Imagining Philosophy of Religion Differently: Interdisciplinary Wittgensteinian Approaches

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Abstract Despite a growing interest in philosophy of religion in secondary level education, especially in the United Kingdom, courses at undergraduate level frequently fail to build upon the preliminary understanding that students have gained. A fixation on the evaluation of religious "truth-claims" tends to detract from an appreciation of the variegated nature of religious forms of life and practice, while a limited palette of examples constrains the cross-cultural reach of the subject. After outlining weaknesses in the approach often taken to teaching philosophy of religion, this chapter considers both how increased interdisciplinary engagement can deepen and expand the cultural range of philosophy of religion and how Wittgenstein-inspired modes of investigation can facilitate such interdisciplinarity. The influence of Wittgenstein's ideas in the study of religion outside philosophy is concisely surveyed, and examples are given from my own teaching of how to integrate Wittgensteinian and interdisciplinary dimensions into an undergraduate course.

Keywords Philosophy of religion · Ludwig Wittgenstein · Interdisciplinary approaches · Cross-cultural · Anthropology

1 Introduction

The popularity over recent years of philosophy of religion units in religious studies courses at pre-university level in the United Kingdom has contributed to a growing interest in this area of study at university level. Although what is taught in secondary education under the title of philosophy of religion, or sometimes "philosophy and

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ethics”, suffers from problems of narrowness, it has tended to provide students with a competent grounding in the subject. When it comes to university, however, undergraduate courses in philosophy of religion often fail to significantly deepen or expand the students’ philosophical inquiry into religious matters. Frequently duplicating portions of secondary level syllabuses (most of which were, in the first instance, modelled on what gets taught in introductory university courses), the university courses commonly add further technical detail while missing opportunities to enhance students’ appreciation of the variety of phenomena that exist within the category of religion.

A particular problem is the extent to which philosophy of religion has fostered an exaggerated conception of the role that propositional beliefs, or “truth-claims”, play within religious forms of life. Strhan (2010, p. 31) summarizes the problem as follows:

> The centrality of philosophy of religion within RE [religious education] leads students to view being religious as believing that certain statements of knowledge are true. Thus, exam specifications, determining to a large extent the content of the curriculum, tend to present religion in too simplistic terms as assent to certain religious propositions.

Although the problem that Strhan highlights is a genuine one, it could be misleading to suggest that it is caused by the “centrality of philosophy of religion within RE”, for the real problem is more specific than this: it is that a *particular conception* of what philosophy of religion is has become dominant both in pre-university religious education (or religious studies) courses and, paradigmatically, at university level. By presenting philosophy of religion per se as the enemy, we risk bolstering a false opposition between philosophy on the one side and other approaches to the study of religions—including social scientific and philological approaches—on the other, when what really needs to be recognized is the possibility of doing philosophy of religion differently, broadening its horizons in ways that afford a richer understanding of the multiple forms that being religious (or rejecting religion) can take.

This chapter has a critical and a constructive aspect. On the critical side I elaborate my allegation that philosophy of religion, primarily as it is taught in universities, needs to be imagined differently. Then, on the constructive side, I discuss some ways in which a philosophy of religion syllabus might be enhanced, both with regard to its cross-cultural and multi-religious scope and, relatedly, in terms of its engagement with other relevant disciplines. My contention is that methods of investigation inspired by Ludwig Wittgenstein harbour the potential to facilitate such interdisciplinarity, especially given the wide-ranging influence that his work has had across several disciplines involved in the study of religions, including anthropology and theology along with the methodologically diverse area known as religious studies.

2 Philosophy of Religion at Pre-University Level

Pre-university students in the United Kingdom have been most likely over recent years to study philosophy of religion as part of an AS (Advanced Subsidiary) or A (Advanced) Level religious studies course, which they would normally take in the context of their secondary education from the ages of sixteen to eighteen. Although things are set to change in the near future, the 2013 OCR (Oxford, Cambridge and RSA [Royal Society of Arts]) specification document for religious studies includes both an AS and an A2 philosophy of religion unit, which are designed to be progressive (see OCR 2013, pp. 12–15, 39–40). Thus, although students who proceed to A2 Level after completing the AS Level have been entitled to choose units from areas of study different from those which they took at AS Level, they are encouraged to remain within the same unit area.

Between them, the AS and A2 philosophy of religion units have provided a coherent introduction not only to philosophy of religion, but to western philosophy more generally, making reference to key figures such as Plato, Aristotle, Boethius, Aquinas, Descartes, Hume, Kant, and indeed Wittgenstein (Mayled et al. 2015). Among the strengths of the syllabus are its long historical range, its sustained comparative emphasis, and its bringing of philosophy into dialogue with scriptural sources (most notably the Bible). Thus, for example, the AS unit has typically begun with "Ancient Greek influences on philosophy of religion" (OCR 2013, p. 12), with Plato's analogy of the cave and theory of Forms being examined along with Aristotle's conceptions of causation and of a Prime Mover. This has been followed by a section entitled "Judaeo-Christian influences on philosophy of religion", which features comparisons between biblical representations of God and Aristotle's more austere conception, and a version of Plato's *Euthyphro* question is adduced in discussing the "goodness of God". Then come the traditional arguments for God's existence, usually covering the ontological, cosmological and teleological arguments plus a Kantian moral argument and some psychoanalytic challenges from Freud. The AS syllabus has then tended to conclude with discussion of the problem of evil and issues arising from the relation between religion and science. Following this, topics dealt with by the A2 unit have included: religious language (in which context Wittgenstein receives a mention), religious experience (with William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience* providing a point of departure), miracles, the nature and attributes of God, and life after death (OCR 2013, pp. 39–40).

Weaknesses of these A Level philosophy of religion syllabuses include the fact that, by remaining closely tied to the European or Euro-American philosophical tradition, the religious and cultural purview is rather limited, with Christianity—or, at most, the so-called Judaeo-Christian tradition—being implicitly treated as normative for what constitutes the religion about which philosophical questions are to be raised and addressed. Occasional gestures are made in the direction of non-Abrahamic traditions, such as when reincarnation is mentioned among the "views of life after death" (OCR 2013, p. 40; Mayled et al. 2015, pp. 269–271), but these gestures do not extend very far. Moreover, the textual focus of the units contributes to the problem that I mentioned above, namely that the conceptualization of religion is limited to one that prioritizes doctrines over practices, presenting those doctrines as propositions or "truth-claims" largely in abstraction from the practices that, as Wittgenstein would put it, give the words their sense (cf. CV, p. 97e).[1]

The weaknesses to which I have just drawn attention would not be so much of a problem, at least for students who go on to study philosophy of religion further at university, were it the case that university courses actively sought to deepen and expand the philosophical discussion of religion beyond what is offered at secondary level. Regrettably, however, this is not generally what happens. Indeed, university courses often restrict the syllabus even more in certain respects while presuming that they are providing greater "clarity and rigor to traditional pursuits" (to quote the contemporary American philosopher of religion William Wainwright) by applying such "tools" as those of "modal logic [and] probability theory" (Wainwright 2005, p. 6). I shall say more about philosophy of religion as it is commonly taught at university undergraduate level below.

3 Philosophy of Religion at University Level

What many undergraduate courses, or modules, in philosophy of religion do—in the United Kingdom but also in the USA and elsewhere in the Anglophone world—is to structure the material in terms of a series of arguments between so-called "theists" on the one side and "atheists" on the other while assuming these arguments to be paradigmatic of what is at issue, not only in the philosophy of religion, but in religious life outside the academy as well. As a consequence, questions of justification and truth are privileged over more nuanced inquiries into the variety of ways in which religious beliefs and practices enter into the lives of people and their communities. In this connection, Anna Strhan's critical remarks are well taken when she points out that the understandable "desire to protect students against religious indoctrination" by cultivating their analytic and evaluative skills runs the risk of "a more subtle indoctrination" into the assumption that religious life is exclusively a matter of weighing up arguments for and against religious doctrines (Strhan 2010, p. 32).

An illustrative example of unadventurous thinking in course design is provided by a recent syllabus for an undergraduate module in philosophy of religion taught within the Department of Philosophy at King's College London. It begins in week 1 with "Existence Arguments and Non-Existence Arguments"; week 2 is entitled "Arguments for (Broad) Atheism I"; week 3 is "Arguments for (Broad) Atheism II"; week 4 is "Arguments for (Narrow) Atheism"; week 5 is "Arguments for (Narrow) Atheism II"; and the remainder of the module deals with life after death and the rationality of religious belief, all with Christianity—or some tenuously Christian form of "theism"—as an assumed background (see King's College London 2014–2015).

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[1] Following convention, titles for Wittgenstein's works are abbreviated (BB = The Blue and Brown Books, TLP = Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, WL = Wittgenstein's Lectures, PO = Philosophical Occasions CV = Culture and Value), with section (§) or page number (p.), with full citation and initials (e.g., PO) in the References.

Tim Mawson of the University of Oxford epitomizes the attitude of many lecturers in philosophy of religion when, at the outset of his book *Belief in God*, the subtitle of which proclaims it to be "An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion", he announces that the book is "going to be focusing on the central claim of the Western religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, those religions that say that the answer to the question [of 'the physical world'] is a personal agent, namely God" (2005, p. 2). Mawson proceeds to ask his readers to view his neglect of "the traditions of the Eastern religions"—not to mention the many smaller religions that are well described neither as western nor as eastern—"as methodological humility rather than methodological narrow-mindedness". In his defence, he adds:

> If I am to make significant progress in the space allowed by a relatively short book, I must concentrate on an area that I can reasonably hope to traverse in the amount of time such a format allows. So for this reason, which I admit is not a philosophical reason, I'm going to focus exclusively on the main philosophical arguments pertaining to the monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and to the main claim of these religions, that there is a God. (2005, p. 2)

Mawson is undoubtedly right that one cannot hope to cover everything about the philosophy of religion in a single book of fewer than three hundred pages. Still less can one expect to do so in a single module of ten, eleven or twelve weeks. But opting for the narrowness of Mawson's approach—considerably more attenuated than even the A Level syllabus—seems peculiarly remiss when one is claiming to provide a genuine introduction to the philosophy of religion rather than to merely a tiny portion of it.

4 Broadening Developments in Philosophy of Religion

Despite the persistent insularity of philosophy of religion syllabuses in many universities, pressure for greater depth and inclusiveness is coming from a variety of directions. There have, of course, long been philosophers of religion who have themselves sought to broaden the subject's remit, prominent among these being John Hick (1922–2012), who affirms in a work first published in 2001 that to him "it seems clear … that the philosophy of religion is not properly just the philosophy of the Christian (or Judaeo-Christian) tradition, but in principle of religion throughout history and throughout the world" (2010, pp. 12–13). More recently Kevin Schilbrack has gone further than Hick in pushing not only for a more historically and geographically encompassing approach, but for stronger mutual engagement between philosophy and other disciplines involved in the study of religions as well, notably the sociology and anthropology of religion and the various subdisciplines that get lumped into the category of religious studies (Schilbrack 2014, esp. ch. 7).

At least as important as these forces coming from within philosophy of religion is the pressure generated by campaigning groups such as Minorities and Philosophy (MAP 2015) and the Society for Women in Philosophy (SWIP UK 2015), which are concerned not exclusively with philosophy of religion but with philosophy across the board. The activities of these two groups in particular is not only raising awareness about the imbalances within most philosophy departments in English-speaking countries—in which women and members of non-white ethnic groups are severely underrepresented among the academic staff—but also devising strategies for rectifying these imbalances. Their campaigns include promoting the diversification of invited seminar speakers and course reading lists to ensure that relevant and important work by women and non-white philosophers is not unfairly neglected (see, e.g. BPA/SWIP UK 2014, p. 6; Diversity Reading List 2015). The trend that these campaigns are generating is thus towards increased cultural inclusiveness and a questioning of conservative agendas both in teaching and in research.

In the philosophy of religion this diversification agenda encourages the expansion of syllabuses to take account of non-Christian and non-Abrahamic religious traditions and also the incorporation into course reading lists of material produced by female and non-white authors, thereby opening up fresh perspectives on religious issues. The agenda is assisted by the sorts of multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary ways of working that people such as Schilbrack and myself have been advocating (see Burley 2015), and these ways of working can themselves be furthered through the adoption of Wittgensteinian methods, which are remarkably conducive to bringing philosophy into productive dialogue with other disciplines, including those that I have mentioned already such as anthropology, religious studies and theology. An important reason for this is that some of the investigative approaches in these other disciplines have much in common with Wittgenstein's later methods. Moreover, Wittgenstein's work has had a direct impact on those disciplines that is comparable to its impact on philosophy; indeed, in some respects the impact in those other disciplines has been more pervasive and enduring.

In the next section I underscore some instances of where Wittgenstein's influence has been significant in the study of religions outside mainstream philosophy before focusing, in Sect. 6, on some specific examples of how philosophy of religion can be deepened and expanded.

5 Wittgenstein and the Study of Religions

Among the ideas associated with Wittgenstein that have been influential in the study of religions are those of "family resemblance concepts" and "forms of life", but also some of the themes discernible in his "Remarks on Frazer's *Golden*

Bough” (PO), most notably the criticisms of Frazer’s intellectualist tendencies and the emphasis that Wittgenstein places on seeking analogies between forms of behaviour in other cultures and things that go on in one’s own culture.

With regard to the notion of family resemblances, this has had at least as strong an effect on thinking about the concept of religion as it has in any other area of inquiry. Though often mediated through, or conflated with, the notions of polythetic classification popularized by the anthropologist Needham (1975) or so-called prototype theory devised by Lakoff (1987, esp. pp. 16–17), talk of family resemblance is commonplace in the study of religions. Probably the first to take up the idea in print was Ninian Smart, who, in an article first published in 1959, urges us to “abandon the old-fashioned notion of definition and throw off the fascination of essences”, instead recognizing that the term “religion”, like other general terms such as “game”, applies “to a wide variety of things in virtue, not of some common property, but of ‘family resemblance’” (1959, pp. 222–223).

Subsequent to Smart, many others have adopted the view of “religion” as a family resemblance concept and have also applied this idea to various specific religions, with the concept of Hinduism having become signally prone to being characterized in these terms. The Indologist Wendy Doniger, for example, advocates a “polythetic approach” to thinking about Hinduism, which she says “owes much to the concept of family resemblance laid out by … Wittgenstein”. She recommends depicting the concept in the form of a Venn diagram, “grouped into sectors of different colors, one for beliefs or practices that some Hindus shared with Buddhists and Jainas, another largely confined to Hindu texts in Sanskrit, a third more characteristic of popular worship and practice, and so forth” (2010, pp. 28–29).

In my own experience of teaching undergraduate courses on Hindu traditions and South Asian religions more generally, many students find the sort of approach outlined by Doniger intuitively appealing. It constitutes a sober intervention in the often heated debates between those scholars who insist that there is no such thing as Hinduism—there is, at most, merely a disparate collection of Hindu*isms* or Hindu *religions* (von Stietencron 1997)—and those who maintain that, on the contrary, there are certain things that all Hindus have in common, such as a belief in a cosmic principle called *dharma*, which bind them together into a relatively cohesive religious community (Halbfass 1988, ch. 17). The family resemblance idea provides a means, not of simplistically disposing of these disagreements, but of inviting us to look and see whether they hinge upon certain questionable assumptions. One such assumption might be that “religion” must have an essence and that what we, as students of religion, have to do is discover whether any given phenomenon or tradition (such as Hinduism) fulfils the requirements—the necessary and jointly sufficient conditions—for having the term “religion” applied to it. Deploying the idea of family resemblance allows us to attend more closely to the particular ways in which religious traditions both diverge from and intersect with one another, without forcing us to expect them all to conform to a predetermined blueprint. Such an approach, which can serve to relieve both scholars and students of what Wittgenstein (BB, p. 1; WL, p. 90) would call “a mental cramp”, have usefully been embraced in connection not only with Hinduism but also with New Age religions

(Kemp 2004, p. 7), Buddhism (Jackson 1988, p. 129), Tantra (Urban 2003, pp. 43, 272), and no doubt with other religious phenomena as well.

Aside from the notion of family resemblances, Wittgenstein's influence on the study of religions has also been felt in discussions of the relation between belief and practice. Again, Rodney Needham—who in one place suggestively describes social anthropology as "empirical philosophy" (1972, p. xiv)—foregrounds this issue in his book *Belief, Language and Experience* (1972), which is dedicated jointly to the anthropologist Lucien Lévy-Bruhl and to Wittgenstein. The book could be characterized as a sustained cross-cultural grammatical investigation into the concept of belief, at the end of which Needham concludes that the ways in which his fellow ethnographers have attributed "beliefs"—especially religious "beliefs"—to the communities they study has frequently been unduly loose and misleading. More generally, Wittgenstein's influence is discernible in the reluctance among many contemporary anthropologists to try to *explain* religious practices by reference to underlying beliefs or theories supposedly held by the practitioners. The suggestion that practices, such as rituals, might not be based on specific beliefs—such as the belief that performing the ritual will bring about a certain practical effect—was hardly original to Wittgenstein, but Wittgenstein gave the suggestion a form of expression that has caught the imagination of several anthropologists of religion.

In one of his remarks on Frazer, for instance, Wittgenstein writes that "One could almost say that man is a ceremonial animal" (PO, p. 129)—a phrase that is picked up in the title of Wendy James's book *The Ceremonial Animal: A New Portrait of Anthropology*, in which James invokes not only the notion of ceremoniousness, but also Wittgenstein's term "form of life", in order to accentuate the sociality of human cultural and linguistic activities (2003, esp. p. 6). Much could also be said about the creative uses to which Wittgenstein's ideas have been put by other anthropologists such as Clifford Geertz, Stanley Tambiah and Veena Das, not to mention the repercussions of his work in other relevant disciplines such as theology and even biblical hermeneutics (MacDonald 2005); but enough has been said for our present purposes to indicate that Wittgenstein's voice remains eminently audible in the study of religions beyond philosophy.

6 Interdisciplinary Wittgensteinian Experiments in Teaching

My task in this penultimate section is to outline some examples of how I have endeavoured in my own teaching to deepen and expand the scope of philosophy of religion, both by using explicitly Wittgensteinian material and by employing an implicitly Wittgensteinian sensibility to promote interdisciplinary inquiry. Of particular pertinence is a third-year undergraduate course entitled *Religion, Belief and Ethics*, which I designed with the intention of exposing students to a wider range of subject matter, and of ways of going about philosophy of religion, than they are likely to have met earlier in their undergraduate studies or during their secondary education. Here I shall give a few examples of what is covered in the syllabus with a view to illustrating three of the course's main objectives. One objective is to show students how standard topics in philosophy of religion can be explored in deeper and more morally serious ways than is normally the case. A second objective is to raise questions regarding the nature of religious belief and hence about what we understand, or think we understand, religion to be. And the third, closely related, objective is to extend the syllabus in cross-cultural directions.

One of the standard topics included in the syllabus is that of life after death or eternal life. This is commonly broached in philosophy of religion courses in terms of whether there are good reasons for believing that life after death is possible, but the logically prior question of what it means to speak of an afterlife—or of eternal life, resurrection, reincarnation, and similar matters—is routinely neglected. I aim to encourage students both to see that it is a mistake to overlook this logically prior question (or nexus of questions) and to be open to the possibility that there are *many* things that speaking of, and believing in, an afterlife might amount to.

I find that adducing the subject of reincarnation, or rebirth, at the outset of the course immediately prompts students to think about the connections between what we might call, as a starting point, metaphysics and ethics—between, in this particular case, the belief in a kind of life beyond death on the one hand and the sorts of ethical values that inform a person's life on the other. The article that I get students to read and to discuss during the first seminar is by the psychiatrist and perseverant reincarnation researcher Stevenson (1977), which serves several purposes. First, since the piece was published in a medical journal it effectively disrupts the unhelpful expectation that sources relevant to philosophy of religion are to be found only in explicitly philosophical publications. Second, it immediately plunges students into a form of cross-cultural and interdisciplinary inquiry that exceeds the often constricted parameters of mainstream philosophy of religion.

Third, although Stevenson's own interest in the article is the question of whether the idea, or "theory", of reincarnation has explanatory power with regard to various human phenomena—such as why some children are exceptionally gifted, why others exhibit phobias or unusual habits, and so on—his approach enables me to shift the focus slightly: away from questions of explanation and towards questions of how a belief in reincarnation facilitates alternative perspectives on these aspects of human life. For example, we might say that *in the light of* a belief in reincarnation a child's fear of water is able to be spoken of in terms of the child's having perhaps drowned in a former life; similarly, a precocious musician's talent could be described in terms of her having carried this ability over from one life to the next. None of this is intended—by me, at any rate—to constitute a reason why someone who does not already believe in reincarnation should start believing in it; rather, it is a first step towards our seeing how religious beliefs shape the possible ways in which phenomena can be perceived and understood.

A fourth purpose served by the Stevenson article is that of providing a convenient entry point for discussing conceptual issues concerning what it means to attribute a religious belief to someone. Fortuitously, Stevenson's article is cited by

David Cockburn in a thoughtful essay entitled “The Evidence for Reincarnation” (1991), in which Cockburn contemplates the ethical significance of regarding someone, especially a child, as in some sense the “same person” as someone who previously died. I use Cockburn’s piece as a follow-on reading, exhibiting for students a very different style of philosophizing from that which is typical of philosophy of religion, a style that owes much to the ethical thought of Peter Winch, who was himself of course greatly inspired by the work of Wittgenstein.

Inevitably perhaps, given the kind of training they have previously undergone, students are apt to initially miss Cockburn’s point, which is that in order to see what talk of reincarnation means, an important place to look is the ethical attitudes of those who speak in these terms. Many students hear this as a call to leave aside metaphysical questions about whether reincarnation “really happens” and to instead concentrate exclusively on questions of how we ought to treat one another: whether it is “fair” to look upon a child as the reincarnation of someone else, and so on. It can require effort to bring students to see that in a case such as belief in reincarnation there may be no clear sense that can be given to the idea of “leaving aside” the metaphysical questions in order to concentrate on the ethical ones, for “metaphysics” and “ethics” are intimately interfused. But some students do get the point; and even those who continue to struggle with it are enabled to see that attention needs to be given to how religious beliefs and ethical values relate to each other.

Another noteworthy feature of Cockburn’s article is its inclusion of reflections on how a dialogue between two parents of a child might go if one of them were to believe the child to be a reincarnation of another child of theirs who had died and the other parent were to reject this contention. Though, again, some students misunderstand the point of this dialogical form of exposition—falsely assuming that the author, Cockburn, must be endorsing one parent’s view and opposing the other—the form nevertheless begins to ease them into other ways of viewing philosophical inquiry: into the possibility that there is value in exploring alternative perspectives, regardless of whether one ends up agreeing or disagreeing with any of the perspectives considered.

From reincarnation, the course moves to the notion of immortality or eternal life as expounded principally in Christian thought, which provides an opportunity for bringing philosophical sources into engagement with theological ones. As primary readings I generally use articles by Jantzen (1984) and Lash (1978), respectively, each of whom seeks to place in question the assumption that terms such as “immortality” and “eternal life” obviously refer to a state of existence subsequent to death. These perspectives help to reemphasize questions of meaning over questions of truth or justification, obliging us—and students—to forego lazy assumptions that we know perfectly well what “immortality” or “eternal life” means and that believing in it must necessarily be incompatible with believing our lives to be finite in duration.

Relevant to these discussions of eternal life are contributions by Phillips (e.g. 1970), who provocatively exhorts his readers to consider the practical moral and religious significance of belief in eternal life, and himself invokes Wittgenstein’s rhetorical questioning in the *Tractatus* of whether the idea of “eternal survival after death" offers any clearer answer to the problem of life's meaning than does our present finite life (TLP: 6.4312; Phillips 1970, p. 49). By citing these remarks from Phillips and Wittgenstein in the context of more thoroughgoing theological investigations of talk about eternal life, it becomes possible to show students how, despite the prejudices of many mainstream analytic philosophers of religion, construing Wittgensteinian approaches as "anti-realist" or "non-cognitivist" are simplistic. Rather, what Phillips and other Wittgensteinians are doing is, for the most part, identifying possibilities of sense in religious discourse that are frequently neglected by those philosophers who are in a hurry to determine whether some given proposition is true. Of course, the alternative is not to uncritically accept what theologians say—not least because much of what they say can be frustratingly enigmatic—but to look carefully at the roles that religious forms of language have in believers' lives, and this can again require the cultivation of a more anthropologically or ethnographically inflected sensibility than is commonly found in philosophy of religion.

In addition to Wittgenstein's own suggestive allusions (Rhees 1965, p. 25; CV, p. 45e), one conspicuous point of contact between philosophy and anthropology is in the debate sparked in large part by Peter Winch's critical response to the ethnographic work of Edward Evans-Pritchard (Winch 1964). Whatever one thinks of Winch's particular arguments, the debate that they instigated—concerning how, or whether, religious and magical practices in small-scale societies are to be understood—can be highly engaging for students. Although Winch himself, along with other Wittgenstein-influenced philosophers, is customarily dismissed in the literature as advocating an implausibly deflationary "expressivist" or "emotivist" theory of ritual practices (cf. Cook 1983), if one is able to see beyond those superficial characterizations then rich interpretive possibilities can come into view. Especially notable is the procedure, exemplified by Wittgenstein himself in his remarks on Frazer, of seeking in one's own culture analogies or "connecting links" with practices performed in cultures that are ostensibly different. Following Wittgenstein, Winch (1964, pp. 320–321) recommends, for instance, not assuming that divinatory practices are a kind of misguided proto-science and instead suggests looking to forms of Christian prayer as a more profitable analogue. Even if this specific example of Winch's proves to be too limited, the principle of seeking analogies for the purpose of disclosing possibilities of meaning is extremely fruitful, notably as a step towards fuller engagement with ethnographic sources, which in turn brings an array of small-scale indigenous societies into the purview of philosophy of religion.

7 Concluding Remarks

Let me, then, sum up the principal points I have been highlighting. First I drew attention to some weaknesses in the way that philosophy of religion is commonly taught. The fixation on critical analysis and evaluation of beliefs—construed in terms of “propositional attitudes”, “assent to propositions” or “truth-claims”—gets underway prior to university but really comes to the fore in undergraduate courses, where opportunities for expanding conceptions of human religious life are frequently missed and students are fed desiccated arguments disconnected from the cultural contexts in which religious beliefs and practices have the sense that they do.

Second, I indicated some sources of pressure, both internal and external to philosophy of religion, which have the capacity to unsettle the complacency that continues to surround much of the teaching in this area. Third, by furnishing reminders of how influential Wittgenstein’s ideas have been in the study of religion outside philosophy, I proposed that Wittgensteinian approaches can be especially conducive to interdisciplinary working.

Finally, I selected examples from the syllabus of my own course, *Religion, Belief and Ethics*, to illustrate some directions in which to look if philosophy of religion is to be imagined differently. Prominent among these directions is increasing cross-cultural inquiry, which is itself enabled by interdisciplinary exchange between philosophy and anthropology. There remains enormous potential in that direction, both for teaching and for ongoing research, and it is in work inspired by Wittgenstein—by philosophically inclined anthropologists as well as anthropologically inclined philosophers—that we find many of the methods best suited for furthering these developments.

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