INTRODUCTION

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For the vast majority of its history, European philosophy has been deeply entwined with religion. From ancient Greece, where philosophy was not a distinct academic field but a way of life, as Pierre Hadot has argued, through medieval scholasticism where religion's presence in philosophy (or, rather, philosophy's presence in religion) is obvious, and even into modern philosophy right up until Nietzsche, philosophy has been shot through with what we call religion. It was, in fact, only a very short heyday—if that's what it was—in the first half of the 20th century when philosophy seemed sufficiently unconcerned about and unaffected by religion. But then, in the 1960s, religion started to sneak back in. As if confirming Gilbert Ryle's prediction in his review of *Being and Time* that Heideggerian thinking would lead to the "windy mysticism" of religion[1], Heidegger's students and readers, such as Arendt, Levinas and Ricœur, devoted more and more attention to religion. By the 1980s, even some of the 68ers were beginning to look again at religion: first Foucault, then Derrida, followed by Lyotard. By the time the century would close, essentially every major European philosopher would have devoted a significant work to some aspect of religion, a development that has continued up to our present time.

That some philosophers in this tradition began to reconsider religion in the last few decades, however, should not lead one to the conclusion that religion is treated favourably by all these philosophers and certainly should not be taken as evidence that religion is unanimously appreciated in continental philosophy. From the beginning of this turn, it has had its detractors. An early, very vocal expression of resistance came from Dominique Janicaud's well-publicized criticisms.[2] Janicaud argues that at some point in its later development, phenomenology had been effectively hijacked by a religious sensibility that in his view resides outside of the parame-

[1] Gilbert Ryle, "Review of Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*," in *Critical Essays: Collected Papers Volume 1* (London: Routledge, 2009), 205–222, here 222.
[2] See interview with John Caputo in this special section.

ters that Husserl and the early practitioners of phenomenology had envisaged. The "theological turn," as he put it, violates the phenomenological enterprise by incorporating into it matters that properly speaking belong to the domain of metaphysics. More recently, a group of mostly younger philosophers, some of whom are rallying around the name of "speculative realism," have voiced their strong opposition to what they take to be the unbecoming infatuation with religion on the part of many contemporary continental philosophers. In an effort to describe the ostensible dead-end of the correlationalism spawned by Kant's Copernican revolution, Quentin Meillassoux argues in *Après la finitude*—a foundational text for speculative realism—that Kant's grounding of the subject opened the door for religion's reincorporation into philosophical discourse, a development that he condemns as the "exacerbated return of the religious."[3] Summarizing speculative realism's allergic reaction to religion, John Caputo notes of this newer generation of philosophers that they "are tired of hearing about undecidability, religious turns, and the ethics of the other, and they are looking for a more hard-nosed, materialist, realist atheist line of thought."[4]

The concern with what is perceived to be the indefatigability of religion's recidivism has become a divisive factor even amongst those who share a materialist or immanentist outlook. Adrian Johnston, for example, accuses Meillassoux of "knowingly or unknowingly, smuggl[ing] idealist religiosity back into materialist atheism via a non-dialectical 'materialism.'"[5] For Johnston, even Alain Badiou—one of the major inspirations behind the new materialist and object-oriented philosophies—is charged with not having sufficiently divested his thought of religious assumptions, in particular, the "barely concealed fragments of Christianity appropriated with little to no significant modification."[6] One can discern in such vehement expressions to purge philosophy of the remnants of religion a profound disavowal not only of how religious ideas and practices played an essential role in shaping western ideas, but also how religious

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[3] Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, (tr.) R. Brassier (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 45.

[4] John Caputo "The Return of Anti-Religion," *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory*, vol. 11 no. 2 (Spring 2011): 32–125, here 32 [www.jcrt.org/archives/11.2/caputo.pdf]

[5] Adrian Johnston, "Hume's Revenge, *À Dieu, Meillassoux*?," in *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*, (ed.) L. Bryant, N. Srnicek, and G. Harman (Melbourne: re.press, 2011), 113.

[6] *Ibid*., 93. See also Adrian Johnston, "Alain Badiou, the Hebb-Event, and Materialism Split From Within," *Angelaki*, vol. 13, no. 1 (2008): 27–49.

assumptions and preconceptions do and can continue to inform and to contribute to even the most secular discourses of the contemporary world—including, we might add, the "belief systems" of the most ardent of atheists. The failure and desire not to recognize these points rests entirely on the underlying, wholly unquestioned, assumption that there is something called *Religion*, which is unambiguously bad, regressive, and malignant, and there is another thing called *Secular*, which is wholly distinct from *Religion*, and therefore good, progressive, and beneficent.

Despite their obvious differences, philosophers as diverse as Derrida, Taylor, and Habermas, among others, argue that this refusal to seriously understand religion in all of its complexity—past, present, and future—entails that not only are we unaware of the beneficial and affirmative contributions of religion, but we are equally, and more disturbingly, completely oblivious to those destructive religious passions that fuel some of the most regressive features of our present world beyond the obvious example of the various religious fundamentalisms that have reared their ugly heads for at least a century now. As Schmitt, Derrida, and others have taught us, these passions have also been at play in a number of deeply problematic secular discourses, like the eschatological attempts on the part of certain communist regimes in the 20th century to violently hasten the arrival of the kingdom of heaven on earth. In less dramatic terms, though equally far-reaching, the modern world as a whole can be said to have undergone a process that William Cavanaugh aptly describes as the "migration of the holy."[7] The modern age involves a profound rechanneling of psychic and affective investments that were previously directed towards the sacred sites of the church and temple. Modernity has seen a migration of these commitments to the state and its welfare apparatus. If our pre-modern ancestors invested all their hopes for security and wellbeing in religious ideals and institutions, we moderns now do the same vis-à-vis the state. From Foucault to Agamben, we have only in these last few decades become aware of the extent to which the state has acquired an all-encompassing, almost apotheosis character in the lives of us late moderns. Our failure to see these consequences no doubt has something to do with the cover provided by an unquestioned faith in a certain understanding of secularism that has been bequeathed to us from the Enlightenment.

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[7] William T. Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011).

Nobody has illuminated the relationship between the secular and religion more than Charles Taylor in his monumental work, *A Secular Age*.[8] Drawing on continental philosophical conceptions of genealogy and horizon, Taylor looks at the historical developments and background understandings that enable secularism and its misunderstandings to come into being. In this work he underscores three critical points about the relationship of the secular and the religious: (1) Though it might seem obvious, many of the misconceptions we have concerning religion stem from the unfortunately all-too-frequent assumption that religion is a monolithic phenomenon. A more adequate starting point is to accept that religion, past and present, is remarkably complex and varied. (2) Likewise, there is no such thing as *the* secular age or Secularism. No less so than religion, secularism comes in different forms and shapes. Not only are there significant differences between, for example, American and European secular cultures, but there are also conspicuous regional differences in how secularism is instituted and lived out on a daily basis within these broader geographical areas. (3) Rather than being antithetical to each other, religion and secularism share a complicated and interwoven set of historical trajectories. In Taylor's case, western secularism is an outgrowth of religious reformist tendencies that mark the development of Christianity at various peak moments, most notably, the Hildebrandine reforms of the 11th century, the radical initiatives of the Franciscans in the 13th century, and the various Protestant reformations that swept across Europe in the middle of the last millennium. What Taylor and others demonstrate is that the claim that secular modern life represents a straightforward break with religion involves a blatant distortion of actual historical dynamics. Though they may disagree on some of the details, scholars ranging from Taylor to Robert Bellah and José Casanova agree that the various secular worldviews that make up the modern social imaginary have critical antecedents in their respective religious heritages. For all these reasons, we would do well—following William James's famous use of the term—to speak of *varieties* of religions and secularisms.

The word "varieties" also accurately characterizes the distinctive and plural voices that have and continue to engage religion within the continental philosophical tradition. Without a doubt a new area of inquiry has clearly emerged in continental philosophy since the turn of the century. It has been dubbed variously as the "religious

[8] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

turn" or the "theological turn" in continental philosophy, or "postmodern theology," but increasingly as the *continental philosophy of religion*. Some of the most obvious names associated with this movement are no longer with us today: Emmanuel Levinas, Paul Ricoeur, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Henry. At present, the philosophers on the continent itself who continue to engage with religion include major figures like Giorgio Agamben, Rémi Brague, Jean-Louis Chrétien, Jürgen Habermas, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Jean-Luc Marion, Jean-Luc Nancy, Peter Sloterdijk, Gianni Vattimo, and Slavoj Žižek. In the English-speaking world some of the more established continental writers on religion include John Caputo, Simon Critchley, Grace Jantzen, Richard Kearney, and Merold Westphal. And while his work is not immediately thought of as "continental," Charles Taylor's reflections on religion and secularism are certainly in dialogue with Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Benjamin, Merleau-Ponty, and Habermas, and he is discussed and debated within continental philosophical circles.

The work of this diverse group of philosophers represents a rich array of views on religion. That there is no consensus in this subfield of continental philosophy should not be seen as a shortcoming, but rather a reflection of the fact that the story of religion's influence is incredibly multifaceted. It is, perhaps, more importantly, an *ongoing* process. The various accounts that one finds in current continental thought concerning the significance of the history and future of the relationship between religion and secularism shed light on this ongoing development. The philosophizing on religion from a continental perspective, in this respect, represents a much-needed antidote to the one-dimensional and ultimately unconstructive representations of both religion and secularism that one continues to find in the popular media today and, unfortunately, we might add, many pockets of the academy and other intellectual spheres.

It was for these reasons that, when we decided to organize a conference on these issues—on which this special section is based—we did so under the banner of *Varieties of Continental Thought and Religion.* It took place in Toronto between 14 and 17 June, 2012, at Ryerson University and was the first major conference of its kind hosted by a Canadian university, even though Canada is home to many scholars who work in this area, and even though Canada itself has a rather distinct variety of secularism. Besides inviting open submissions, we invited a number of speakers to be plenaries from various areas of continental philosophy, including phenomenology, hermeneutics, deconstruction, critical theory, and film-philosophy (about which, more below). We also organized a special screening of

the film *The Tree of Life* (Terrence Malick, 2011) with the Cinematheque of the Toronto International Film Festival at the Lightbox theatre and a public talk by Robert Sinnerbrink. There were a few reasons for this. Besides the film's content dealing with religion, Malick, as is well known, has an impressive philosophical pedigree: he studied Heidegger at Harvard with Stanley Cavell; filled in for Hubert Dreyfus in his Heidegger course at MIT; translated and wrote the introduction to Heidegger's *The Essence of Reason*; and, finally, started a PhD in philosophy at Oxford (on the topic of the concept of world in Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein, and Heidegger) before launching a remarkable career as one of America's most critically acclaimed filmmakers.

The authors gathered in this special section of *Symposium* were the keynote and plenary speakers at the Varieties conference. Although we do not have in this collection the talk that Caputo gave as the keynote address at our conference, he did graciously agree to be interviewed by us at a later date (see the introduction to the interview for details). In "The Insistence of Religion in Philosophy: An Interview with John D. Caputo," our questions and Caputo's answers range across a variety of issues in the continental philosophy of religion. Most broadly, Caputo discusses the relationship between continental philosophy and religion. Acknowledging that continental philosophers often have an allergic reaction to religion, failing sometimes to see the implications of the postmodern breakdown of dichotomies, Caputo nevertheless believes, without this becoming a dogmatic agenda for him, that continental philosophy and religion stand to mutually gain from their encounter. He sees two main variants of the continental philosophy of religion, which stem from Kant and from Hegel. Identifying with the latter, although minus the absolute knowledge, Caputo regards the difference of philosophy and religion as a difference of *modality*, not *region*—that is, they address not different topics (*topos*, place), but fundamentally the same things in different manners (*modus*). Religion's manner is to depict and cultivate what phenomenology came to call a *Lebenswelt*, a lifeworld. Religion is not, as it gets conceived in modernity, a separate compartment of life or category of being. The significance of God, as a key part of that lifeworld, is thus not that he supposedly demonstrably exists with particular attributes, as metaphysical theology and philosophy have approached him, but that his name is inherited from the lifeworld and yet harbours an excess that forever calls it into question. God is, for Caputo, an insistent demand upon the existent inhabitants of the lifeworld. As such, while the name of God may demand that a feature of the world be deconstructed, the

name of God itself is, following Derrida, undeconstructible. But if this undeconstructible name is nevertheless inherited from a cultural tradition, then in different cultural traditions, Caputo wagers, this structure is likely named differently, although it is possible that it may not exist there at all. Caputo acknowledges that this is a broadening of Derrida's interests, an active reinterpretation of the forms of thinking that all of us have inherited from Derrida. And Caputo does think that continental philosophers have all inherited from Derrida, that he has permanently altered the way we think and approach things, and that Derrida and deconstruction do then have a future.

If Caputo has argued that religion is a lifeworld in the phenomenological sense, Charles Taylor has powerfully made the case, also on the basis of phenomenology, that the secular age, too, is a lifeworld with its own distinct imaginary. This insight allows Taylor to debunk what he calls "subtraction stories" of secularization, in which the secular is regarded negatively as a residuum leftover when religion has been purged. Secularization, for Taylor, is rather the positive formation of a new, modern lifeworld characterized by an "immanent frame" and forms of humanism. In "Cross-Pressured Authenticity," Ronald Kuipers zeroes in on Taylor's important point that a *certain* kind of humanism—one that Taylor qualifies as "exclusive"—represents a refusal to take seriously the challenge of the modern wager, that is, following William James, to allow oneself to experience the existential turbulence of occupying the "open space"[9] of modernity. In this way, Taylor's powerful critique exposes those who seek to project a "false aura of the obvious" and thus refuse to "recognize the fragility of their position." This fragility implicates believers and unbelievers alike. Taking issue with an overly-simplistic secularization theory, Taylor presents us with a Western cultural landscape that, far from demonstrating the end of religion as was predicted decades ago, reveals instead a myriad of spiritual "options." In such a new historical and cultural context as we find ourselves today, even the most strident religious adherents cannot help but be cognizant of the "cross-pressure" this situation of cultural plurality induces. Such cross-pressures lead to what Taylor calls a "fragilization" of one's religious identity. Complicating this story, the modern emphasis on authenticity amplifies the fragilizing effects of these various cultural cross-pressures. As a result, increasing numbers of individuals are insisting on cultivating their own spiritual identity. No doubt for many that is still done in connection to an established historical faith tradition. But increasingly it is important

[9] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 549, 551.

for adherents to choose which aspects of those traditions they will affirm. Through the lens of Taylor's work, Kuipers paints a much more complex picture of our current state of affairs than the one offered to us by the standard secular account.

Besides the spiritual and existential problems that the modern, secular condition of pluralism raises, the "fact of pluralism" identified by Rawls also generates social and political challenges for the secular age. Taking up the agenda-setting responses to these challenges by John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas, Nikolas Kompridis argues in "Can Public Reason Be Secular and Democratic?" for a "thick" understanding of the processes of communication among different cultural constituents in a polity. Although Kompridis's contribution might at first seem out of place in this collection, given that he makes no reference to continental philosophy beyond Habermas and that his first sentence announces that he is not interested in religion per se, it is important to understand the rich perspective that informs Kompridis's powerful analysis. In his book, *Critique and Disclosure: Critical Theory Between Past and Future*[10], Kompridis had shown how Habermas's conceptions of reason, agency, communication and the lifeworld could be greatly deepened—though ultimately transformed—by understanding aright and building upon Heideggerian disclosure and the phenomenological sense of the lifeworld. Complementing, or perhaps encompassing, this source is what Kompridis elsewhere calls "philosophical romanticism," part of which involves understanding the agent as receptive, a notion present in the current essay.[11] Although Kompridis never to our knowledge refers to Levinas, readers familiar with the latter will see overlap in their thinking on this matter. In the present essay, Kompridis is primarily focused on Habermas's recent suggestion that religious reasons must be translated into secular reasons if they are to play a justificatory role in the political public sphere. The demand presupposes, in Kompridis's judgement, both an under-complex view of translation and a metaphysical view of the unity of reason. According to Kompridis, Habermas's conception of translation is cognitivistic, by which he means that "Habermas prioritises the cognitive dimension of religious contents and at the same time reduces those contents to their cognitive dimension," thereby leaving out whole swaths of people's religious experience. In assuming a

[10] Nikolas Kompridis, *Critique and Disclosure: Critical Theory between Past and Future* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).
[11] Nikolas Kompridis (ed.), *Philosophical Romantism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

unity of reason, Habermas assumes that behind the plurality of cultural forms is one form of reason and reasoning, so that attempts to translate cognitive contents from "language" to another are simply one and the same reason transporting contents from itself to itself through itself. Eschewing Habermasian assumptions about the "unity of reason," Kompridis presents an alternative conception that makes room for multiple and heterogeneous languages of public reason, and which places the stress on language learning rather than on language translation. Beginning from a disunity of reason means not granting any language a monopoly on reason, and that the giving and receiving of reasons demands a mutual struggle for communication. Such a struggle demands of its participants the effort to learn the other's language, which can only be achieved through some measure of familiarity with the background framework of the language, including the community's practices, forms of life, and norms, which, in turn, demands that one be receptive to transformations of one's self-understanding.

A similar call for acknowledging the fallibility of our own standpoints, for the recognition of the legitimacy of non-secular forms of life, and for a philosophy responsive to the situation others introduce to us is found in the thought of Paul Ricoeur. In "Ricoeur from Fallibility to Fragility and Ethics," Morny Joy discusses the French philosopher's complex personal and intellectual relationship to religion. Ricoeur, according to Joy, never ceased thinking of religion's contribution to addressing some of the most intractable problems associated with the human condition. Nonetheless, he was extremely hesitant to disclose his own personal religious commitments. This reservation extended to his use of religious language—those categories had to be restrained by the demands of reason. Ricoeur would not permit his own philosophy to defer to religion for clarification. That reservation was certainly sealed in his engagement with Kant's own reflections on the role and limits of religion for philosophy. His initial work had a strong speculative component to it, one that was focused on providing descriptive analyses of the origins of evil. But over time, Ricoeur's thought became increasingly concerned with action and a marked desire to ameliorate human suffering. And while he retained a lifelong suspicion of theodicies, he nevertheless appreciated how faith communities had developed important spiritual and psychological supports for those who suffered. He acknowledges, in a number of key texts, that religion should be taken into consideration in our philosophical deliberations about how we are to relate to others. As Joy puts it, "Ricoeur's intention in this regard is to shape philosophy to be equally responsive." For him, religion, at its best,

cultivates responsiveness towards those who suffer as a result of injustice or the natural and accidental calamities that can befall any of us.

Readers of Caputo's *The Insistence of God* will come across a brief discussion of Terrence Malick's film, *The Tree of Life*.[12] We mentioned Malick's philosophical pedigree above, but this is complimented by the serious interest that many continental philosophers have taken in film, most notably Deleuze, Badiou, and Žižek, as well as philosophers whose interests overlap with those of continental philosophy, like Stanley Cavell and Robert Pippin. Philosophers are not alone in their efforts to explore the complex interweaving of belief and unbelief, religion and the secular, sacred and profane. In the second volume of his influential *Cinema*, Deleuze makes the bold claim that a new kind of cinema—what he dubs the "time-image"—has the power to give us "reasons to believe in this world"[13]; precisely at the moment when the link between ourselves and the world has been severed. For Deleuze, the time-image represents a genuine attempt to address the cultural-historical nihilism that erupts to the surface in our late modern world. In yet another variant of continental philosophy, Robert Sinnerbrink turns to Malick's visionary film, *The Tree of Life*, which poses the question of belief on a number of levels, as a case study for philosophically exploring the relationship between cinema and belief.[14] Can film depict belief, spiritual experience, and love in a manner that transcends our cultural scepticism? Sinnerbrink argues that, with its fusion of moral, historical, metaphysical, and spiritual visions, the film challenges the viewer's own scepticism, whether towards religion, morality, or the aesthetic possibilities of cinema. Malick's wager in *The Tree of Life*, Sinnerbrink avers, is that cinema retains the power of creating an aesthetic mythology; that it is a medium of aesthetic revelation capable of evoking personal, historical, even cosmic memory.

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[12] John D. Caputo, *The Insistence of God: A Theology of the Perhaps* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013), 249–50.

[13] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 177.

[14] Some of the issues that are raised here are further explored in J. Caruana and M. Cauchi (eds), *Accursed Films: Postsecular Cinema between The Tree of Life and Melancholia* (SUNY Press, forthcoming).