

Further Response

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I would like to thank Professor Danie Goosen very much for his incisive response to my paper and the questions he has posed. I would like to stress that my paper was not positioned to undertake a global examination of some of the foundational issues facing Religious Studies. Rather it was aimed principally at those who wish to abolish Religious Studies, or furnish it with a new name as well as different methodological and theoretical presuppositions. As such, it was constrained by a number of contextual factors. Nonetheless, I will attempt to respond to certain of Dr. Goosens' questions that address crucial issues.

First, the problem of dualism. Most contemporary scholars, educated principally in western, even Eurocentric schools and universities, among whom I include myself, acknowledge dualism as an endemic to their thought processes – with a lineage stretching back to Aristotle's logic. From this perspective, I tend to regard all pronouncements as necessarily suspect, even if they are performing a rhetorical purpose. So any universal statement requires due and careful scrutiny. But the type of dualism I am especially questioning is that where the oppositional nature of two terms is being reinforced. Often an adversarial method is also employed to demonstrate the superiority, correctness of one term. Its objectivity is taken for granted. Such an approach may clarify a definition or an argument, and this is perhaps its main intention, but it does little to promote insight or tolerance about a specific situation. Here, even Aristotle allowed that *phronesis* was advisable.

In my own appeal to Derrida and Foucault, I did make very clear that I was not advocating their earlier work that has often been applied in somewhat disingenuous ways. I am, however, intrigued by their later work where both returned to a more humanistic orientation. In this context they

both conceded that they did not intend to destroy the ‘self’ entirely. Instead, they had wanted to put into question the sense of entitlement, of undue influence, presumed by the heirs of the Enlightenment. All too often this entailed a rejection or an unwillingness to acknowledge those who were deemed deficient in certain requisite qualities and ideals associated with rationalism. It is this a particular form of objectivity again that I ‘object’ to, as it excluded many human beings and was deployed in the interests, often implicit or even unconscious, of those who wielded various forms of power.

Then there is the question of ontology. I worry today that any invocation of an ‘unreconstructed’ mode of ontology could allow a space for a particular mode of a dogmatic Christianized variety that would dictate the terms for the study of religions. This would impose definite restrictions on the contemporary exercise of Religious Studies departments where pedagogy – specifically in an officially multicultural country such as Canada where I hail from – focusses on teaching of a non-confessional category.

What I did not have the space or time to develop in my presentation was the strong influence of two other scholars on my own work, Paul Ricoeur, with whom I was fortunate to study, and Charles Taylor, whose lectures I have often attended. They have both been instrumental in helping me to come to an appreciation of how extremely vital context can be in any discussion, or preferably dialogue, in relation to religious matters. Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of suspicion has been invaluable. It is their respective work on recognition, however, although not unproblematic, that has informed more recent revisions of my work. Ricoeur’s advocacy of a respectful acknowledgement of each person’s integrity and rights, moderated by an honest self-reflexivity, has dramatically changed the terms of encounter with other peoples and religions. I believe that their work provides a new modality in a pluralistic and increasingly globalized world for dealing constructively with those many fraught concerns associated with dualism, objectivity and ontology and their role in Religious Studies.

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