

The background of the cover is a dark blue field filled with numerous bright, white-to-light-blue light trails. These trails are mostly vertical, with some horizontal and diagonal streaks, creating a sense of dynamic movement and energy, similar to a long-exposure photograph of city lights or a particle detector.

Philosophical Explorations of New and Alternative Religious Movements

Edited by
Morgan Luck



PHILOSOPHICAL EXPLORATIONS OF NEW AND ALTERNATIVE RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS

This book is the first collection of philosophical essays, by a team of international authors, focusing on new and alternative religious movements. The book begins with an examination of the definition of new religious movements, before offering an introduction to, and an analysis of, core beliefs held by particular movements. Contributors offer an analysis of one or more of the core tenets of the religious movement, providing readers with both an insight into the group and the methodology of philosophy of religion.

For Hayley

Philosophical Explorations of New and Alternative Religious Movements

Edited by

MORGAN LUCK
Charles Sturt University, Australia

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2012 by Ashgate Publishing

Published 2016 by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

Copyright © Morgan Luck 2012

Morgan Luck has asserted his right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as the editor of this work.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Notice:

Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Philosophical explorations of new and alternative religious movements.

1. Cults.

I. Luck, Morgan.

209–dc23

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Philosophical explorations of new and alternative religious movements /

[edited by] Morgan Luck.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4094-0653-2 (hardcover)

1. Religions. 2. Religion--Philosophy. I. Luck, Morgan, 1976–

BL80.3.P45 2011

299°.93–dc23

2011045499

ISBN 9781409406532 (hbk)

ISBN 9781315600390 (ebk)

Contents

<i>List of Contributors</i>	<i>vii</i>
<i>Acknowledgement</i>	<i>xi</i>
1 Philosophy and New and Alternative Religious Movements: Should They Be Introduced? <i>Morgan Luck</i>	1
2 New Religious Movements: How Should New Religious Movements Be Defined? <i>George D. Chryssides</i>	11
3 Religious Naturalism: Does Religion Require the Supernatural? <i>Beverley Clack and Dan O'Brien</i>	31
4 New Atheism: Is New Atheism a New Religious Movement? <i>John Bishop</i>	45
5 The Word of Faith Movement: Are We All Little Gods? <i>Andrew Fisher</i>	61
6 A Guru-Disciple Tradition: Can Religious Conversion be Non-cognitive? <i>Michaelis Michael and John Paul Healy</i>	77
7 Scientology: What Is the Relationship between the Supreme Being, Thetans and the Cosmos? <i>Brian D. Smith</i>	97
8 Raelianism: What Is the 'Central' Raelian Argument for the Non-existence of God? <i>Morgan Luck</i>	111

vi	<i>Philosophical Explorations of New and Alternative Religious Movements</i>	
9	Mormonism: Is the Mormon Concept of God Problematic? <i>Wylie Breckenridge</i>	125
10	Digital Theology: Is the Resurrection Virtual? <i>Eric Steinhart</i>	133
11	The Arica School: Towards a Logic of Unity? <i>Andrew J. Dell'Olio</i>	153
	<i>Index</i>	175

List of Contributors

JOHN BISHOP is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Auckland, New Zealand. He is the author of *Natural Agency* (Cambridge University Press, 1989) and *Believing by Faith* (Oxford University Press, 2007) and journal articles in the areas of philosophy of religion and philosophy of action.

WYLIE BRECKENRIDGE is a lecturer in philosophy at Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga. He specializes in philosophy of language, metaphysics and epistemology. He did his graduate work at Oxford, then spent some time as a postdoctoral fellow at Cornell before returning to Australia.

GEORGE D. CHRYSIDIS studied philosophy and theology at the University of Glasgow, and gained his doctorate from the University of Oxford. He taught philosophy and religious studies at various British universities, becoming Head of Religious Studies at the University of Wolverhampton, England in 2001, a post which he held until 2008. He is currently Honorary Research Fellow in Contemporary Religion at the University of Birmingham.

George Chryssides has studied new religions since the mid-1980s and written extensively on them. His books include *The Advent of Sun Myung Moon* (1991), *The Elements of Unitarianism* (1998), *Exploring New Religions* (1999), *Historical Dictionary of New Religious Movements* (2001), *A to Z of New Religious Movements* (2006), *A Reader in New Religious Movements* (2006, co-edited with Margaret Z. Wilkins), *The Study of Religion* (2007, with Ron A. Geaves), *Historical Dictionary of Jehovah's Witnesses* (2008), *Christianity Today* (2010) and *Heaven's Gate* (2011, edited).

He has acted as consultant on new religious movements to the United Reformed Church in England, and he served for several years as chair of the board for the Centre for the Study of New Religious Movements at Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham, England.

BEVERLEY CLACK is Professor in the Philosophy of Religion at Oxford Brookes University. Her publications include *Feminist Philosophy of Religion: Critical Readings*, co-edited with Pamela Sue Anderson (2004); *Sex and Death: A Reappraisal of Human Mortality* (2002); *Misogyny in the Western Philosophical*

Tradition (1999); and *The Philosophy of Religion*, co-authored with Brian R. Clack in 1998 (a fully revised second edition of this book was published in 2008). She was recently involved in the ESRC-funded Seminar Series ‘Changing Notions of the Human Subject: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Emotional Well-being and Social Justice in Education Policy and Practice’, and is currently working on the application of psychoanalytic theory to the philosophy of religion.

ANDREW J. DELL’OLIO is Professor and Chair of the Department of Philosophy and Director of the Program in Asian Studies at Hope College in Holland, Michigan (USA). He received his BA from Rutgers College and his MA, M.Phil. and Ph.D. from Columbia University. He studied with Oscar Ichazo and the Arica Institute from 1982 to 1986. He has published numerous articles in the philosophy of religion and ethics, and is the author of *Foundations of Moral Selfhood* (2003) and co-editor (with Caroline J. Simon) of *Introduction to Ethics: A Reader* (2010). His current research interests include the comparative philosophy of moral self-cultivation and the history of religious philosophy in the twentieth century.

ANDREW FISHER has been a lecturer in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Nottingham since 2004. He lectures in a diverse range of subjects to all levels of students, including postgraduates. Fisher specializes in metaethics and has an increasing interest in the philosophy of education. He has published three books and a number of articles. Fisher is the Director of Teaching for the Faculty of Arts, the School of Humanities E-learning Coordinator and a Senior Tutor. He has a Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education and an MA in Higher Education. He is a member of the Society for Christian Philosophers.

JOHN PAUL HEALY is a Lecturer in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Charles Sturt University, New South Wales, Australia. John is the author of *Yearning to Belong: Discovering a New Religious Movement*, which explores Hindu-based guru–disciple traditions in the West. Most of John’s work has focused on the tradition of Siddha Yoga and its schismatic groups. His main interest has been conversion and recent work focuses on the life and culture of various New Religious Movements.

MORGAN LUCK is a senior lecturer in philosophy at Charles Sturt University and a senior fellow of the Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics (CAPPE). Morgan has degrees in several disciplines including Cultural and Media Studies, Screen Production and Religious Studies. He completed his MA and Ph.D. in Philosophy at the University of Nottingham and a PGCE in Religious Education at

the University of Cambridge. His areas of research include philosophy of religion, metaphysics and ethics.

MICHAELIS MICHAEL graduated from Monash University in Melbourne with a B.Sc. (Hons) in Zoology and an MA (prelim) in Philosophy. He worked for a time at the Monash Centre for Bioethics before going on to do his Ph.D. in Philosophy at Princeton University. He now works at the University of New South Wales. His published work spans numerous areas of philosophy, including human rights, bioethics, formal logic, philosophy of language, metaphysics and the history of philosophy.

DAN O'BRIEN is a Senior Lecturer in Philosophy at Oxford Brookes University, an Honorary Research Fellow at Birmingham University and an Associate Lecturer at the Open University. He has previously taught at the universities of Birmingham, Warwick and Keele. He is the author of *An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge* (Polity, 2006), *Hume's Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding: Reader's Guide* (Continuum, 2007; with A. Bailey), and *Philosophy for Everyone: Gardening* (Blackwell, 2010, edited). At Brookes, Dan teaches modules on the Philosophy of Religion, Epistemology, the Philosophy of Mind and the Philosophy of Science. His current research focuses on David Hume's philosophy of religion and on the epistemology of testimony and trust. Forthcoming works include *Hume's Complete Writings on Religion* (Broadview, edited) and *The Continuum Companion to Hume* (with A. Bailey).

BRIAN D. SMITH is the Vice President of Academics and Assistant Professor of Theology at Florida Christian College in Kissimmee, Florida, USA. He received his BA from Florida Christian College (2003) with a double major in Bible and Christian Ministry, his MA in Contemporary Christian Theology and Philosophy from the Seminary of Lincoln Christian University (2005), and his Ph.D. in Theology at the University of Exeter (England).

Brian grew up at Southside Christian Church in Fort Pierce, Florida, which ordained him for ministry in 2003. He has served the churches as a youth, associate and preaching minister in a mixture of interim, part-time and full-time roles. He continues to serve the churches through supply preaching and presenting seminars relating to his academic interests.

Brian began service as Registrar at FCC in 2003, began teaching in 2005, and was promoted to the position of Associate Dean of Academics in 2007 and became Associate Dean of Academics and Institutional Effectiveness in 2009. On 1 June 2011, he was appointed Vice President of Academics by the President and Board of Trustees. He teaches traditional, adult degree completion, and online courses

in the areas of theology, philosophy, Bible, world religions and contemporary religious movement (new and alternative religions). He is a full member of the Evangelical Theological Society and regularly contributes to the work of the *Stone-Campbell Journal*.

ERIC STEINHART is a Professor of Philosophy at William Paterson University. He works primarily on metaphysics using contemporary analytical and logical methods and tools. He received his BS in Computer Science from the Pennsylvania State University in 1983, after which he worked as a software designer for several years. Some of his algorithms have been patented. He earned an MA in Philosophy from Boston College . He was awarded the Ph.D. in Philosophy from SUNY at Stony Brook in 1996, winning the first ‘Distinguished Dissertation’ award given to any Humanities student in the history of the university. His past work has concerned Nietzsche as well as metaphor (analysed using possible worlds semantics). He has written extensively on the metaphysics and computation. He is increasingly interested in the philosophy of religion, focusing on the intersection of mathematics and theology, and naturalized versions of classical resurrection theories. He also likes New York City, New England, mountain hiking, all sorts of biking, chess, microscopy and photography.

Acknowledgement

My thanks to Lisbet Fernández (www.lisbetfernandez.com) for allowing me to display the image of her sculpture *Camino*s on the front cover of this book. And to Michael Cavén (www.flickr.com/photos/mcaven) for permitting me to use his photograph of this sculpture.

This page has been left blank intentionally

Chapter 1

Philosophy and New and Alternative Religious Movements: Should They Be Introduced?

Morgan Luck

A Personal Statement of Faith?

If you are a stranger to rejection letters from academic journals, then the chances are you are not an academic. In brief, when an academic submits their research paper to a journal, in the hope that their paper will be published, sometimes they receive a letter from the editor of said journal explaining why their hopes have been misplaced. Usually such letters can be quite insightful and helpful (for, by informing you what was wrong with your paper, they help you avoid such mistakes in the future). However, I must admit to having been somewhat befuddled upon receiving the following letter from a well-known multidisciplinary journal in the area of new and/or alternative religious movements (or NARMs):¹

Dear Morgan,

I am writing regarding your research note on ‘Aliens and Atheism: The Central Raelian Argument for the Non-existence of God’, which you submitted to the *Journal of XXXXX*.

We have received virtually instant referee feedback. Your research note is not recommended for publication. The main reasons for this is that the text shows no signs of an in-depth study of Rael’s ‘atheistic’ philosophy and that it is a personal statement of faith rather than a piece of academic work.

If you have any questions, please let me know.

Best wishes,

XXXXX

¹ Please note that I am deliberately not attempting to define NARMs in this introduction. This is largely because George D. Chryssides focuses upon this issue in Chapter 2.

The paper in question was an earlier (but largely similar) version of the paper included in this collection (now entitled ‘Raelianism: What is the “Central” Raelian Argument for the Non-existence of God?’). In this paper I critique a particular argument for the non-existence of God presented by a NARM known as Raelianism (which is an atheistic religion). The source of my befuddlement was the claim that the paper was ‘a personal statement of faith rather than a piece of academic work’. In this introduction I wish to explore some of the possible reasons this comment may have been made, and then explain why this experience motivated me to produce this collection.

One Possible Explanation of the Reviewer’s Comment

My first guess as to how the reviewer had arrived at the conclusion that my paper was a personal statement of faith was that they were thinking along the following lines:

1. The paper critiques an argument against theism.
2. Anyone who critiques an argument against theism is a theist.

Therefore,

3. The paper is a reflection of the author’s faith in theism.

The conclusion to this argument, if true, would come as something of shock, as I’ve never considered myself a theist.

Although I am conscious that this may sound like sour grapes, I am quite sure this argument is not a good one. It is entirely possible for someone to critique an argument for a conclusion they believe is true. For example, although I believe apples are edible, I would critique any argument that suggested they are edible because they are really bananas in disguise. What is more, within philosophy of religion it is not at all uncommon for atheists to be critical of arguments for atheism, or for that matter, theists to be critical of arguments for theism. I suspected there was a better explanation of the reviewer’s comment.

A Second Possible Explanation of the Reviewer’s Comment

I reported this incident to a colleague in the field of religious studies, who was able to offer an alternative explanation of the incident. During the 1970s, he explained, most people in the western world were very wary of NARMs or, as they

were often called then, ‘cults’. In one respect this was quite understandable, for at the time the popular image of a ‘cult’ involved such activities as brainwashing, mind control, sexual abuse and mass suicide. Since then many academics (but by no means all (Zablocki, 1997; Zimbardo, 1997; Singer, 2003)) take such reports of brainwashing and mind control to be largely unfounded (Richardson, 2003), and, although instances of sexual abuse and mass suicide do occur, they do so in only a very small minority of these groups. Nevertheless, as a result of this popular image, NARMs were the subject of over-inflated criticism – perhaps most notably from the Christian counter-cult movement. In view of this, many academics (most especially sociologists) have been working hard to redress this imbalance.

Given that my paper was critical of a NARM, my colleague explained, it might appear to some to be a throwback to a period where Christians (predominantly) criticized NARMs. This might explain the suggestion that my paper was the work of someone of presumably religious faith. The thought would be as follows:

1. In the past, the group most critical of NARMs were Christians.
2. This paper is critical of a NARM.

Therefore,

3. The paper is a reflection of the author’s faith in Christianity.

Although I certainly understand this inference, I’m not sure it does the reviewer’s comment justice either. For even if it were true that I was Christian, this wouldn’t necessarily make my paper a statement of faith. There must be something else the reviewer had in mind when making the comment.

A Third Possible Explanation of the Reviewer’s Comment

Perhaps it was not religious faith that the reviewer was referring to, but faith in the particular type of reasoning I adopted to critique the Raelians. This line of thought is quite pronounced within postmodernism, a post-enlightenment project that questions the objectivity of social ‘facts’. And postmodernism has been especially influential in the field of sociology, where NARMs tend to be most commonly studied.

It would not be unusual, my colleague explained, for someone influenced by postmodernism to be hostile to the underlying logic, or way of thinking, that fuelled my critique of the Raelian argument against theism. This is because certain postmodernists hold that this way of thinking, or ‘meta-narrative’, may be no more

legitimate than alternatives that find the Raelian argument to be perfectly good. ‘All such claims to objectivity and truth’, as Hicks reports (2004, p. 16), ‘can be deconstructed.’ In other words, although the norms of reasoning I used to evaluate the Raelian argument may find it wanting, there may be other legitimate norms that do not. This provides us with an alternative explanation as to why my paper might be ‘a personal statement of faith’:

1. The paper assumes certain western norms of reasoning are true.
2. No single type of reasoning can be demonstrated to be true.

Therefore,

3. The paper is a reflection of the author’s faith in western norms of reasoning.

This seems a much more robust explanation of the reviewer’s comment. I was indeed guilty of assuming a particular standard of reasoning in my criticism of the Raelian argument (in fact, the Raelians themselves seem to assume the same western/scientific norms). However, this will be true of nearly every analytical philosopher of religion; for such philosophers are usually happy to admit that their work assumes certain norms of reasoning hold. Perhaps then, the comment had less to do with my paper per se, and more to do with a tension between postmodernism and analytical philosophy.

A Fourth Possible Explanation of the Reviewer’s Comment

Another possible reason why a postmodernist might be hostile towards my critique of the Raelian argument is because this type of critique, my colleague informed me, might be seen as unjust and thus un-academic. This is because my paper builds upon a dominant power structure (that is, western standards of argumentation) to further marginalize a minority group (that is, the Raelians). ‘Reason and power’, as Jean-François Lyotard states (1984, p. 11), ‘are one and the same.’

My paper, my colleague explained, may appear to be contrary to the principles of postmodern education (albeit an extreme version of), which suggests academics should attack the dominant paradigm (which in this case would be theism) rather than critique an already persecuted minority. As Hicks reports (2004, p. 18), some postmodernists hold that education

should focus on the achievements of non-whites, females and the poor; it should highlight the historical crimes of whites, males, and the rich; and it should teach children that science’s method has no better claim to yielding truth than any

other method and, accordingly, that students should be equally receptive to alternative ways of knowing.

If the reviewer shared this commitment, it may be understandable that my paper could be viewed as ‘a personal statement of faith rather than a piece of academic work’. The argument would be as follows:

1. The paper critiques a marginalized group.
2. Any paper that critiques a marginalized group further marginalizes it, and so is not a piece of academic work.

Therefore,

3. The paper is not a piece of academic work.

However, there is more than one way for a NARM to be further marginalized.

One way to further marginalize NARMs might be for philosophers of religion to harshly scrutinize them in much the same way many of them already analyse Judeo-Christian theism. Another is by not scrutinizing them in this fashion at all. Philosophers of religion, in particular analytical philosophers, rarely focus their attention on NARMs. Rather, their attention is for the most part on Judeo-Christian theism. This is hardly surprising given the central place of this type of theism within western philosophy, and the number of people in the world who adhere to it. What is more, many philosophers of religion focus upon Judeo-Christian theism because they take it to be, at least when compared to alternative religious worldviews, the most likely to be true (this may hold even if the philosopher in question is an atheist). The practical upshot is that NARMs could be considered as being further marginalized as a result of philosophers not bothering to scrutinize them – they are just not taken seriously enough to be worth the effort.

So, given the postmodernist’s commitment to not further marginalizing minority groups, what should philosophers of religion do? Take NARMs seriously enough to critique them? Or not critique them for fear of further marginalization? On this occasion, I follow Oscar Wilde in his suggestion that there is ‘only one thing in life worse than being talked about, and that is not being talked about’. In other words, I am denying premise 2 of the above argument – sometimes the critiquing of a marginalized group should be viewed as an act of inclusion, rather than an instance of further marginalization.

Of course, all this is mere conjecture; the reviewer may have had completely different motivations for the comment. Nevertheless, it does provide a useful segue to the rationale behind this collection of papers.

Getting Involved

Most academics who study NARMs are sociologists. And sociologists and philosophers have very different projects. It may be usual for sociologists to describe what members of NARMs believe. They might also describe the arguments used to support those beliefs. However, it would be less common for them to critique these arguments and pronounce them good or bad. Yet this type of activity commonly occurs within philosophy.

This difference in projects leads to an interesting problem. If most philosophers of religion are not interested in NARMs, and most academics interested in NARMs are not interested in philosophy of religion, who might be interested in the kind of research typified by my paper? One somewhat oblique answer is that perhaps my paper, and the others like it gathered together in this collection, might help to generate this interest. A second, less oblique answer is that perhaps the adherents of NARMs themselves might welcome such attention.

The continual lack of attention given to NARMs by philosophers of religion is regrettable, as both philosophers and adherents to such religions have much to gain from each other. Philosophers are able to offer adherents a systematic means of scrutinizing the central tenets of their own religion, identifying major concerns, clarifying difficult concepts and developing rigorous apologetics; whilst religious adherents offer philosophers an abundance of new and often ingenious arguments for the truth of religious claims. It seems that a robust cross-fertilization is long overdue. Consequently, the aim of this collection is to illustrate to philosophers of religion, those interested in NARMs, and adherents of such movements, what such an engagement might look like.

The Papers

So what would a philosophy exploration of NARMs be like? In this collection a number of different approaches to the topic have been offered – which I shall now outline.

George D. Chryssides, in his paper ‘New Religious Movements: How Should New Religious Movements Be Defined?’, looks at what it is to be a new religious movement. He concludes that it is doubtful whether the category, as it is currently conceived, has much coherence.

Beverly Clack and Dan O’Brien, in their paper ‘Religious Naturalism: Does Religion Require the Supernatural?’, examine those religious worldviews that do not entail the supernatural, such as pantheism or some forms of paganism.