RACISM AND PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION: A PLEA FOR A PARADIGM SHIFT IN THE FIELD

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ABSTRACT

Renewing philosophy of religion today raises the question of how to overcome racism and epistemic violence toward non-Western philosophical–religious traditions. Concretely, this requires not only describing and including such traditions but more importantly recognizing that they can propose new philosophical and religious insights. This article discusses some recent approaches to the issue from both cross-cultural philosophy and environmental science in dialogue with Indigenous traditions. Overcoming racial prejudices through an endless co-production of knowledge, where each culture is expected to participate as a global witness to the *uncertainty* of all claims of cultural domination, is defended.

Keywords: Philosophy of religion; Racism; Intercultural philosophy; Indigenous knowledge

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1. Introduction

This article is subdivided into three parts. I will first deal with two contemporary versions of the relationship between racism and philosophy of religion. I will then propose a personal approach to the issue. Lastly, I will provide some methodological examples that concretely illustrate the direction in which a paradigm shift toward overcoming racism in philosophy of religion should occur.[2]

I would like, by way of introduction, to explicate the horizon of contemporary discussion from which my reflections emerge. Over the past three decades, the renewal and future of philosophy of religion have become a common point of discussion, both from the analytical and continental sides.[3] The questions raised since the publication of studies reflecting the comparativism between religious and non-religious "worldviews,"[4] the "end" of postmodern methodological oppositions, and the "ends" of a non-ethnocentric perspective, or even the "postcolonial experience of various dispossessed communities," were subsequently materialized into veritable international research networks, including

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[2] This paper is an expanded version of a lecture given at European Academy of Religion (Palermo, Italy), in May 2024.

[3] One of the crucial points regarding early efforts for a cross-cultural philosophy of religion is precisely that of the collaboration—in this sense cross-cultural—of the two traditions, analytic and continental, in which modern Western culture has fractured. See on this point Thomas Dean, "Introduction: Cross-Cultural Philosophy of Religion," in *Religious Pluralism and Truth. Essays on Cross-Cultural Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Thomas Dean (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 1-5.

[4] Ninian Smart, "The Philosophy of Worldviews, or the Philosophy of Religion Transformed", in *Religious Pluralism and Truth*, 17-31; Nick Trakakis, *The End of Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Continuum, 2008) and "After the End of Philosophy of Religion," in *Reconfigurations of Philosophy of Religion. A Possible Future*, ed. Jim Kanaris (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2018), 71-97; Timothy D. Knepper, *The Ends of Philosophy of Religion: Terminus and Telos* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Purushottama Bilimoria and Andrew B. Irvine, eds., *Postcolonial Philosophy of Religion* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2009).

the Global-Critical Philosophy of Religion[5] and the Global Philosophy of Religion Projects.[6] Though different in their approach, these networks deal with the following preoccupation: Can the philosophy of religion examine its history and assumptions to encompass a broader, more diverse range of religions, religious topics, and religious reason-giving?[7] This concern particularly aims to reduce a certain approach to religious and philosophical questions that genealogically refer back to Christian theism and apologetics, as well as the modern categorization of religion as a social genre or private faith that opposes the discourse of the secularized world and the protocols of the scientific community. The background of this task comprises not only the findings of the religious, historical, and anthropological sciences but also the reflection of decolonial thought, feminist philosophy, and critical philosophy of race, both of which address the power relationships and epistemic injustice that have characterized the Western imposition of the concepts of religion and philosophy beyond

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[5] See "Global Critical Philosophy of Religion. Can philosophy of religion enter the globalized, 21st-century world?", website of the project, accessed January 22, 2025, https://globalcritical.as.ua.edu. The recent volume by Nathan R. B. Loewen and Agnieszka Rostalska, eds., *Diversifying philosophy of religion*. *Critiques, Methods and Case Studies* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2023), represents the most important result of this project to date, not least because of contributions that are critical or cautious of globalizing and diversifying operations.

[6] As an introduction to this project, see Yujin Nagasawa, "Global Philosophy of Religion and its Challenges", in *Renewing Philosophy of Religion. Exploratory Essays*, eds. Paul Draper and J.L. Schellenberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 33-47. For a different interpretation of the same project, see Victoria Harrison, "Global philosophy of religion (s)," *Religious Studies* 56.1, (2020): 20-31.

[7] *Religious reason-giving* refers to that broader cognitivity of religions, linked to the practices of individuals and communities rather than to doctrinal systems, to which a philosophy of religion should strive to globalize and diversify itself, cf. Timothy D. Knepper, "The End of Philosophy of Religion?", in Kanaris, *Reconfigurations*, 99-130 and K. Schilbrack, *Philosophy and the Study of Religion. A Manifesto* (Malden: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 10-25, who, however, diverge on how these "religious reason-givings" are accessed.

Western context.[8] One of the most significant aspects of these new approaches in the philosophy of religion is that they increasingly tend to configure an exit from the comparativist attitude and an appreciation of the central role that non-Christian and especially once-colonized and subaltern cultures, must play in the discipline. Concretely, this requires not only an in-depth description of non-Western cultures but above all the recognition that they are at the origin of new philosophical and religious inquiries. These cultures are, thus, capable of critically intervening and transforming how philosophy of religion has hitherto developed,[9] raising doubts as well regarding the argument linking the renewal of the discipline to globalization and the inclusion of *other* religions. After all, such an argument would constitute a renewed apology for the totalizing and provincial reason of the modern West.[10]

If this analysis is correct, then one should not interpret the question of the crisis and renewal of the contemporary philosophy of religion as solely arising from factors external (e.g., multicultural society) to its Western history. To ensure that this external factor is not in fact simply extrinsic, understanding it precisely as an instrument that has only to be absorbed and resolved in Western interpretive categories, the other side

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8 Regarding the importance of the theme "epistemic injustice and religion" for understanding how not only to give a bias-free account of marginalized groups but of the social experience or worldview witnessed by individual identities living in even dominant religious or nonreligious communities, see Jaclyn Rekis, "Religious Identity and Epistemic Injustice: An Intersectional Account," *Hypatia* 38.4 (2023): 779-800.

9 See Trakakis, "After the End", 74, who rightly grasps a non-secondary point by emphasizing how a "sincere openness" toward non-Christian religions signifies "being corrected and enlightened by the other, and not simply seeking to prove a point or defeat one's interlocutor," and "above all a readiness to undergo a possibly painful and disruptive transformation in one's worldview."

10 See in this regard Irvine and Bilimoria's, "Postcolonialism", who defend a fallibilist approach toward a global understanding of the philosophy of religion, an understanding based on a postcolonial criticism that does not reiterate the arguments of postmodern philosophy against Eurocentrism but proposes forms of learning from "subaltern" knowledge and still subject to "epistemic violence."

of the coin should also be considered: the external factor reflects, like a mirror, the limits of Western thinking, in the dual sense of thinking that recognizes the multiplicity of religions and takes upon itself the principle of their unification. From this perspective, Western thinking, particularly as it appears since modernity, makes itself visible as an ambiguous structure of epistemic power that cannot be exercised without condemning and replacing, first its own ancient and medieval tradition, and then addressing the traditions of non-Western people. In both cases, the multiplicity of philosophical and religious traditions is not eliminated but is maintained as a differentiated and different object through which the unifying power seeks to acquire its legitimacy. This power, moreover, as M. de Certeau has well pointed out precisely in reference to the "rationality of the Enlightenment,"[11] cannot advance its dominion claims without in a sense depending on the structure of the multiplicity it seeks to dominate, civilize, and replace.

However, de Certeau's argument implies a twofold type of dependence: 1) dependence on a structure that belongs to the history of the West and 2) dependence on a structure that does not belong to the history of the West and coincides with non-Western responses to the *catastrophe* of Western domination.[12] The first dependence is in a sense the most evident and the most analyzed with respect to the second. T. Vial called attention to the fact that modern concepts of race and religion are constituted together and based on "theological anthropology."[13] With

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[11] Michel De Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 172-4.

[12] See E. de Martino, *The End of the World. Cultural Apocalypse and Transcendence*, trans. Dorothy L. Zinn (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2023). I echo here the theses of Italian ethnologist E. de Martino, who in his last posthumously published work, recently also available in English, uses the theme of cultural "apocalypse" as a common element in the crisis of Western modernity and "Third world" eschatologies and prophecies.

[13] See Theodor Vial, *Modern Religion, Modern Race* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

this term, Vial effectively summarizes, in my opinion, the ambiguity of the power structure that still determines many of the current initiatives to diversify and "do conceptual justice to religious diversity."[14] Indeed, whether engaged in essentializing or radically differentiating religion, Western modernity always imposes its specific mode of regulating the "chaos of history" over any other possible type of regulation. Such a mode is only apparently distant from the structure of a Christian history providentially and teleologically directed toward God. Behind the modern theories of race and religion lies, for Vial, an immanentization of the Christian narrative, which now operates in the sense of the infinite progress of individual subjectivity. Moreover, it certainly allows for the localization and legitimization of a multiplicity of histories and geographies of human agency while still privileging the superiority of the agency of that Western social group that has indicated such progressiveness as the "meaning" of history. What Vial helps us to understand, suggesting the novelty of the second dependency structure I mentioned earlier, is that modern reflection on religion simultaneously inherits and critiques its cultural mechanism of reference: that is, such reflection does not at all escape from Christianity when it is understood as a device for *deconstructing* any cultural system that attempts to "babelically" advance claims to universal dominance.[15]

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[14] It is in these terms that M. Burley has defined his "radical pluralist approach," see Mikel Burley, *A Radical Pluralist Philosophy of Religion. Cross-cultural, Multireligious, Interdisciplinary* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020).

[15] Regarding the Christian debt of the concept of "deconstruction" see, among other places, the following comments by Jacques Derrida: "If there is deconstructing to do, Christianity is it (period). And Plato, predisposing one to Christianity. And Hegel, in order to sublate Christianity into absolute knowledge and so forth. And Marx, in order to sublate Hegel. And Heidegger, who is never done with Luther, with Hegel, again, and Kierkegaard. For a certain Christianity will always take charge of the most exacting, the most *exact*, and the most eschatological hyperbole of deconstruction, the overbid of 'Hoc est enim corpus meum.' It will still make the sacrifice of its own self-deconstruction." *On touching—Jean-Luc Nancy*, trans. Christine Irizarry (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 59-60. More importantly, consider the Derridean interpretation of the biblical myth of the Tower of Babel, which "does not merely figure the irreducible multiplicity of tongues; it exhibits an incompletion, the impossibility of finishing, of

Instead, it seeks to detach that device from its historical–geographical partiality and totalize it into a system of emancipation and freedom belonging to the historical development of modern Western societies.

In this sense, one might say, philosophy of religion is interested in other religions insofar as it projects onto them the failed and unattainable attempt of modernity to escape from its own tradition, thereby exerting a kind of racism that is first directed toward itself—that is, systematizing and eradicating Christian-connoted *deconstruction*—and then extended toward all non-Christian religious traditions, themselves systematized into their own supposed essence or grasped in their historical–geographical multiplicity. The novelty of the second dependency structure of the Western domain is then constituted when the need for a "reflexive turn,"[16] that is, for an analysis of the Christian device that has determined the categories of the philosophy of religion, is provoked by contexts that lie outside this device. In these contexts, one can find both new ways of "theorizing the difference,"[17] as well as a genuine "anti-discourse"[18] on the limits of modern domination and a "reform" of humanism centered on an endless confrontation between cultures that challenge each other,

totalizing, of saturating, of completing something on the order of edification, architectural construction, system, and architectonics." "Des tours de Babel", in *Psyche. Inventions of the Other, Volume 1*, eds. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg, trans. Joseph F. Graham, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 191.

[16] Such a "reflexive turn" originally builds on the results of previous critical analyses of the modern category of "religion" coming from "Religious Studies," seeking then to understand their meaning in view of "new approaches to philosophy of religion," see Richard Amesbury, "Introduction: Making the Reflexive Turn in Philosophy of Religion", in *Philosophy of Religion after »Religion«*, eds. Michael Ch. Rodgers and Richard Amesbury (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2023), 1-7.

[17] See Vial, *Modern Religion, Modern Race*, Chapter 7 ("Modernity and teleology").

[18] Enrique Dussel, "Anti-Cartesian Meditations: On the Origin of the Philosophical Anti-Discourse of Modernity," *Journal for Culture and Religious Theory* 13, no. 1 (Winter 2014): 11-52, especially 36, where the auctor discusses the manner in which this "critical anti-discourse" is formulated by Indigenous communities who have suffered "modern-colonial domination."

albeit based on a common experience of the "end of the world".[19]

This latter paradigm of reference, in which a space of mutual action (and reaction) seems to emerge between different subjects within a discipline that has been traditionally practiced always and only within a unique perspective (whether religious or non-religious), constitutes, in my opinion, the framework within which the problem of the racism–philosophy of religion relationship must be analyzed today. In other words, it is a paradigm where the two terms of the relationship are recognized as analytically contained in a much more complex history than that of colonial consciousness alone, of the *ego conquiro* described by E. Dussel,[20] and which needs, above all, the viewpoint of the colonized, or even better the de-colonized. The latter indeed possesses the capacity to live historically within a twofold elaboration of the chaos of modern history or the end of the world: that coming from the crisis within the West and that consequent to the trauma suffered by the colonization of non-Western traditions

2. Two conceptions of the relationship between racism and philosophy of religion

Within this discussion, accusations of racism toward what might pluralize the field enable contributions that are not only polemic but also constructive and normative. Consider, for example, the positions of philosopher S. Sikka[21]. In posing the question, "Is philosophy of religion racist?", she does not offer a pure denunciation of the fact that the history of the discipline has led and still leads toward the theoretical failure to

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[19] See de Martino's "critical ethnocentrism" proposal, in which Indigenous messianic movements take a central role, in *The End of the World*, Chapter 4 ("Apocalypse and Decolonization").

[20] See Enrique Dussel, *El Encubrimiento del Otro. Hacia el origen del mito de la Modernidad* (Madrid: Editorial Nuoeva Utopía, 1993).

[21] See S. Sikka, "Is philosophy of religion racist?", in Loewen and Rostalska, *Diversifying*, 81-93 (from which I quote).

capture central elements of Asian, African, and Indigenous traditions. Indeed, the critical study of bias must always be accompanied by work to reform and improve the field. In particular, Sikka is concerned with some solutions that simply expand the philosophy of religion, incorporating the study of religious traditions that have been ignored because of racist attitudes. Such an approach reproduces one of the most serious injustices of the modern Eurocentric discourse—the distinction between philosophy and religion[22]—and consequently relegates religion to a heterogeneous cultural phenomenon compared to that of philosophical thinking. Instead, Sikka argues that true reform of philosophy of religion should include non-Western knowledge and practices as "co-subjects" in philosophy. Therefore, overcoming racism and diversifying methodologies implies respect for non-Western cultures based on a normative analysis of their contents not on the suspension of evaluative judgment.

Similarly, in the essay "Race and Philosophy of Religion,"[23] theologian V. Lloyd argues that theoretical perspectives are not adequate for understanding the shared genealogy of the concepts of race and religion within Western culture. Rather, a political dimension must be incorporated. Lloyd criticizes the interpretation of the relationship between race and religion as described by Derrida and Agamben. Both philosophers make contingent use of such concepts, rendering them functions that explicate an intellectual proposal: that of excess, of the force destabilizing the system, or the "différance" in Derrida, and that of the social logic of the West, understood by Agamben as a "dispositive" that admits within it elements that are both internal and external to that logic. In this way, Derrida and

[22] About how this distinction constitutes the paradox of Western philosophy of religion, as a discipline that attempts to include non-Western traditions by unfairly categorizing them all as "religions" while providing the only "scholarly forum" for philosophical discussion of those traditions, see S. Sikka, "»Religion« under Erasure: Why the Concept is Problematic and Why We Still Need It," in *Philosophy of Religion after »Religion«*, eds. Rodgers and Amesbury 13-29.

[23] See Vincent W. Lloyd, "Race and Philosophy of Religion," in *Philosophy of Religion after »Religion«*, eds. Rodgers and Amesbury 85-105.

Agamben maintain the race–religion nexus, although they subordinate it to a speculative plane with no capacity for translation into social practice. Lloyd's critique addresses the fact that, for both philosophers, the concepts of race and religion undergo an ideological absorption that is similar to what happens in Western secularized and multicultural societies. In these societies, race and religion are recognized as differences or diversities to be tolerated and ordered within standardized procedures (as, for example, in the case of a government questionnaire on gender and ethnicity). According to Lloyd, a philosophy of religion that considers how race and religion are carefully managed in the present should explore the aspects of religion and race that are most difficult to translate into a secularist and multicultural idiom. Such an approach would also explore the dialectical struggle between an unmanageable knot of religion and race and attempts to identify and manage these categories[24]. Ultimately, for Lloyd, this philosophy of religion would achieve in the world of social practices what Derrida attempts in the world of ideas: identifying a knot of practices that is never smoothed out by ideology and asking what it might mean for this knot to counter "the system."

In summary, Sikka and Lloyd posit that, through the thematization of racial identity, racism, and pluralism, a privileged way can be opened for a new philosophy of religion, one in which respect for those who have been the object of epistemic violence turns into their reconsideration

[24] The theological–political character of Lloyd's proposal is less conservative than it might seem at first glance, in that the struggle against the "management" of religion and race by the secular, multicultural, and neo-liberal hegemony is not limited to the pure condemnation of a world governed by ineliminable structures of domination, thus aiming for otherworldliness but tending toward "traditions of imaging otherwise," that is, traditions capable of transforming and subverting social practices, cf. on this point Vincent W. Lloyd, "Introduction: Managing Race, Managing Religion," in *Race and Secularism in America*, eds. Jonathon S. Kahn and Vincent W. Lloyd (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 16-15 and *Black dignity. The Struggle Against Domination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2022), 112-130, where in addition to "Black theology," reference is also made to the "cultural-religious practices of African ancestors."

as prominent subjects and partners of philosophical and political confrontation. This means, however, that the elimination of racial prejudice must operate on a different plane than that of constructivism and contextualism,[25] that is, on that plane that provides us with the ordinary categories and cultural–historical dimensions from which epistemic violence against religions would arise. Put differently, the attestation of the invention of a race–religion binomial, insofar as it refers back to a constellation of intuitive and social constructions that are not shared or globally sharable, does not also contain a normative orientation capable of providing answers as to how to deal with and struggle against racism. Therefore, a philosophy of religion constructed from a subaltern and racialized context does not contribute to overcoming racism, at least until its identity proposes something more than an ethics of "recognition" of the other[26] or the addition of "Black–feminist–queer–transnational analytic paradigms" to a pre-established and confusingly multicultural identity logic.[27] The suggestion from recent philosophical proposals devoted to

[25] Bessone's political philosophy perspective has highlighted this point thoroughly. She proposes avoiding "irreducible relativism" in evaluating the use of the concept of race through the positive assumption of the "epistemic uncertainty" that constitutes race as a "normative concept," see Magali Bessone, "Les contextes de la race: une question normative," *Archives de philosophie* 81 (2018/3): 516 f. I will develop in the conclusions of the article such a positive assumption of *uncertainty*, seen as the original datum of the absence of cooperation between cultures in the foundation of a philosophy of religion.

[26] In this sense, N. Maldonado-Torres characterizes, in dialogue with F. Fanon, the "symmetrical" ethical relationship between the self and the Other, in which the modern/colonial subject never succeeds in truly encountering others "in their alterity" (i.e., as interlocutors), except as elements belonging to a "zone of nonbeing," see Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "Race, Religion, and Ethics in the Modern/Colonial World," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 42, no. 4 (December 2014): 704-7.

[27] This is how A. Beliso-De Jésus considers the identity politics that has been installed in the American academic landscape since the 1980s' and its consequences for the study of religion: "*Diversity* became the newfound rhetoric of American multicultural liberal education. […] It is a platform of governing difference in multicultural America—a governance that is based on the normatizing of whiteness. It has made ethnic identifications based in histories of oppression and imperial and colonial interventions to become flag-bearing nationalisms where American identity is defined by claiming

restoring a joint genealogy of the concepts of religion, race, and modernity is that of a rereading and reinterpretation of the normative vocation of the philosophical tradition,[28] a vocation that takes place in the sense of an ethical transformation triggered by the "sub-alterity" of the subaltern and the non-identifying openness it brings about "in the process of doing research."[29]

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alterity. This has produced the confusing logic through which Americans consistently ask people born in this country "where they are from" or "what is their nationality" because American identity is assumed to be White. This is further obscured when discussing racialized and gendered religious subjects. Religious studies' Americaness and whiteness thus provide the foil for religion to become akin to ethnicity and gender." Aisha M. Beliso-De Jesús**, "**Confounded Identities: A Meditation on Race, Feminism, and Religious Studies in Times of White Supremacy," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 86, no. 2 (June 2018): 315-6.

[28] This is the direction taken by A. Yountae and E. Craig in the first volume devoted explicitly to this issue: "Decolonizing philosophy of religion cannot be a straightforward matter of inserting the experiences of colonized and racialized persons to qualify or even determine the content and propositions of philosophical work. A more fundamental and epistemologically oriented examination is needed. We want to ask instead how philosophy of religion is itself a colonialist project and what other options develop among those who not only experience racism and colonization but actively work against their ways of seeing and shaping the world." Eleanor Craig and An Yountae, "Introduction. Changeling Modern/Coloniality in Philosophy of Religion," in *Beyond Man. Race, Coloniality, and Philosophy of Religion*, eds. An Yountae and Eleanor Craig (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2021), 26.

[29] Precisely for the purpose of better understanding the cooperative and multidisciplinary effort of an anti-racist enterprise vis-à-vis any logic of domination, the fact that both Maldonado-Torres and Beliso-De Jésus characterize their proposals through the appeal of some of the most subversive aspects of Christianity (even and especially vis-à-vis any appropriative identification of it by believers) should be explored in depth: respectively the "decolonial ethics of love and gift", see Nelson Maldonado-Torres, *Against War: Views from the Underside of Modernity* (Durham, NC.: Duke University Press, 2008) and the "transcendental transformation" of the practitioner committed to the sacred and not to the study of religion, see Beliso-De Jésus, "Confounded Identities", 11-2.

3. A personal approach to the issue

Based on the insights of Sikka and Lloyd, I intend to propose an approach in which the tension between the protagonists involved—that is, between Western and non-Western perspectives—is neither eliminated nor presupposed as an ontological or social fact. This tension involves the use of identity categories, such as those of racial belonging or religious diversity, understood as categories whose use hinges on the free choice of the protagonists to determine, confront, and transform themselves with respect to their starting perspectives.

My approach is inspired by the "irrealist theory of race," recently proposed by J. Ganeri.[30] According to Ganeri, the current critical philosophy of race oscillates between the eliminativist and constructivist positions in race theory. On the one hand, the collapse of the idea that human beings fall into biological essences as groups requires that the concept of race no longer be used in discussions and analyses of humankind's sociopolitical reality, as this concept epistemically corresponds to nothing. This eliminativist position is contrasted with the constructivist position, according to which if humans eliminated the language of race from their vocabulary, they would soon find themselves unable to express some important truths about the reality of racial discrimination. "The conundrum at the heart of contemporary philosophy of race," Ganeri notes, "is thus either to explain how we can get along without expressing such truths or else to discover a way to salvage the use of the vocabulary of race." Ganeri's proposed solution is on a very different register than that of expressing a truth from a supposed racial (biological or sociological) entity. This solution focuses on irrealism, a path in which discourse on race does not refer to essences but rather represents a "performative speech act" or even an "act of self-definition." To justify this path of irrealism, Ganeri uses some of Frantz Fanon's reflections on the affirmation of racial identity and techniques of disalienation of subaltern peoples. In effect, according to

[30] See Jonardon Ganeri, "An Irrealist Theory of Race," *Critical Philosophy of Race* 12, no. 1 (2024): 106-24 (from which I quote).

Fanon, the new freedom acquired by these peoples does not correspond to a retroactive repair—to an archaeology of the past in which the existence of black literature, art, or philosophy is discovered. According to Ganeri, Fanon rejects both the constructionist and eliminativist ideas, as both disagree with the "freedom of self-definition," which is both a freedom from the impositions of domination and the freedom "to manufacture an identity for himself." In the latter case, the performance of racial identity is constituted, according to Ganeri's interpretation of Fanon, as a normative performance—a "reasoned choice" that shapes identity and determines the kind of life one pursues with others. If there is anything "real" in such a reasoned choice, one could say that it manifests itself indirectly, that is, in the sense of a "tension" between the act of the infinite foundation of identity and the renunciation of the instrumentalizations and impositions of the real world.

Ganeri's use of Fanon's theory is highly instructive, as it allows one to detect a closeness between the irrealist theory of race and the theory of critical ethnocentrism developed in the last century by the Italian historian of religions Ernesto de Martino. Within the decolonial question, a parallel exists between the oscillation on racial identity, which Ganeri addresses, and the oscillation on the use of religious categories that de Martino discusses in analyzing magic in Indigenous cultures. This parallel is instructive because it reveals the same normative attitude that moves the black man who aspires to the legitimization of his positive freedom, as well as the Western scholar of religions who undertakes to elaborate a critical examination of conscience about their discipline. According to de Martino, in consequence of the transoceanic and synchronic encounter with alien cultures, the scholar of religions is faced with a methodological paradox: they either totally disregard their own cultural history and thus consider alien phenomena in an indifferent and relativistic manner (a fairly eliminativist perspective regarding the event of the encounter between different cultures) or they rely on obvious anthropological categories, thus causing these categories to flow back uncontrollably onto the alien phenomena and compromising the objectivity of their procedure (a fairly

constructivist perspective regarding the role of the religious scholar in the encounter between cultures).

The resolution of this paradox is enacted for de Martino through a "critical ethnocentrism," which is an unfulfilled "task of unification" aimed at confronting the history of subaltern peoples with the history of the West. This "ideal" task does not operate from an assumed "unity" of mankind. As in the rational choice of racial identity in Ganeri, the search for a heuristic augmentation of the human must be conceived as a reformative task. The rational choice of the Western scholar implies not only an acknowledgement of the encounter between alien cultures but also, above all, the willingness to continuously implement confrontation as a basis for evaluating the free and conscious dismantling of familiar anthropological categories[31].

What does this parallel between the rational and reformative choices of Western and non-Western peoples mean for the renewal of philosophy of religion? Preliminarily, it means that rational reflection on heterogeneous religious traditions must be based on a notion of identity and difference that is not guaranteed by abstract or historically constructed entities. Rather, to overcome racism in philosophy of religion, one should consider the recognition of the alterity of religions as an ethical task that constantly reoccurs and therefore does not declare ontological or factual guarantees. If it possessed such guarantees, the recognition of alterity would soon result in mutual indifference or even worse, in a complete absorption of one tradition into the other, as alterity would refer to a referent (biological, cognitive, and socio-historical) that can easily be questioned or relativized in its existence by either tradition.

[31] See de Martino, *The End of the World*, 162-71 and 320.

4. Methodological examples for a paradigm shift: intercultural philosophy, epistemic pluralism, and co-production of knowledge

I now turn to present a set of methodological examples that I believe can help apply this approach to philosophy of religion. These examples are based on a dynamic conception that deepens the constructive and evaluative aspect of the perspectives considered above while emphasizing the moment of reciprocity and parallel transformation between the protagonists involved, that is, between Western and non-Western perspectives. Therefore, my discussion is oriented toward methodologies from different contexts that invite us to consider the renewal of the philosophy of religion as an issue that can arise as much within the formation of Western identity as that of non-Western identities and as the result of a mutual encounter between the tasks of two non-homogeneous identities.

(1) First, I refer to what occurred in the German discussion of intercultural philosophy toward the end of the previous century. This discussion stemmed from the reception and rethinking of Karl Jaspers' theory of the Axial Age[32]—a theory in which a cognitive and moral revolution occurred in parallel and without mutual contact among multiple civilizations (China, India, and Europe) from 800 to 200 BCE. Jaspers' perspective, which is deeply influenced by the Kantian reflective faith now applied to Eurasian philosophical–religious traditions, attempts to reflexively decipher the figures of an encompassing transcendence that can never be objectified. Jaspers' perspective paved the way for an intercultural and global discussion on the concept of philosophy, as it provided a discussion that not only juxtaposed different birthplaces of philosophy but also provoked serious discussions about how philosophy

[32] See Karl Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History*, ed. Christopher Thornhill (Oxon: Routledge, 2021). For an interpretation of the possibilities and limitations of Jaspers' theory in terms of intercultural philosophy, see Hans Schelkshorn, "Die Moderne als zweite Achsenzeit. Zu einer globalen Geschichtsphilosophie mit und gegen Jaspers," *Polylog* 38, (2017): 81-102.

is understood. Indeed, Jaspers' idea of a non-European or non-Eurocentric origin of philosophy transforms the Kantian problem of the limits of knowledge into a theory regarding a space of communication between different reflections on cognitive limits.

The Axial Age theory particularly intervenes in the intercultural philosophy of F. M. Wimmer[33] and H. Kimmerle[34]. Although these philosophers hold opposing views regarding philosophy, their conceptions can be mediated through Jaspers' reflection. In effect, this reflection does not characterize the philosophical element as a classical radical shift from myth to logos but as a dynamic and not at all progressive process of self-reflection in which, on the one hand, the mythical or traditional elements of a given culture always subsist and, on the other hand, the philosophical schools that different cultures produce within them confront (or should continue to confront) each other. Here, Jaspers' theory mediates Wimmer's position that the concept of philosophy, even if developed in non-European societies, must remain rigidly distinct from mythical, religious, and theological systems with Kimmerle's position, according to whom the concept of philosophy extends to mythical world images and oral or written sapiential traditions. That is, for Kimmerle, philosophy possesses a broad sense that we can find in every human culture, including, for example, Egyptian mythology.

In substance, Jaspers' mediation enters intercultural philosophy to avoid the contradiction between an extreme broadening of the concept of philosophy and its rigid reduction or, put differently, between a radical and relativistic pluralism that considers as philosophy every activity of homo sapiens' thinking and a limitation of the philosophical to pure rational argumentative praxis. Thus, Jaspers' theory provides a more complex response, one in which the specificity of philosophy and its extension

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33 See Franz M. Wimmer, *Essays on Intercultural Philosophy* (Chennai-Madras: Satya Nilayam, 2002).

34 See Heinz Kimmerle, *Interkulturelle Philosophie zur Einführung* (Hamburg: Junius Verlag, 2002).

into contexts still considered to be linked to mythical thinking are united. This allows cultures that have not experienced a break with myth, for example, African and pre-Columbian traditions, to be considered. In addition, Jaspers suggests that only on the level of a mutual and continuous confrontation between European and non-European philosophical and religious schools—not simply between philosophy and revealed religion—is a critical–reflexive concept of reason kept alive. This confrontation is translated in modernity as an *intercultural philosophy of religion*, which represents the historical manifestation of the truth of faith, of the Kantian transcendental, in its deepest degree.

(2) My second methodological example is again drawn from Ganeri, in particular his discussion of "epistemic pluralism," which helps elucidate what communication between philosophical–religious traditions should comprise in the global sense which Jaspers also adopted. I will refer mainly to two texts by Ganeri that elaborate epistemic pluralism: "A Manifesto for Re:emergent Philosophy" and "Epistemic Pluralism: from Systems to Stances." The distinctive feature of Ganeri's position lies in his reference to an intellectual pluralism that is non-Western and drawn from the Indian tradition, particularly the Jaina philosophers. In this tradition, Ganeri identifies an essential distinction between "epistemic systems or principles" (*pramāṇas*) and "epistemic standpoints or stances" (*nayas*).[35] Both principles and stances are part of an "epistemic culture," but only "epistemic standpoints or stances" give rise to "epistemic pluralism," allowing dialogue and conflict between epistemic cultures. "Epistemic systems or principles" in Jaina epistemology refers to a set of general normative propositions that specify the conditions under which a particular type of belief is justified. Just as Western thinking establishes a set of propositions for what is scientifically justified (the principles of observation, deduction, induction, etc.,), so Sanskrit cultures propose similar sets of underived epistemic principles. The crucial point, Ganeri

[35] See Jonardon Ganeri, "Epistemic Pluralism: From Systems to Stances," *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* 5, no. 1 (2019): 1–21 (from which I quote).

notes, is that epistemic pluralism does not occur with respect to these principles; that is, no pluralism exists regarding the sources of justifications for a belief or propositional attitude concerning the real. Instead, pluralism subsists in the combination of these sources or propositions to generate new knowledge. In Ganeri's words, "A *naya,* an epistemic stance, is not a proposition but a practical attitude, a strategy or policy which guides inquiry: it is an approach to the problem of producing knowledge." On this basis, the early Jainas, in their survey of the variety of epistemic stances employed in classical Sanskrit intellectual culture, identified a multiplicity of stances and discussed their application. In effect, the Jaina distinction between principles and stances does not necessitate that the distinct deliverances of stances are necessarily contradictory. Rejecting the idea that things have a single unique essence, the Jainas instead propose that reality is, in some sense, manifold or multifaceted. Therefore, epistemic stances will always be plural and incomplete, without refuting the rational completeness of the epistemic principles that constitute their content.

Ganeri argues that scientism, as a typical aspect of European colonialism, invalidates the possibility of a pluralism of epistemic stances because scientism presents itself, paradoxically, as a dogmatic "stance," that is, as a view that imposes a single strategy in the use of epistemic principles. This so-called "view from nowhere" strategy is characterized by the disenchantment of the world and access to its truth independently of any other strategy. This view has historically translated into violence and fear of any other epistemic culture. In contrast, the deliberative and normative, rather than prescriptive, qualities of Jaina epistemology admit an epistemic pluralism that does not utilize epistemic principles to view the world from nowhere. Rather, in this epistemic pluralism exist pairs of genuinely alternative epistemic stances, excluding facts under which one is more correct than the other.

Ganeri's position provides a valid example of philosophy of religion in the application of such an "epistemic pluralism" in the global discourse on philosophy. In this context, Ganeri does not develop a simple theoretical reflection, but highlights the advent of a new historical epoch,

the "age of re:emergence."[36] This age, which is our own, is distinguished by a "heightened appreciation of the value of world philosophies, the internationalization of the student body, the philosophical pluralism which interaction and migration in new global movements make salient […]." In this new reality, philosophical research has emerged that expressly distances itself from the "colonial use of reason," that is, from the possibility that a certain provincial epistemic culture, such as Western culture, presents itself as impartial, a-contextual, and universally unique. Consequently, Ganeri does not refer to individual philosophies re-emerging from a colonial past (such as the Indian tradition) but to a network of philosophical and religious practices, a dynamic and hybrid articulation comprising different localities and epochs in which rational investigations developed.

This creative contact between philosophical ideas prevents regression to the two paths pursued by colonial epistemic violence, paths to which many philosophers of religion attentive to issues of race also refer: a) the path of classifying a tradition as an Indigenous and native essence, as a culture or wisdom separate from the unique model of colonial rationality, and b) the path of comparability with colonial rationality and deprivation of its own philosophical identity. This new method of philosophizing does not represent for Ganeri a mere revitalization of traditions, but a revitalization that allows for the reinvention of traditions in the form of rational practices. Like the epistemic pluralism of stances, such practices allow for the expansion of our knowledge of reality and the deepening of a cosmopolitan consciousness without imperialistically imposing single access to such domains.

(3) As a third methodological example, I would like to briefly present an approach that, in a sense, ideally connects the previous two (that of Jaspers and Ganeri). This example concerns the efforts to co-produce knowledge enacted by scientists and Indigenous peoples to

[36] See Jonardon Ganeri, "A Manifesto for Re:emergent Philosophy," *Confluence* 4, (2016): 134–42 (from which I quote).

build collaborations in the face of a common concern for biodiversity conservation and climate change. Such co-productions unite needs from two contexts, creating the preconditions not only for realizing new types of knowledge of reality—new "stances" as Ganeri would say—but more importantly for a concrete transformation of the starting traditions, whether Western or non-Western. In such co-productions of knowledge, the change in perspective undertaken by each community is more central than achieving common goals. Some examples of these knowledge co-productions were recently analyzed in a multiauthor volume published at Cambridge University Press.[37]

Two of the editors of this volume had already reconstructed the history of these co-productions, focusing on the "issue of validation."[38] This issue regards the fact that the recognition of Indigenous knowledge at the political and scientific levels has comprised a long process to overcome two prejudices: a) the one whereby the burden of knowledge validation would fall to the scientific community alone and b) the one that recognizes the non-existence of any validation regarding Indigenous knowledge, as the concept of validation always involves an "asymmetry of power." Both biases underlie attitudes that only seemingly lead to recognition and respect for Indigenous knowledge. Historically, co-production perspectives have been adopted by passing through stages that have slowly placed the issue of validation at the heart of Indigenous knowledge systems. Indifference to this knowledge or its relegation to wisdom repositories and sacred sites subject to the extraction of useful elements for science and environmental education leads us to a real

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[37] See Marie Roué, Douglas Nakashima, and Igor Krupnik, eds., *Resilience through Knowledge Co-Production: Indigenous Knowledge, Science, and Global Environmental Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

[38] Marie Roué and Douglas Nakashima. "Indigenous and Local Knowledge and Science: From Validation to Knowledge Coproduction." In *The International Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, ed. Hilary Callan (Hoboken: Wiley, 2018); First published September 5, 2018. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118924396.wbiea2215 (from which I quote).

paradigm shift, according to Roué, who explicitly quotes T. Kuhn. At first, a type of "validation that demonstrated that classification systems rooted in Indigenous systems, while differing in several aspects from their Western science equivalents, nonetheless shared the latter's ambitions to be systematic, to be rigorous, and to impose a certain order" is advanced. Only later does this "respectful validation" deepen radically, establishing itself as a "self-validation"—that is, a validation determined by protocols internal to Indigenous communities. The shift from Indigenous culture as an object of research to Indigenous culture as a community of researchers also requires introducing a strong "incommensurability" between the scientific and Indigenous paradigms. This incommensurability does not allow the two communities to intervene in assessing what is meaningful to the other.

Paradoxical as this may seem, the recognition of mutual autonomy of meaning is transformed into the opportunity for a more radical "engagement" in the confrontation between authentic knowledge systems. A multiplicity of models has been theorized over the past two decades to create innovation through the recognition of complementarities and parallels. However, Roué wonders, should the paradigm shift of "self-validation" cease at this stage, or can it aspire to something more ambitious? In introducing the strategy of a "co-production" between knowledge systems, Roué must refer to an empirical context, rather than a theoretical model:

> Several communities of practice, particularly in the Arctic and in circumstances where complexity is heightened by uncertainty, such as that generated by global climate change, have attempted to move toward a coproduction of knowledge [...]. In the face of pressing demands for action in a context of uncertainty, this approach places an emphasis on the establishment of a respectful partnership, in an interconnected world, where knowledge from diverse sources is pooled and complementarities recognized.

The reference to the Arctic as a place where Indigenous peoples and the scientific community experience the trauma of environmental and cultural disaster allows us to assess the importance of the co-production process. In the Arctic, this

> process goes beyond simply taking stock of the commonalities and differences of parallel sets of self-validated knowledge. Through a dialogue that can often be lengthy and in which no partner claims superiority of their information or methods, areas of uncertainty are highlighted […] When productive, this approach goes beyond complementarity, encouraging partners to co-produce new knowledge and better define uncertainties.

5. Conclusion

The case concerning Indigenous knowledge, from its rejection to its reinvestment, could be applied to a range of religious phenomena excluded or deformed by the paradigm of modern philosophy of religion. However, the case of Indigenous knowledge also relates to constructive strategies to be implemented in the future. Perhaps the climate issue and respect for biodiversity could provide insights for our discussion. The current experience of a loss of the natural world or its salvation through multiple techniques and technologies provides an opportunity for the philosophy of religion to learn the value of *uncertainty* as a stimulus—as a dramatic occasion for Indigenous and scientific communities to renew their cooperation. In this uncertainty of nature, and of human intervention in it, an additional dimension is added to the previous methodological examples (i.e., in intercultural philosophy and re:emergent philosophy). I describe this dimension in the following way. Once self-validation of each other's cultures, Western and non-Western, has been recognized, the task of a common struggle against racism and for pluralism does not find its guarantee only in such a recognition of complementarity—that is, based on the fact that the world has historically entered a cross-cultural epoch (as in the perspectives of Jaspers and Ganeri). Rather, a common

struggle against racism also requires a complementary reflection on the areas of natural and cultural uncertainty that impede our concrete capacities and possibilities to co-produce epistemically and ethically sustainable knowledge.

Uncertainty towards the increasing complexity of the social–ecological environment means, first and foremost, the acceptance of what, on one side as well as the other, prevents its overcoming. The case of the integration of indigenous and scientific knowledge is meaningful in this regard, as the building of "resilience" in natural resource management seems to pass precisely through the recognition of the differences and "creative tension" between traditional and "scientific methods, with the former offering "the depth of a local and culture-specific experience" and the latter allowing "for a broader context beyond the local level."[39] In such recognition, integration is reformulated as the co-production of knowledge, that is, as an "active partaking of diverse knowledge systems at all stages of knowledge-generation."[40] Coproducing knowledge does not actually mean promoting asymmetries or compromise formations, but rather seeking a partnership in which each actor emphasizes a methodological aspect that could, or has historically been able to, undermine its *own* management of uncertainty and socio-environmental complexity. In concrete examples of collaboration between Indigenous and non-indigenous knowledge, not only is it crucial for non-indigenous researchers "to recognize the lack of familiarity with Indigenous knowledge systems, to learn about them, to accept them as equal to Western science".[41] The empowerment of Indigenous communities also

[39] See Erin L. Bohensky and Yiheyis Maru, "Indigenous Knowledge, Science, and Resilience: What Have We Learned from a Decade of International Literature on 'Integration'?" *Ecology and Society* 16, no.4 (December 2011): 6, http://dx.doi.org/10.5751/ES-04342-160406.

[40] Noam Obermeister, "From dichotomy to duality: Addressing interdisciplinary epistemological barriers to inclusive knowledge governance in global environmental assessments," *Environmental Science & Policy* 68, (2017): 80-6.

[41] Olga Lauter, "Challenges in Combining Indigenous and Scientific Knowledge in the Arctic," *Polar Geography* 46, no. 1 (2023): 62–74.

requires legitimizing "adoption processes"[42] of Western scientific and technological knowledge from Indigenous perspectives. The latter could thus truly become bearers of those "alternative knowledges that address global environmental destruction and warming," which Maffie talked about, thus nurturing a double epistemological process:[43] on the one hand, a process that deconstructs Indigenous epistemologies by avoiding their reduction to mere *ethnoknowledges*,[44] and on the other hand, a process that deconstructs Western modernity by grasping the self-destructive paradox inherent in its claimed technological and scientific superiority.

The considerations discussed above seem to take us far away from my starting question—that of a paradigm shift in the philosophy of religion to defuse its epistemic injustice towards its history and the histories of others. However, issues concerning scientific progress and the preservation of our planet are connected not only with a change in the processes of epistemological production but with the philosophical–

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[42] See, in this regard, the instructive study on the use of forest-monitoring technology among Indigenous communities in Amazonia by Nidia Catherine González and Markus Kröger, "The Adoption of Earth-Observation Technologies for Deforestation Monitoring by Indigenous People: Evidence from the Amazon," *Globalizations* 20, no. 3 (2022): 415–31.

[43] See James Maffie, "'In the end, we have the Gatling gun, and they have not': Future prospects of indigenous knowledges," *Futures* 41, no.1 (2009): 53-65. In this context Maffie uses the Fanonian notion of a mutual "reciprocal relativization," that is, "the idea that alternative knowledges and epistemologies come to perceive the limitation of their own orientations." The passage Maffie refers to is a famous lecture by Fanon ("Racism and culture," 1956), in which the end of "racial prejudice" is said to reside in the "decision to recognize and accept the reciprocal relativism of different cultures, once the colonial status is irreversibly excluded", cf. Franz Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution*, trans. Haakon Chevalier (New York: Grove Press, 1969), 44.

[44] See Maffie, "Future prospects", 61. From a different perspective, S. Gill highlighted the risk of incommunicability between the indigenous world and academia if indigenous ontologies and epistemologies are seen as accessible only to someone possessing an Indigenous identity, see Sam Gill, "What Is Mother Earth?: A Name, A Meme, A Conspiracy," *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 18, no. 2 (2024): 185-6.

religious evaluation that non-Western cultures propose of Western modernity. As Maffie pointed out, these evaluations, at least with regard to some examples of South American and African Indigenous traditions, do not tend to describe a claimed epistemological superiority of one culture over the other, but rather refer to a divine or supra-human horizon in which Western knowledge and human groups are interpreted as separate brothers or monsters returning home from distant places. In these examples, modern knowledge is seen more as a "gift from the gods,"[45] of which only foolish and destructive use is made by its bearers. While there are certainly also more negative evaluations, in which such knowledge and its bearers are seen as signs of an imminent Indigenous end of the world[46] or emphasized in their incommensurability[47] with such a world, an awareness of the struggle against environmental catastrophe should incentivize both sides to deepen and rediscover the initial datum of an "insecurity" towards a future impossible to predetermine or anticipate.[48] In this sense, the task of epistemic and ethical co-production becomes an exercise without ontological or historicist guarantees, that is, an exercise that transforms racial prejudice into the duty of elaborating an interracial culture that is now deeply diffused as a fact in and of the globalized world. This culture of confrontation, seen from the perspective of a philosophy of religion that accepts the double internal and external deconstruction of its

[45] Maffie, "Future prospects", 58.

[46] See De Martino, *The End of the World*, 178 f., on the relationship between Western culture and Australian Aborigines.

[47] See Vanessa de Oliveira Andreotti et al., "Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Anticipation," in *Handbook of Anticipation. Theoretical and Applied Aspects of the Use of Future in Decision Making*, ed. Roberto Poli (Cham: Springer Nature, 2019), 393-406, concerning the challenge that indigenous philosophy poses to Western conceptions of temporality and the futurity.

[48] It seems to me that it is precisely this uncertainty that Indigenous thinking might have in common with the deconstruction of Christian culture mentioned by Derrida. For that matter, look at the significant conversation with Heidegger and Derrida by the Māori philosopher Carl Mika, *Indigenous Education and Metaphysics of Presence. A Worlded Philosophy* (Oxon: Routledge, 2017).

knowledge, then takes on the task of positively accepting the catastrophe that each philosophical–religious tradition represents vis-à-vis another to avoid not only a natural catastrophe but the violence of imposing the illusion of a human essence, whether Western or non-Western, devoid of catastrophe or incommensurable elements.

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