, given the *critical* nature of my philosophy of religion, I also contend that we use the most successful means of predicting and explaining the behaviour of natural phenomena – i.e. the sciences – to evaluate anomalous or exceptional religious phenomena (with the caveat that sciences not only have progressed quite a bit since the mechanistic understandings of the Enlightenment but also continue to change and progress).

Question 10. If the 'path' of the cosmos concerns its functioning and order (per Q9), then the 'obstacles' along this path will be things that stand in the way of this functioning and order. In other words: what prevents the cosmos from working the way it should? Like Q7, Q10 involves a central topic in theistic philosophy of religion – the problem of evil. Also like Q7, however, Q10 includes other kinds of answers (karma, mandate of heaven, evil beings) and null results ('There really are no obstacles except our confusion that there are obstacles'). Moreover, Q10 takes us into contemporary issues that threaten the future of our world: environmental catastrophe, economic disparity, and other products of colonialism and capitalism.

In sum, I submit that Questions 6–10 do not assume a teleological view of the cosmos since they permit 'null results' that challenge such a view. More generally, I contend that Questions 1–10 collectively offer a new orientation for 'global' philosophy of religion that is inclusive of many different religious philosophies in a manner that does not unfairly privilege one type of religious philosophy. This is one reason why I commend the use of the journey metaphor to restructure philosophy of religion – it is not the exclusive 'property' of some one tradition or type of religious philosophy and therefore does not unfairly compel the other forms of religious philosophy to fit themselves to it. Here are two more related reasons: it actually 'works' in a manner that is inclusive of and fair towards different religious philosophies (as I believe the textbook itself will show), and it is also inclusive of the major topics and issues within each religious philosophy. Why is this the case? Maybe for my final two reasons: journeys actually do serve to metaphorically structure religious growth and maturation in many different religious traditions,[13] and they might in fact do so because Lakoff and Johnson are correct in their claim that the journey metaphor employs primary metaphors that are both fundamental to cognition and widespread, if not universal, in manifestation.

Critical: how to practise global-critical philosophy of religion

With what space remains, I turn now to four issues pertaining to the textbook's method of practicing global-critical philosophy of religion.

(1)   What is the difference, if anything, between the 'first order' religious philosophies that constitute the content of global-critical philosophy

(2)   of religion and the 'second order' act of philosophizing about religion globally and critically?

(2)   What is the difference, if anything, between legitimate sources of knowledge and illegitimate 'appeals to authority' in global-critical philosophy of religion?

(3)   Why should the global-critical philosopher of religion evaluate religious reasons and ideas?

(4)   How should the global-critical philosopher of religion evaluate religious reasons and ideas?

Since I am calling this the 'critical' section of my article, however, a definition is first in order.

In the introduction to the textbook, I tell the (undergraduate) reader that by 'critical' I mean the second, not the first, dictionary definition, i.e. not 'to indicate the faults of (someone or something) in a disapproving way', but 'to form and express a sophisticated judgment of (a literary or artistic work)'. Of course, global-critical philosophy of religion does not form and express sophisticated judgements of *literary or artistic works*. But it does form and express *sophisticated judgements*, which requires sophisticated understandings of what religion is and how it works. Take, for example, the vexed questions in the academic study of religion about what religion is and does, or whether religion even is at all. It is telling that textbooks in theistic philosophy of religion rarely bat an eye at these questions (therefore implying that religion just is (Christian) theism?). Another particularly important issue for a critical understanding of global-critical philosophy of religion involves the awareness that religions themselves do not 'say' or 'believe' anything; rather people do – and what people say or believe about any given religion can differ dramatically. Religions are therefore 'sites of contestation' – power struggles about who gets to represent some religion and how. Consequently, my textbook does not aim to establish, for example, what Buddhists believe about this or Christians say about that, but rather how certain texts that are identified as Buddhist or Christian, or that purport to describe the views of some Buddhists or Christians, have and can be interpreted and used.[14] In short, I avoid generalizing as much as possible.

This takes me to my first issue, which involves a 'power struggle' of sorts between the 'first order' religious philosophies that constitute the content of global-critical philosophy of religion and the 'second order' act of philosophizing about religion globally and critically. In retrospect, I take this as an issue about which I was not duly critical. The problem began with what seemed to be a general agreement among participants in the seminar involving two of the chief learning objectives of the textbook: on the one hand, to gain a critical understanding of religious philosophies and philosophers in global perspective; on the other hand, to practise global-critical philosophy of religion. This, for me, was the difference between the *content* of global-critical philosophy of religion and the *act* of philosophizing about religion globally and critically, which I marked linguistically

as the difference between 'religious philosophies' and 'philosophy of religion'. One member of the seminar, however, took issue with this distinction, maintaining that it reinscribed a power dynamic that we should instead work to undermine – privileging the 'neutral' and 'comparative' standpoint of global-critical philosophy of religion over and above the 'theologically motivated' and 'tradition-bound' philosophies of religious traditions and thinkers. Did not some so-called 'religious philosophers' practise their trade in ways that were not theologically motivated and tradition bound? Moreover, why should the sources of authority of the secular academy be privileged over and above those of religious traditions?

Semantically, this issue was easily enough solved – refer to the 'religious philosophies' as 'philosophies of religion', recognizing that they can be practised 'globally' or 'comparatively', at least to some degree, and that they do not necessarily begin from or take root in (illegitimate) 'appeals to authority'. Substantively, though, I ran up against the thorny issue of distinguishing between (legitimate) sources of knowledge and (illegitimate) appeals to authority. This issue would seem to be heightened in global-critical philosophy of religion, where sources of knowledge include not just the scriptures and testimonies of diverse religious traditions but also dreams and omens, mystical experiences and shamanistic trances, prophecy and prognostication. Moreover, in some cases perception itself is doubted as a source of authority; perhaps inference too insofar as paradox is championed.

One solution to this problem is simply to rule out all sources of knowledge except those that that would be accepted by someone who does not believe or practise any religion. There are several problems, however, with this strategy. One is the assumption that there is a discrete boundary between those who do and do not believe in or practise religion. A second is the assumption that those who do not believe in or practise religion are unified in what they accept as sources of knowledge. A third is that the absence of religion is being privileged, and the authority of 'science' is probably being assumed. A fourth is that forms of tradition-dependent philosophy of religion are being ruled out.

I therefore propose a different solution to this problem, one that is inspired by the *vāda* tradition of debating in mediaeval India.[15] When two or more people are practising global-critical philosophy of religion, they should try to come to agreement about which 'authorities' they will accept as valid sources of knowledge. Perhaps this will rule out appeals to authority that are specific to particular religious traditions. But it need not, especially when there is general agreement about tradition-based sources of knowledge or real concern over the reliability of empirically based knowledge.

What about when just one person is practising philosophy of religion? If she is evaluating someone else's act of religious reason-giving, she should try to supply reasons for why that person would have accepted their premises as true, and if she is putting forward an act of religious reason-giving, she should try to give reasons why others should accept her premises as true. Moreover, she should practise philosophy of religion in a manner that is contextual, fallibilistic, and personal (not to

mention humble and gentle). This last term ('personal') is particularly important here. As I see it, the practice of global-critical philosophy of religion, especially at the undergraduate level, has a personal, edifying, and cultivating dimension, one aspect of which involves thinking more critically about one's own religious reasons and ideas alongside the religious reasons and ideas of others. It is not for the purpose of establishing which religion is true, nor of 'proving others wrong', but of furthering one's own search for meaning, value, and truth, especially in a multi-religious world where one's 'neighbours' have their own religious reasons and ideas, not to mention practices and institutions.

This brings me to my third issue: why should the global-critical philosopher of religion evaluate religious reasons and ideas at all? Let me begin by taking a step back, for it is necessary first to get my full method of global-critical philosophy of religion into view, at least in its broad strokes. In general, I advance a three-step method for (global-critical) philosophy of religion: description, comparison, and evaluation. With regard to description, I advocate looking at four aspects of acts of religious reason-giving: the *logical form* of the act, the *conceptual meanings* of the act, the *contextual setting* of the act, and the *political uses* of the act. (Easier said than done.) With regard to comparison, I defend my use of the journey metaphor for restructuring the basic topics and questions of philosophy of religion. (See above.) And with regard to evaluation, well, this is where things get tricky.

In the textbook, I begin with the following definition of evaluation: evaluation is the process by which philosophers raise and pursue questions of meaning, truth, and value about acts of religious reason-giving in comparative perspective. I then clarify two components of this definition – *raise and pursue questions* and *in comparative perspective* – and go on to speak about how this 'raising and pursuing' should happen 'however possible' (more on this last bit shortly). But the question remains: why should the global-critical philosopher of religion do this? Or as my students might put it: *how dare* the global-critical philosopher of religion do this, i.e. evaluate the religious reasons and ideas *of someone else*?

Perhaps this question is not of concern to the audience for whom I now write. It is, though, of concern not only to many of my undergraduate students but also to some 'description only' scholars in the academic study of religion, especially in a climate of political correctness and cultural relativism that tells us we should not 'judge others'. It is for these readers, especially my students, that I provide reasons such as the following:

(1) Religious traditions and communities make claims about what is real, true, and good; to understand and evaluate these claims is to take them seriously.

(2) Humans care about what is real, true, and good; to understand and evaluate the claims that religious traditions and communities make about matters of reality, truth, and goodness is to take ourselves seriously.

(3) Evaluation in global-critical philosophy of religion can be empathetic, humble, gentle, and fallibilistic; it is not for the sake of proving others wrong or inferior.

(4) Philosophy always has and always will require chutzpah: philosophy simply is, or at least involves, raising and pursuing questions of meaning, truth, and value; global-critical philosophy of religion is no different in this respect.

(5) Philosophy of religion is ultimately a personal endeavour. To the extent that reasons are relevant to my own religious beliefs and practices, I use philosophy of religion to help me understand which beliefs are true and which practices are conducive, as best I can tell in the here and now.

Do reasons like these suffice? Probably not. Still, I hope they help. They have, anyway, with my students, some of whom have found meaning and truth in religious ideas they had not previously known, others of whom have found reasons for religious ideas they had always known – and all without consigning their neighbours to hell.

Only one question now to go: *how* should the global-critical philosopher of religion raise and pursue questions of meaning, truth, and value in comparative perspective? Both in my textbook and in my classroom, I say, 'however possible'. This involves mapping arguments, analysing terms, questioning the truth of premises, examining the soundness of deductive arguments, weighing the strength of inductive arguments, and so forth. I also invite hermeneutic approaches, by considering why religious reasons were taken as convincing by some in their original contexts and whether they can be for any of us in our own context, as well as phenomenological approaches, by attending to how religious ideas appear to us when we 'bracket' at least some of our relevant assumptions.

Still, both in my textbook and in my classroom, I must confront the common undergraduate assumption that without any directly confirming or disconfirming empirical evidence, the evaluation of religious reasons and ideas is purely subjective and wholly futile. It is in response to this view that I have found modest success in having the students utilize a broad set of epistemic virtues – empirical accuracy, external coherence, practical usefulness, internal consistency, theoretical simplicity, and explanatory scope – in their acts of evaluation. Although empirical accuracy is rarely direct, religious reasons and ideas are not entirely without some relevant empirical observations and scientific findings. Nevertheless, it is usually coherence and usefulness that my students find most coherent and useful, even if they must continually be pushed to understand these virtues beyond their personal-subjective ramifications. Every now and again, consistency, simplicity, and scope also show themselves useful.

'However possible', we therefore raise and pursue questions of meaning, truth, and value about religious reasons and ideas in comparative perspective, all in a

manner that is rooted in my students' individual journeys for meaning, truth, and value, though as members of an increasingly diverse, global world – a world in which it is no longer acceptable to think of religion primarily as theism and to practise philosophy of religion solely with regard to theistic concerns.

Conclusion

Is there a future for philosophy of religion that is global and critical? This much seems indubitable. What about a future for an undergraduate textbook that practises philosophy of religion globally and critically? Yes, this too. Now, as a former classmate quipped, it is time for you, my readers, to write competing textbooks. Let us show the next crop of philosophers of religion that the reasons and ideas of philosophy of religion go far beyond those of (Christian) theism.

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Notes

1. For now, let 'religious philosophies' denote those dimensions of religious traditions for which philosophical questions (see below for which ones) are matters of focused attention, discussion, and debate in and between religious traditions. Given that many forms of contemporary philosophy of religion are in service of a certain (Christian) religio-philosophical theism or a certain (Christian) religio-philosophical postmodernism, I also include them in the category of 'religious philosophies' – at least for now. I will come back to this rudimentary definition and problematize it in the second section of this article.

2. For the most notable exceptions, see Kessler (1998), Yandell (1999), Runzo (2001), Griffth-Dickson (2005), Vroom (2006), and Eshleman (2008). I find, though, that none of these works rethinks the topics and questions of philosophy of religion radically enough to put the religious philosophies of the world on equal footing. Nor do any of these works engage with critical issues in the academic study of religion.

3. One conceptual version of this article had me dealing with ten total issues, one per paragraph. Instead, I decided to go with the two most thorny. Here are the eight I omitted: (1) which traditions of philosophy of religion to include and exclude; (2) how to balance generality and specificity for each tradition of

philosophizing about religion; (3) how to balance context and content for each tradition of philosophizing about religion; (4) how to deal with the issue of 'null' responses to the topics/questions (this one I do deal with below under the 'Global' section); (5) how to show that academic/theistic philosophy of religion is not the only 'living' tradition of philosophy of religion; (6) how to incorporate primary sources without utilizing an anthology (if indeed it comes to this!); (7) how to deal with the 'Hick-ian question' about which path, if any, is true; (8) how one person can(not) write such a book.

4. Perkins (2014) demonstrates how a version of the 'problem of evil' was very much alive in 'classical Chinese philosophy', in part owing to the fleeting success of the Mohists, who held that *Tian* rewards virtue and punishes vice. If this 'problem' had a 'solution' in the late Zhou Dynasty, it was one that simply rejected person-like concepts of 'highest' or 'first' or 'divine' or 'cosmic' reality. *Tian* was merely nature – the heaven above. This view largely prevailed in subsequent Chinese philosophy (after the demise of Mohism); thus, the problem of evil did not feature prominently in it.

5. I think of this as an abductive process in contrast to the inductive process of the second approach above and the deductive process of the first approach above.

6. See Knepper (2013) for the promissory note. And see Paden (2001), 280 for the following list of panhuman conceptual behaviors: creating linguistic objects that have no visible existence, and acting towards them as though they were real and efficacious; classifying and mapping the universe, including time and space; worldmaking; attributing significance (including causation) to events and objects whether mental or physical; experimenting with alternative forms of consciousness, trance, disassociation; disciplining the mind and body and forming constraining regimens of behavior in order to effect certain results and kinds of fitness; using ideas to guide behavior and sort out behavioral options; reflecting on perceived errors of thought and behavior; reinventing selfhood.

7. Although I have yet to complete exhaustive research on this topic, I can here refer to a smattering of evidence relative to the five pre-modern traditions on which I focus: in the case of South Asian religious philosophy, the use of path and step metaphors in Buddhism, Jainism, and Yoga (among other 'Hindu' *darśanas*); in the case of East Asian religious philosophy, the ubiquity of *dao* (way) language in the *sanjiao*; in the case of West Asian (Abrahamic) religious philosophy, the trope of mystical journey or ascent, not to mention the importance of pilgrimage more generally; in the case of African (Yorùbá) religious philosophy, the destiny of the *orí* as journey; in the case of Native American (Lakota) religious philosophy, the journey by which the *šicun* escorts the *nagi*, upon death, beyond the Milky Way.

8. These traditions of philosophy of religion involve (a) groups of people who are informed by the same families of religious traditions, more or less, (b) who practise philosophy of religion with regard to similar topics and in a similar manner, more or less, and (c) who pass down and preserve those practices through institutions of some sort.

9. These questions take us into fascinating comparative terrain involving phenomena such as Christian and Muslim debates about free will, Confucian positions about original goodness, Vedānta understandings of the relationship between Ātman and Brahman, Chan/Zen debates over Buddha-nature and sudden enlightenment, original sacred mystery (*wakan*) in Lakota thought, and the destiny of the *orí* in Yorùbá thought.

10. Here are some possible examples: trickster figures in Yorùbá and Lakota traditional ways; deviant saints such as Kṛṣṇa Caitanya and Rāmakṛṣṇa in South Asian religious philosophy; Daoist and Chan/Zen amorality with regard to East Asian religious philosophy; and mystics such as Rābiʻa, Ḥallāj, Marguerite Poerte, and Meister Eckhart in Abrahamic religious philosophy.

11. It was the Daoist among us who most strenuously resisted these questions, albeit in philosophically important ways.

12. This is another way in which my proposal differs from classical 'perennial philosophies'. I do not maintain that all philosophies of religion philosophize about the same content or contain the same doctrinal core. I do, however, think that each of my ten questions returns philosophically interesting and important answers, even when those answers reject their questions.

13. See note 7.

14. Alas, we philosophers of religion are still usually dealing primarily with texts, whether they are those of sacred scripture (etc.) or those of scholars such as historians and anthropologists. Perhaps, though, there is a future for a 'living philosophy of religion', which begins with people, not texts.

15. I am here influenced by Clayton (2006) in particular (with regard to the uses of the *vāda* tradition for philosophy of religion) and Wildman (2010) in general (with regard to the relationship between philosophy of religion and theology).