Book Reviews

Reconfigurations of Philosophy of Religion: A Possible Future. Edited by Jim Kanaris. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2018. Pp. xxi + 295.
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At the beginning of the book, Kanaris forewarns: "One will be hard pressed to find a uniform vision in this collection" (ix). From the start, then, it seems there is scarce chance of uncovering a golden thread weaving together the twelve contributions of the book. An impression further confirmed by the radical divergence of the contributors' methodologies, interlocutors, and objectives. Consider, for instance, Pamela Sue Anderson's feminist philosophy of religion, Jin Y. Park's East-West comparative philosophy of religion, Tyler Robert's socio-political critical philosophy of religion, or Clayton Crockett's appeal to François Laurelle's non-philosophy for philosophy of religion. Each of the contributors in the volume presents an innovative reconfiguration of philosophy of religion with varying implications for its future. And yet, as the subtitle suggests, the many reconfigurations of philosophy of religion propose "a possible future," in the singular, and consequently, the possibility of a cumulative way forward for a field of inquiry which seemingly has as many methods as it has researchers like so many unrelated points of light in the night sky. As philosophy of religion continues to proliferate in a myriad of directions with increasing distance and isolation over time, what possible future can constellate its reconfigurations together?

Kanaris prefers a musical metaphor suggesting that the differences among the contributors form a polyphony (echoing the title of one of his earlier books) rather than the chaotic dissonance of a cacophony. To this polyphony ensues the back and forth of philosophy of religion. Following Raschke, Kanaris likens the contrasting interplay of the contributors to "play therapy" – a kind of jouissance or "jig" – intended to characterize the contributions' interrelation as step and counter step, which involves a certain degree of synchronization harmonized, at least in part, by a common cadence. In the introduction, the reader can find a succinct summary of the contributions that delineates their similarities and differences, so it would be redundant to do the same here. Rather, the purpose of this review will be to adumbrate several of the primary leitmotifs composing the fugue of the future of philosophy of religion intonated in the book. In the first chapter, Joy Morny fittingly quotes David Tracy: "The entire narrative of philosophy of religion in the modern West

needs rethinking and retelling if both the 'roots' and 'fruits' of that curious modern invention, philosophy of religion, is one day to play a properly interdisciplinary and intercultural role" (3). Many of the contributors speak to this narration and pursue very different story lines for rethinking and reconfiguring philosophy of religion. Yet, some of the main topoi reappear in re-narrating its history and repositioning it in academia as a "properly interdisciplinary and intercultural" field of inquiry that can have a significant role for religious studies as a whole.

One primary aspect of retelling the story of philosophy of religion is reassessing the place and function of demonstrative arguments for theism like the proofs for the existence of God and the project of theodicy for addressing the problem of evil. Joy, Anderson, Trakakis, and Knepper speak directly to the shortcomings of this approach for philosophy of religion. For instance, Anderson, who in seeking to re-vision gender for philosophy of religion, critiques traditional philosophers of religion: "Most notable here is the central concept in philosophy of religion," she explains, "the 'masculinist' ideal of the omni-perfect God that has been an 'idol' for men's rational subjecthood and that has idolized 'the second sex' who fixes her gaze on the God-man, preventing her from thinking and living a life that is her own" (58). From this perspective, the approach to philosophy of religion that concentrates its efforts on advancing rational arguments for theism or theodicy without regard to the contexts motivating its most basic categories often unwittingly recapitulates politico-identity prejudices like the "masculinist ideal" or, inversely and adversely, flawed femininity. As a corrective, Anderson accentuates the importance of a "contextualized" reconfiguring of philosophy of religion that critically reflects on gender, sex, race, and class, and accomplishes this critical reflection by incorporating multiple disciplines within its field of inquiry. Other contributors think similarly, advocating for contextualized, multi-disciplinary, and comparative engagement in philosophy of religion. For instance, Trakakis encourages Western thinkers to adopt a "metaphysical reorientation" and "turn to the idealist and monist metaphysics of the East" (99). Knepper proposes that philosophy of religion become "an academic field of inquiry that seeks, above all, to understand and explain the diversities and patterns of religious reason-giving in the religions of the world" (108). Similarly, Wildman contends that philosophy of religion should become a multidisciplinary-comparative inquiry if it is to remain a viable interlocutor in modern academia. Jin Park provides an outstanding example of the cross-fertilization of comparative analysis by comparing the reception of the disciplinary locution "philosophy of religion" in an Eastern context.

Each of these contributors has their own reasons for advancing a contextualized, comparative approach to the study of religion, but perhaps no one articulates the postmodern philosophical basis for doing so as clearly as Carl Raschke. When referring to the impact of Derrida, Raschke commends that philosophy of religion

adopt the radical stance of "theorizing and philosophizing the force of difference" (164). Raschke puts this so pointedly that it is worth quoting at length: "However, what is clear is that Western philosophy, and philosophy of religion in particular, has no choice but to go global and to 'decolonize' in ways it has never imagined before… To decolonize, and thus to 'postmodernize' in the most radical sense imaginable, would involve far more than any tiresome academic 'diversity' program of recognizing privilege or learning to listen to the 'other'. It would be to penetrate philosophically into what we wrongly consider as 'naïve' symbolico-collective narratives of those whom we have not allowed to speak in the past, and whom we are used to dismissing with our familiar pan-Cartesian hauteur before we in our good Western 'parental' attitude take it upon ourselves to 'speak for' them" (170). Along similar lines, Caputo in Derridean terms characterizes the kind of radical theology ingredient in philosophy of religion as the "invention de l'autre in the double sense of invention, the in-coming or breaking-in of something unforeseeable and the coming-upon something we did not see coming" (215). It is the hope in encountering l'autre and "the force of difference" that sets forth the conditions for the possibility of philosophy of religion's reconfiguration as well as its place within religious studies. It is to the latter that I now wish to turn.

In 2013, Kanaris invited the contributors of this volume to a symposium seeking to answer the question, "Does philosophy of religion have a future?" The book is the fruit of that inquiry. Invariably and unsurprisingly, they all answer in the affirmative and with the caveat that it will be a future that departs significantly from its past. The book is divided into two parts: Part One: Philosophy of Religion and the Philosophical Tradition, and Part Two: Philosophy of Religion and Religious Studies, Theology, and the Modern Academy. Without much ado, Kanaris only mentions this division in a footnote. The difference between the two approaches, one historical-genealogical and the other intra-disciplinary, is not elaborated in detail. It seems rather only a matter of emphasis. Rather than an internecine debate, there is a sense that the volume presents a tacit vision of philosophy of religion as a field of inquiry consisting in evaluating presuppositions – often tracing their progeny and evolution – that govern the concepts, methodologies, and practices that determine various approaches to studying religion. Thus, broadly speaking, philosophy of religion as it is presented in this volume suggests a kind of reflective discourse on the discipline of religious studies as a whole, evaluating critically the assumptions and implications of those who through the application of varying methods study religion. By doing so, philosophy of religion crystallizes the reasons for favoring contextualized and comparative studies of religion like sociology of religion, anthropology of religion, gender studies, comparative studies of religion, religion and politics (i.e. political theologies), etc. Philosophy of religion thus distills the presuppositions governing why and how religion should be (and should not be) studied.

This task gives philosophy of religion a new charter. Its reflections on any particular religion must remain descriptive while its disciplinary task for the field of religious studies aims to be normative. Both tendencies are new to philosophy of religion in the late twentieth- and twenty-first century. Previously when early modern philosophers of religion compared Western religions to other religions they often included an evaluative component favoring the former to the latter. While this kind of normative comparison of religions has long been passé, what is new is that many of the contributors see a tacit continuation of this kind of normative-preferential assessment in contemporary philosophers of religion who through proofs for God's existence (theism) or arguments for God's goodness (theodicy) implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, privilege one religion over others. If philosophy of religion is to avoid valuing particular religions and safeguard difference to become a truly comparative and contextualized inquiry, it must take upon itself the responsibility of methodological reflection on what studying religion entails and what norms are requisite to preserve the integrity of its subject. As the philosophers of religion in this volume consistently emphasize, one such norm is that the study of religion can no longer take place from the perspective of a removed, abstract observer. Instead, it must be critically immersed in the embodiment of religious beliefs, symbols, and practices. There are different names for this approach with varying emphases. Kanaris calls this kind of posture to studying religion an "enecstatic jig," Roberts, "critical responsiveness," and Caputo, "radical hermeneutics."

Speculating about what might possibly come to pass usually disrupts the present with what should now be the case. Herein lies the challenge of contemplating the possible future of philosophy of religion: if the present and the future are situated through their critical reception of the past (i.e. narration and renarration), then it is quite challenging – after all, we are most unaware when we are most convinced – to imagine the ways in which contemporary philosophy of religion will become our successors' past and become so many foils for them when they indict us not in our weaknesses but in what we perceive to be our strengths. Insofar as the future puts the present under critique by welcoming in anticipation what is avenir (to come), few aspire to be the first to the future and thereby inaugurate in the present "a time out of joint," as Raschke phrases it à la Derrida and Hamlet. The notable contributors of this volume, insightfully brought together by Kanaris, have braved just that.