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What I'm reading

The anthropology of ontology (religious science?)

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Through engagement with a range of recent publications, this article offers a mini-ethnography of wonder discourses in the anthropology of ontology, leading to a rethink of the concept of religion. It has sometimes been suggested that science and religion are antithetical orientations to the experience of wonder: whereas science seeks to banish wonder by replacing it with knowledge, religion remains open to wonder in the face of the unknowable. With this criterion of difference in view, this article identifies certain trends in the anthropology of ontology that appear to enjoin and pursue open-ended wonder in ways that might be read as constituting anthropology as religious science. This coincidence of supposed opposites recommends, I conclude, a relational account of religion.

Since roughly the 1990s, a growing number of anthropologists have become interested in the study of ontology – the investigation and theorization of diverse experiences and understandings of the nature of being itself.[1] This generally takes the form of ethnographic accounts of indigenous non-Western modes and models of being, presented in more or less explicit contrast with aspects of a Euro-American or modern ontology imputed to conventional anthropology. This anthropological study of ontology is not a unified subfield, however. As I have sought to trace out in other contexts (Scott 2007: 3-5; in press), anthropological approaches to questions of being have emerged and continue to develop under many unintegrated rubrics, including: phenomenological anthropology, the new animism, the study of personhood and sociality, post-humanism, perspectival anthropology, and the 'ontological turn'. These diverse approaches in no way constitute a self-conscious movement; nevertheless, in order to highlight the often unrecognized affinities among them, I will refer to them all collectively as the anthropology of ontology.[2]

The central observation I wish to make is that something arguably religious runs through much of this anthropology of ontology. This type of anthropology is not only an aspect of the anthropology *of* religion; it is often also the anthropology of religion *as* religion – a new kind of religious study of religion. My agenda here is to elaborate this claim in three stages. First, I review one of the many criteria that have been invoked

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in Western thought to define science and religion as reciprocal 'others', namely the criterion of wonder. It has been argued that, whereas science (or philosophy more broadly) seeks to displace wonder with knowledge, religion keeps wonder alive. Second, I look at how some contributors to the anthropology of ontology are reproducing this wonder-based distinction between science and religion in slightly altered terms. In the place of (but also encompassing) science as the term that shuts down wonder, these anthropologists refer to a Western ontology they often call Cartesian, or sometimes Kantian, dualism. And in the place of religion as the term that keeps wonder open, they refer to an ontology they usually call animism, relationalism, or non-dualism. But some anthropologists of ontology are not simply studying this wonder-friendly ontology in non-Western contexts. Some, I will argue, are attempting personally to embrace and live it and are commending it to others as a mode of being with the potential to revolutionize anthropological practice and even save the planet from ecological apocalypse. As an addendum to this analysis, I conclude by citing indications that some anthropologists want furthermore to encompass science within this existential take-up of relational non-dualism. They seek to obviate the religion-science dichotomy altogether and reposition anthropology within a new hybrid religion-science that is both an investigative response to wonder and the ethnographic engendering of limitless new wonders.

It is important to clarify from the outset, however, that I am not using 'religion' and 'religious' as pejorative terms meant to unmask the anthropology of ontology or the authors whose work I cite as somehow illegitimate or ideologically suspect. Rather than stemming from a will to discredit, my attempt to identify something religious in the anthropology of ontology arises from two intersecting projects: the general problem of defining what we mean when we talk about religion in the social sciences; and my own particular interest in wonder as an index of ontological crisis and transformation – both in anthropology and among my principal fieldwork consultants, the Arosi of Makira in the Solomon Islands (Scott in preparation).

Despite wide assent to Talal Asad's (1993) conclusion that an essentialist definition of religion is not viable, attempts at working definitions still feel necessary as soon as one wishes to label something 'religion' or 'non-religion' – or simply to teach a course entitled 'The Anthropology of Religion' (cf. Lambek 2008). 'Religion' has become, like *mana*, a 'floating signifier', a symbol emptied by a surfeit of possible and seemingly contradictory meanings (Lévi-Strauss 1987: 63-4). Because 'religion' has the semantic capacity to capture aspects of almost anything, the concept threatens in many analytical contexts to disappear altogether. For any given purpose, therefore, religion must be precipitated through ascriptions of affinity and incompatibility with various possible others: politics, art, law, science, culture, secularism, atheism, nihilism, humanism, animism, spirituality, and so on. But it is precisely these analytical manoeuvres that cause religion to splinter and float, transmuting mercurially into one thing and its opposite at the same time, depending on the criteria of difference employed to grasp it.[3]

Accordingly, an aim of the following observations is to explore what comes into view when the criterion of that which keeps wonder alive is employed to precipitate religion from its others. This reading of recent trends in the anthropological literature on ontology is thus chiefly a mini-ethnography of the anthropology of ontology as part of the anthropology of 'secular' religion. It is part of the study of contemporary religion that is asking 'What forms does religion take beyond the normative limits of

received religious traditions or for post-theists?' An underlying suggestion is that wonder-spotting may be a good way of tracking and identifying new forms and practices of religion in a supposedly disenchanted world.[4]

Wonder and the othering of religion and science

I begin with a quote from Martin Buber. The passage in question is taken from Buber's essay on Moses, and the specific phenomenon to which he alludes is the parting of the Red Sea. Referring to this particular biblical event, Buber formulates a general principle: he proposes that an attitude of open-ended wonder is the quality that distinguishes religion from what he casts as philosophy. Buber writes: 'The philosophizing and the religious person both wonder at the phenomenon, but the one neutralizes his wonder in ideal knowledge, while the other abides in that wonder; no knowledge, no cognition, can weaken his astonishment. Any causal explanation only deepens the wonder for him' (1946: 75). What Buber calls 'philosophizing' comprises, I suggest, not only what we would recognize as speculative philosophy, but also modern science, broadly understood as the quest 'to understand the causes of things' (to quote the motto of the LSE[5]). So, here we have a clear example of religion and science differentiated in Western thought on the basis of a very specific criterion: open-ended versus occluded wonder. And in this instance, the side of religion – the side of open-ended wonder – is valued positively as an asset that science appears to lack.

In her landmark publication on the subject, *Strange wonder: the closure of metaphysics and the opening of awe* (2008), and related journal articles (e.g. 2006), Mary-Jane Rubenstein (cf. Ferguson 2006: 20) constructs an analytical history of what might be termed inverse variants of this opposition in Western thought. She shows how, despite Plato's foundational insight (attributed to Socrates in the *Theaetetus*) that wonder (*thaumazein*) is the beginning of thinking and thus of all philosophy, Plato's heirs have evinced a deeply ambivalent, even parricidal, stance towards the primal mood that begot their vocation. In this history, Aristotle, Descartes, and Francis Bacon stand out as spokesmen for the view that wonder, once it has stimulated thinking, ought quickly to be banished by means of ever-increasing understanding of what things are and how they work. These thinkers all value positively the impetus of philosophy and science to displace wonder with fixed and well-ordered knowledge. Open-ended wonder, by contrast, they value negatively, identifying it not necessarily with religion *per se*, but with states of implied deficiency to which religion has often been likened: ignorance, childishness, or, 'worse', to quote Rubenstein (2006: 13), femininity. Indeed, 'What is the gender of religion?' is an essential question to be asked of any configuration of religion among its possible semiotic neighbours and diametric opposites.

Wonder and the othering of relational non-dualism and essentialism

With this wonder-based opposition between religion and science in view, I move now to the main part of my discussion; I examine how some representatives of the anthropology of ontology are recasting this opposition in terms of two different ontologies, or modes of being. And they are doing so, I emphasize, in ways that – in line with Buber – invite us to think about their projects as religious. Rejecting the legacy of the allegedly wonder-occluding ontology they name Cartesian dualism, these anthropologists are advocating something like conversion to the allegedly wonder-sustaining relational non-dualism they impute to indigenous animisms – often, intriguingly, with the aid of reference to a wealth of Western philosophers, writers, artists, and even scientists.

Table 1. Cartesian dualism and relational non-dualism contrasted.

Cartesian dualism	Relational non-dualism
Western modernity	Indigenous non-Western world
Immaterial vs material	Animism
Mind/soul vs body	Perspectivism
Subject vs object	Relationalism
Ideal vs real	Intensive and extensive multiplicity
Culture vs nature	Flux
Human vs animal	Fractality
Animate vs inanimate	Participation
Law of non-contradiction	Transformation
Essentialism	Motility
Stasis	Flat ontology
Science	Immanence
Transcendence	Reciprocity
Hierarchy	Balance
Imperialism	Wonder-sustaining
Ecological exploitation	
Wonder-occluding	

As a quick means of spelling out the putative characteristics of these two ontologies, I have outlined them in a way that suggests how, in my view, they have evolved in the anthropology of ontology into something like a Weberian set of contrasting ideal types (Table 1). I hasten to clarify, however, that my outline is isomorphic to the views of no one thinker; rather, it attempts to capture the cumulative upshot of multiple dialogic iterations of this contrast.[6] It is informed by the writings of – among others – Terry Evens, Martin Holbraad, Tim Ingold, Bruno Latour, Morten Pedersen, Deborah Bird Rose, Marilyn Strathern, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, Roy Wagner, and Rane Willerslev.

In the first column, I have listed concepts and characteristics commonly associated with Cartesian dualism and widely ascribed to Western modernity. As this list indicates, Cartesian dualists are said to live in terms of two absolutely distinct ontological categories: the material and the immaterial. These two categories form a root pair governing a series of analogous and hierarchical oppositions, including: mind (or soul) versus body; subject versus object; ideal versus real; and culture versus nature.

At the same time, however, these oppositions are said to inform a second series of equally hierarchical oppositions within the domain of what some might view as the purely material. These include: animate versus inanimate; human versus animal; and ultimately *X* versus not-*X*. Thus, even material monists have predominantly retained the fundamental essentialism of dualistic thinking, especially its tendency to sequester the human as somehow other than and above the natural (cf. Ferguson 2006: 27-32).[7]

Critics of this way of being frequently reference modern science as its *locus classicus* and credit it with having secured the many benefits of medicine and technology, yet they find Cartesianism deeply flawed. Some even deny its ongoing viability. They argue that Cartesianism entails a necessary and undesirable practical expression of its ontological principles – what I would term an onto-praxis (Scott 2007: 18-24). The Cartesian person allegedly acts out the key structure of this ontology by assimilating every relation to the asymmetrical master-relation between transcendent immaterial subject and inert material object. Thus, to every Cartesian, every 'other' appears as something

to be seized, known, dominated, and digested. This onto-praxis has supposedly led not only to social inequalities in Western societies, but also to Western imperialism and biospheric devastation.

Now, what I really want to highlight in all of this is the way some anthropologists are registering their complaints against this ontology by accusing it of wonder*cide* (e.g. Evens 2008: 223). Tim Ingold has formulated this complaint most explicitly in terms of a contrast between what he terms 'animic' ontology and science. (Note what is arguably Ingold's concern is that 'animic' ontology may be deemed anaemic and thus gendered feminine *vis-à-vis* 'rigorous' science.) Ingold writes:

> Astonishment, I think, is the other side of the coin to the very openness to the world that I have shown to be fundamental to the animic way of being. It is the sense of wonder that comes from riding the crest of the world's continued birth ... To outsiders unfamiliar with this way of being, it often looks like timidity or weakness, proof of a lack of rigour characteristic of supposedly primitive belief and practice. The way to know the world, they say, is not to open oneself up to it, but rather to 'grasp' it within a grid of concepts and categories. Astonishment has been banished from the protocols of conceptually driven, rational inquiry. It is inimical to science. Seeking closure rather than openness, scientists ... have forgotten how to be astonished at the birth of the world (2011: 74-5).

Many like-minded anthropologists are furthermore critiquing anthropology itself as a Cartesian onto-praxis and finding it guilty of this same wondercide. They argue that, like all Cartesians, anthropologists have generalized the essentialism of the core material/immaterial binary into a universal essentialism preoccupied with discrete entities. Just as the immaterial cannot simultaneously be material, so also any *X* in existence cannot simultaneously be not-*X*. The law of non-contradiction has ruled anthropology (cf. Willerslev 2007: 12).[8] Accordingly, these critics suggest, anthropologists have approached the discursive and non-discursive practices of our field interlocutors in the same way that naturalists approach exotic flora and fauna: that is, as marvels or monsters to be explained away. Whenever faced with claims that seem to imply violation of the law of non-contradiction – such as that twins are also birds, or that a terracotta army can guard the dead; or that a cucumber can substitute for a bull; or that a child is also its deceased grandparent, and so on – anthropologists have been amazed by the alterity of the people who could possibly say such things, but have quickly moved to snuff that wonder – and deny that alterity – under functional, hermeneutical, and cognitive representations of what such 'apparent' claims might really be about. In this way, anthropology has helped to assert the cultural transcendence and political ascendency of Cartesian-based truth claims over much of the rest of the world. No wonder there are no wonders left in this mode of being.[9]

The antidote to this dysfunctional ontology, some anthropologists are saying, lies in my second column (see Table 1). Here I have listed concepts and characteristics associated with what is usually referred to as animism, relationalism, or non-dualism and widely ascribed to diverse non-Western indigenous people, especially in Amazonia, Melanesia, Australia, Inner Asia, and the circumpolar north.[10] To simplify, I give this ontology the synthetic label relational non-dualism.

In the abstract, the chief distinction between these two ontologies is this: whereas Cartesian dualists see *things* – including concepts, such as religion, for example – as *discrete entities*, relational non-dualists see *things* as *relations*, both internally and externally. For relational non-dualists, we are told, there are no pure unmixed things or essences, only the web of relations which inhere in things and in which things inhere.

Accordingly, there is likewise no static being for relational non-dualists, only a continuous flux of transformative becoming. Terry Evens, a leading champion of the virtues of this mode of being, characterizes it as 'an ontologically dynamic state in which boundaries connect as they separate and a thing is always also other than what it is' (2008: xx).

As this language indicates, there is no strict law of non-contradiction operative in relational non-dualism. Rather, relational non-dualism is said to be 'participatory'. Things not only can be, *but always already are*, other than themselves, and can thus transform from one thing into another (as does 'religion'). Some anthropologists, such as Evens, seem to model the quantum of shared being among relational objects as partial and shifting. Others, however, such as Roy Wagner and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, seem to model relations as fractal across all scales: all forms contain all possible relations and thus all possible other forms. No wonder wonders abound in this mode of becoming.

Advocates of relational non-dualism endorse it as a so-called 'flat ontology': that is, an ontology in which every relational form, whether human or animal, animate or inanimate, is equally a subject and an actant. There are no transcendent subjects *vis-à-vis* inert objects, only immanent subjects, immersed in myriad shifting relations. This flat ontology, its proponents say, entails an onto-praxis of reciprocity and balance and is therefore the best hope for halting and reversing the destructive tendencies and effects of Cartesianism. Some anthropologists are even saying that the earth can be saved from cataclysmic climate change only if Cartesian dualists can somehow reset their mode of being to relational non-dualism – and do so quickly (e.g. Latour 2009*a*; Pinney 2013; Rose 2011).

But, for present purposes, the main point of interest here is the way some anthropologists are expressing their enthusiasm for relational non-dualism by celebrating its inexhaustible capacity for wonder. I have already quoted some of Ingold's praise for 'animic' openness and astonishment at the horizonless unfolding of becoming. In a similar vein, Deborah Bird Rose describes what she terms the 'ontology of connectivity' (2011: 88) of Aboriginal Australians as yielding 'a fabulous glee in ... awareness that the living world is more complicated, less predictable, more filled with transformations, uncertainty, and fantastic eruptions of life's mysteries than is allowed of in ordinary thought' (2011: 5-6). Embracing a clearly post-biblical, Batesonian orientation to life she terms 'ecological existentialism', Rose (2011: 16) in fact acknowledges that her project is in some sense deeply 'religious'.[11]

Equally revealing, I suggest, are what may be read as the efforts of some anthropologists to reform anthropology into a site of relational non-dualist onto-praxis, driven by engagement with wonder and conducted as wonder production. It would be fair to say that this project is at the vanguard of the anthropology of ontology. As I understand it, the agenda consists in two key mandates.

First, in the encounter with alterity – that is, when meeting up with those relational non-dualist phenomena that violate the law of non-contradiction – anthropologists should hold on to their initial 'wonderment' (Henare, Holbraad & Wastell 2007: 1), resisting the Cartesian inclination to neutralize it. Martin Holbraad (2012: 246-53, 263) has recently recast this recommendation in terms of the Greek concept of *aporia* (literally, 'without passage'). In Western philosophical tradition, this refers to the perplexity or sense of being at a loss that arises when thinking arrives at seemingly necessary but impossible conclusions. It is the state of confusion Socrates classically

induced in his interlocutors by leading them into contradictions that undermined their assumptions, and it is the very condition that left Theaetetus 'lost in wonder' (Plato, *Theaetetus* 155c, in Rubenstein 2008: 3; cf. Kofman 1983). Holbraad could be read, in fact, as suggesting that anthropology is a special vocation to *aporia*, almost a quest for *aporia* as the sign that one has encountered alterity at the limits of one's conceptual resources. Once induced, however, the *aporia* of alterity should be resolved by allowing its impact to help us generate new concepts rather than by applying inadequate concepts that can only represent others as afflicted by 'an epistemic teratology – error, illusion, madness, ideology' (Viveiros de Castro 2002: 130, in Holbraad 2012: 50).[12]

This generative process is at the heart of the second mandate: when writing ethnographic accounts of such encounters, anthropologists should not pretend to be able to represent others as if they were simply given in the world, but should present ethnography as a non-equivalent 'translation', a new creation that matches neither the world of the ethnographer nor the world of the others involved (Viveiros de Castro 2004; cf. Hage 2012: 297). Such a translation is a new world, a new wonder, emerging from the virtual into the actual in the disjunctive nexus of relations (Henare *et al.* 2007: 10-16). Thus, in their foreword to the first issue of *HAU*, a recently launched open-access on-line journal of ethnographic theory, the editors, Giovanni da Col and David Graeber, announced: '*HAU* is especially interested in hosting "ethnographic translations" of those excessive remainders, remainders or *wonders* that arise when worlds are (happily, productively) out of joint' (2011: viii, emphasis original). Might we call the production of such ethnographic translations thaumatography (wonder-writing), thereby generating a new concept, a new wonder?[13]

Moving towards post-Cartesian religion-science?

Now, if wonder-spotting is a way of tracking transformations of religion in a putatively disenchanted world, then much of the anthropology of ontology may be said to be religious.[14] No wonder, then, that Viveiros de Castro (2004) likens his proposed method of 'controlled equivocation' to shamanic work as 'translation', and Holbraad (2008; but see 2012: 238) suggests a parallel between what he calls his recursive method of 'inventive definition' and the art of divination. Clearly, these and other anthropologists are trying to move anthropology away from Cartesian assumptions and practices and, presumably therefore, away from any claims to being a science. Yet, there are intimations that some anthropologists of ontology want to position anthropology within a new post-Cartesian religion-science they suggest might emerge out of shared experiences of open-ended wonder.

This aspiration tends, however, to bifurcate 'science' in the discourses of the anthropology of ontology. In these discourses one encounters characterizations of a conventional essentialist science, on the one hand, but also references to what might be termed various post-humanist, non-dualist, or non-modern forms of science, on the other. Thus, Ingold frequently critiques the dualism he sees in 'the modern scientific world view' (2000: 110), but also appeals enthusiastically to the work of a few 'courageous' (2000: 173) developmental systems theorists whose ideas he describes as 'heresy in mainstream evolutionary biology' (2011: 9). Inspired by the latter, he has long sought dialogue and *rapprochement* between social anthropology and the physical sciences. At an even more inclusive scale, moreover, he has recently identified return to open-ended wonder as the necessary pre-condition for reconciliation between religion (*qua* animism) and science:

> Are animism and science therefore irreconcilable? Is an animistic openness to the world the enemy of science? Certainly not ... [But] if science is to be a coherent knowledge practice, it must be rebuilt on the foundation of openness rather than closure, engagement rather than detachment. And this means regaining the sense of astonishment that is so conspicuous by its absence from contemporary scientific work. Knowing must be reconnected with being, epistemology with ontology, thought with life. Thus has our rethinking of indigenous animism led us to propose the reanimation of our own, so-called 'western' tradition of thought (2011: 75).

Independently of Ingold, Holbraad, too, appears to distance his agenda for anthropology from one kind of science while promoting wonder as a common ground for rethinking the relationship between science and an array of its possible others. As part of his contribution to the ontological turn, Holbraad (2009) has argued for an anthropological methodology that adopts a non-representational or 'motile' version of truth, a version of truth as infinitely emergent and generative of new ontologies rather than reflective of a single fixed world. This approach, he has observed, 'puts clear blue water' between anthropology and any mode of science that is still 'playing at the old game of truthful representation' (2009: 91). Recently, however, Holbraad has sought to bridge (or even drain away?) this water by inviting scientists (including an astrophysicist and a particle physicist) to a workshop he convened in June 2013 at University College London entitled 'Wonderments of Cosmos: A Trans-disciplinary Conversation on Cosmological Horizons'. How, the workshop announcement asked, might

> a broader human impulse to wonder at the cosmos, conceived as the ultimate horizon of human existence ... cast in a new light age-old debates about the relationship between science, religion and art? And how far might it serve to re-cast or even re-negotiate the boundaries between the proverbial 'two cultures' of the sciences and the humanities? (Holbraad 2013).

In these anthropological overtures to scientists, Ingold and Holbraad appear, like Buber before them, to recognize wonder as the common matrix of both religion and science and thus as a continuing antecedent by virtue of which religion and science are always already related – neither identical nor radically distinct, but kindred. It seems, therefore, that these and other visions for *rapprochement* between science and religion (or, alternatively, between the modern and the non-modern, e.g. Hage 2012: 303-4) ought to be understood less as anti-modern attempts to return to an imagined premodern whole than as non-modern (*sensu* Latour 1993) attempts to recombine lineages that are already ingredient in each other.

These observations lead to another. Like Buber's attempt to distinguish religion from philosophy/science based on the criterion of open-ended versus occluded wonder, attempts within the anthropology of ontology to distinguish indigenous relational non-dualisms from Western Cartesianism constitute modern works of purification, belied from the outset by the constant discovery and production of hybrids – not least of all the anthropology of ontology itself as a largely non-modern project within the social sciences (cf. Latour 1993).[15] In a sense, then, the anthropology of ontology already entails examples of what some of its practitioners are hoping to create, namely sites of recombination between religion and science. And it appears, moreover, that a perceived proliferation of hybrids, especially as indexed by a supposed efflorescence of wonder discourses and openness to non-human agency in the physical sciences, may be what is inspiring some anthropologists of ontology to see the present as a promising moment for still further hybridizations through 'trans-disciplinary conversation'.

But any appeal to wonder that positions it as that which always already connects religion and science, and which therefore has the capacity to elicit their kinship, has further implications. Such strategies for staging new hybridizations implicitly open things much wider; they prompt new ways of recognizing that, not just religion and science, but all the domains and disciplines of modernity are always already ingredient in one another.

As discussed above, there is a long-standing tradition within Western philosophy that wonder is the original and constant wellspring of thinking itself. '[I]t is owing to their wonder that men both now begin and at first began to philosophize', said Aristotle (1984: 1554). The longevity of this idea in Euro-American thought is perhaps no reason to grant it authority, yet it is good to think when it comes to conceptualizing how the various domains of life, which for many have become naturalized categories, might be related. If wonder is the common matrix of all thought and engagement with what appears, then all trajectories of thought are kindred, though they move on from wonder in different directions and through the development of different conventions. And despite this divergence, furthermore, each trajectory inheres in all the others as a possibility that might yet emerge. Having begun in wonder, every trajectory can encounter fresh wonders and experience wonder again as the enduring source of new beginnings of thought and world-making. For this reason, no trajectory is ever fully foreclosed in any other.[16]

Alter-modern religion

In a recent contribution to the anthropology of ontology, Ghassan Hage draws on Viveiros de Castro's perspectival multinaturalism to promote what he terms a 'critical primitivist anthropology' (2012: 303). He argues that classic 'primitivist' anthropology's distinctive contribution to critical thought has been its capacity to imagine alternative ways of being, to show us that 'we can be radically other than what we are' (2012: 289) – a capacity he likens to that of the shaman (2012: 290, 300).[17] In order to sustain this contribution, he urges, anthropologists should transformatively reproduce this classic (or modern) primitivist anthropology as a new non-modern investigation of what he describes as 'alter-modern spaces' (2012: 294; cf. Hardt & Negri 2009) or 'new "New Worlds" ' (2012: 303). These terms refer to various loci of alterity, 'minor realities' within modernity, intra-modern analogues to 'the worlds analysed by primitivist anthropology' (2012: 304). Alert readers will notice, however, that Hage is thus chasing his own tail (or, in fact, biting it like the ouroboros, the ancient icon of non-dualism and now the logo of *HAU*), for his argumentation suggests that Viveiros de Castro's perspectivism not only offers resources for thinking about alter-modernities but is itself just such a site of alter-modernity. Perspectivism thus emerges from the discussion as a promising fieldsite for a critical primitivist anthropology interested in discovering alternative ways of being.[18]

This article, I would like to suggest, executes something like such a reflexive programme of study, albeit with a more commodious fieldsite in mind. It constitutes a wonder-focused mini-ethnography of the anthropology of ontology, understood as inclusive of but greater than perspectivism. What it discovers, furthermore, in the anthropology of ontology are the resources for imagining alternative ways of thinking about religion and its others. Specifically, it points to the possibility of a relational account of religion rather than an essentialist definition. By such an account, religion always already inheres in all its others (including science), and all its others always

already inhere in religion. This not only helps 'make sense' of religion's vexing capacity to appear as both itself and one or more of its others at the same time; it could, moreover – perhaps ironically – help to re-rationalize efforts to do and teach the anthropology of religion.

NOTES

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I am grateful to Matthew Engelke, both for inviting me to submit this article to *JRAI* and for his supportive comments. I would also like to thank the anonymous reviewer for asking probing questions, and Krista Ovist for contributing helpful insights.

[1] For a while now I have been reading, *inter alia*: Descola (2013), Evens (2008), Hage (2012), Holbraad (2012), Ingold (2000; 2011), Kohn (2007), Pedersen (2011), Poirier (2005), Remme (2012), Rose (2011), Swancutt (2012), Viveiros de Castro (2007; 2010), Willerslev (2007). I also consider my own work to be part of this broad trend (see esp. Scott 2007).

[2] During the first decade of the twenty-first century, there were several independent calls for an ontology-centred anthropology (e.g. Clammer, Poirier & Schwimmer 2004; Descola 2005; Henare, Holbraad & Wastell 2007; Scott 2007). In the United Kingdom, however, the label 'ontological turn' tends to index chiefly the Cambridge-associated initiative (Henare *et al.* 2007). I wish to emphasize, therefore, that I am acknowledging and addressing a phenomenon within anthropology that is greater than the Cambridge 'turn' alone.

[3] John Sallis has argued that, in the Platonic dialogues, wonder (*thaumazein*) arises precisely from this kind of analytical discourse, because such discourse causes 'the mixing of opposites' to 'become manifest' (1995: 252) and point to 'the birth of all things from flow and motion' (1995: 251). Arguably, this implies that the Socratic method has always been about discovering that every concept is a floating signifier pointing to underlying flux (cf. Holbraad 2012: 182, 246).

[4] Based on her fieldwork with family history hobbyists in England, for example, Fenella Cannell suggests that 'modern genealogical practice is, in fact, a space ... for exploring nonreducible mystery' (2013: 208). Such ethnographic pursuit of wonder as an index of religion in a supposedly disenchanted world could extend well beyond (and before) the anthropology of ontology. As part of the ethnography of this ongoing phenomenon, one might also analyse such contemporary projects as Bennett (2001), Bhaskar (2002), Kosky (2013), and Tallis (2012).

[5] The source of this motto is Virgil's *Georgics* 2.490. But, as Mary-Jane Rubenstein (2008: 12-13) points out, the opposition between unresolved wonder and the study of cause and effect in European thought is at least as old as Aristotle.

[6] I present these two ontologies as ideal types for ease of exposition only. The criticism that the analytical production of these two models of ontology tends to reify them in dualistic ways is not lost on anthropologists interested in questions of being (e.g. Holbraad 2012: 34-5; Scott 2013). That said, the task of formulating a satisfactory model of how they are related remains a work in progress. Does relational non-dualism hierarchically encompass essentialism, as Viveiros de Castro seems at points to suggest (in Latour 2009*b*)? Or are they two sides of a Möbius strip, each able to flip over into the other at certain limits, as I have offered for consideration (Scott 2013: 356)? Or is the essentialism of representational thinking cognitively dominant owing to processes of evolutionary adaptation, as Holbraad seems tentatively to suggest (2012: 284 n. 2)? This last position might furthermore imply that relationalism is either 'counter-intuitive' (like some cognitivist accounts of religion) or 'non-intuitive' (like some cognitivist accounts of science), or, indeed, that some instances of relational thinking are religious while others are scientific (cf. Boyer 1998).

[7] This claim may seem surprising, but the fundamental error of Western ontology, according to its critics, is not so much its original fixation on the immaterial/material divide – or even binarism *per se* – as its more general and ongoing essentialism, its focus on mutually exclusive categories and entities, and its unrelenting quest for fundamental particles. Accordingly, the argument goes, forms of monism and pluralism are not true others to dualism; they are equally essentialist and therefore ultimately dualistic, intent on finding hard lines of containment that inevitably produce new oppositions. Dualism exists wherever the search is on for a pure indivisible monad, whether one or many (cf. Evens 2008: 301 n. 1).

[8] The critique of Cartesian dualism has, therefore, prompted diverse reconsiderations of the work of Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (1926) and his 'law of participation' (e.g. Evens 2008; Goldman 2007; Hage 2012; Rose 2011; cf. Costa and Fausto 2010).

[9] The claim that anthropology has historically sought to defuse the impact of alterity may strike many readers as odd, given the frequent complaint that anthropology seeks out the exotic. According to Viveiros de Castro (2004: 16), however, the analytical strategies of most mainstream anthropologists (with notable exceptions, such as Marilyn Strathern and Roy Wagner) have served to deny difference out of a 'desire for ontological monism': that is, the will to reduce Other to Self in the name of human unity.

[10] Some anthropologists of ontology now avoid territorializing these two ontologies and argue that 'ontologies ... are not phenomena out there to be found', but are 'analytical artifices' employed to make sense of research data that happen to pertain to particular fieldwork contexts (Holbraad 2012: 255; cf. Pedersen 2012).

[11] For a number of contributors to the anthropology of ontology, Gregory Bateson's work and his concept of 'the sacred' (G. Bateson & Bateson 1988; cf. G. Bateson 1972: 448-66) clearly stand as important sources of inspiration. It is worth noting, therefore, that in a recent retrospective essay, his daughter, Mary Catherine Bateson, states that he 'regarded a sense of wonder at the natural world as a valuable corrective to the limitations of science' (M.C. Bateson 2008: 16).

[12] Holbraad (2012: 109-30, 246) seems to treat alterity, and therefore also *aporia*, wonder, awe, paradox, and mystery, as functions of essentialism, which he analyses in terms of 'representational truth' and its 'ontological discontinuity'. This implies that relational non-dualism – which Holbraad develops in terms of 'motile truth' and its ontology of continuity – knows no radical alerity and, hence, no wonder. I would suggest that this may be to under-theorize the capacity of this ontology to entail its own criteria of alterity and wonder (Scott in press). Holbraad might argue, however, that some anthropologists of ontology are projecting their own Cartesian wonder onto others. Nevertheless, my point here is that, in its own way, Holbraad's neo-Socratic method constitutes an endeavour to keep wonder open through anthropological creativity – through anthropology as the birthing of new conceptual objects.

[13] While this article was already in press, the second volume in the 'HAU Masterclass Series' appeared, containing an archive of lectures by Marilyn Strathern. In his editor's introduction, da Col pronounces Strathern the 'Mistress of Enchantment' (2013: xi) whose teaching and writing mimetically capture and convey the dynamics of a 'Melanesian perceptual regime' that '*unfolds through surprise*' (2013: ix, italics in original). By thus instantiating what they are about, both Strathern and her work are comparable, according to da Col, to a Klein bottle (a version of the ouroboros) in which the antinomies of interiority and exteriority, subject and object, anthropologist and ethnographic other neither diverge nor merge but define and flow in and out of one another. In the form of da Col's extension of this image – the 'Strathern bottle' – Strathern thus emerges as the consummate anthropologist, a living *Wunderkammer* (wonder cabinet) who discovers wonder in the field, displays and induces wonder in her teaching and writing, and both externalizes and internalizes wonder as being/becoming itself (cf. Rubenstein 2006: 14).

[14] Necessarily omitted from this mini-ethnography of the anthropology of ontology is consideration of whether some scientists are moving towards their own versions of religion-science, or science as religion. Many scientists are invoking the concept of wonder in popular media (e.g. Cox & Cohen 2011; 2013; Dawkins 1998), but it would require separate analysis to determine what this may reveal about current trends in scientific ontology. Is it a sign of competition with some version of religion, an attempt to promote science as a superior source of life-affirming wonder? Or is it a sign of post-Cartesian currents in some areas of scientific research (e.g. Hoffmeyer 2008)?

[15] This hybridity is neatly captured, for example, in the name that Philippe Descola chose for his position at the Collège de France: 'Chair of the Anthropology of Nature' (Kohn 2009: 137; cf. Latour 2009*a*: 466).

[16] According to Descartes (1989 [1649]: 52), 'Wonder is the first of all passions', the first response to unknown otherness and prior to all negative or positive judgements. It thus has 'no opposite' (1989 [1649]: 52) among the other passions, which all entail evaluation. Placed in dialogue with the many Deleuzian discourses in the anthropology of ontology, this description of wonder prompts the thought that wonder may be the passion in which all others inhere as intrinsic difference, the mood of multiplicity.

[17] Given this comparison with shamanism, I cannot help but wonder: if one were inclined to credit religion with a distinctive contribution to critical thought (as Hage does for sociology, history, and psychology), might it not closely resemble this anthropological work of envisaging the possibilities for self-transcendence?

[18] This apparent circularity need not indicate a flaw in Hage's argumentation or methodological proposals if one accepts the relational non-dualist premises of perspectival anthropology. Perspectival anthropology presupposes difference rather than identity between any two perspectives, and also within all perspectives; it positions itself as unlikely, therefore, to discover in the other a simple replica of itself. Indeed, one's tail is never identical to one's teeth.

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L'anthropologie de l'ontologie (une science religieuse ?)

Résumé

A partir d'une lecture de plusieurs publications récentes, le présent article présente une mini-ethnographie des discours sur l'émerveillement dans l'anthropologie de l'ontologie qui conduit à repenser le concept de religion. On a parfois suggéré que la science et la religion étaient des approches antithétiques de l'expérience de l'émerveillement : alors que la science cherche à bannir l'émerveillement en le remplaçant par le savoir, la religion reste ouverte à l'émerveillement face à l'inconnaissable. Compte tenu de cette différence, l'article identifie certaines tendances dans l'anthropologie de l'ontologie qui semblent susciter et rechercher un émerveillement en forme de questionnement ouvert, d'une manière qui pourrait, selon son interprétation, instituer l'anthropologie comme une science religieuse. En conclusion, cette coïncidence de contraires supposés milite pour que soit fait un compte-rendu de la religion sous un angle relationnel.

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