



## ARTICLE

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# Using the 'journey metaphor' to restructure philosophy of religion

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**ABSTRACT** This essay forwards a new orientation and point of origin for philosophy of religion—an orientation that does not privilege theism, and a point of origin that does not begin with the attributes and proofs of God (and thereby privilege theism). To do so, it turns to the metaphor theory of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, specifically their analysis of the metaphor *life is a journey*. It draws on the internal structure of the journey metaphor to identify its core, constituent parts: journeys have a point of origin and destination, a route that is planned, obstacles and sights that are encountered along the way, and a traveler who is accompanied by and encounters other travelers. It then uses these core, constituent parts to generate five philosophical questions about the “journey” of the self and five philosophical questions about the “journey” of the cosmos: (1) Who am I (as traveler)?; (2) Where do I come from?; (3) Where am I going?; (4) How do I get there?; (5) What obstacles lie in my way?; (6) What is the cosmos?; (7) Where does the cosmos come from?; (8) Where is the cosmos going?; (9) How does the cosmos get there?; (10) What obstacles lie in the cosmos’ way? The majority of the essay then shows how each of these questions generates topics for global philosophy of religion and embraces content from a diversity of religious philosophies. Thus, this essay concludes that the journey metaphor is able to offer a new orientation and point of origin for philosophy of religion that is inclusive of a global diversity of religious traditions.

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### Why the journey metaphor

The premise of this paper is that philosophy of religion is in need of a new orientation and point of origin—an orientation that does not privilege theism, and a point of origin that does not begin with the attributes and proofs of God (and thereby privilege theism).<sup>1</sup> I won't spend time offering arguments to support this premise, save to maintain that if philosophy of religion is to be the philosophy of (all) religion, then it needs not only to include all religious traditions and communities (insofar as possible) but also to treat all religious traditions and communities evenhandedly. Insofar as philosophy of religion begins with and remains confined to the philosophical problems of a certain theistic (Christian) God, it can do neither.

My premise is merely the launching point for the rest of my paper, which seeks to offer a different orientation and point of origin for “global-critical” philosophy of religion—philosophy of religion that is globally inclusive of many different religious traditions and critically informed by the academic study of religion.<sup>2</sup> (Henceforth, I will drop the “global-critical” adjective and just speak of “philosophy of religion” since philosophy of religion really ought to be global and critical.) In my view, there are at least three places where one could look for such an orientation and point of origin: one could turn to a religious tradition that is not theistic, look for the philosophical commonalities in all religious traditions, or seek an orientation and origin that is not proprietary to any religious tradition. For reasons that I'll now explain, my preference is for the third option.

For me, the first option risks repeating the mistakes of the Enlightenment—i.e., making some particular religious tradition normative in the philosophy of religion. Supposing, for example, that we look to East Asian religious philosophy for a new start for philosophy of religion. Our central topics and issues might then concern moral, political, and mystical philosophy: how to live in harmony with the natural, social, and spiritual worlds; how to organize states that are conducive to flourishing and balance, especially in relationship to “heaven/nature” (*tian*); how to actualize and return to states of non-differentiated unity. Don't get me wrong; these are all important topics for philosophy of religion. However, if these issues are made the normative ones, then traditional-theistic philosophy of religion ends up looking deficient and strange (rather than the other way around). No doubt, there is something attractive about this. The powerless become powered; the powerful, powerless. Still, if philosophy of religion is going to be global, then it needs to be as inclusive as possible—leveling the playing-field as much as possible, and including as many players on the field as possible. Option one does not achieve these goals.

Realizing the failure of option one, option two looks for commonalities between all forms of philosophy of religion. This is to assume that there is a common philosophical core to all religious traditions such that every philosophical question asked by one religious tradition or community would have answers from all the other religious traditions and communities. However, as we can already see above from East Asian religious philosophy, this assumption is dubious. Maybe, though, there are commonalities to the belief structures of all religious traditions, just not to the forms that their philosophies of religion take, à la perennial philosophy? Maybe, for example, all religious traditions have “higher powers” or “ultimate realities” about which to philosophize? Well, of course many do, but not all. So, if we followed this second route, religio-philosophical traditions like certain Buddhisms and Jainisms and Confucianisms would end up looking deficient or strange. Moreover, the second option just isn't possible without some sort of starting point or hypothesis. I therefore favor the third approach, adopting a starting point that is not

proprietary to some particular religious tradition, while also paying attention to how these categories of inquiry fit all religious traditions and communities.

Instinctively, we might think that option three is the weakest of all. Why look outside the traditions of philosophy of religion for the topics and issues for philosophy of religion? Well, one reason is that the topics and issues of philosophy of religion would not be the “property” of any one form of philosophy of religion. So, we would not have the problem of all the other forms of philosophy of religion trying to fit themselves to it. Another reason, of course, is the failure of the first two options. If there isn't significant overlap between the forms of philosophy of religion, then we can't really look to one particular form of philosophy of religion or the commonalities between all philosophies of religion. However, the best reason will simply be the success of option three in providing topics and issues for philosophy of religion that do not privilege any particular form of philosophy of religion and that are inclusive of all philosophies of religion. It will be the burden of the next two sections of this paper to demonstrate, or at least intimate, this success. Of course, though, I first need to provide my starting point that is outside all philosophies of religion. This I will do by turning to metaphor theory in general and journey metaphor in particular.

With regard to metaphor theory in general, I draw on the cognitive metaphor theory of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, which provides an account of how human thinking is structured by metaphors, especially those drawn from concrete bodily experience. At the heart of this account are two claims: humans draw on concrete bodily experience in understanding and expressing abstract concepts, and humans do so by systematically structuring abstract concepts in accordance with bodily experiences. For Lakoff and Johnson, this systematic structuring is performed by “primary metaphors,” which map sensorimotor experiences to subjective experiences. Take, for example, the sensorimotor experience of warmth and the subjective experience of affection. The primary metaphor *affection is warmth* maps the sensorimotor experience of warmth to the subjective experience of affection, thereby providing us a way to think about the abstract concept of affection in terms of the concrete experience of warmth.

What's more, we make this connection both naturally and unconsciously. For Lakoff and Johnson, this is due to a conflation of sensorimotor experiences and subjective judgments in early childhood such that neural activations of a sensorimotor network are immediately “projected” to a subjective network. When we experience of our mother's warmth along with the subjective experience of her affection, these two experiences get neurologically conflated, with experiences of warmth naturally and unconsciously triggering experiences of affection. Only later, do we begin to differentiate these two experiences, thereby allowing us to deliberately and consciously use sensorimotor concepts to conceptualize and verbalize subjective experiences, even in the absence of their corresponding sensorimotor experiences. We use the concept of warmth to help ourselves understand and express the concept of affection, even when we are not warm.

Given the foundational similarities of early childhood experience, these primary metaphors are, for Lakoff and Johnson, “widespread,” if not universal (Lakoff and Johnson, 1999: p. 57). Of course, this is not to say that all metaphors are quasi-universal since most metaphors are not primary metaphors. Still, primary metaphors function as the atomic building blocks for the more numerous, molecular, “complex metaphor.” Even the complex metaphor therefore receives an indirect grounding in sensorimotor experience. It is for this reason that Lakoff and Johnson maintain that “[m]any, if not all, of our abstract concepts are

defined in significant part by conceptual metaphor” (Ibid.: p. 128).

There is one metaphor in particular that is especially well suited to provide a new framework for philosophy of religion: the journey metaphor. The version of this metaphor that you are probably most familiar with is *life is a journey*, which uses the conceptual structure of a journey to help us understand and express our lives. By use of this metaphor, we sometimes think of our lives as going somewhere, as following a path, as encountering obstacles on that path, as walking down that path with co-travelers, and so forth. However, the journey metaphor is also used to conceptualize and articulate *religious lives*, more specifically religious growth, progress, maturation, or cultivation. In fact, the journey metaphor is ubiquitous in the diverse languages, cultures, and religions of the world—a common and ready means by which humans think about and talk about those aspects of our lives that have religious dimensions.

To show how this metaphor can be used to provide a new starting point for philosophy of religion, I must first take a look at its internal structure. According to Lakoff and Johnson, *life is a journey* is a complex or molecular metaphor composed of the cultural belief that everyone is supposed to have a purpose in life, the primary metaphors *purposes are destinations* and *actions are motions*, and the fact that a long trip to a series of destinations is a journey (Ibid.: pp. 52–53, 61–62). This complex metaphor also encompasses four sub-metaphors: *a purposeful life is a journey*, *a person living a life is a traveler*, *life goals are destinations*, and *a life plan is an itinerary* (Ibid.: pp. 61–62). Finally, the journey metaphor has several entailments or conceptual implications, among which are that one should plan their route, anticipate obstacles, be prepared, and have an itinerary (Ibid.).

I can now draw on Lakoff and Johnson’s analysis of *life is a journey* to identify the core, constituent parts of the journey metaphor. Journeys have a point of origin and destination, a route that is planned, obstacles and sights that are encountered along the way, and a traveler who is accompanied by and encounters other travelers. Of course, these constituent parts are not themselves philosophical questions or topics, so I need to use them to generate such questions or topics. Here are the five philosophical questions that stand out most to me, each one of which is linked to a constituent part of the journey metaphor:

- (1) Who am I (as traveler)?
- (2) Where do I come from?
- (3) Where am I going?
- (4) How do I get there?
- (5) What obstacles lie in my way?

The critical reader might by now have several concerns. Let me anticipate and address four of them. First, note that the five questions above are each vague in a way that makes them difficult to answer as stated. The first question, for example, could mean any of the following: Who am I as an individual? Who am I as a member of some group? Who am I as a human being? The five questions above must therefore be asked with respect to the content of philosophies of religion, so as to be able to specify each one in a way that is not only more precise but also explicitly tied to this content. With regard to the first question, for example, the notion of “I” as individual is not present in all religious traditions and communities through time. So, the question “Who am I?” brings into play the question “Am I?” Relatedly, the topics of inquiry with regard to these questions center on the internal parts and external relations of the “self.” Thus, our first question ends up concerning whether humans should be understood as individual entities or as sums of internal parts or sets of external relations. (More on this in the next section below).

Second, one component of the *life is a journey* metaphor is the cultural belief that everyone is supposed to have a purpose in life. Surely it is not the case that every culture has this belief. True, indeed. Moreover hopefully, my response to the first concern above already anticipates my response to this concern: if it is true that not all cultures or religions think of the self as an individual, then it is true that not all cultures or religions think that every individual has a purpose in life. Still, I want to make it clear that my method for deriving a new set of topics and questions for philosophy of religion does not assume that all philosophies of religion think of individual lives as purposeful, nor even utilize the metaphor *life is a journey*. As I say above, I do think that the journey metaphor is commonly used in religious traditions to think and speak about religious growth, progress, maturation, or cultivation. More importantly, though, I think that the core components of the journey metaphor (origin, destination, route, obstacles, sights, co-travelers) can be used to generate philosophical questions and topics (traveler, origin, destination, path, obstacles) about which every philosophy of religion has something to say, even if by absence. (More on this immediately below).

Third, it is not the case that a philosophy of religion has to have a positive or explicit answer to the five questions above to have an answer to them at all. Put differently, philosophies of religion can return a “null result” to these questions and do so in a philosophically interesting and important way. As we have already seen, many philosophies of religion “answer” the first question—Who am I?—by, in a sense, not answering it. I am not I but rather I’s or we. Humans are complex internal processes and parts or external relations and obligations. The same holds true for the other four questions. Some philosophies of religion maintain that we do not come from anything and are not going anywhere, or that there is no path intentionally to follow and no obstacles that truly exist. These are among the most interesting and important ways of answering the five questions above, since these answers challenge typical modern-western preconceptions, allow us to see the phenomena of religion more widely, and inspire us to think differently.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, although the five questions above are important and interesting questions for philosophy of religion, as well as questions that are neglected by traditional-theistic philosophy of religion, they are also questions that neglect the topics of traditional-theistic philosophy of religion—for, entirely missing in these five questions are the core problems of traditional-theistic philosophy of religion: the attributes of God, the existence of God, and the problem of evil. My solution to this problem is simple and elegant. It begins with the acknowledgment that in some philosophies of religion it is not only humans in particular but also the cosmos in general that can be thought of as journeying (in the sense of having an origin, destination, path, and obstacles). It then notes that in some philosophies of religion, the crucial relationship is that between humans as microcosm and cosmos as macrocosm. Finally, it shows how reduplicating our five questions with regard to the cosmos yields a second set of rich, inclusive, and fair questions and topics for philosophy of religion:

- (6) What is the cosmos?
- (7) Where does the cosmos come from?
- (8) Where is the cosmos going?
- (9) How does the cosmos get there?
- (10) What obstacles lie in the cosmos’ way?

Again, I hasten to add that the qualifications above also apply to this set of questions: they will need to be made precise and tied to our philosophies of religion, and null results to them will need to be included. With these qualifications in place, I am confident that these five questions, along with the first set of five questions,

offer a radically new point of departure for philosophy of religion, one that can be inclusive of the philosophies of religion of the globe in a manner that does not unduly privilege any one philosophy of religion. Now it is a matter of showing how.

### Journeys of the self

In the next two sections I will show how each of these questions generates topics for philosophy of religion and embraces content from a global diversity of religious philosophies. For the sake of space, I consider only 5–6 “traditions” of philosophy of religion around the globe and through time, which for the sake of space I will shorthand as follows: East Asian philosophy of religion, South Asian philosophy of religion, West Asian or Abrahamic philosophy of religion, African and Native American philosophy of religion, and contemporary philosophy of religion.<sup>4</sup> In doing so, I will engage in a fair amount of generalization, but this is only for the sake of economy in this paper. In reality, I advocate looking at individual thinkers, texts, and debates, rather than generalizing over traditions.

The first question about the self is simply, what is it? It’s important here to note that by “self” I don’t mean a Cartesian self, although that is of course one view of the self. Perhaps to be more accurate, we could ask about the journeyer. Who or what is journeying? As I explained above, this first question leads us into questions about the journeyer’s external relationships and internal processes. Is the “self” an individual being or a set of external relationships with other beings, whether human or not? Is the “self” a substantial being or a set of internal parts or processes? As for content from religious philosophies with which to sharpen these questions, there are of course the rival views of self in South Asian religious philosophy: *atman*, *anatta*, *jiva*, *purusha*, and so forth. In Southern African religious philosophy, there is the notion of *ubuntu*, and, if I’m not mistaken, there are similar notions in some Native American traditions. In East Asian religious philosophy, we have the differing understandings of self in early Daoism and Confucianism, even if these are always relational in some sense. Moreover, Abrahamic religious philosophy would make for interesting comparisons with regard to Buber’s and Kierkegaard’s relational selves, as well as the notions of *fana* and *baqa* in Sufism. Finally, contemporary philosophy of religion offers the perspectives of cognitive neuroscience and Continental philosophy, each insofar as it undermines the notion of an individual, substantial self. So, in the end, our question about *what* the self is leads us into interesting territory about *whether* the self is.

Our second question about the “self” concerns its origins: where does the self come from? Here, I propose tackling questions about how the self understands itself given its origin. So, the question really is this: How does my origin determine or affect what it is that I am as a member of the human species (or some localized people)? Or, to put it succinctly: Why am I the way I am? Here are some elaborations of this question: Am I free or good or intelligent because God created me that way? Or did God create me “broken” in some way? Am I free or good or intelligent because of cosmic or human nature? Or do I have no nature whatsoever? Or am I the way I am because of something I did in a past life? Or because of some fate that has been bestowed on me before or at birth? Or because of the result of thousands of years of random mutation and natural selection? Such questions about the self’s innate freedom, goodness, and intelligence divide fairly neatly between Abrahamic, East Asian, and South Asian religious philosophy. Abrahamic religious philosophy, at least in its Christian and Muslim forms, has wrestled the question of how to reconcile human freedom and divine sovereignty. East Asian religious philosophy, especially Confucianism, has contended

about the innate goodness of humans. Moreover, in South Asian religious philosophy one crucial issue concerns in what sense the self is or acquires “enlightenment.” In some African and Native American traditions, there are narratives of a “paradise lost” and what that means for human beings. Finally, contemporary philosophy of religion offers three controversial topics about how humans understand themselves vis-à-vis their “origin”: feminism and patriarchy as a kind of original condition, Darwinianism and biology as a kind of original condition, and Freudianism and psychology as a kind of original condition.

Our third question turns from the self’s origins to its destinations. Here, we are concerned with whether the self survives death and, if so, how. These questions would seem to be among the most pressing for many humans. Moreover, how humans answer these questions sometimes has profound consequences for how they live their lives. Still, in the context of the preceding two questions, one might wonder whether this third question is predicated on false or limited understandings of what the self is. If we are not in fact an individual, substantial, autonomous self, then there isn’t such a “thing” to survive death. Nevertheless, many different religious traditions do maintain the notion of individuated, postmortem, heavenly existence. Interestingly, this view shows up in different cultures across the globe. However, just as interesting is the fact that each of these traditions also contains views of postmortem existence as non-individuated. Still other traditions think of postmortem existence as less “heavenly” and more “familial” (in the sense of reuniting with ancestors/dead). Moreover, in other cases, it just isn’t possible to say what happens after death, or it isn’t important to say what happens after death, or we simply don’t die. Some of the religious-philosophical content to be considered in the context of this question includes, in the case of South Asian philosophy of religion, early Vedic positions, Upanishadic positions, Jain and Buddhist positions, and the positions of some of the “Hindu” philosophical schools. Here, there is no shortage of diverse content. By contrast, there is in East Asian religious philosophy a striking lack of concern with what happens to us after we die, at least in classic Confucian and Daoist sources. However, that lack of concern can and should be contrasted with traditions like Pure Land, in which what happens after death is all consuming. Of course, there is also the importance of ancestors in East Asia, which is also often crucial for many African and Native American traditions. With regard to Abrahamic traditions there is an interesting diversity of positions just in the Bible, even if not in the Qur’an. There is also, of course, the mystical traditions of these religions where postmortem unification with God can sometimes be the end of human existence. Finally, naturalistic religious positions in contemporary philosophy of religion bring further enrichment and complexification to the question of postmortem ends.

Our fourth question about the self turns to the paths by which the self reaches its destination. As in the cases of the previous questions, there is an abundance of material to cover—not only different paths for different religious traditions but also different paths within religious traditions. However, there is also, in this case, an abundance of ways to *focus* this material. One such way would be to look at whether these paths primarily involve the body or the mind or both. Another way would be to look at the difference between “cat” paths and “monkey” paths. Here are yet more ways: Does the path lead to a postmortem, other-worldly destination or to a this-life, this-worldly destination? Does the path require multiple lifetimes or just one? Should the destination be the focus of the path, or does focusing on the destination distract from the path? Does the path need to be found or chosen, or are we already on it and just need to realize that? But the way of focusing this material that I prefer most of all involves the relationship between morality and religion. Whereas many of

students whom I have taught assume that the whole point of religion is to teach and reinforce morality, some religious philosophers have argued that to focus on conventional morality and social conformity is to lose the spirit and substance of religion. To put the matter in terms of question four, it is to get distracted from one's religious path. If I were to focus the material of the fourth question in such a way, I might look first at trickster figures in African and Native American religious philosophies. In South Asia, the content would instead concern amoral and immoral paths as found in some Tantras, Krisnaivisms, and Shaivisms. In East Asia, things are a bit tamer, probably because of the influence of Confucianism. Still, there are certain Daoisms and Buddhisms that offer ostensibly amoral or immoral paths. In the case of Abrahamic religious philosophy, there are certain mystics in the Christian and Muslim traditions who say or do morally questionable things, at least within the context of their societies. Moreover, in contemporary philosophy of religion there is of course the work of Soren Kierkegaard, as well as intriguing material about the relationship between religion and morality in feminism, post-colonialism, and cognitive science of religion.

Our final question about the self looks at the obstacles that prevent it from reaching its destination. When I originally considered the topic of destinations under question three, I focused on the question of whether the self survives death and if so how. Here, I look instead at this-worldly side of our ultimate destinations—salvation, enlightenment, harmony, attunement, obedience, submission, health, flourishing, and so forth. My leading question in this case is: What keeps us from reaching these destinations? Or, to put this question a bit more precisely: What keeps us from living the way we should? In a sense, this is a question of ethics; in another sense, not. One way to think about this question is as the flipside of the fourth question above. There, we looked at the relationship between religion and morality, asking how we should live, focusing on the issue of whether this requires going “beyond morality.” Here, we instead look at what prevents us from living the way we should, which in some cases is immoral behavior but in other cases is just the opposite. Here is another way in which the content of this question goes “beyond ethics”: For many religious traditions, what prevents humans from living the way they should is not a function of the moral decisions that they make but rather an “original condition” that afflicts them simply by virtue of being human. Christians will know this as “original sin.” In other traditions, it is something else: an original imbalance, or evil urge, or selfishness, or ignorance. In still other traditions, this original condition is existence-itself, which keeps us separated from Brahman or Dao or God or ancestors. In yet other traditions, this condition involves our delusion that there is a problem in the first place—what keeps us from living the way we should is thinking that we are not living the way we should. Of course, there is also the problem of evil beings—demons or witches or even human beings that keep us from living the way we should. Moreover, there is also the fact that, for some philosophers of religion, it is certain humans that keep other humans from living the way they should by creating oppressive social realities. Patriarchy certainly fits here. So does slavery. Perhaps also capitalism. Some would even say that what keeps us from living the way we should is religion itself.

### Journeys of the cosmos

I turn now to the “journey of the cosmos,” repeating each of my five questions, but with respect to the “cosmos” rather than the self. Let me begin, though, with a quick word about the word “cosmos” and its journey. By cosmos, I mean simply everything that exists, taken as an ordered whole. This definition is not far from the one given by Merriam-Webster: “an orderly harmonious

systematic universe.” But I want to be careful to point out that by “cosmos” I don't mean “universe,” at least not if “universe” is taken in the contemporary scientific sense. Certainly, our contemporary scientific understanding of the universe is one type of cosmos. We might even say that it is gradually becoming the most widespread and prominent understanding of the cosmos. However, other understandings of the cosmos remain, some of which articulate themselves in relation to the contemporary scientific paradigm. For some of these cosmoses, there are realities more basic and fundamental than physical entities and processes; for others, there are dimensions or universes beyond the scientific universe.

As for the cosmos's “journey,” of course this isn't a literal journey. Still, the structure of the journey metaphor offers productive philosophical questions to ask about the cosmos, just as with the self. Here, again, are our five questions about the cosmos:

- (6) What is the cosmos (if anything)?
- (7) Where did it come from (if anywhere)?
- (8) Where is it going (if anywhere)?
- (9) How does it get there (if it all)?
- (10) And what obstacles lie in its way (if any)?

In the case of each question, the parenthetical comments are crucial. I don't presume that the cosmos has an origin, destination, and path (etc.)—for to do so would be to endorse a teleological view of the cosmos, which is often present in Abrahamic religious traditions but lacking in other religious traditions. Put simply: I don't presume that the cosmos is on a journey. Rather, the structure of the journey metaphor gives me the philosophical questions to ask about the cosmos, and these questions can be answered either positively or negatively. Maybe the cosmos has a beginning and end; maybe it doesn't.

As for the first (sixth) question—what is the cosmos?—we can begin by recognizing that, just as in the case of the self, appearances can be misleading. We might think that the cosmos exists in a manner that is fully independent and real, just as we did with the self. However, answers to this first question show how many philosophies of religion challenge this commonsense view. Perhaps the cosmos is only illusion (as it is in some South Asian traditions); perhaps it is just God (as it is in some South Asian and Abrahamic mystical traditions); perhaps it is really constituted by underlying cosmic principles and forces (as it is in some East Asian traditions); perhaps it is composed by numerous universes (as it is in some Buddhist traditions); perhaps it involves realms of ancestors (as in some African and Native American traditions); or perhaps it is ultimately a heavenly existence with God (as in some Abrahamic and South Asian traditions). Whatever the case, what is particularly interesting is how these cosmologies serve spiritual practices and rituals. In other words, what we often find is that religious cosmologies are not for the sake of doing “science,” but for the sake of offering worlds in which to live religiously. This raises an interesting question that should be dealt with under this question: as our contemporary scientific cosmology grows in influence and importance, how can religious traditions continue to offer cosmologies for religious practice?

Question two (seven) about the cosmos takes up some of the central questions of contemporary theistic philosophy of religion: Does the cosmos have an origin and, if so, what is its nature? Ever since the Enlightenment, if not earlier, philosophy of religion in Europe and some of its colonies has been predominantly concerned with these questions. So much so, that it is just natural for many of “us” to think that these are the central questions for philosophy of religion in general. However, this is not the case. Many other religious traditions don't think of God as a creator (e.g., East Asian traditions, for the most part; some South Asian

traditions). Moreover, some of those religious traditions that do think of God as a creator tend to think of God as a remote and uninvolved (e.g., some African and Native American religious traditions); in these cases, the existence of God just isn't very important to actual lived religion. This can be a point of instruction for traditional-theistic philosophy of religion: the origin of the cosmos and nature of its originator isn't generally all that important for most of the religious traditions of the world. Another point of instruction: these questions just aren't "live" for most religious traditions because they simply don't matter to practice.

Question three (eight) turns from the origin of the cosmos to its end. In terms of our journey metaphor, the question is about the "destination" of the cosmos. However, I articulate this philosophically by asking whether the cosmos has an end and, if so, what happens after that. In this case, it is necessary to ask these questions not only about the cosmos writ large but also about "this world" or "this order," where these terms refer to the way things currently are for humans (as a whole), in their habitable space (as a whole), as interpreted religiously. This is due to the fact that, for many religious traditions, the end is not really the end; rather it is merely the beginning of something new or different—a new or different world here on Earth or a new or different world in some other realm, but not necessarily a new or different cosmos. What is interesting about many of these cases (where worlds or orders are said to come to an end) is that they occur during times of significant trouble. Maybe there is a prolonged drought or flood; maybe there is an invasion and life under oppressive foreign rule; maybe there is a natural disaster that significantly alters the practices and structures of a society; maybe there is a rapid change of customs and values that threaten age-old traditions—it is during such times that we tend to see apocalyptic or eschatological religious ideas and practices. Why? Such ideas and practices provide relief in at least two ways: they predict an imminent end to the trouble and a future state without troubles; they predict a reward for those who have suffered unfairly and a punishment for those who have caused this suffering. Content for this question includes the fascinating case of Wavoka and the "Ghost Dance," fervor for the Messiah or Mahdi in Abrahamic religion, apocalyptic movements in East Asian religious philosophy, the *kalpa* theory, as well as future manifestations of avatars and Buddhas in South Asian religious philosophy, and attempts to reconcile "religion" and "science" in contemporary philosophy of religion.<sup>5</sup>

Our fourth (ninth) question concerns the "path" of the cosmos. Of course, I am once again not asking about the literal path of the cosmos. Rather, I am using the metaphor of path to generate interesting and important philosophical questions about how the cosmos operates or functions in-between its origin and end (if it in fact has an origin or end). For many of us "moderns," questions about how the cosmos operates or functions are answered by science: the cosmos operates or functions according to "natural laws." But many religious traditions believe in and value the occurrence of things that would appear to violate "natural laws": miracles, appearances of supernatural beings, and other extraordinary experiences. Some religious traditions also believe that some divine mind or cosmic order predetermines everything that happens in the cosmos, even the so-called laws of nature. Perhaps one issue here concerns what falls under the category *laws of nature*. Are there current laws or laws yet to be discovered that would encompass so-called miracles? If so, do these laws explain away miracles? Or do they provide scientific mechanisms by which miracles can happen? And what about cultures for which the categories *laws of nature* and *miracles* don't exist or aren't opposed—cultures for which seemingly miraculous occurrences are understood to be part of the natural, this-worldly order? One

should be careful in these cases to contextualize religious philosophies. Still, given the dominance of science in our contemporary world, it would be good to focus on that which would seem to elude scientific explanation or violate natural law. These phenomena include lots of different things: physical events in the natural world (e.g., making the sun stand still), sensory manifestations of divine beings (e.g., angelic appearances), mental appearances of divine beings (e.g., hearing the voice of God in one's head), journeys of the mind or body to alternate realities (e.g., shamanic phenomena), possession of body or mind by divine beings (e.g., trance in some African traditions), healing of body of mind (e.g., African healers), and other extraordinary religious experiences (e.g., achieving a sense of union with God).

Our final (tenth) question examines the "obstacles" that lie in the way of the "journey" of the cosmos. If, per the last question, the "path" of the cosmos concerns its functioning and order, then the "obstacles" along this path will be things that stand in the way of this functioning and order. The question in this latter case is this: what prevents the cosmos from working the way it should? Note this question is always asked from the perspective of some human questioner. It is we humans who have ideas about how the cosmos should work and want to know why it is not working the way it should when some misfortune befalls us. Sometimes this misfortune can be individual: why am I suffering? More likely, though, it concerns the misfortune of the individual's clan or community. In some cases, it even concerns the misfortune of an entire nation or people. Whatever the case, it is clear once again that what might seem theoretical is actually practical. We humans want to know why we suffer, as well as how and when that suffering will stop. This is true even in the case of the classical "problem of evil." Of course, many of "us" think first of the problem of evil when considering content relevant to the question of cosmic obstacles. However, it is important to consider the full range of "evil" and human response to it. This includes the "rational" theodicy of karma-samsara in South Asia, the "mystical" theodicy of balance and harmony in East Asia, concern with tricksters, spirits, and witches in some African and Native American religious philosophies, and an increasing focus on "structural evil" and "proactive theodicies" in contemporary philosophies of religion.

### Conclusion: which journey, if any, is true?

These are the ten questions that I believe could offer a means of restructuring philosophy of religion to make it globally inclusive. As a "post-scriptum" of sorts, I want to end by observing that one central question of Western philosophy of religion is not among these questions. It is a rather recent addition; nevertheless, it has caused much ink to be spilt. I am referring here to John Hick's so-called problem of pluralism. Is it the case that only one religious tradition, at most, can be true? Hick, of course, proposed that humans simply can't know which, if any, religious tradition is true of the "Real in itself." At best, each human can engage "authentically" with her own religious tradition—the "real as she thinks and experiences it" (Hick, 1999).

To put Hick's problem into the terminology of the journey metaphor is to ask whether it can be the case that all—or at least many—of these religious journeys can be true or useful. Allow me to respond to this issue in two ways. First, this issue should and does find a home within my restructured account of philosophy of religion as a sort of meta-question—an eleventh question, if you will. Where religions offer a coherent system of beliefs and practices, this eleventh question asks whether that system can be true or useful, particularly with regard to the fact that there are other such systems. I suspect that it is this question that will be asked more and more as the inhabitants of our earth find

themselves living closer and closer to people of different religious traditions. Nevertheless, I am quick to follow this first response with a second: the philosophy of religion that I practice is not primarily concerned with sorting out either which religious traditions are more or less true and useful or how different religious traditions can all be true or useful. On the one hand, I do not find it as viable and valuable as asking about the forms of religious reasoning with respect to the ten questions above. On the other hand, I tend to think that it is not up to the philosophers of religion to settle this matter (just as it is not up to the philosophers of science to determine which scientific theories are true).

### Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this paper as no datasets were generated or analyzed.

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### Notes

- 1 I contend that philosophy of religion is in need of such a new orientation and point of origin; I do not insist, however, that the framework advanced in this paper must be used in doing so. It is just one of many attempts to reorient philosophy of religion globally. For others, see Wildman (2010) and Schilbrack (2014). See also my own earlier attempt (Knepper, 2013).
- 2 See the forthcoming publications by the American Academy of Religion's seminar in Global-Critical Philosophy of Religion (GCPR): an undergraduate textbook in GCPR, a teaching supplement in GCPR, and a series of essay volumes in GCPR.
- 3 This is one way that my proposal differs from classical "perennial philosophies." I do not maintain that all philosophies of religion philosophize about the same content or contain the same doctrinal core. I do, however, think that each of my ten questions returns philosophically interesting and important answers, even when those answers reject their questions.
- 4 Below, I often treat African and Native American religious philosophies together, not because I think all African and Native American religious traditions are the same, but because there are sometimes interesting resonances between certain African and Native American religious traditions.

- 5 Another interesting and important philosophical topic related to this question concerns the ways in which "eastern" philosophies of religion with cyclical views of time have attempted to demonstrate a tighter fit with contemporary scientific cosmology.

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### Additional information

**Competing interests:** The author declares no competing interests.

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