

THE EPISTEMIC BENEFITS OF DIVERSIFYING THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

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Abstract. There have been recent calls to expand contemporary analytic philosophy of religion beyond the oft implicitly assumed Christian tradition. Instead of exploring moral reasons to expand the discipline, I argue that there are strong epistemic reasons to favour diversifying the philosophy of religion. Increasing diversity is likely to increase disagreement, and there are epistemic benefits to be gained from the existence of disagreement. I argue that such considerations quite clearly apply to the philosophy of religion, and as such that there are epistemic reasons to diversify the field. I conclude by offering a number of practical steps we can take towards achieving this end which are relatively easy to implement.

I. INTRODUCTION

Anecdotally, the majority of those working in contemporary analytic philosophy of religion are Caucasian men with some sort of Christian affiliation. At the very least, there is some empirical data to suggest that philosophers of religion are overwhelmingly theists (where ‘theist’ here quite clearly means ‘monotheist’).¹ Consider that the highest correlation between a philosophical view and specialization occurs between theism and the philosophy of religion.² Likewise, the greatest difference between the beliefs of specialists and non-specialists occurs in the philosophy of religion with respect to theism and atheism.³ In general, 72.8% of philosophers are atheists, while in the philosophy of religion itself only 20.87% are atheists.⁴ Some worry that this homogeneity makes the work produced by philosophers of religion especially susceptible to the pernicious effects of various cognitive biases and heuristics.⁵ Some of these considerations seem to have motivated recent calls to expand the scope of analytic philosophy of religion beyond the Judeo-Christian tradition.⁶ These calls are sometimes about diversifying the topics which are pursued and other times about diversifying the membership of the practitioners in the discipline. In what follows when I speak of diversifying the field, I refer to the philosophical and religious beliefs of the practitioners.⁷

In this article, I’m simply going to assume that even if there is no moral imperative to expand the scope of the philosophy of religion beyond Judeo-Christianity (though I am sympathetic to the idea that there is one), there is certainly a moral imperative not to hinder its expansion. Instead of focusing on the relevant moral aspects of expanding the discipline, I’m going to instead focus on epistemic reasons to increase the diversity of views represented in the field. I’m going to argue that there are epistemic reasons

1 See David Bourget and David J. Chalmers, “What do philosophers believe?”, *Philosophical Studies* 170, no. 3 (2014). Bourget and Chalmers are planning to update their results soon.

2 Bourget and Chalmers, “What do philosophers believe?”, 482.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid. 476, 483.

5 e.g., Paul Draper et al., “Diagnosing Bias in Philosophy of Religion”, *Monist* 96, no. 3 (2013).

6 e.g., Paul Draper and J. L. Schellenberg, *Renewing Philosophy of Religion: Exploratory Essays* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2017).

7 Note that this likely entails diversifying the identity (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation) of practitioners too, though I suppose this is ultimately an empirical question.

to favour diversifying the philosophy of religion because there are epistemic benefits in the offing when certain types of disagreements occur. Of course, diversifying the philosophy of religion does not in itself guarantee the existence of more disagreement. This is because the additional beliefs added could be consistent with the ones already held by philosophers of religion. Diversity does not equal disagreement. However, I submit that the odds of increasing disagreement in the discipline increase as more divergent views are added to it. This is ultimately an empirical claim, and so one I will not defend in detail here. But I think it is safe to assume that as more views are added, there will also be more disagreement.⁸ Notice too that disagreement, *by definition*, cannot occur in an entirely homogeneous discipline. I conclude by offering a number of practical steps we can take to diversify the field which are relatively easy to implement including supporting relevant translation projects, adding non-western readings to undergraduate courses, and slowly acknowledging more non-western ideas in our research. Finally, while I do work in other subdisciplines, I consider myself first and foremost a philosopher of religion. These are thus criticisms and suggestions coming from within the field and apply to myself just as much as any other practitioner in the philosophy of religion.

II. THE EPISTEMIC BENEFITS OF DIVERSIFYING THE DISCIPLINE

In this section I'm going to examine the evidence for supposing that there are epistemic benefits in the offing if certain types of disagreement occur. To begin, I'm going to motivate sceptical worries based on disagreement which may make us wonder how disagreement could ever be epistemically helpful. After that, I'll outline some empirical evidence which supports the idea that there are epistemic benefits when certain types of disagreements occur.

II.1 *The Epistemology of Disagreement*

The epistemology of disagreement is a relatively recent subfield in social epistemology. It typically addresses the following or some such similar scenario: Suppose an agent evaluates a body of evidence and comes to believe proposition P. Further suppose that she becomes aware of an epistemic peer — someone equally likely to be right about whether P — who believes not-P. What should her reaction be upon discovering that there is peer disagreement with her belief that P? Does peer disagreement constitute a higher-order defeater for her original first-order belief? Is the disagreement itself evidence about whether P?

Conciliationism is the view that the agent needs to revise her original belief that P once she becomes aware of epistemic peer disagreement about P.⁹ Weak versions of conciliationism say that while some revision is required, it's not always the case that disagreement defeats the rationality of believing P. Maybe the agent just needs to only very slightly lower her credence that P. Strong versions of conciliationism, however, say that peer disagreement defeats the rationality of the agent's original belief that P. Once she discovers peer disagreement the agent needs to lower her credence in P below the threshold for rational belief or suspend judgment altogether in P.¹⁰ Strong conciliationism, if true, poses a sceptical threat to many of our beliefs given that there is widespread peer disagreement about many topics. Non-conciliationism denies conciliationism and says that there are some cases where epistemic peers are rational to remain steadfast in the face of the disagreement with one another. Throughout the remainder of this article I'll use 'conciliationism' as a placeholder for 'strong conciliationism'. The literature on the epistemology of disagreement has grown enormous in recent years, but for my purposes it's not important to outline the debate between conciliationists and non-conciliationists.¹¹

8 Thanks to an anonymous referee for pushing me to be more precise.

9 D. Christensen, "Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News", *Philosophical Review* 116, no. 2 (2007); Richard Feldman, "Reasonable Religious Disagreements", in *Social Epistemology: Essential Readings*, ed. Alvin Goldman and Dennis Whitcomb (Oxford Univ. Press, 2011).

10 J. Matheson, *The Epistemic Significance of Disagreement* (2015).

11 A small number of views are hybrid in sometimes recommending conciliating and other times remaining steadfast (e.g., Jennifer Lackey, "A Justificationist View of Disagreement's Epistemic Significance", in *Social epistemology*, ed. Adrian Haddock et al. (Oxford

We might ask whether on either of these views, disagreement in the philosophy of religion could ever be good. On the one hand if conciliationism is true, then more disagreement in the philosophy of religion would demand more conciliationism amongst its practitioners. In turn, this would mean that philosophers of religion ought to be less sure and more sceptical of their current beliefs. In this way, less disagreement would actually turn out to be good since it would mean practitioners could remain epistemically justified in their initial beliefs. In other words, if conciliationism is true, theists in the philosophy of religion should take epistemic comfort in the fact of widespread agreement. On the other hand, if non-conciliationism is true then the occurrence of more disagreement in the philosophy of religion doesn't really yield epistemic benefits. There might be more views, but each practitioner is permitted to remain steadfast in their beliefs. Disagreement, at least in itself, doesn't add anything epistemically. If this is right, then perhaps philosophers of religion should be epistemically indifferent to expanding the field. How does any of this tie into the idea that there are epistemic benefits to expanding the discipline?

The fact of the matter is that disagreement in itself does indeed provide epistemic benefits, at least in certain contexts. As such, these benefits provide a reason for philosophers of religion to remain steadfast in the face of disagreement. While the benefits themselves provide reasons in support of non-conciliationism, they also show why diversifying the philosophy of religion is a good thing, epistemically.

II.2 Page's Modelling

Economist Scott Page argues that when certain conditions are met, heterogeneous groups composed of individually less talented individuals *always* outperform homogenous groups made up of individually more talented individuals. This provides some evidence for the claim that disagreements are epistemically beneficial. According to Page, his claim only obtains in cases where the following conditions are met:

Condition 1: The Problem is Difficult: No individual problem solver always locates the global optimum.

Condition 2: The Calculus Condition: The local optima of every problem solver can be written down in a list. In other words, the problem solvers are smart.

Condition 3: The Diversity Condition: Any solution other than the global optimum is not a local optimum for some nonzero percentage of problem solvers.

Condition 4: Good-Sized Collections Drawn from Lots of Potential Problem Solvers. The initial population of problem solvers must be large and the collections of problem solvers working together must contain more than a handful of problem solvers.¹²

When these conditions obtain, then heterogeneous groups composed of individually less talented individuals *always* outperform homogenous groups made up of individually more talented individuals. One may fairly wonder how often these conditions are likely to obtain in the real world. If they don't obtain very frequently in the real world, then even if Page is right, it has little bearing on the philosophy of religion. However, one context in which these conditions will *often* obtain is in research conditions.¹³ Consider that in the context of philosophy of religion, Condition 1 says that no philosopher always achieves the best answer (i.e., the global optimum). Philosophical discourse occurs largely in written discourse and so Condition 2 is easily met. The Diversity Condition in Condition 3 is met in the philosophy of religion. But if this is something that can be met to varying degrees, then increasing diversity would be beneficial. Finally,

Univ. Press, 2010)).

¹² Scott E. Page, *The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools, and Societies* (Princeton Univ. Press, 2007), 162. I have discussed Page's work in a number of other places, including Kirk Loughheed, *The Epistemic Benefits of Disagreement* (Springer International Publishing, 2020).

¹³ Page's work has come under recent criticism, but I take it that the worries have more to do with scope than with his conclusions more generally. For a criticism of Page and reply see Abigail Thomson, "Does Diversity Trump Ability? An Example of the Misuse of Mathematics in the Social Sciences", *Journal of the AMS* 61, no. 9 (2014) and Daniel J. Singer, "Diversity, Not Randomness, Trumps Ability", *Philosophy of Science* 86, no. 1 (2019).

Condition 4 can be met in the philosophy of religion, but again shows it would be better to have even more practitioners who hold different beliefs. If Page is right, what we don't want is a group of practitioners in the philosophy of religion who hold many of the same beliefs. It's epistemically better if there are practitioners who, though working on similar problems, hold different beliefs from each other and attack the problems from all different angles.

II.3 Argumentation Theory of Reasoning

The Argumentation Theory of Reasoning as proposed by the social psychologists Hugo Mercier and Dan Sperber challenges the well-established dual-process theory of reasoning.¹⁴ While it is no doubt controversial, if it is true it provides some interesting evidence in support of the epistemic benefits of disagreement. According to Mercier and Sperber the primary purpose behind arguing is to convince our opponents and hence to effectively communicate. We aren't that effective at offering good arguments (i.e., valid and sound) for what we believe. On the other hand, it was an adaptive advantage to be able to identify who to trust (i.e., who was friend and who was foe). We thus developed the ability to accurately judge the arguments offered to us by other people. While we aren't good at offering arguments, we are considerably better at evaluating arguments offered by others.¹⁵ Consider that we don't suffer from some of the same biases and heuristics (at least not to the same extent) with respect to evaluating arguments from others as we do when evaluating our own arguments. This makes sense inasmuch as the arguments we produce are more about effective communication than about rationally defending our ideas.¹⁶

If the Argumentation Theory of Reasoning is true, what does it tell us about the philosophy of religion? Well, if we're better at evaluating arguments for positions we don't agree with than offering arguments for our own positions, then more disagreement in the philosophy of religion would be epistemically advantageous. Of course, this isn't to say that there isn't already much disagreement in philosophy of religion. There are frequent disagreements over how good a particular argument is even if, for example, the argument is for the existence of God and the philosophers examining it are all theists. Though there is much shared belief in the philosophy of religion there is still much disagreement over the quality of various arguments. This is all to the good. However, my claim is that it would be epistemically *better* if there were also disagreement of a different kind. This is disagreement about the conclusions of such arguments, instead of just the quality of them. So, my claim is really about *adding* to the disagreement that already exists in the philosophy of religion. Likewise, given the prominence of biases in religious belief, it's also likely that disagreement of this latter kind would also add to the epistemic benefits of the disagreement in the former kind of cases (i.e., where the inquirers agree on the conclusion but not necessarily on the merit of specific arguments).

II.4 Relevant Examples

There are also a number of examples from the history of science which support the idea that remaining steadfast in the face of disagreement yields epistemic benefits. This of course, implies that a diversity of viewpoints can be epistemically beneficial since otherwise there could be no disagreements. Ignaz Semmelweis (1818–1865) was a European doctor who became convinced that there was a connection between physician handwashing and a lower infant mortality rate. However, without microscopes that could detect bacteria, this connection couldn't be proven. Semmelweis defended his views to the medical profession despite widespread disagreement and he eventually suffered a breakdown because he couldn't convince his colleagues.¹⁷ Yet we now know that Semmelweis was correct and his work was the catalyst which eventually led the medical community to accept his views, though only after his death. Other

¹⁴ See Pascal Mercier and Dan Sperber, *The Enigma of Reason* (Harvard Univ. Press, 2017). For a statement of the dual-process theory see Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2011).

¹⁵ Mercier and Sperber, *The Enigma of Reason*, 7.

¹⁶ I discuss the Argumentation Theory of Reasoning in the content of the epistemology of disagreement in Lougheed, *The Epistemic Benefits of Disagreement*, 73–77.

¹⁷ Lougheed, *The Epistemic Benefits of Disagreement*, 65–67.

examples include Galileo and Heliocentrism, Charles Darwin and Natural and Selection, and Gerard Gierlinski and human-like footprints in Greece.¹⁸ I won't attempt to extrapolate necessary and sufficient conditions we could take away from these cases and apply to similar cases where an individual is cutting against the grain of the majority. However, they do lend support to the general idea that disagreement is truth-promoting. And practitioners in the philosophy of religion need to hold different views in order to disagree.

III. FIVE ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this section I'm going to discuss five objections or points that at least deserve further consideration. They are (i) that my argument relies on diachronic epistemic when it is synchronic epistemic reasons that matter; (ii) that we can achieve cognitive diversity with acceptance, not belief; (iii) that the individual has to make unpalatable epistemic sacrifices for the community; (iv) that the argument only works in research environments; and (v) that expanding the discipline may result in additional agreement.

III.1 Synchronic Epistemic Reasons versus Diachronic Epistemic Reasons

Perhaps the most serious (and obvious) objection to my line of argument is the one that is based on the claim that epistemic benefits of disagreement do nothing to defeat conciliationism. The objection has been raised by conciliationists who think that peers must revise their beliefs in the face of disagreement, even if the sort of epistemic benefits I've mentioned are in the offing. For example, Richard Feldman writes that:

This skeptical conclusion [that we should suspend judgment in the face of disagreement] does not imply that people should not defend the views that seem right to them. It may be that the search for the truth is most successful if people argue for the things that seem true to them. But one can do that without being epistemically justified in believing that one's view is correct.¹⁹

Likewise, David Christensen writes that:

It's quite plausible that knowledge is best advanced by people exploring, and attempting to defend, a variety of answers to a given question. Perhaps, human psychology makes this easier to do when investigators actually have a lot of confidence in the hypotheses they're trying to defend. Certain sorts of inquiry might well work best when a variety of investigators have irrationally high levels of confidence in a variety of pet hypotheses. So there may well be important epistemic benefits to certain patterns of irrational belief. But I would argue that the patterns of belief are no more epistemically rational for all that.²⁰

So, this objection says that the existence of disagreement might be epistemically beneficial, but it doesn't follow that remaining steadfast in the face of disagreement is epistemically rational.

A promising way to respond to this objection is to draw a distinction between synchronic epistemic reasons and diachronic epistemic reasons.²¹ Synchronic epistemic rationality is about what an agent ought to believe *right now* in light of the reasons they currently possess. Diachronic epistemic rationality, however, considers what an agent ought to believe *right now* but in the light of *future* reasons, the specific content of which is still unknown. Of course, on this latter approach one needs to be in possession of reasons to think utilizing this method is likely to yield epistemic benefits. The argument I've laid out here is about diachronic epistemic reasons, not synchronic epistemic reasons which seem to be what concerns Feldman and Christensen.

Perhaps Feldman and Christensen will insist that we should only be concerned with synchronic epistemic reasons. The epistemology of disagreement literature is concerned with synchronic epistemic ra-

18 Ibid., 68–69.

19 Feldman, "Reasonable Religious Disagreements", 157.

20 Christensen, "Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News", 216. Christensen here doesn't explicitly mention practical rationality, but in claiming it would be epistemically irrational to remain steadfast what he says here does seem to be in the spirit of the objection.

21 Loughheed, *The Epistemic Benefits of Disagreement*, 100–107.

tionality, so appealing to diachronic epistemic reasons does not defeat sceptical worries based on strong versions of conciliationism. But notice that even if this is so, it doesn't defeat my general claim that more disagreement and cognitive diversity in the philosophy of religion would be epistemically beneficial. Maybe at the level of synchronic epistemic rationality, more disagreement does indeed lead to more scepticism. However, if getting at the truth matters to us in our inquiry, then there is little reason to ignore diachronic epistemic reasons in our inquiry.²²

If there is no way to combine synchronic and diachronic epistemic reasons into an all-things-considered epistemic rationality, that offers a principled way of balancing them against each other, then we need a principled reason to favour one type of rationality over the other. But strong conciliationists like Christensen and Feldman never tell us why to value synchronic epistemic reasons more than diachronic or all-things-considered epistemic reasons. If truth is the goal in the philosophy of religion, then there are epistemic reasons, i.e., diachronic or all-things-considered epistemic reasons, to promote disagreement and cognitive diversity.

III.2 Acceptance instead of belief

Thus far, I have only discussed the idea that it is beneficial to have practitioners in the philosophy of religion who *believe* a variety of different propositions. But it has been suggested that we can achieve the epistemic benefits of disagreement if agents simply *accept* different propositions.²³ To accept a proposition is to act as if it is true and to use it in the premises of arguments.²⁴ Thus, we need not worry about the distinction between synchronic and diachronic epistemic reasons. Regardless of what it is rational for an agent to believe, we can say that agents ought to continue to accept propositions in the face of disagreement (even if continuing to believe would be irrational) because doing so will yield epistemic benefits. A variety of different viewpoints that are accepted by various practitioners in the philosophy of religion is epistemically beneficial.²⁵

This suggestion could, in some sense, allow one to maintain that we don't really need more cognitive diversity at the level of belief in the philosophy of religion. What we really need is more cognitive diversity with respect to the positions that practitioners accept and defend as true. So, we just need a commitment from current practitioners to start defending more varied positions. In some ways this solution is consistent with much of what I have argued for thus far. For this practice would increase disagreement (at least non-doxastic disagreement) and thus potentially yield the epistemic benefits I claim are in the offing. However, there are at least two reasons to be sceptical of this approach to diversifying the field. First, it's doubtful that positions which are merely accepted will be as tenaciously defended as those that are believed. In this way the disagreement achieved via acceptance is weaker than the disagreement achieved via belief.²⁶ The chances of gaining epistemic benefits are thereby lessened. Second, if it really is true that philosophers of religion are more prone to suffer from various cognitive biases because religious beliefs are held so dear, getting such philosophers to defend different positions in the first place will be difficult, if not impossible. Too much is at stake for them.

III.3 Individual versus Collective Benefits

Another worry has to do with the difference between individual and collective benefits. For in some of the examples of epistemic benefits gained via disagreement that I mention in the history of science, the individual inquirer in question had little by the way of success in convincing their peers until after their death. For the individual to remain steadfast in the face of disagreement, in sometimes quite hostile cir-

22 This argument assumes that epistemic consequentialism is true. I won't spend time defending it here. For my defense of it see Loughheed, *The Epistemic Benefits of Disagreement*, 98–107.

23 Catherine Elgin, "Persistent Disagreement", in *Disagreement*, ed. Richard Feldman and Ted S. Warfield (Oxford Univ. Press, 2010); Loughheed, *The Epistemic Benefits of Disagreement*.

24 Elgin, "Persistent Disagreement". For more on acceptance L. J. Cohen, *An Essay on Belief and Acceptance* (Clarendon Press, 1992).

25 This claim is, I suppose, ultimately subject to empirical investigation. We could go out into the world and check whether this is true.

26 Loughheed, *The Epistemic Benefits of Disagreement*, 87–91.

cumstances, shouldn't she herself be able to reap the epistemic benefits? There are a few items to mention by way of response. In the cases mentioned above it isn't clear at the time of the disagreement precisely when the epistemic benefits will be realized by the community and/or the individual inquirer. Not knowing when the benefits may occur down the road is at least some reason for the individual not to give up. Furthermore, the philosophy of religion is in many ways a *community of inquirers*.²⁷ As members in this community we should have concern for the epistemic well-being of the whole community, not only ourselves. None of this implies sacrificing our individual epistemic well-being for the sake of the group's well-being. But this isn't what appears to have happened in the cases described above. This also further strengthens the idea that for philosophers to remain steadfast in the face of disagreement, they really must *believe* the proposition in question.

III.4 Research Contexts

Jane Freidman explains that:

[T]rue inquirers are aiming to figure something out, but those others need not be. [For example, t]he detective is trying to figure out who robbed the bank and the reporter whether the working conditions are good. Their actions seem to count as part of their inquiries exactly because they are done in the service of their cognitive or epistemic aims or goals. A true inquirer then is someone with a certain kind of goal or aim, and so at the bottom of any true inquiry is a certain kind of aim- or goal-directed state of mind or attitude. This should come as no surprise — inquiry seems clearly to be an aim- or goal-directed activity.²⁸

In previous work defending the epistemic benefits of disagreement I have attempted to show how such considerations *might* extend beyond research contexts.²⁹ I won't outline those details here. Still, we might wonder whether epistemic benefits can really be in the offing from the mere existence of disagreement. Don't the individuals in question have to be inquiring in the subject matter at hand and properly oriented towards getting at the truth? The good news is that even if this sort of worry applies to my attempt to take these considerations beyond research contexts, they certainly do not apply to disagreements in the philosophy of religion. For the philosophy of religion is a topic of inquiry and philosophers are inquirers. The fact that appealing to the epistemic benefits of disagreement to justify increasing cognitive diversity works best in research environments only serves to bolster my argument.

III.5 We don't know what we don't know

It's logically possible that diversifying the philosophy of religion in the ways suggested above will not yield much by way of epistemic benefits. Maybe in the long run the disagreements will only serve to confirm the views already held by a majority of the practitioners in the field (e.g., despite adding more viewpoints the field eventually converges on theism). Notice that in the first case, even if more disagreement only tends to confirm currently held views this is not a reason to reject calls for cognitive diversity. For we don't know beforehand the results of further diversifying the field before we actually do so. As John Stuart Mill says:

[T]he peculiar evil of silencing the expression of an opinion is, that it is robbing the human race; posterity as well as the existing generation; those who dissent from the opinion still more than those who hold it. If the opinion is right, they are deprived of the opportunity of exchanging error for truth: if wrong, they lose, what is almost as great a benefit, the clearer and livelier impression of truth, produced by its collision with error.³⁰

Even if our views don't change, we'll have better reasons for holding them and be better able to defend them. This is, in itself, epistemically beneficial. And finally, we simply can't know what insights we're currently missing. The only way to dismiss the value of such insights out of hand would be to already know

27 For more on the community-oriented nature of this response see Klaas J. Kraay, "Elgin's community-oriented steadfastness", *Synthese* 198, no. 6 (2021).

28 Jane Friedman, "Inquiry and Belief", *Noûs* 53, no. 2 (2019), 298.

29 Kirk Loughheed, "The Epistemic Benefits of Worldview Disagreement", *Social Epistemology* 35, no. 1 (2021).

30 Mill, John, Stuart, *On Liberty* (Yale Univ. Press, 2003), 87. Loughheed, *The Epistemic Benefits of Disagreement*, 78–79.

their content. But we don't, so we can't. We simply have to do the work of adding different views to the field before making such assessments.

IV. PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

This marks the end of my defense of what I think would be the epistemic benefits of diversifying the philosophy of religion. As stated in the introduction, I recognize that diversity does not equal disagreement. An underlying assumption throughout is the claim that increasing diversity in the philosophy of religion is very likely to increase the disagreement in it too. With this qualification in mind, I want to close by offering a number of practical steps the field can take in order to help realize cognitive diversity. I don't claim that this is the best or only set of advice that ought to be followed in this regard. Rather, I aim to offer recommendations that are relatively easy and straightforward to implement. We philosophers of religion can all implement these strategies to some degree without very large costs to our time and energy.

IV.1 Translation Support

We need to support scholars who want to translate non-English works in philosophy of religion into English. For better or worse, contemporary philosophy of religion operates almost entirely in English so this is just a matter of practicality.³¹ It's simply easier for us to support this kind of work than to attempt to learn the multiple languages which would otherwise be required. I also don't pretend that this is a perfect solution inasmuch as certain ideas and nuances are inevitably lost in translation. Nevertheless, this is a relatively simple way for us to increase the number of ideas in the field. But what can we do to support such work other than to use the translations once they're produced? The most tangible ways to support it are in the forms of research time and financial support. Scholars need significant amounts of time to devote to translation. This means they may need teaching and administration release. Giving such scholars special priority in this regard is one way to help. Furthermore, money set aside for translation projects should be included in our grant proposals going forward inasmuch as possible. Many large grants now award smaller breakout grants for projects related to their theme. Save some of these smaller breakout grants for translation projects. Furthermore, funding organizations should be open to awarding large grants exclusively to translation projects. If this advice is followed, then over the next few decades there could be an influx in translated texts into the field and hence an influx of new ideas.

IV.2 Undergraduate Teaching

We also need to make changes to our undergraduate curriculum. My main suggestion here is to add non-western readings/topics to undergraduate course syllabi in the philosophy of religion. I'm not suggesting an entire overhaul of the curriculum or that we need to entirely revamp our current courses. Rather, start by adding three or four non-western readings to your philosophy of religion course. This is manageable as it does not require creating an entirely new course with new slides and lectures, etc. But it does take a small step toward exposing undergraduate students to non-western ideas in the philosophy of religion. Likewise, it's inevitable that some of these students will continue on to graduate school and we can thereby impact the next generation of philosophers by making such changes. Another way to facilitate this sort of change would be an online resource dedicated to providing resources for teaching non-western topics in the philosophy of religion. For example, a living annotated bibliography on non-western philosophy of religion would help us know where to start when attempting to make these changes to our courses.

31 I don't think English is somehow a superior language, the history of field has just played out in such a way that it's now conducted primarily in English.

IV.3 Research

As with the small changes to undergraduate courses described above, we can make similar changes in our research. Once we're slightly more familiar with non-western material, we might think about how some of the ideas impact our research. Note that I'm not suggesting we need to become experts in Asian or African philosophy of religion. We might simply begin by adding small sections or even footnotes where we flag potential connections to non-western ideas. Again, not only will this potentially change the trajectory of our research, but it will also influence the next generation of philosophers of religion who are reading our work. We don't need to give up researching the topics that interest us most, but we can do these little things to slowly help improve the field. Over time, I think these changes will help expand the field into a truly global discipline, i.e., a global philosophy of religion. This is because if this advice is followed, the next generation of philosophers will be much more keenly aware of the world beyond Judeo-Christian theism.

IV.4 Grants, Graduate Admissions, and Hiring

I am wary to wade into topics that can be extremely controversial (especially as a formerly precariously employed member of the profession myself), but I do have some tentative recommendations regarding grants, graduate admissions, and hiring. Above I said that granting agencies need to be open to providing significant financial support for translation projects. Similarly, granting agencies need to be open to global projects in the philosophy of religion. A recent grant, *The Global Philosophy of Religion* led by Yu-jin Nagasawa at the University of Birmingham is an extremely promising step in this regard.³² Likewise, inasmuch as appropriate supervision is available, graduate admission committees should not shy away from applicants interested in non-western philosophy of religion. As the discipline becomes more global hopefully more supervisors in non-western philosophy of religion will become available. Finally, hiring committees who desire a philosopher of religion should be open to hiring specialists in non-western philosophy of religion. Having the ability to teach and/or research in non-western philosophy of religion as a job requirement for philosophy of religion might be too stringent right now (i.e., it would eliminate too many good job candidates), but in the future it might be appropriate. Furthermore, such requirements would provide practical motivation for philosophers of religion to include non-western ideas in their teaching and research.

IV.5 Diversity of Ideas versus Diversity of Beliefs

Again, one worry for these suggestions is that while they will certainly contribute to a larger diversity of *ideas* in the philosophy of religion (i.e., of the ideas being discussed and considered), they do nothing to contribute to a diversity of *beliefs*. Without a diversity of beliefs, the disagreements I claim will be epistemically beneficial simply won't occur. So, if the practitioners of philosophy remain mostly Christians, my recommendations won't help.³³ As stated in the introduction, diversity does not equal disagreement. Part of what I'm assuming in these recommendations is that adding to the diversity of ideas will in fact add to the diversity of beliefs because a more diverse set of philosophers will be drawn towards working in philosophy of religion. This amounts to an empirical claim that I cannot demonstrate here. Enacting some of my suggestions and waiting to see what happens is the best way to test it.

V. CONCLUSION

Contemporary analytic philosophy of religion is primarily composed of men who are theists. Specifically, it is focused primarily on the problems and prospects of Christian theism. While this may not be inherently problematic, the discipline would be epistemically better off if it had more viewpoint diversity because such diversity would likely bring about more disagreement. There is not only probably a moral

32 See <https://www.global-philosophy.org/>.

33 This worry is owed to an anonymous referee.

obligation to expand it (or at least not to resist such expansion), there are strong epistemic reasons to expand it. Economic models, the argumentation theory of reasoning, and a plethora of examples in the history of science support the idea that disagreement and cognitive diversity can help us get to the truth. Such reasons are indeed epistemic, though they are diachronic epistemic reasons, because the goal in question is to acquire the truth (or knowledge or understanding). We simply cannot know the possible insights we're missing without actually doing the work of exploring non-western (and non-theistic and non-Christian) ideas. There are a number of ways to implement these ideas including supporting translation projects, slowly adding non-western topics into our teaching curriculum and our research where relevant, and also in our general grants, graduate admissions, and hiring practices and policies. These don't have to be huge fundamental or overarching changes to positively impact the next generation of philosophers, but we can each do our small part.³⁴

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