Animisms: Practical Indigenous Philosophies

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This paper is the final draft after peer review. Please find the published paper: De Smedt, J. & De Cruz, H. (2023). Animisms. Practical indigenous philosophies. In: T. Smith (Ed.), *Animism and Philosophy of Religion* (pp. 95-122). Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

In this chapter, we focus on animism and how it is studied in the cognitive science of religion and cultural anthropology. We argue that philosophers of religion still use (outdated) normative notions from early scientific studies of religion that go back at least a century and that have since been abandoned in other disciplines. Our argument is programmatic: we call for an expansion of philosophy of religion in order to include traditions that are currently underrepresented. The failure of philosophy of religion to discuss and accommodate different perspectives means a large part of human religious beliefs, practices, and experiences remains outside its purview. As a point of focus, we examine animism in two cultures as a way to think about what sorts of questions and ideas an expansion of philosophy of religion into lesser-explored traditions could offer.

1.   Introduction: The scope of philosophy of religion

Since the 1960s, analytic philosophy of religion has been to a large extent concerned with questions about rationality and justification, especially of (Christian) theism. A lot of this literature boils down to the question of whether religious belief can be rational or warranted, especially in the face of naturalistic atheist alternatives. Analytic philosophy of religion appears primarily in two forms. First, in the guise of natural theology, which uses reason to evaluate religious claims, such as versions of the ontological, cosmological, or design arguments. Second, as a form of philosophical theology that uses philosophical methods to evaluate theological doctrines (Whitney 2018). For example, if the afterlife that Christians and Muslims conceive of is eternal, wouldn't it become unbearably boring? This question of the tedium of immortality has generated a substantial philosophical literature (e.g., Williams 1973, Wisnewski 2005); this literature indirectly sheds light on the rationality of theological views such as the eternity of the afterlife. If the afterlife eventually becomes intolerably boring, it cannot at the same time be eternally blissful, and notions of a Christian or Muslim afterlife would be incoherent.

Implicit in the preoccupation of philosophy of religion with rationality, or lack thereof, is a notion of what the word "religion" stands for. Judging by what has been published in the most recent years in journals such as *Faith and Philosophy, International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion, Journal of Analytic Theology,* and *Religious Studies, "*religion" is by default either a generic monotheism (often a flavor of classical theism, see Pearce and Oppy forthcoming, for discussion) or an unspecified Christian theism. This only seems to change if these journals publish a special issue on non-Christian philosophy of religion (e.g., *Journal of Analytic Theology,* volume 8, 2020). In textbooks for educational purposes, the hegemony of Christianity in philosophy of religion is, if anything, even starker. For example*, Philosophy of Religion, selected readings* (Peterson et al.

2014) is currently in its fifth edition and is marketed on OUP's website as "The most complete and economically priced introductory anthology in the philosophy of religion."[1] While the editors have excerpted texts from Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, Judaism and Greek polytheism, only 12% of this "most complete" textbook engages with non-Christian religious traditions. In analytic philosophy of religion, gauging the rationality of religion thus boils down to gauging the rationality of monotheistic (mostly Christian) beliefs. The study of philosophy of religion at western departments is at odds with other studies of religion in the humanities and social sciences, including religious studies, sociology, and cognitive science, where "religion" has a much broader meaning, and is more culturally inclusive.

In this chapter, we focus on animism and, in particular, how it is studied in the cognitive science of religion and cultural anthropology. Neither of these disciplines privilege monotheism among the many forms of religiosity. We argue that philosophers of religion still use (outdated) normative notions from early scientific studies of religion that go back at least a century and that have since been abandoned in other disciplines. Our argument is programmatic: we call for an expansion of philosophy of religion in order to include traditions that are currently underrepresented. The failure of philosophy of religion to discuss and accommodate different perspectives means a large part of human religious beliefs, practices, and experiences remains outside its purview. As a point of focus, we examine animism in two cultures as a way to think about what sorts of questions and ideas an expansion of philosophy of religion into lesser-explored traditions could offer.

In section 2, we explore what "religion" means in analytic philosophy of religion, showing that philosophers rely on outdated and often colonialist attitudes when thinking about religion. Section 3 examines the cognitive basis of animism, providing evidence for its antiquity among human societies. Section 4 explores animism in two distinct cultural settings, kincentric ecology as conceptualized by the Rarámuri in Mexico, and the conceptualization of the *Nuna* (Land, the natural environment) as the default state of nature by speakers of Inuktitut among Canadian Inuit. Through these case studies we highlight topics and questions of potential interest to philosophers of religion. Section 5 examines two ways in which philosophy of religion could benefit from the inclusion of lesser-explored religions.

2. What "religion" means in philosophy of religion

Philosophy of religion, as a branch of philosophy, is currently often seen as a subcategory of metaphysics and epistemology. For example, on the PhilPapers website, one of the main archiving websites for philosophy preprints and author copies, philosophy of religion falls under metaphysics and epistemology, together with fields such as philosophy of mind and philosophy of language. The conceptualization of religion as primarily concerned with metaphysics and epistemology is a modern conception. As the historian of religion Peter Harrison (2015) points out, the word, "religion" and cognate terms (such as *religio* in Latin) shifted in meaning over time. We will now briefly look at this historical development.

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[1] https://global.oup.com/ushe/product/philosophy-of-religion-9780199303441

For medieval authors such as Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), *religio* was a theological virtue, primarily associated with inner devotion and prayer; in this view, philosophy of religion—if we were to apply this term anachronistically to his work—would be a subfield of value theory or ethics. This notion of religion as internal disposition persisted among Renaissance authors such as Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499) who equated "Christian religion" with a disposition to live one's life oriented toward truth and goodness. A similar idea operated in the concept of *piety* in the work of the modern theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), where piety is a kind of internal religious sentiment that arises from our feeling of absolute dependence on God. However, since the Early Modern period, there was a gradual shift away from religion as an inner disposition and virtue toward something more external that can be studied comparatively (Smith 1998). This shift was driven by comparative studies of religion in anthropological and sociological contexts, where "religion" became a term that denotes a body of beliefs and practices, often by people from disparate cultures and places, no longer concentrating on Christian theology. The modern study of religion has three pillars: comparative study, and attention for both beliefs and practices. As we will see later on, of these three, contemporary philosophy of religion is mainly interested in beliefs, is hardly interested in the practices, and has as a whole discarded the comparative study of religion. This is in contrast to other academic disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, or religious studies, which do study these three aspects.

The scientific study of religion began in the Early Modern period with natural histories of religion. Bertrand de Fontenelle (1657-1757) and David Hume (1711-1776) speculated on the origins of religious beliefs and practices. They tended to focus on specific religious practices, such as "fetishism" (this term is now outdated, and corresponds roughly to what we now call animism and totemism), oracles, and rituals to placate or cajole gods into doing what their petitioners want. For example, Fontenelle's *Histoire des Oracles* (*History of Oracles*, [1686] 1824) is a naturalistic account of why humans can come to believe in miracles and why they rely on oracles. Probably the best-known exemplar in this Early Modern literature is Hume's *Natural History of Religion* (1757) which proposes that the earliest religious belief was a kind of animistic polytheism. Hume argued that people in the past were ignorant about the causes of natural events, especially adverse events, such as droughts and earthquakes. In an attempt to gain both understanding and control—or at least, the illusion of control—they anthropomorphized elements of their environment. For example, one cannot prevent a drought, but with rituals for an anthropomorphized rain-god one has the sense one does *something* toward alleviating a dry spell. As a result, people came to believe that gods control aspects of their environment, leading to the earliest polytheistic systems. They worshipped and performed rituals for these gods in order to placate and please them, and to petition them to do things for them. Over time, as a mirror of their own social structures, these polytheistic belief systems slowly evolved into henotheistic and later monotheistic religions. Especially relevant for the study of animism is Charles de Brosses's *Du Culte des Dieux Fétiches* (1760, translated as *On the Worship of Fetish Gods*, 2017). In this work, de Brosses (1709-1777) coined the influential term "fetishism" to denote a combination of magical thinking and animism. He understood the latter term as imbuing the natural world with agency and volition.

These Early Modern natural histories of religion were explicit in drawing parallels between the religious beliefs of their readers (Western Christianity) and the religious beliefs of Indigenous peoples from Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Take de Brosses's study of fetishism in sub-Saharan Africa. He examined the cognitive basis of animistic practices, drawing broad and sweeping comparisons between then contemporary African animal worship and similar practices in the Americas, and in ancient Egypt. He concluded that superstitious thought is the same, no matter where it occurs. He then used this idea to analyze and critique the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation, remarking the following:

> I do not see why one should be so surprised that certain peoples have divinized animals, when one is much less surprised that they have divinized men. This surprise and the difference in judgment that goes along with it seem to me to be an effect of pride and self-esteem [*amour propre*], which act without us noticing. For despite the high preeminence of the nature of man over that of animals, at bottom there is as much distance from one as there is from the other to reach divine nature: that is, it is equally impossible to attain. Since a man can no more become a Divinity than can a lion, the nation that claims the former is just as unreasonable in its thinking as that which claims the latter. However, it presents no difficulty to admit that very civilized, learned and spiritual nations, such as the Greeks, the Romans and even the Egyptians, deified and worshipped mortal men... But from my point of view, all of these sorts of idolatry are equally unreasonable (de Brosses 1760/2017, 102)

Differently put, the Incarnation is no less incredible and unreasonable as imbuing a lion with divinity because the ontological gap between lion and God is just as wide as between a human and God. De Brosses (1760) argued that the same cognitive mechanisms that operate in animism and magical thinking in Indigenous peoples from sub-Saharan Africa and the Americas also accounted for similar tendencies in his Christian contemporaries.

David Hume made a similar rhetorical point in his discussion of the Roman Catholic belief in transubstantiation (the belief that the wafer and wine in the eucharist really and literally become the body and blood of Jesus Christ). He argued that the only reason his contemporaries did not marvel more at the bizarreness of Roman Catholicism was that they were so used to it. Recounting an amusing anecdote where a proselyte tells a priest "You have told me all along that there is but one God: And yesterday I ate him", Hume reflected, "Such are the doctrines of our brethren, the Catholics. But to these doctrines we are so accustomed, that we never wonder at them: Tho', in a future age, it will probably become difficult to persuade some nations, that any human, two-legged creature, could ever embrace such principles" (1757, 74-75). The rhetorical force of these remarks at the time derived from the fact that European readers believed themselves superior in intellect compared to Africans, Asians, and Native Americans. The authors of natural histories of religion argued, to the contrary, that Christian beliefs were just as irrational and superstitious as the beliefs Christians commonly derided. Custom and familiarity was the main reason why they did not consider these beliefs dubious. Natural histories of religion, then, presented religions from

Indigenous societies and from historical societies such as ancient Greece or ancient Egypt as a kind of mirror that properly reflected one's own distorted religious views.

The comparative study of religion was taken up again in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by anthropologists and sociologists. But whereas the Early Modern authors sought to emphasize *similarities* between Indigenous non-western religious beliefs and Christianity, these later authors (often working in a context of imperialism and colonialism) used the concept of animism to emphasize *differences* between Indigenous and western religions. As Aaron Freeman (2014) shows, de Brosses and contemporaries challenged the notion that "idolatry" should be regarded as the corruption of an ancient monotheism. Rather, they regarded animism as what Sperber (1996) would call a "cultural attractor," an idea that occurs cross-culturally because human minds find the idea attractive. For example, the idea of an afterlife occurs cross-culturally because the idea that a person can persist after their physical death is intuitively appealing (see De Cruz and De Smedt 2017 for an overview). Nineteenth-century authors such as E. B. Tylor (1832-1917) and James Frazer (1854-1941) operationalized animism in a distinct way. Like the Early Modern authors, they saw animism as a tendency to imbue the environment with animacy and purpose, and they also co-opted the idea that animism was among the most ancient religious beliefs. But they devised a cultural evolution of religion in which animism was the earliest step. Christianity was a further step in the evolution of culture. Whereas Tylor (1871) saw the monotheism of his own British culture as the pinnacle of cultural development, Frazer (1890) saw science as its apex. Since according to these cultural evolutionist models all cultures go through the same evolutionary steps, cultures that have magical and animistic thinking would be at an earlier stage of development. In *Primitive Culture* Tylor (1871) argued that religion was a cultural universal. All human cultures, including those that were seen as primitive in his time, such as Indigenous Australians, have religious beliefs and practices. In his view, the origin of religion is the human tendency to project spirit onto natural living and non-living things, including plants, animals, mountains, and stones. The origin of this universal human tendency was our attempting to explain the difference between a living person and a dead person. According to Tylor (1871), people concluded that persons must have both a spiritual and a material body. The spiritual body is the thing which roams at night when one is dreaming and returns into the material body upon awakening. After death, the spiritual body leaves the material body permanently and becomes a soul that continues to exist after the demise of the material body. This, according to Tylor (1871, chapter 12), is the principle that underlies all religions (see also Sidky 2015). Frazer (1890) held similar cultural evolutionist ideas, but he put magic—practices that attempt to control supernatural forces for various ends—at the center of the earliest religions, rather than spiritual bodies. Cultural evolutionism is now discredited in anthropology, and, since the influential work by anthropologists such as Franz Boas (1885-1942) and Bronisław Malinowski (1884-1942), cultures are now studied on their own terms, with attention to their unique history.

Later authors, notably the logical positivists, such as Hans Hahn (1879-1934), Rudolph Carnap (1891-1970), and Otto Neurath (1882-1945), had a positive appraisal of animistic and magical thinking (see Josephson-Storm 2017 for review). For example, Otto Neurath (e.g., [1921]1973) saw science as a practical enterprise. He likened it to a boat that is forever traveling on the open sea. The sailors who can never dock in a harbor for repairs, and who can never start afresh are like

people who try to acquire knowledge through whatever practical means available, including the sciences. In Neurath's view, science is not something special and highly unusual that is specific to western culture. He saw it as closely related to magical thinking, and animism in particular, arising out of a commonsense way of trying to make sense of the environment across times and cultures.

> Man of the magical form of life has no special mode of thinking (Lévy-Bruhl), we are of his flesh and blood (Frazer). In particular, pre-animistic magic, probably the oldest, is akin to our behavior. But animistic magic too is like modern behavior, directed toward *finite, earthly* ends. Of course the men of magical times expected more than we do from words and other evocative measures of a fairly simple kind, whereas we tend to expect effects to be precipitated by complicated machines or by bodies specifically designed to do so (Neurath, [1931] 1973, 321).

This idea of the continuity between the sciences and animistic philosophies can be found in several other authors who seem to have come up with this independently. For example, the philosopher and anthropologist Robin Horton (1932-2019) argued that African traditional thought and western science both share the same methodological goals of explanation, prediction, and control. He proposed that "each category of beings" (gods, ancestors, heroes, water spirits) "has its appointed functions in relation to the world of observable happenings... Like atoms, molecules, and waves, then, the gods serve to introduce unity into diversity, simplicity into complexity, order into disorder, regularity into anomaly. Once we have grasped that this is their [the supernatural beings'] intellectual function, many of the puzzles formerly posed by 'mystical thinking' disappear" (Horton 1967, 52). In a similar vein, the sociologist and philosopher Bruno Latour ([1996] 2010) draws an analogy between fetishists (animistic thinkers) who carve a sculpture of a god, and who then claim that this god is real, autonomous, and active in the world, just like a scientist such as Louis Pasteur created the fact of fermentation in his lab, and then also stated that it was real, autonomous, and active in the world.

However, the predominant view among scientists and philosophers of that era was that animism was a more "primitive" form of thought. The developmental psychologist Jean Piaget (1929), for example, saw animism as an ontological confusion in young children: they impute life, consciousness, and purpose to inherently lifeless, unconscious, and purposeless things such as the wind or the sun and moon. According to Piaget, over time, as they mature, children grow out of animism and become more restrictive in their attributions of agency. This idea is challenged in more recent work that indicates that animistic thinking is cross-culturally widespread, for example in China (Järnefelt et al. 2019, see also Smith, this volume). Moreover, it also occurs among a number of adults with PhD degrees in STEM or in the humanities who see the natural world as a living, interconnected being with purpose and intentions (see e.g., Kelemen et al. 2013, see also Steinhart, this volume).

Meanwhile, the idea (dating back to the Early Modern period) that monotheism is the cognitive and cultural default persisted. In the 19th century, authors such as Andrew Lang (1844-1912) argued against Frazer and Tylor, proposing that people from small-scale, Indigenous cultures really

had an original monotheism, which got distorted and degenerated over time. As was the case with cultural evolutionism, there is no convincing empirical evidence to support primitive monotheism, which seems to have sprung from a literal belief in the Tower of Babel story (Genesis 11:1–9, an origin myth that seeks to explain why people speak different languages). Monotheism is almost absent among hunter-gatherer societies and only appears in the historical record once sedentary and large-scale societies emerge (see e.g., Whitehouse et al. 2019 for an analysis). Some larger-scale Indigenous cultures have monotheistic beliefs but, rather than being examined on their own terms, descriptions of these religious systems were often distorted to make them fit better with notions of philosophical Christian monotheism or missionization, as, for example, in the case of the disputed Māori deity *Io* (Cox 2014).

Despite the dearth of evidence for an original monotheism, when we presented a paper on this topic (eventually published as De Cruz and De Smedt 2013) in philosophy seminars, mentioning that there is no good empirical evidence for a primitive monotheism in archaeology, we had on several occasions philosophers of religion objecting to this, and defending primitive monotheism. For all we know, they typically argued, humans 100,000 years ago were monotheists but, regrettably, through the noetic effects of sin their original monotheistic beliefs degenerated over time! Primitive monotheism has also been defended in print by philosophers of religion, among others by Smith (2017) and van Inwagen (2004).

In contrast to earlier scientific works on religion (natural histories of religion, cultural evolutionism, and primitive monotheism) that mainly used non-western religious concepts and practices either to critique or to shore up Christian ideas, contemporary researchers who do comparative work regard religious beliefs and practices as interesting in their own right. Sociologists, anthropologists, and psychologists avoid (to the extent this is possible) making value judgments about the relative rationality of religious concepts and behaviors across cultures. However, philosophy of religion has not kept pace with these developments. The discipline seems still firmly planted in a colonialist mindset that sees Indigenous religions and philosophies as less rational, less evolved, and less cultured than Christianity. Primitive monotheism is still seen as a live plausibility. The other Abrahamic theisms, such as Judaism and Islam, also get some place at the table, but beyond this, the openness to non-Christian approaches remains limited.

3. Cognitive science of religion and the study of animism

Religion is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, so its study benefits from a wide range of disciplines. An influential theoretical framework in the scientific study of religion is the cognitive science of religion (CSR). The interdisciplinary field of CSR began in the late 1980s with the study of religious beliefs and rituals. It seeks to explain commonalities in religious beliefs and practices across the world as the result of stable features of human cognition, including perception and inductive inference. According to CSR scholars, religious beliefs and practices are the result of common human cognitive dispositions that operate in a variety of everyday, ordinary circumstances. These cognitive dispositions include inferring goal-directedness, thinking about the minds of others, and attributing intentions to actions. Moreover, religious concepts and behaviors are subject to the same cultural evolutionary processes as other domains of human culture (see

White, 2021 for a comprehensive overview of the field). There is nothing special about religion. It is not some separate sphere of cognition that requires its own explanation. Rather, for example, teleological thinking in religious contexts is but one instance of a more general tendency to reason teleologically. As De Cruz and De Smedt (2015) have pointed out/argued, teleological thinking in religious contexts (e.g., the gods created the Earth to give us a dwelling) is similar to teleological thinking in other domains, such as in making inferences about tools, plants, or animals (e.g., the smith forged this sword to defend himself, plants have flowers to give honey to bees).

Animism is at the heart of Guthrie's (1980, 1993) anthropomorphism, one of the earliest and most influential CSR theories on the origin of religion. Stewart Guthrie is an anthropologist by training with expertise on new religious movements in Japan. According to his anthropomorphist account, perception is interpretive: animals (including humans) need to make sense of ambiguous stimuli, such as leaves rustling in the wind, or a distant shape in the mist across a valley, and decide what these might mean. This interpretation involves making a (low-level, unconscious) bet. An ambiguous stimulus is often interpreted as an agent, because the potential benefits of doing so outweigh the costs of not inferring an agent when one is in fact present. Guthrie does not think our agency detection is over-sensitive—as later authors who have drawn on his work such as Barrett (2004) propose. Rather, it makes ecological sense to weigh our interpretations of ambiguous phenomena in favor of agency, regardless of whether one is a prey animal or a predator: "it is better for a hiker to mistake a boulder for a bear than to mistake a bear for a boulder" (Guthrie 1993, 6). Still, Guthrie classifies the instances where we take the rustling of leaves in the forest for a spirit as false positives (mistakes). But he believes that the false positives are worth it, all things considered. The most relevant agents in our evolutionary history are other human beings, who can be competitors, friends, enemies, offspring, mates, etc. Thus, the human tendency to discern agency in the environment expresses itself in the form of anthropomorphism. This is why we see faces in the clouds, in plugs, even in slices of pizza. Guthrie's anthropomorphism theory is supported by a wide range of empirical studies, which have further specified how anthropomorphism and religion relate (e.g., Shtulman 2008, Epley et al. 2007).

Though CSR is descriptive rather than normative, Guthrie's account (not unlike other accounts of animism) contains an inherent evaluative assumption: imbuing the environment with agency (especially anthropomorphic agency) is an *error*. However, as Tim Ingold (2006) and David Abram (1997) have noted, the assumption that the default in our environment is *lack* of animacy (rather than animacy) is a philosophically substantial claim. This presumption that no animacy is the default stance, and that our cognitive system imputes agency where there is none is a philosophical assumption that should be explored and justified, rather than merely assumed. Thus, Guthrie's account has normativity baked into it.

Another issue with Guthrie's theory is that we lack an account of how of these perceptual-level dispositions give rise to animistic belief systems across different cultures. After all, people in animistic cultures are not confused. For example, traditionally the Yup'ik (Alaskan Inuit) or the Anishinaabe (Great Lakes, US-Canadian border) perceive other animal species as persons, and these animals are invited to participate in ceremonies. This does not mean that other animals are perceived as on a par with humans. When they are not performing ceremonies, the Yup'ik will not

mistakenly try to interact with non-human animals as if they are human—a bear will be treated with caution rather than courtesy. Rather, the category "person" is extended to include "other-than-human persons" (Hallowell 1960), which incorporate nonhuman animals, plants, and some mineral objects. The cognitive underpinnings of animism may lie in our predilection to detect and favor the interpretation of stimuli as humans, but we need not only cognitive factors, but also cultural learning to explain the range of animistic beliefs in various cultures.

Animism is cross-culturally and geographically widespread. It is ancient in human history. Several lines of evidence point to this fact. First, animistic religions tend to be widespread among Indigenous societies across the world. Peoples et al. (2016) conducted a phylogenetic analysis where they looked at the religious beliefs and practices among 33 hunter-gather societies. They found that animism was present in all societies studied and therefore probably the most ancient religious element, followed by afterlife beliefs and shamanism. Second, we see evidence for animism in paleolithic cave and mobiliary art in Europe, with the depiction of human-animal hybrids such as the lion-man from Höhlenstein Stadel (southwestern Germany) dated to 41,000–39,000 Before Present or the bison-woman from Grotte Chauvet (southeastern France) from around the same period (see De Smedt and De Cruz, 2020, chapter 4 for an overview of religion in the Paleolithic period).

4. Animism as a philosophical stance

Animism can be conceived of as a philosophical stance with universal human cognitive underpinnings. Animistic philosophies are concerned with questions that are fundamental to all forms of human existence, including subsistence, the relationship of humans to their broader environment, the position of humanity in nature, and social relationships with both human and non-human others. Our interactions with other beings and places that make up our environment constitutes who we are and who they are. They also form the condition of our knowledge, as all knowledge ultimately rests on observation (Ingold 2000, 106-108). In this way, our being situated in an environment, and our interactions with that environment constitute us ontologically, epistemologically, and ethically.

The anthropologist Tim Ingold (2016, 15-16) outlines the web of relations between humans and their broader environment, including plants and nonhuman animals, winds, celestial bodies, supernatural beings, and places (mountains, rivers, forests): "these organism-persons [are] not bounded entities but sites of binding, formed of knotted trails whose loose ends spread in all directions, tangling with other trails in other knots to form an ever-extending meshwork." Our world is not something we can ever look at from the outside, but rather something that emerges as a result of our interactions with our environment: "knowledge rests upon observation […] there can be no observation without participation [in the] surrounding currents of activity" (Ingold 2000, 108). Ethics in animistic philosophies always has a strong environmental component because humans do not occupy the world, but inhabit it, and interact with it.

As we have argued earlier (e.g., De Cruz and De Smedt 2015), sophisticated theological ideas often find their basis in stable human cognitive biases and dispositions. For example, the idea that the

universe is designed by agents (e.g., God, or the gods) taps into teleological thinking that things that are complex and functional are made by an agent and serve a purpose (Kelemen 2004). Without any cognitive traction of this sort, religious ideas would not get off the ground, but once they do, they can be philosophically elaborated in various ways.

So, like other religious views, animism has psychological roots and it is also a philosophy, with ontological, epistemological, and ethical commitments. Animistic ontology has presuppositions about what the world is, how it is constituted, and how humans fit within this picture. Different forms of animism have their own ontological views and commitments, but they share the "interpenetration of the qualities of the personal with the natural in the creation of the supernatural" (Winkelman 2013, 93). Animistic epistemology examines how we, as finite human knowers, can gain knowledge about our environment which is always suffused with the personal. This epistemology is relational—we recognize a sense of "felt presence," the "sense of self in the unknown other" (Winkelman 2002, 75). Once we have knowledge of our surroundings, we are in a position to know how to relate to our environment with its interrelated beings (animals, plants, supernatural beings, but also rivers, mountains, and other geographical entities). Animistic philosophies thus always have a prominent environmental ethical component, with attention for the preservation of the environment and respect for ecological relationships (Cajete 2000).

In the remainder of this section we examine two examples of animistic worldviews to give a sense of the rich philosophical underpinnings of animism. The term "animism" has come back into use after a long period of disuse. As we have seen, in its older, cultural evolutionist sense, animism was used to describe a kind of cognitive default: animistic thinking was seen as a childlike, mistaken propensity to impute agency into the environment, for example, one's car doesn't start, one gets upset and thinks that the vehicle is being headstrong. The implicit idea was that animists (often Indigenous peoples, but also young children) were ontologically confused about agency. However, Ingold (2006) argues that animism as a religious system is *not* about imputing agency to things that are really socially inert or lack agency. Rather, animism is a philosophical stance with a distinct phenomenological character of

> being alive to the world, characterised by a heightened sensitivity and responsiveness, in perception and action, to an environment that is always in flux, never the same from one moment to the next. Animacy, then, is not a property of persons imaginatively projected onto the things with which they perceive themselves to be surrounded… it is the dynamic, transformative potential of the entire field of relations within which beings of all kinds, more or less person-like or thing-like, continually and reciprocally bring one another into existence. The animacy of the lifeworld, in short, is not the result of an infusion of spirit into substance, or of agency into materiality, but is rather ontologically prior to their differentiation (Ingold 2006, 10).

Arguably, seeing the world as something fundamentally inanimate and impersonal onto which people then "project" animacy is also a philosophical position, one common in western cultures, which one might call *inanimism*, following Bruno Latour (2010), or naturalism, following Philippe

Descola (2005). Inanimism is not unproblematic: seeing the world as by default inanimate and without thought gives rise to a range of seemingly insurmountable philosophical puzzles, such as the problem of consciousness (how can consciousness arise out of unconscious matter?) and the problem of how life arose in a lifeless universe. These puzzles arise because of the philosophical position we have assumed. Adopting inanimism as a default stance also fundamentally changes one's perception of the world, as does animism. The philosopher and environmental activist David Abram (1997) explains how an animistic attitude slowly began to alter how he perceived the world when he learned

> of the intelligence that lurks in nonhuman nature, the ability that an alien form of sentience has to echo one's own, to instill a reverberation in oneself that temporarily shatters habitual ways of seeing and feeling, leaving one open to a world all alive, awake, and aware (Abram 1997, 19).

Because animism is so distinct from inanimism, and therefore might strike many as unfamiliar, it may be tempting to make sweeping generalizations about the philosophy of animistic thought, but it is important to bear in mind that animistic religious systems differ from one another in their philosophical outlook. Animism is not a monolithic religious tradition: animistic cultures have different animistic beliefs and practices. The latter may include depicting human/nonhuman hybrids and shamanic rituals. In this respect, it is more correct to say there are different animisms. We will here focus on two brief case studies to show how different, while at the same time similar, animisms can be, and what their philosophical suppositions are. In this way, we make the case for philosophy of religion to expand its vision to encompass a wider range of traditions, including animistic traditions.

4.1 Kincentric ecology of the Rarámuri

The Rarámuri are an Indigenous culture in Mexico. They have lived on the Sierra Madres Occidental for over 2,000 years. Their population density is quite high, even though they live in a mountainous area. The Rarámuri practice selective burning of oak trees on mountain plateaus, where they allow the vegetation to regenerate after burnt patches have been used as bean fields. This prevents the soil from becoming depleted. Moreover, it helps to guard against forest fires. As a result, the ecology of the area that the Rarámuri tend is a diverse patchwork of oak trees and smaller plants, with a high diversity of both fauna and flora (LaRochelle & Berkes 2003). Central to their way of life is a philosophical attitude that the ethnobotanist and anthropologist Enrique Salmón terms *kincentric ecology*:

> Indigenous people in North America are aware that life in any environment is viable only when humans view their surroundings as kin; that their mutual roles are essential for their survival. To many traditional indigenous people, this awareness comes after years of listening to and recalling stories about the land (Salmón 2000, 1327).

The various creatures with which the Rarámuri engage, including those they hunt, cultivate, and eat, are considered kin. Like the Yup'ik mentioned earlier, Rarámuri are not confused about biology. Rather, kincentric ecology is a sophisticated set of philosophical notions, in which the concept of *iwígara* is central.

> *Iwígara* is the total interconnectedness and integration of all life in the Sierra Madres, physical and spiritual. To say *iwígara* to a Rarámuri calls on that person to realize life in all its forms. The person recalls the beginning of Rarámuri life, origins, and relationships to animals, plants, the place of nurturing, and the entities to which the Rarámuri look for guidance (Salmón 2000, 1328).

Iwígara is tied up intimately with traditional knowledge of plants, especially medicinal plants that appear on the cleared patches of oak forest after the land is allowed to regenerate following the bean harvest. Because the plants are kin to humans, knowledge about them is comprehensive— this not only contains knowledge about the concrete usage (in diet, technology, or medicine), but also about when they flower, what shape the berries might take, and ecological relationships to other plants. This knowledge is often transmitted in stories (Salmón 2020).

The relationship of humans and the rest of the cosmos is a fundamental pillar of Mesoamerican Indigenous thought, captured in their cosmovision (Robles-Zamorra 2021). Cosmovision is the ontological view that humans are a part of a larger cosmic whole, which consists of three closely interrelated aspects of reality (human, natural, and spiritual). There is no meaningful or clear division between these aspects. Rather, our natural and spiritual environments structure and provide conditions for our cultural practices, in this way shaping customs such as hunting, planting, weeding, harvesting, and predicting the weather. It also includes traditions that stress the interrelation with ancestors and spirits such as the *Día de los Muertos,* which yearly celebrates the connection between the living and the dead. The philosopher Alfredo Robles-Zamora (2021) notes that this cosmovision has been a feature of Mesoamerican thought for at least two millennia, and has survived the Christian missionization. It still shapes the practical lives of Indigenous peoples in the region today. The Rarámuri further emphasize the continuity between human and nonhuman kin by seeing a continuous cycle of rebirths where humans can be reborn in nonhuman form, and vice versa (Salmón 2000).

4.2 The significance of the Land and its people for Inuktitut-speaking Inuit

Considering nonhuman others as kin is one philosophical form of animism. A different animistic philosophy can be found among speakers of Inuktitut languages in the Canadian arctic. In spite of large changes in subsistence economy over the past decades Inuit communities value a deep engagement with and immersion in the Land (*Nuna*). The *Nuna* is an uncanny, not to be dominated or even knowable shifting mass of ice and unexpected weather conditions with migrating animals in which humans are just one of many elements. They cannot impose human made order on this. Inuit cosmology has three elements that also influence how humans are perceived. First, water (the open sea) is the prime source of sustenance (for the Inuit, sea mammals); it is associated with the basic qualities of animal life. In the philosophical anthropology of the Inuit, water (or the open

sea) stands for the stuff of life common to animals and humans. Second, the *Nuna* is the middle point of the cosmological structure. It is populated with animals such as polar bears that are an important symbol of balance. In Inuit philosophical anthropology, *Nuna* stands for human awareness and our potentiality to do things—in Inuit languages *inua* (also the root for the word "Inuit"). This lies either dormant in us, or is made manifest by the situations we find ourselves in. Third, sky (*sila*, breath) is the impersonal and imperishable part of life, or life-breath, which each creature borrows for a while from the sky and then returns after death. Each living being that contains a life-breath gets reincarnated in other things of its kind. Thus, the idea of human personhood is intimately linked to Inuit cosmology, specifically to their triune concept of water-land-sky. These are not just forces in their ecology, but also in the psychology of individual persons. The balance and interaction between these three elements creates a person, this includes both human and other-than-human persons (Qitsualik 2013).

When one is feeling psychologically unwell, as when one feels depressed, stressed, or is unsure what direction to take in one's life, one goes out and camps, fishes, traps, and hunts for some time on the *Nuna* (including the sea) as a way to reconnect. A common expression is *nunamii'luni quvianaqtuq*—"it is a happy moment to be on the land" (Robertson & Ljubicic 2019).

Engagement with the *Nuna* is not only a prerequisite for physical and mental health, it is also regarded as essential for moral growth and cultivation. Traditional subsistence techniques such as hunting and fishing require prudence, taking calculated risks, and flexibly deploying reasoning skills, as well as knowledge about the weather, land, ice and snow conditions, and animal behavior (Searles 2010). The yields of fishing, hunting, and trapping – called "country food" – are often shared with older, less mobile members of the community, which helps to cultivate generosity, an important aspect of traditional hunter-gatherer morality (Collings 2001). The *Nuna* and its nonhuman occupants are thus tied into Inuit philosophy in a very practical way, namely as essential for human flourishing and wellbeing: "feelings of emotional wellness and wholeness [come] from being able to spend time on the land: in short, 'the land enriches the soul'." (Wilcox et al. 2013, 22).

The Inuit novelist and anthropologist Rachel Attituq Qitsualik (2013) describes the animistic beliefs of Inuit communities as seeing non-anthropomorphic agency and life as the default. Unlike the Rarámuri, who achieve a sense of interconnectedness with other beings by considering them kin, Inuktitut speakers see the *Nuna* as ultimately unfathomable and surprising. The Land and its boundaries are sovereign and require respect. It is the absence of human-made order, not something to be subdued or overcome by humans. Rather, as the default state of nature it has its own balance, and humans have to be mindful not to upset this balance when interacting with the *Nuna* and its nonhuman coinhabitants. Inuit negotiate the boundaries between their world and the Land with an eye toward sustainability, and for young Inuit to engage with the Land is to learn this embodied philosophy first-hand, through concrete, physical interactions.

5. Implications for the philosophy of religion

The two case studies in section 4 give a glimpse of the ontological, epistemic, and ethical attitudes that underlie Indigenous animistic philosophies and their relationship to concrete subsistence practices. At this point, one may wonder what the relevance of these Indigenous philosophies could be for philosophy of religion, as the latter is not typically concerned with subsistence or ecological sustainability. However, since the publication of Lynn White Jr's influential paper "The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis" there is an increasing recognition that philosophical presuppositions do have a profound influence on subsistence. To briefly recap, White argued that the roots of the ecological crisis (already a point of discussion in the 1960s) are not only technological (e.g., too much CO_2 being pumped into the atmosphere), but are fundamentally philosophical views that underlie the exploitation of nature. Technology does not float free from societal and philosophical ideas. White argued: "Human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny—that is, by religion. To Western eyes this is very evident in, say, India or Ceylon. It is equally true of ourselves" (1967, 1205). In White's view, the exploitation of nature by westerners predates the Industrial Revolution (though the latter exacerbated it), and goes back to the theological notion of human exceptionalism. Created in God's image, and having dominion over nature (Genesis 1: 26-28), Christians feel self-licensed to "exploit nature for [their] proper ends" (1967, 1205). After all, it is God's will. White sees the turning point of this situation in the destruction of European pagan animism by Christian proselytizers in the early Middle Ages: "By destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects" (1205).

It is interesting to note that CSR provides some measure of support for White's idea that being a Christian reduces animistic thought. Several studies have found not only an absence of relationship between religiosity (often Christianity, as the participants in these studies are all too often North American undergraduates) and animism, but also a negative correlation. For example, Willard et al. (2020) found that Christians show a reduced tendency to anthropomorphize their environment compared to non-religious people: conceiving of a monotheistic God makes it harder to see agency in the environment. White's paper has generated a huge literature. In particular, a number of authors (e.g., Carroll et al. 1997/2016) have explored the competing hypothesis that Christianity can also promote care and stewardship for nature. However, as Taylor et al. (2016) show through a large analysis of quantitative studies, Abrahamic religions tend to promote destructive and anthropocentric environmental attitudes, whereas Indigenous religions are more likely to promote pro-environmental attitudes.

The focus on justification and rationality of theistic (often Christian) beliefs leaves a wide range of topics in the philosophy of religion unexplored. There are various reasons for why philosophy of religion is skewed in this way. One important contributing factor is probably the demographic composition of the philosophy profession in western departments, combined with self-selection. Western philosophers are predominantly white and male (though gender and ethnic diversity is slowly improving), and atheism predominates. The percentage of theistic philosophers outside of philosophy of religion is around 15% (De Cruz 2017, Bourget and Chalmers 2014). Among philosophers of religion Christianity is the most common religious affiliation; estimations range between 60.5% and 72.3% (see e.g., De Cruz 2017, Bourget and Chalmers 2014). Analytic philosophers tend to think of their discipline as exploring ideas unrelated to personal lived

experience. Yet, it is sociologically unsurprising that philosophers would explore philosophical positions that are close to their personal beliefs, and indeed, qualitative analysis (De Cruz 2018) confirms this.

There might be a less epistemically innocent explanation for the lack of diversity in topics in philosophy of religion, which tracks Thi Nguyen's (2020) distinction between epistemic bubbles and echo chambers. Members of epistemic bubbles lack exposure to alternative sources of information and viewpoints. Philosophy of religion as practiced at western philosophy departments is an epistemic bubble: a place where Christianity is accorded a high prima facie credibility, due to the demographic composition of the field. Other beliefs are tolerated to the extent that they are philosophically and religiously similar (e.g., Judaism and Islam).

However, something more nefarious may be taking place. Members of epistemic echo chambers are in a position where other voices are actively undermined and discredited. Within philosophy of religion, Christian theism and naturalistic atheism are often posited as the only positions (e.g., Peterson 2014; this paper is chosen at random, many others fit the bill), excluding other views from the realm of possibilities, and even from philosophy. In this way, animism ends up being not properly part of philosophy. Most of the literature on animistic philosophy is published not in philosophical journals, but in journals for anthropology and (human) ecology. The delineation of what philosophy is, is not just some intellectual exercise of definitions: it influences which topics get published and which do not, and ultimately, who gets to stay in academia (working at a university) and who doesn't (Dotson 2013). So, one's definition of what philosophy is has an important gatekeeping function. When one of the authors of this paper became an editor of the *Journal of Analytic Theology*, the editorial team received an email by a well-known philosopher of religion who bluntly stated that he would stop reading the journal if it started publishing papers on paganism (a blanket term that includes animism). If a topic does not fit the unwritten standards of what is philosophy of religion, it is not merely deemed "bad philosophy," but rather, not philosophy at all. This is not unique to philosophy of religion. The culture of justification played in the past, for example, Descartes was decried as "not philosophy" by the Scholastics, and nowadays analytic and continental philosophy "[have grown] apart and developed separately from one another, leading eventually to a kind of *détente*, although one based largely on mutual ignorance" (Moran 2010, 236).

To achieve a more inclusive philosophy of religion, we might use one of the following strategies. A first strategy is to shift the burden of proof away from unconventional, underrepresented philosophy of religion to standard philosophy of religion, and to argue that only philosophy of religion that engages with the full range of religious beliefs and practices is worthy of the name. However, a second strategy, at once more modest and more radical, suggests we question the culture of justification within philosophy; we ought not to be too concerned with gatekeeping or about what counts as "proper" philosophy of religion, but be more inclusive. As we have seen in the previous sections, expanding philosophy of religion to incorporate Indigenous animistic religions offers us some scope to think more about issues that have not received sufficient attention in philosophy of religion, such as the relationship between religion and the environment,

or the way in which contemporary existential threats such as overexploitation of resources relate to practical philosophical principles, allowing philosophy of religion to play on a larger stage.

6. Conclusion

In this chapter, we have examined animism as a philosophically rich religious attitude that offers scope to expand the philosophy of religion. We have shown that animism rests on cognitive biases that make it an intuitive option, though, like other religious systems, animisms need cultural elaboration. Cultural elaboration requires philosophical presuppositions to ground the ontological, epistemic, and ethical aspects of animistic thinking. Philosophers of religion can not only broaden their toolkit significantly, they can also expand the range of problems they investigate (e.g., ecological deterioration) by considering animisms within the scope of philosophy of religion.

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