

# Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers

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Volume 26 | Issue 4

Article 9

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10-1-2009

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### Recommended Citation

Smith, James K.A. (2009) "The End of Enclaves: A Reply to Benson," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*: Vol. 26 : Iss. 4 , Article 9.

Available at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol26/iss4/9>

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# THE END OF ENCLAVES: A REPLY TO BENSON

James K. A. Smith

In reply to Benson's response, I agree that we should be seeking the dissolution of all enclaves in philosophy of religion—whether continental or analytic. But I continue to suggest that continental philosophy of religion bears special burdens in this respect.

I consider Bruce Ellis Benson to be an ally in the project of fostering a "healthy" continental philosophy of religion and so welcome his response. Indeed, given that many in the mainstream of philosophy of religion might be either skeptical or suspicious about the very project—seeing this exchange as an exercise in re-arranging the deck chairs on the S.S. Mickey Mouse—it's important to emphasize that we share the conviction that philosophical sources emerging from the phenomenological and hermetic traditions have much to contribute to philosophical reflection on faith. So I appreciate that he's taken my "talking points" in the spirit they were offered: as conversation starters. Let me just briefly continue that conversation and then leave it for others to take up elsewhere. Without any pretention to being comprehensive, I'll respond on just a few points.

A. First, regarding the importance of a "pluralist" philosophical formation: While I don't think the ground for my concern was only autobiographical, I'll concede that my own philosophical formation is probably hovering in the background (though my doctoral work included training in "analytic" bioethics and early modern philosophy). And Benson is undoubtedly right to point out that many departments which are friendly to continental philosophy, including many at Catholic universities, also include solid resources in both analytic philosophy and the history of philosophy (Fordham, Georgetown, and Boston College immediately come to mind, for instance).<sup>1</sup> So I agree there are rich opportunities for emerging scholars interested in continental philosophy of religion to pursue graduate study in such pluralistic contexts, enabling them to become

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<sup>1</sup>And Benson is certainly correct to point out that many philosophy departments are monolithic in the direction of analytic orientation. I grant that there is no shortage of enclaves (and associated "jargons") in American philosophy. I see some "thawing" on the analytic front in this regard, which is why I think it's especially important that continental philosophers become bi-lingual in order to help erase such distinctions. Given the shape of "mainstream" philosophy in the North America, I suppose I think something of a burden is on us, as continental philosophers, to find ways to participate in that mainstream conversation—though, as I note in my article, that is not license for assimilation.



“bi-lingual” in philosophy of religion.<sup>2</sup> I think we’d both agree that ideally we’d simply like to see the growth and health of philosophy of religion (and Christian philosophy) *as such*, with the hope that we could forego the qualifiers “continental” or “analytic” in that respect—indeed, that such qualifiers would wither on the vine. Instead, we’d both hope that philosophy of religion could be pursued under a big tent which makes room for philosophers drawing on different toolboxes, so to speak: some have acquired helpful tools from Frege, Wittgenstein and Alvin Plantinga; others have acquired helpful tools from Husserl, Heidegger, and Jean-Luc Marion; and together, they can get quite a bit of work done.<sup>3</sup> There are encouraging indications that the so-called analytic/continental divide is fading.<sup>4</sup> And I think Christian philosophers should be especially invested in undoing this divide. This is why I think it’s so important that emerging Christian philosophers and philosophers of religion cultivate a sense of collaboration between analytic and continental schools of thought by receiving formation in both. Benson rightly notes that there are ample opportunities for that to happen.

However, that still leaves two related concerns: (1) Many contributors to continental philosophy of religion receive their graduate training, not in philosophy programs, but in divinity schools and religious studies departments where they concentrate on philosophy of religion. In these cases, there are not the same curricular guardrails, as it were, that will constrain emerging scholars to be formed in the history of philosophy and analytic methods. As such, there can sometimes be less of a check on narrow, “theory-driven” models of philosophy of religion. Granted, graduate students in religious studies departments can usually enroll in a couple of classes in the university’s philosophy department. But if a young scholar enrolls in a Kierkegaard seminar and one devoted to Jean-Luc Marion, then her philosophical courses have not provided the kind of breadth that Benson also values. This is not a principled argument against such programs; rather, it is an encouragement to young scholars who find themselves in such programs to value, as early as possible, the

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<sup>2</sup>Though I should note that young scholars are best served by pursuing training in broader fields which would then equip them for more narrow work in philosophy of religion. In other words, philosophy of religion is often best pursued as an area of competence rather than an area of specialization.

<sup>3</sup>On this point, see William J. Wainwright, “Introduction” to *The Oxford Handbook to Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Wainwright (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 9–10.

<sup>4</sup>See, for instance, Samuel Wheeler, *Deconstruction as Analytic Philosophy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), as well as a special issue of *Ratio* in dialogue with Derrida, now published as *Arguing with Derrida*, ed. Simon Glendinning (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001). Or consider the growing dialogue between phenomenology and the cognitive sciences (as seen in the journal *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*). And closer to home, consider Deane-Peter Baker, *Tayloring Reformed Epistemology: Charles Taylor, Alvin Plantinga, and the De Jure Challenge to Christian Belief* (London: SCM Press, 2007), or the fact that Michael Rea would contribute to a volume like *Belief and Metaphysics*, ed. Conor Cunningham and Peter Candler (London: SCM Press, 2008).

historical and analytic resources available to them.<sup>5</sup> (2) While Benson rightly extols programs where “the analytic/continental divide” simply doesn’t exist, I think we still need to emphasize *why* this is important. I’m not encouraging a pluralistic philosophical formation only to later retreat into a professional enclave. But if there’s such an abundance of pluralistic, non-enclavish philosophical formation for continental scholars, why doesn’t the field reflect this?<sup>6</sup> A skim of conference programs or the tables of contents of related books would not leave one with the impression that the field *values* such pluralism. My reason for encouraging broad philosophical formation is so that the shape of the field might be characterized by the same pluralism.

B. A second point is more complicated: my critique of the proliferation of edited volumes and my encouragement to re-value the peer-reviewed journal article. This is complicated because of the nature of peer-review as blind and anonymous. In particular, I confess to being uncomfortable with the fact that Benson cites specific information about specific projects, and cites private correspondence with an editor of one of the most significant series in the field. I’m uncomfortable with this because it creates a situation of dissymmetry: the fact is, I, too, have been involved in these processes and projects (and others). But how could I cite my related correspondence and involvement without thereby compromising blind review? I suppose some of my reservations about these patterns and processes stems from my “insider” involvement—and more specifically, from some experiences of frustration and surprise in such cases. But I think the integrity of the system does not permit me to cite specifics in the way that Benson (as an editor, rather than reviewer, in this case) does. So in lieu of that, let me respond more generally on a few points.

(1) To state what should be obvious, I don’t think that analytic philosophy of religion is immune to the temptations of nepotism, nor do I think peer-review on the analytic side is any sort of ideal world. So my concern with continental philosophy of religion in this regard was not necessarily because of some quantitative amplification of the problem *vis-à-vis* the mainstream in the field. Rather, I was suggesting that continental philosophy of religion, at this relatively early stage, might have the opportunity to resist wider trends—and has a vested interest in doing so.

(2) I concede that there is a very fine line between the small subset of a philosophical discipline that constitutes the relevant “experts” in a sub-field and what I’ve been decrying as “enclaves.” One person’s enclave is another’s research group. Indeed, given the nature of professional expertise, it is also very difficult to distinguish between expertise and *friendship*—and here things get tricky. Insofar as continental philosophers of religion consider themselves an embattled group, this self-perception also

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<sup>5</sup>For instance, the graduate programs in religious studies at Syracuse and Virginia provide excellent opportunities to draw on strong philosophy programs—even though the “philosophy” of religious studies at Syracuse and Virginia are very different.

<sup>6</sup>Again, my concern here about the shape of continental philosophy of religion does *not* entail some idyllic picture of analytic philosophy of religion, which I think can also be subject to criticism for its enclavish predilections.

tends to foster patterns of defense vis-à-vis an “outside” and convivial altruism on the “inside.” In short, I confess that I find current conversations in continental philosophy of religion tend toward celebration rather than critique, adulation rather than criticism.<sup>7</sup> And it has been my experience in the peer-review process that those who buck this trend tend to be marginalized as hostile or axe-grinding. Their reviews or evaluations are thereby de-valued, and sometimes replaced by a newly requested evaluation.

(3) This is why my concern with edited volumes is tied to my suggestion that continental philosophers of religion seek to publish in more “mainstream” journals. Granted, given that philosophy of religion tends to be dominated by analytic discussions, this will require moving into foreign territory in a way; and continental philosophers of religion might expect some frustrations in this regard—that’s part of the experience of trying to become bi-lingual. However, journals such as *Faith and Philosophy*, *International Journal of Philosophy of Religion*, and *Religious Studies* are not averse to publishing continental studies. And if continental philosophers of religion would submit their work to those venues, I can see several positive outcomes. Just by participating in these wider ventures, they will thereby be contributing to the erasure of enclavish boundaries. In addition, by submitting their research to a wider conversation, their work will (hopefully) be subject to critical review by sympathetic<sup>8</sup> philosophers of religion outside of their narrow subfields. That should provide a welcome “outsider” perspective, generating new perspectives, insights, and lines of conversation. Finally, if the process goes well and work is published, the readers of such journals will be exposed to a wider range of philosophical reflection on religion—again, eroding the existing enclaves in the field.

C. Third, regarding the importance of “literature reviews”: I was not suggesting, of course, that every article should begin with a dissertation chapter. Rather, my concern was that articles in continental philosophy of religion make themselves responsible for situating their contribution to the field—and actually making some *new* contribution. What I decry as the “essay” form excuses the philosopher from such responsibility. While there might be no shortage of sources cited, including secondary literature, the “essay” form is free to operate *as if* others have not spoken on the same theme or issue or question. Perhaps what I should encourage is a sense of *progress* in continental philosophy of religion—a sense that this conversation is going somewhere: that we’ve been pursuing question Q;

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<sup>7</sup>Again, I don’t think analytic philosophy of religion is perfect on this score. However, I do think the analytic subfield *does* exhibit more room for internal critique. I take it that this is one of the luxuries of being the dominant “mainstream” configuration of the field.

<sup>8</sup>In order for such experiments to work, we need editors and referees who exhibit certain virtues—who begin from a basic stance of charity with respect to continental philosophy and are willing to entertain that the tools of the phenomenological tradition have something to contribute to a wider conversation. It will also require editors and referees willing to be stretched out of their comfort zones with respect to methodology and terminology, and perhaps even willing to acquire a certain minimal facility with these sources. On the other side, it requires continental authors who are willing and able to translate or paraphrase their work in ways accessible to a wider audience.

that Heidegger offered answer X; that Jean-Luc Marion quite definitively demonstrated the shortcomings of X and, instead, articulated Y; that I will point up the problems with Y and offer a re-tooled rendition of X as X', etc. While continental sources might rightly have concerns about both "demonstration" and "progress," I don't think that precludes us from adopting conventional habits that constrain us to be accountable to relevant advances in the field. While there's plenty of room for "essays" that riff or wax eloquent on some (new) theme, what we need are more articles that are tight, careful contributions to the advancement of knowledge in the field.

Much more could be said. But in lieu of that, I'll leave the reader to hopefully find prompts and suggestions in the interplay between my article and Benson's response. At the end of the day, I think we're both hoping for the end of enclaves in the philosophy of religion. That will require a generation or two of formation, including the inculcation of virtues that value cross-disciplinary or cross-tradition dialogue. The goal is to form analytic philosophers primed enough by a curiosity in what the continental tradition has to offer to be open to learning a new language, and continental philosophers, willing to engage in translation work, who also find value in the tools of analytic philosophy. Such formation best starts at home; that is, I think such a vision of ending enclaves is best begun, not at the abstract, national level of societies and journals, but the more tangible level of our departments.

Indeed, many of my convictions and concerns in this respect stem from my being welcomed into the Philosophy Department at Calvin College. A historically "analytic" department with a long legacy in Christian philosophy and philosophy of religion, I have most prized our Tuesday Colloquium—an almost forty year tradition of spending two hours together each week in order to read and (vigorously) criticize one another's work. For me, Colloquium has been a rich philosophical education, making up for all those gaps in my own graduate formation. Whether reading Stephen Wykstra on CORNEA,<sup>9</sup> Kevin Corcoran on personal identity,<sup>10</sup> or Del Ratzsch on philosophy of science<sup>11</sup> (along with many more), I have had opportunities to be stretched into new philosophical fields and have found new ways into my own work, asking questions, say, of Derrida that I wouldn't have otherwise. Conversely, unless my colleagues are shameless actors, I think some have also come to appreciate that a continental toolbox also offers helpful resources for philosophical reflection on faith. But that has been the fruit of patient conversation over time. If Benson and I are both looking for the end of enclaves in philosophy of religion, that will require encouraging practices that foster such an end.

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<sup>9</sup>Stephen J. Wykstra, "CORNEA, Carnap, and Current Closure Befuddlement," *Faith and Philosophy* 24 (2007), pp. 87–98.

<sup>10</sup>Kevin Corcoran, "Material Persons, Immaterial Souls and an Ethic of Life," *Faith and Philosophy* 20 (2003), pp. 218–228.

<sup>11</sup>Del Ratzsch, "Natural Theology, Methodological Naturalism, and 'Turtles All the Way Down,'" *Faith and Philosophy* 21 (2004), pp. 436–455.