
Reply to Ochs

DEAR PETER OCHS,

First, my thanks for the generous reading of, expansions on, and probing questions to my essay. I will respond seriatim.

I largely concur with your diagnosis, though would add that the specific aspects of modernity that the various so-called “fundamentalisms” reject vary. Hindu and Muslim fundamentalisms, for example, are reactions to the history of modern Christian-inflected colonialism. Naming these movements “fundamentalisms” is arguably entangled in that history. These movements may point to lacunae within modern secular culture(s), but before we could identify resources (religious or not) for addressing those lacunae, we would first need to rethink the division between “the secular” and “the religious” that secularism presupposes (see Talal Asad, among others).

I would accept the term “humanism” as a label for the fourfold and endorse as well attending to “non-cogito-based reasonings” as aspects of religiosity. Two caveats: academic analyses of such forms of knowing are largely cogito-based work. Noncognitive aspects of religion are just as vulnerable to distortions (cognitive and noncognitive) as religious ideas. Moreover, we cannot pick up and put down at will this particular yardstick, “Man the Measure.” We scholars are made in “man’s” image to one degree or another. We can, however, undo him by putting to work his formidable resources through various kinds of *askeses*—including cognitive *askeses*. Comparative theologians Wendy Farley and John Thatamanil arguably do so via the *askeses* of meditative and textual study under religious adepts. Saba Mahmood and Mary Keller, via the *askeses* of ethnography and feminist theory, reconceptualize religious subjectivities.

Levinas’s is a powerful and provocative vision, but I share your wariness. Because he leaves uninterrogated and unthematized the various social and psychosomatic regimes implicated in the ethical (in its broadest sense) and its refusal, I have found Foucault, Derrida, and psychoanalytic theorists more helpful.

Will attending to “the empirical” address the impoverishment arising from the gap between the academy and the “religious houses” (thank you for introducing me to this term)? I would prefer “attending to the embodied” (social/institutional structures and their subjects). The line

distinguishing the theoretical from the empirical is indistinct; critiques of religious studies like Masuzawa's and J.Z. Smith's demonstrate that scholarly approaches to "the empirical" are deeply imbued with theory. Theory is also embedded in "empirical" religious practices.

Without doubt, some Derridean acolytes have hyper-intellectualized deconstruction. Our accountability as "theologians and religion-philosophers" to the concrete reality of religious traditions and communities *may* provide a check on that particular temptation, particularly to the degree that we turn to high theory to address specific forms of suffering, pain, or injustice (a reparative *and* creative task).

At least within theology, I think the division you describe is accurate. I am indeed advocating a "third activity" that would foster a kind of mutual accountability—or at least engagement—between religious houses and the academy, though not through a one-size-fits-all approach. With or without official encouragement, the AAR is already "housing such mediating practices" in certain program units. The Queer Theory and Religion Consultation invited a Metropolitan Community Church minister and political activist to respond to their inaugural session, for example. Other forms of experimentation under the AAR's aegis but perhaps outside the structure of the annual meeting would be welcome.

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