

After the Postsecular and the Postmodern

After the Postsecular and the Postmodern:
New Essays in Continental
Philosophy of Religion

Edited by

Anthony Paul Smith and Daniel Whistler

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SCHOLARS**

P U B L I S H I N G

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New Essays in Continental Philosophy of Religion,
Edited by Anthony Paul Smith and Daniel Whistler

This book first published 2010

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-1987-5, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-1987-9

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, we wish to thank the contributors for their tireless efforts in making this volume happen. Thanks are also due to the team at CSP for their assistance, Kathryn Bevis, Jenny Bunker, James Carter and Joseph Carlisle for their work in organising the events at which some of the ideas in this volume were first aired, Pamela Sue Anderson for initiating these events as well as her continued support and Jenny Bunker and Hayley Smith for all their encouragement.

FOREWORD

PAMELA SUE ANDERSON

“Modernity Reborn, or Enlightenment—again—in Continental Philosophy of Religion”! This could be the alternative title and something I could contribute as a focus for readers of this collection of new essays. Without a doubt, Daniel Whistler and Anthony Paul Smith give us “Continental philosophy of religion” seen with new eyes. The fresh air and cogency of their Introduction are palpable. Neither the editors nor the contributors pull any punches in the traditional manner whereby positions “for” and “against” (God) must be reinforced by strong barricades on each side. And yet the authors in this collection each “tell it like they see it” with clear voices and attentive eyes equipped with incisive and historical skills. This said, it must be noted that being “critical” is neither their main aim nor the dominant virtue here. In particular, instead of treating *modern* philosophy of religion as a theological taboo, both modernity and philosophy of religion as found in the historical traditions of Continental Europe are freed from the spoof which—as argued cogently by the editors in their Introduction—had wrongly persuaded many (and especially theologians) to think them “illegitimate”!

We, as readers, are offered bold and energizing “test-cases” in speculation, in liberation (of thought) and in heresy. The contributions before us are, then, brave historically and philosophically. This also makes the work political: the volume could generate a storm of free thinking which not only challenges one’s own constraints in writing in this field, but opens us to what feels extremely novel here (to me at least), that is, both the secular and the speculative. “Experimentation” might be the new buzzword for this fresh approach to European thought and to philosophy of religion; this also supplements (or moves beyond) what is often perceived as the philosophical approach on the Continent which remains caught up with phenomenology and hermeneutic method. Doing Continental philosophy of religion without current or recent constraints of method and content is meant to be excessive. It is also, as I see it, “revolutionary” in the best sense of this term.

To the credit of the editors and the contributors, what we have here is—in their own words—a “fuller picture of what Continental philosophy

of religion can be". To give you a taste for what is to come, for one thing, the obligation is to see how "modern philosophy of religion liberated itself and disrupted claims to orthodoxy. Such modern strategies provide a template for contemporary efforts". For another thing, a crucial imperative is "to think beyond the failures of the moderns (while remaining within that tradition) so as to carry out a speculative inquiry into the very nature of the secular".

From my own point of view, it was at a conference in 2007 at the University of Oxford, entitled, "Transcendence Incarnate," that a new breed of young philosophers came to my attention with Daniel Whistler acting (at least in organisational terms!) as "the midwife"—in the very best Socratic and inclusive sense of this concept. Both Anthony Paul Smith and Daniel Whistler are each owed our intellectual debt and huge gratitude for the hard work and inspiration evident everywhere in this courageous volume of constructive ideas in philosophy for the second decade in the present, twenty-first century. Thanks to Dan and to Anthony—at this point, I turn you over to their capable hands in a most original Introduction.

EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS CONTINENTAL PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION NOW?

ANTHONY PAUL SMITH
AND DANIEL WHISTLER

I. Madame Curie as Philosophical Persona

Marie Curie was not afraid to get her hands dirty. Her lifelong experimentation with radioactive isotopes was made possible by openness to contamination, and even recklessness in the face of it. In her attempt to understand and work with radioactive material, she continually exposed herself to contamination and (in true Spinozist fashion) this resulted in a fundamental—and ultimately fatal—change in the constitution of her body. There are destructive and constructive contaminations, but more often there are both together: Curie's research led to both cancer treatments and the atomic bomb; it enlarged scientific understanding but also contributed to her death. Curie's risks with contamination engendered both joyous affects and passions.¹

¹ Illustrative of this interplay of joy and passion in Curie's life is an anecdote from Le Doeuff: "The book [my teacher] gave me was a biography of Marie Curie, written by her daughter Eve, if I remember rightly. A week later I gave it back. 'So you saw,' he said, 'how cold she was in her attic room and how she put her suitcase on top of the bed covers...' 'What a woman she was! She could dance non-stop for three days! So that afterwards her shoes were only fit for the dustbin!' replied she who is always suspicious when people start talking about her edifying sacrifices." Michèle Le Doeuff, *Hipparchia's Choice* 2nd ed, trans. Trista Selous (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 144. It is here, when we take on the persona of a woman, that we must also acknowledge the lack of a specifically *feminist* Continental philosophy of religion in this volume. Feminist philosophy of religion is part of how Continental philosophy of religion is currently practiced, but there are no essays devoted to it here simply because there already exists two

This volume is also concerned with contaminations.² Various accounts of them and strategies to deal with them are given throughout, creating a metaphilosophical debate that forms the unconscious connecting thread throughout the essays. Roughly, there are two groups of strategies proffered. First, a number of the contributions chart the sometimes destructive effects of the recent theological contamination of philosophy. The task here is simply that of finding a way to perform a philosophical operation upon theological material, while retaining something properly philosophical. Here philosophy turns outwards, both as a critical operation on theology and as a liberation of aspects of religion from their own theological contamination. Second, some of the contributions experiment in the possibility of an aggressive alternative: a complementary philosophical contamination of theology. Experimentation here risks a disintegration of the philosophical body, in order to disturb theology's ideological and orthodox identity (that is, to contaminate it). What is at stake in both cases is a practice of philosophy which avoids dissolving into theology or becoming a tool of theological thought.

Contamination is therefore the challenge, and the pertinent strategy for philosophy of religion is twofold: liberation or automutation.

II. The Liberation and Automutation of Philosophy

The religious turn in phenomenology (Marion, Henry, Courtine), a Christian brand of deconstruction (Caputo) and feminist appeals to Mariology (Irigaray), all manifest the "theological turn" of recent Continental philosophy. The epithet "theological turn" itself implies that all these movements share the same intent: to contaminate philosophy with theological thinking. If anything defines the last decade of Continental philosophy of religion, it is the *theologisation of philosophy*.

This contamination, like Curie's, has been both productive and destructive. Its major benefit is the increase in status and popularity Continental philosophy of religion has enjoyed. There is now no longer any need to pause and wonder at its mere existence; rather, Continental

exemplary volumes that focus specifically on the feminist practice of Continental philosophy of religion. See Pamela Sue Anderson and Beverley Clack eds, *Feminist Philosophy of Religion: Critical Readings* (London: Routledge, 2004) and Pamela Sue Anderson ed, *New Topics in Feminist Philosophy of Religion: Contestations and Transcendence Incarnate* (London: Springer, 2010).

² It cannot be overstressed that we use this concept in a strictly scientific sense; it is *not* intended to imply any hope of ideological purity.

philosophers of religion are able to get on with deepening and developing the discipline. This volume could not have existed without such movements.

However, we also need to ask what consequences this blurring has had for thought: has it, in fact, failed to challenge theology and philosophy equally? Has philosophy been made the handmaiden of theology once again? If we answer in the affirmative, it is because this postmodern dissolution of philosophy of religion into theology has, in the last decade, given rise to an associated movement within theology itself. The Radical Orthodoxy group has popularised a mode of theological thinking which undermines philosophy's claim to autonomy. Once again (this time from within theology), philosophical thinking has been *theologised*, overrun by a theological virus whose intention is to obliterate the distinctiveness of philosophy of religion in the name of theology.

Both the postmodern and the postsecular³ contamination are two sides of the same coin: a one-way injection of theology into philosophy until what is proper to philosophy becomes indiscernible. The deconstruction of the philosophy/theology binary has resulted, not in a true democracy of thought between philosophy and theology, but in the humiliation and debasement of philosophy before the Queen of the sciences, theology.⁴

To designate one of the solutions to this one-sided contamination "the liberation of philosophy of religion" is therefore to call for a critique of such tendencies in the name of philosophy. Liberation is a two-stage operation: it shows up the normativity and partiality of recent contaminations, but it does so in order to free a practice of philosophy of religion from the constraints imposed on it by theological thinking.⁵

³ Although Radical Orthodoxy should not be confused (as we argue in section four) with the postsecular *per se*, but is only a specific theological appropriation of it.

⁴ Janicaud's analysis of the theological contamination of phenomenology is exemplary here. See Dominique Janicaud, "The Theological Turn of French Phenomenology" in *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn": The French Debate*, trans. Bernard G. Prusak (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 3-103 and Dominique Janicaud, *Phenomenology "Wide Open": After the French Debate*, trans. Charles N. Cabral (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005).

⁵ Again, it needs to be emphasised that "liberation" here does *not* imply the repurification of philosophy. Theology and religion are always necessary material for philosophical thinking (however liberated). What our contributions attempt to liberate philosophy from is not theology *per se*, but the normative constraints the introduction of theology into philosophy of religion has brought about. It is for this reason the concept of liberation is appropriate: it names the freeing up of philosophy's capacities after a convalescence. As Bryant, Harman and Srnicek put

Likewise, auto-mutation aims to first liberate philosophy—sometimes from itself, but also from the theological—in order to create new forms of philosophical thinking. As such, the essays collected in this volume represent no school of thought and propound no orthodoxy; rather, they all undertake the task of experimenting on and with theological and religious material.⁶

The interplay between these two methods, one of liberation and the other of automutation, is best summed up in comments made by Gilles Deleuze in which he makes explicit three themes that we see as essential to any answer to the question, “What is Continental philosophy of religion now?”. Deleuze begins a seminar on Spinoza by raising the “problem” of early modern philosophy’s obsession with the concept of God:

It’s quite curious to what extent philosophy, up to the end of the 17th century, ultimately speaks to us, all the time, of God. And after all, Spinoza, excommunicated Jew, is not the last to speak to us of God... Why is philosophy so compromised with God? And right up to the revolutionary coup of the 18th century philosophers. Is it a dishonest compromise or something a little purer?⁷

it in another context, “The danger is that the dominant anti-realist strain of [the] continental philosophy [of the “theological turn”] has not only reached a point of decreasing returns, but that it now actively limits the capacities of philosophy in our time.” (Levi Bryant, Graham Harman and Nick Srnicek, “Towards a Speculative Philosophy” in Bryant, Srnicek and Harman eds, *The Speculative Turn: Continental Realism and Materialism* (Melbourne: re:press, 2011), 3.)

⁶ This questioning of the theological tendency of recent Continental philosophy is in certain quarters already well-established. In addition to Janicaud (see note four), Badiou, Le Doeuff, Rancière and Žižek have all risen to popularity (in part) by pointing out the aporia and shortcomings of that postmodern thinking which has been so susceptible to theological contamination. There is also a younger generation of Continental philosophers who have taken up this mantle of suspicion towards the “theological turn”: Brassier, Grant, Hägglund and Meillassoux. The approach of this volume is indebted to their work, and many of the essays herein engage concertedly with them (sometimes for the first time). The challenge to think philosophy of religion “otherwise than theologically” has also already been taken up by a number of established philosophers of religion. This volume follows in the footsteps of Pamela Sue Anderson, Clayton Crockett and Philip Goodchild (to name but three) who (in very different ways) have all already begun the process of liberating and/or mutating philosophy of religion.

⁷ Gilles Deleuze, “Seminar on Spinoza/Cours Vincennes 25/11/1980”, available at <<http://www.webdeleuze.com/php/texte.php?cle=17&groupe=Spinoza&langue=2>>, accessed 10/02/2010. For another use of this passage, see Philip Goodchild, “Why is philosophy so compromised with God?” in Mary Bryden ed, *Deleuze and Religion* (London: Routledge, 2001), 156-66.

Deleuze rejects two answers to these questions: a pragmatic, extra-philosophical answer (that philosophers needed to conform outwardly to the demands of the Church) and a theological answer (that philosophers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries just had more “feeling” for the divine). Both are rejections of the idea of philosophy of religion as a field engendered by external, normative constraints; philosophy, Deleuze insists, refuses to burden itself with constraint. Rather, early modern philosophy speaks of God *as a means of liberation and transformation*. Using an analogy with painting, Deleuze therefore constructs his own response to the question, “Why is early modern philosophy so compromised with God?”:

Could we not make up another hypothesis, namely that painting in this era has so much need of God that the divine, far from being a constraint for the painter, is the site of his maximum emancipation. In other words, with God he can do anything whatsoever, he can do what he couldn't do with humans, with creatures. So much so that God is directly invested by painting, by a kind of flow of painting, and at this level painting will find a kind of freedom for itself that it would never have found otherwise. At the limit, the most pious painter and the one who... is the most impious are not opposed to each other because the way painting invests the divine is a way which is nothing but pictorial, where the painter finds nothing but the conditions of his radical emancipation... [Painters] make use of God in order to achieve a liberation of forms, to push the forms to the point where the forms have nothing to do with an illustration. The forms are unleashed. They embark upon a kind of Sabbath, a very pure dance, the lines and colours lose all necessity to be verisimilar, to be exact, to resemble something. It's the great enfranchisement of lines and colours... So much so that, in a sense, atheism has never been external to religion: atheism is the artistic power at work on religion. With God, everything is permitted. I have the distinct feeling that for philosophy it's been exactly the same thing, and if philosophers have spoken to us so much of God... [it was from] a joy arising from the labour they were involved in. Just as I said that God and Christ offered an extraordinary opportunity for painting to free lines, colours and movements from the constraints of resemblance, so God and the theme of God offered the irreplaceable opportunity for philosophy to free the object of creation in philosophy (that is to say, concepts) from the constraints that had been imposed on them... the simple representation of things. The concept is freed at the level of God because it no longer has the task of representing something... It takes on lines, colours, movements that it would never have had without this detour through God.⁸

⁸ Ibid.

This is Deleuze's account of the liberation and automutation of philosophy of religion. It is an account which stresses three things: the significance of the early modern period for philosophical thinking about God, the freedom philosophy experiences in acknowledging the atheism at the core of religion and finally the experimental and speculative character (freed from the constraints of representation) of this construction. That is, Deleuze stresses the *modernity*, the *secularity* and the *speculative intent* of philosophy of religion. These three characteristics will structure the present volume.

III. The Contribution of Modernity

The first section of the present volume deals with the *modernity* of philosophy of religion. The six essays contained in this section all attempt to chart the experiments and emancipations immanent to the genesis of philosophy of religion. The questions they answer are: what were the conditions that liberated philosophers to pursue philosophy of religion, and how did it become such a significant part of the philosophical enterprise of modernity? In order to lay the groundwork within which each of the six essays answers these questions, it is worth rehearsing two powerful objections to Deleuze's account of the genesis of philosophy of religion quoted above. These two objections concern (unsurprisingly): the speculative intent and the secularity of modern philosophy of religion.

Speculation and Modern Philosophy of Religion

According to Deleuze, early modern philosophy—in parallel to early modern painting—experienced a colossal liberation when it came to constructing the concept of God. Freed from the constraints of representation, philosophy could be practiced in its most absolute form. No longer need it faithfully depict an already existent reality, for “the theme of God offered the irreplaceable opportunity for philosophy to free the object of creation in philosophy (that is to say, concepts) from the constraints that had been imposed on them.” Philosophy of religion was therefore the site of *philosophy as such*—and only “this detour through God” offered philosophy the chance *to come into its own*.⁹ With the

⁹ The fact that the term “philosophy of religion” only emerged in German Idealism—far from being problematic for our purposes—indicates the extent to which, prior to this, “philosophy of religion” was the site of philosophy as such. The following claim of de Man's concerning aesthetics applies equally well to philosophy of religion: “Its being left nameless until the end of the eighteenth

concept of God, philosophers were free to *speculate*, to experiment and to construct without external constraints. Such was the impulse to speculation in modern philosophy of religion—a joyful and exuberant creation of new concepts.

The first objection to Deleuze's account concerns his divergence from more traditional narratives of the emergence of philosophy of religion. That is, philosophy of religion is usually envisaged as a *critical*—rather than a speculative—enterprise. For proponents of this view, philosophy of religion (especially in the early modern period) was (and remains) primarily a political movement, concerned with puncturing and deflating dominant meta-narratives and offering alternatives to religious orthodoxies. This critical philosophy of religion is a tool of the oppressed. Philip Goodchild proposes such a view in his Introduction to *Rethinking Philosophy of Religion*:

It is important to recognise that... a confluence of theologico-political concerns—the overcoming of dissension, the fostering of true piety, the liberation of religion from political interference, and the exposure of the undermining of ecclesiastical authority by avarice and ambition—contributed to the rational exploration of religion in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and not an abstract love of disembodied reason for the sake of its own purity. The philosophers who engaged with religion in this period must be regarded as a small minority of intellectuals and entrepreneurs... This minority was pitched against the vested interests of church, state and aristocracy on the one hand, and against the religious enthusiasms of puritans and pietists on the other.¹⁰

For the English Deists, Locke and Leibniz (to name but a few), philosophy of religion could not be abstracted from concrete, political concerns with Church and State. Every enquiry into religion was a specific intervention in the social system of the day. Philosophy of religion, therefore, was not a speculative enterprise free to construct concepts without any external constraints, but a battleground for political interests.

There is patent truth to such an account, and none of the contributors would wish to deny any of the political investment implicitly contained in all philosophy of religion. However, no specific form of critique holds a

century is a sign of its overwhelming presence rather than its non-existence.” (Paul de Man, *Aesthetic Ideology*, ed. Andrzej Warminski (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 92.)

¹⁰ Philip Goodchild, “Continental Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction” in Philip Goodchild ed, *Rethinking Philosophy of Religion: Approaches from Continental Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 6-7.

monopoly on the disruption of orthodoxy. As the previous section of this Introduction has argued, such ideological critique is also possible through other means: contaminating orthodoxy by a heterodox virus, or flagging up the restrictions theological thought has on philosophical capability. We see no contradiction between stressing philosophy of religion's critical and its speculative intent. Recent accounts of philosophy of religion have merely stressed one specific mode by which this critique can occur, and so have concentrated almost exclusively on (what we shall call for the sake of brevity) "a genealogy of refusal" which leads from Locke through Hume and Kierkegaard to Nietzsche and finally Derrida.

One of the aims of the "Modernity" section of this volume is to remedy this skewed emphasis by recovering the speculative (but no less critical) element of philosophy of religion that has lain hidden from contemporary concerns. There are two ways in which the contributors approach this aim. First, they do so by setting forth an *alternative genealogy of speculative or affirmatory philosophy of religion leading from Spinoza through Schelling to Bergson and Deleuze*. Michael Kolkman's contribution is paradigmatic here: Henri Bergson is an unjustly neglected figure by Continental philosophy of religion. Not only his explicit foray into the field (*The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*), but also, as Kolkman shows, his corpus as a whole has a significance to which late twentieth century scholarship has been blind.

The second way the contributors to the first section attempt to remedy the neglect of speculation in philosophy of religion is by *rereading figures central to the genealogy of refusal through the lens of speculation*. Exemplary here are James Brown's piece on Toland and Karin Nisenbaum's essay on Rosenzweig. So much emphasis has been placed, Brown argues, on Toland's (and other Deists') political critique of priestcraft and revelation that the constructive element in his project has gone relatively unnoticed. The political attack is, Brown contends, merely a preliminary to the production of a materialist metaphysics. A similar point is made by Nisenbaum with respect to Rosenzweig. While the majority of philosophical readings of *The Star of Redemption* emphasise its existential commitment to freedom, they ignore the metaphysical foundations on which this commitment is grounded: the work is, more than anything else, a speculative system of thought.

Secularity and Modern Philosophy of Religion

According to Deleuze, the philosophical emancipation to speculate we have just been discussing is to be associated with a philosophical atheism.

Atheism is the “power at work” in philosophy of religion. Early modern speculation about God is premised on a release from the constraints of theology. The norms and traditions of theological modes of thinking are cast off in favour of a philosophy that is limited only by its own internal necessity. It is therefore through a distancing from the theological that philosophy of religion can genuinely take place; only by stepping back from the “insider perspective” which informs theological study can the philosopher gain the necessary freedom to exceed the representational. This is the minimal amount of secularity that all philosophy of religion requires in order to take place.

The second objection, therefore, comes from those distrustful of and hostile to this aspect of early modern thought—its secular values. As we will see in the next section, there is no doubting the cogency of some of these critiques or some of the failings of the moderns in this respect; what is at issue, however, is the attitude to modernity such critique engenders.

In one camp stand those philosophers who take their cue from Nietzsche, Adorno, Horkheimer and Lyotard and who criticise the Enlightenment’s refusal to acknowledge the “dark side” of modernisation, the cost as well as the benefits of the will to civilisation. Essential reading here is the second chapter of Brassier’s *Nihil Unbound* as well as Jonathan Israel’s monumental works on the Radical Enlightenment.¹¹ Not only do Brassier and Israel present a picture of Enlightenment thought which revels in its secularity and speculative intent, they also show its sensitivity to the criticisms which are so often levelled against it.

Another camp hostile to the secular values of modernity is formed of the various strands of postsecular thought, which, in its most prevalent form, bears the name “Radical Orthodoxy” (although, as we shall see, this theological movement has co-opted the label “postsecular” for its own purposes). Radical Orthodoxy—as we argued in section two—is one more example of the “theologisation” philosophy of religion has undergone in recent years. This theological contamination here manifests itself specifically as an interrogation of the “artificial space”¹² of secular existence which modern thought has constructed for itself—a space in

¹¹ Ray Brassier, *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 32-48; Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) and *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity and the Emancipation of Man, 1670-1752* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

¹² John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* 2nd ed (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 18.

which “philosophy has its own legitimacy, apart from faith.”¹³ The backbone of the Radical Orthodox challenge to contemporary thought is a questioning of the legitimacy of this “artificial space”. Radical Orthodoxy has constructed an all-embracing genealogy of the history of ideas that attempts to undermine modernity’s claims to be a “legitimate” tradition of thought, in favour of the claims of pre-secular traditions such as Thomism and Augustinianism. In consequence, Milbank and others have emphasised the significance of figures within the “counter-modern” tradition, like Hamann and Jacobi, who expose secularity’s nihilism.¹⁴

Radical Orthodoxy, therefore, follows all secularisation theses in contending that modernity relies on pre-modern ideas that have been perverted in the process of being appropriated. They are “Christian by derivation and anti-Christian by consequence”, as one early proponent of the secularisation thesis put it¹⁵, and at the same time, in Milbank’s more recent words, “Secular discourse... is actually *constituted* in its secularity by ‘heresy’ in relation to orthodox Christianity.”¹⁶ Modernity is “a mistaken deviation from Augustinianism”.¹⁷ It emerged not through a great leap forward, but on corrupted Christian presuppositions. Modern thought is thus an illegitimate, corrupt and distorted offshoot of “true” and “proper” Augustinian or Thomist systems of thought. Yet, secondly (and here Radical Orthodoxy goes beyond most secularisation theses), such perversion has disastrous consequences for thought: a pre-modern “ontology of peace” is transformed into a modern agonistic and nihilistic ontology. “Nihilism is the conclusion of ‘pure reason’.”¹⁸ This is the double bind in which Radical Orthodoxy entraps modernity: it is both derivative of the pre-modern and also its abject, nihilistic other. It is neither innovative nor an improvement! Hence, “the Catholic vision of ontological peace” provides not only the unstained original of which modernity is the perversion, but also “the only alternative to a nihilistic outlook.”¹⁹

¹³ John Milbank, “Knowledge: The Theological Critique of Philosophy in Hamann and Jacobi” in John Milbank *et al* ed, *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (London: Routledge, 1999), 21.

¹⁴ See *ibid*.

¹⁵ Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History: The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), 202.

¹⁶ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 3.

¹⁷ Michael Hanby, “Desire: Augustine beyond Western Subjectivity” in Milbank *et al* ed, *Radical Orthodoxy*, 110.

¹⁸ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, xvii.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 442.

As we will make clear in the next section, there is a valuable truth to the postsecular event that needs to be taken far more seriously than Continental philosophy of religion so far has. However, its misappropriation by theologians—and the visibility this misappropriation has attained—has mostly obscured this truth. Thus, instead of concentrating on the manner in which an “imperial” form of secularity (in part reinforced, it must be admitted, by modern philosophy—sometimes against itself) has prohibited experience of religious particularity, this “theological postsecular” has established a new imperialism, this time tending towards the premodern by means of a persistent polemic against the value of the modern.

It is therefore partially in response to the popularity of such a reading of modernity that the first section of this volume is devoted to “Modernity”. The task which the six essays undertake is to mine the resources of a distinctly modern way of philosophising about religion. While this does involve recognising its faults and wrong turns, it also involves a serious examination of the manner in which modern philosophy of religion liberated itself and disrupted claims to orthodoxy. Such modern strategies provide a template for contemporary efforts. To paraphrase Clayton Crockett, engagement with modern thinkers on religion is necessary for the production of “test-cases of modernity and the stakes of any possible modern... thinking.”²⁰ The studies of modern philosophers which form section one of this volume are “test-cases for modern philosophy of religion”. Their aim is therefore twofold. First, by highlighting the depth, vitality and complexity of speculation about religion in modern, secular philosophy, the essays form indirect rebuffs to postsecular thought’s all-too-quick dismissal of it. Second, and most significantly, by uncovering and subsequently mimicking the intellectual strategies—whether emancipatory or mutative—by which modern thought upset orthodoxy’s claims upon it, they also directly combat the “theological postsecular”.

The first strategy is pursued by George Pattison and Ashley Vaught. Pattison’s careful examination of Heidegger’s appropriation of Kierkegaard serves as a preliminary introduction to his wider project of a phenomenology of religious life. Such an enterprise is, of course, central to the volume’s commitment to free up latent philosophical operations on religion. Vaught—in a fruitful parallel to Deleuze’s comments on the essential atheism in modern philosophy of religion—argues that the driving force of Schelling’s 1809 *Inquiries into the Essence of Human Freedom* is a realisation of the “philosophical atheism” at work in

²⁰ Clayton Crockett, *A Theology of the Sublime* (London: Routledge, 2001), 2.

theodicy. This atheism is the result of Schelling's fidelity to *philosophically think* the problems of theology. Again, the concern here is to isolate a properly philosophical operation on religion. A different approach, however, is taken by the first essay of the volume. Rocco Gangle provides a succinct introduction to the practice of automutation. Spinoza's commitment to immanence, Gangle argues, is only fully understood when one acknowledges the strategies by which he subverts and disrupts theological orthodoxy with heterodox, philosophical devices.

All the essays in the "Modernity" section therefore share a concern with uncovering the distinctive history and forgotten resources of Continental philosophy of religion—history and resources which have been covered over by theological critique and postmodern prejudices. This process of uncovering, it is to be hoped, will give us a fuller picture of what Continental philosophy of religion can be and so enable it to enhance its power of acting and being acted upon. For (to continue the parody of Spinoza) no one has yet determined what Continental philosophy of religion can do.

IV. Reinterpreting the Secular

During the 1990's, around the time that postmodernism reached its height in the Anglophone academy, another strange appellation appeared on the intellectual scene sharing the same "post" prefix—the postsecular. The emphasis in philosophy (but also in anthropology and the social sciences) shifted as scholars began to take seriously radical critiques of identity and power rooted in anti-imperialist and anti-colonial discourses. Questions surrounding religion took centre-stage, because these critiques challenged the hegemony of an underlying and unacknowledged ideological bias towards Western forms of Christianity and post-Christian secularism, even in the very tools philosophy employed.²¹ This ideational imperialism can be traced back to the collusion of European philosophy of religion with the modern Western-style nation-state in the global spread of the capitalist system. Indeed, it is this very critique of modern philosophy of religion that led to the abandonment of the moderns (which this volume seeks to correct). As Asad writes,

²¹ Thus, as Talal Asad tells us, many opponents to secularism in the Middle East have rejected the secular as specific to the Western mode of governance. Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 2.

Secularism is not simply an intellectual answer to a question about enduring social peace and toleration. It is an enactment by which a *political medium* (representation of citizenship) redefines and transcends particular and differentiating practices of the self that are articulated through class, gender, and religion.²²

The question the contributors to section two of this volume ask concerns the capacity for modern philosophy to be subtracted from its political medium and transformed (in the words of Laruelle) into a simple material for reconsidering secularity, both intellectual and political—that is, they ask about the possibility of turning philosophy of religion *against* secularism (or, at least, its historically instantiated forms). The next seven essays in the volume, under the heading “Reinterpreting the Secular”, are representative of the recent impetus in Continental philosophy of religion to think beyond the failures of the moderns (while remaining within that tradition) so as to carry out a speculative inquiry into the very nature of the secular. While the *postsecular* event has for the most part occurred amidst Islamic thinkers (both orthodox and unorthodox), the task for Continental philosophy of religion now is *not* an Islamic turn (as a new insanitation of the Christian theological turn), but a thinking *from* that event in a secular way, allowing identities to proliferate without overcoding secular philosophical thought. At the moment when modern secularism has failed and the so-called return to the religious is on the precipice of failing, philosophers must be bold in putting forth a theory of secularity that is, in its very thinking, an abstract instance of that new secular.

Modern Philosophy of Religion and the Secular

We would be blind, however, if we did not acknowledge the failures of the moderns in their attempts to move to the secular via Christianity. The postsecular posture towards the history of thought and to our contemporary conditions, taken up by such diverse thinkers as Milbank and Hamid Dabashi, remains powerful because it is responding to a real failure in the history of the human world and, as a human failure, it is responding to real suffering. While, after the various periods of fits and starts of the European Enlightenment, Western thought often took the secular to be the highest social and political ideal as the most effective path to peace between nations and peoples, it also resulted in the erasure of identities, often at the barrel of a gun, in the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and South America (to say nothing of local indigenous cultures in North America and Europe).

²² Ibid, 5.

We must distinguish, however, between the genuine postsecular event and its misappropriation and misuse at the hands of theologians. In the wake of the postsecular event, a distinction is necessary between the *infidelity* to that event attested in the “theological postsecular” and a potential *faithfulness* to it made possible through thinking the secular anew. The failure of “imperial secularity” criticised legitimately by genuine postsecular critiques is very different from that depicted in the orthodox theological response to the postsecular event. Phillip Blond describes this latter failure in the Introduction to the edited volume, *Postsecular Philosophy: Between Theology and Philosophy*:

We live in a time of failed conditions. Everywhere people who have no faith in any possibility, either for themselves, each other, or for the world, mouth locutions they do not understand... Ever since Kant dismissed God from human cognition and relegated access to Him to the sphere of practical ethics and moral motivation, human beings have been very pragmatic indeed. They have found value in self-legislation and so see no reason for God.²³

Blond contends that the failure of secularism (the postsecular event) does not constitute an event that demands new theories, but is rather an event that requires the darkening of reason (like Badiou’s “obscure subject” unfaithful to the event), and so a return to transcendence—the transcendence of the Christian God.²⁴

To this form of thinking—and to the political form of “Red Toryism” it has recently taken on in Britain (described by Žižek as “soft fascism”)—this volume stands in defiant opposition.²⁵ As evidenced by Adam Kotsko’s chapter, which engages with the genealogical work of Giorgio Agamben, we must remain faithful to the postsecular event without using

²³ Phillip Blond, “Introduction: Theology before Philosophy” in Phillip Blond ed, *Postsecular Philosophy: Between Theology and Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1998), 1-2.

²⁴ See Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event II*, trans. Alberto Toscano (London: Continuum, 2009), 58-62. There he writes, this infidelity is “the descent of this present into the night of non-exposition... In the panic sown by [the event of] Spartacus and his troops, the patrician—and the Vendean bishop, and the Islamist conspirator, and the fascist of the thirties—systematically resorts to the invocation of a full and pure transcendent Body, an ahistorical or anti-evental body (City, God, Race...) from which it follows that the trace will be denied... and, as a consequence, the real body, the divided body, will also be suppressed.” (59-60)

²⁵ Slavoj Žižek, “Dialectical Clarity versus the Misty Conceit of Paradox” in John Milbank and Slavoj Žižek, *Monstrosity of Christ* (London: MIT Press, 2009), 240.

it as an excuse for reactionary escapism. The response to the postsecular situation is not, *pace* Blond, to return yet again to the presecular (to theology), but (at least for Kotsko and Agamben) a radical messianic nihilism that dismantles the theo-political machine. In other words, what is required in the face of the postsecular event is a philosophy which takes up the modern emancipation of philosophy in the service of a new speculative construction of a true secular. This requires a reconsideration of discussions of the secular in modernity so as to take up what is most powerful therein, and recast it in a new critical form. Clare Greer's contribution to the volume constitutes one such reconsideration, turning to recent debates regarding Hegel's conception of the relationship between religion and the State. She argues that Gillian Rose's interpretation of the Hegelian absolute as a "broken middle" where neither State nor religion dominate challenges Milbank's postsecular rejection of Hegel.

Speculation and the Secular

When social theorists, philosophers and anthropologists began to investigate secular cultures using the same tools they had used to investigate religions, it was a true event in the history of thought comparable to Darwin's theory of evolution and Freud's discovery of the unconscious. It humiliated Western culture, casting it down from its central place in human history and exhibiting the relativity of its particular secular culture. Secularism was identified as the site of disciplines and forces. Just like religions (although the discipline of the secular was (and remains) more complicit in the rise of capitalism, in both its liberatory and oppressive aspects), secularism developed in Western nation-states as a social form necessary for capital to flow. In modern Britain, for example, the need for cheap labour after the neo-liberal de structuring of the 1980s meant that many immigrants from former British colonies and lands where British interests had historically dominated began arriving in the country. The need for this labour created a need for a multicultural society that placed (amongst many other markers of identity) different religious groups within the same social milieu. This, in turn, led to religious antagonisms that were also helpful to the functioning of capital, since they kept workers divided, giving rise to the current myth of a "deeply divided Britain". Many factors are at work here, including the attempt in the name of secularism to rebrand the immigrant communities and have them adapt a "secular lifestyle"—which, in reality, means collapsing their own identity into the identity of the majority population (White and post-Christian). At the global level this call to secularism has meant that Muslims (in

particular) have no recourse to the Islamic tradition in their struggle against imperialism or, even, repressive Islamic states.²⁶ The secular in the hands of Western powers becomes an imperialist weapon, for the secular is always already interpreted as a *particularly Western and post-Christian secular*, rather than anything approaching a generic secular that can be located *equally* in all religious traditions.

Again, this gives rise to a distinction between the “imperial secularity” of the past and the genuine potential of the secular as a category to do justice to all religious particularities. This latter idea we designate “the generic secular”. The task, then, a number of contributors undertake is the construction of a truly generic secular, a secularity that can sustain the particularity, and even proliferation, of all religious and post-religious modes of being. Unleashing both the religious and the secular for such a politics of resistance and positive rebellion is the challenge Daniel Colucciello Barber, for example, takes up. By subsuming both religion and the secular into immanence, Barber is able to refuse the attempt by both to assert themselves as the universal plane, casting the secular and the religious, instead, as *immanent sites of particularities*. John Mullarkey’s essay follows a similar trajectory by means of Bergson’s *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*. Mullarkey argues through the Bergsonian notion of “creative emotion” for a “bellicose” (or, we might say, excessive) equality, the thought of which is equal in both form and content.

These essays are among the first to take up the thought of the “generic” secular within Continental philosophy of religion. Indeed, philosophy of religion’s neglect of the speculative possibilities of diverse cultural materials is shocking. Over the last twenty years, there has been a serious failure to engage in any real way with this aspect of the postsecular event. Islam and the other non-Christian religions have not been taken seriously in the same way that Christianity has, and in consequence there has not been anything like an Islamic turn in philosophy, any more than there has been a Buddhist or Hindi turn. Alberto Toscano’s contribution to the volume goes some way to remedying this lack. It is a stellar example of the practice of the generic secular, tracing particular instances of fanaticism through both Christianity and Islam. Such a genealogy does not have the well-worn goal of denouncing the fanatic (as one always finds in those pop attempts at philosophy of religion common to the opinion pages), but aims towards a fuller understanding of how fanaticism operates as a complex idea within both religious traditions and attempts to practice a “politics of truth”.

²⁶ See Hamid Dabashi, *Islamic Liberation Theology: Resisting the Empire* (London: Routledge, 2008).

There has been a sense among many thinkers who try to inhabit a space between theology and philosophy that the Christian tradition could be cast in the role of victim at the hands of the secular. Such is the Radical Orthodox appropriation of the postsecular event—nothing but a philosophical *manqué*. Following that appropriation, there has been a persistent tendency to maintain that the truly radical response to the postsecular event is not only a return to the religious, but a return to the dominance of the religious over all other forms of thought. Theology—specifically *Christian* theology—would once again become Queen of the sciences. The return of the religious means, within the context of globalisation, a return to religious conflict, war, and violence, and, it is claimed, Christianity would uniquely respond to such events as the tradition that would best rescue the meaning necessary to resist the loss of identity following from *imperial* secularism. The choice given to us by these thinkers is not between freedom and imperialism, but between two imperialisms, both equally parochial. The postsecular has become not an event (as it had initially promised to be), but an obscure disaster that created nothing but fear, a fear utilised by theology to redirect attention to itself.²⁷

A subtler response is required to the postsecular event than the reactionary proselytising of a few. Yes, it is true, that the tools used within Christian theology and the philosophical analysis of Christianity have a wider significance and can be employed in the analysis of post-religious phenomena (capitalism or the secular, for example). However, this is in no

²⁷ The attitude in Radical Orthodox circles to Spinoza is symptomatic. Conor Cunningham's dismissal of Spinoza reads like the worst sort of eighteenth-century heresy-hunting, claiming perversely and hyperbolically, "In the world of Spinoza there can be no difference between a Holocaust and an ice cream." (Conor Cunningham, *Genealogy of Nihilism: Philosophies of Nothing and the Difference of Theology* (London: Routledge, 2002), 68) Just like Blond, Cunningham attempts to bring about a return to the religious through inspiring fear and superstition in his readers. We should, it is implied, run screaming into the arms of the Church on encountering this nihilistic spectre. Apparently, this theology does not know the difference between scholarship and assertion, blindly referencing Spinoza scholars like Yovel and Deleuze out of context to support his own peculiar reading. For example, he claims Spinoza was trying to trick his readers by hiding behind Scholastic concepts and, as evidence for this view, quotes Deleuze: "It is for this reason that Deleuze says that 'the *Ethics* is a book written twice simultaneously'." (Ibid, 68) However, the point Deleuze is making (in *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights, 1988), 28) has nothing to do with Spinoza's use of Medieval terminology, but is rather to do with the inextricably linked metaphysical and practical lines of thinking in the *Ethics*.

way proves that Christianity trumps all. Rather, it shows the importance of paying attention to the strategies and practices of discourse on religion for improving political analysis. Nina Power's essay proceeds in precisely this way, returning to one of the sources of Marxist theory (Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity*) so as to rejuvenate post-Marxist analysis of capital. By means of a reconsideration of Feuerbach's historical naturalism, Power is able to employ the same tools used to undermine religion in the service of a radical political critique of capitalism. She shows that this framework is already at work in mutated form in the philosophy of Paulo Virno. Power's essay demonstrates how the premise of all criticism (the criticism of religion) can be used in the service of the criticism of anti-humanist and anti-naturalist capitalism. Essential here too is Alex Andrews' bringing together of Hägglund's reading of Derrida and Bataille's theory of religion—a combination which also serves as a convenient hinge between sections two and three of this volume—to show how both areligious and religious politics may be organized in a secular project that seeks to alleviate human suffering in the here and now.

V. Contemporary Speculative Philosophy and Religion

Recent Continental philosophy of religion has been practiced primarily within the phenomenological and hermeneutical traditions. What sets this volume apart is the fact that the essays herein are (for the most part) unconcerned with these traditional ways of “doing” Continental philosophy of religion. These essays situate themselves in the *speculative tradition of philosophy*. This label has a threefold reference. First, it is one name among many for the above-mentioned liberative and mutative strategies open to Continental philosophy of religion. Second, speculation refers to the modern tradition of metaphysical speculation with which the first section of this volume engages.

The third—and at present most widespread—reference of the term “speculation” is to those contemporary philosophers who have situated themselves as heirs to modernity.²⁸ “Speculation” thus includes Badiou's

²⁸ Bryant, Harman and Srnicek sum up the affinities and tensions between these three references: “This activity of ‘speculation’ may be cause for concern amongst some readers, for it might suggest a return to pre-critical philosophy, with its dogmatic belief in the powers of pure reason. The speculative turn, however, is not an outright rejection of these critical advances; instead, it comes from a recognition of their inherent limitations. Speculation in this sense aims at something ‘beyond’ the critical and linguistic turns. As such, it recuperates the pre-critical sense of ‘speculation’ as a concern with the Absolute, while also taking into account the