BOOK REVIEW

In Response to the Religious Other: Ricoeur and the Fragility of Interreligious Encounters, by Marianne Moyaert. Lexington, 2014. 260 pp., Hb., \$99 ISBN 978-0-7391-9371-6

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Marianne Moyaert's *In Response to the Religious Other* continues her long pedigree of work developing cutting-edge and hermeneutically sophisticated theory within interreligious studies, which has made her one of the field's most significant thinkers. In this text Moyaert continues her engagement with Paul Ricoeur, who has been a long-standing object of study and source of philosophical tools for her, to develop a hermeneutical theory. In this she is not simply a channel for Ricoeur's own thought but shows herself to be both a sophisticated interpreter and a pioneer in extending insights from him beyond the range he had set. In her at times personal conclusion, Moyaert gives us a reason for this study: "when entering the scholarly domain of interreligious dialogue, it became immediately clear that 'everyone' seemed to agree that the fundamental challenge was that of finding the 'right' balance between openness for the other and preservation of identity." Despite this agreement she continues: "But, when delving deeper into this so-called dialogical tension, I found almost no profound literature exploring the nature of (religious) identity and the relation between self and other" (189).

It seems to me that she is correct, for compared to many areas of theology and religious studies, the broad arena of interreligious studies has not engaged so avidly with academic trends for what I may broadly term post-modernism, continental philosophy, or critical theory. I think there is good reason for this, partly that scholars in the field have come from disciplinary fields where such work may not be *en vogue*, but also much thinking in those areas has tended to support a denial of the validity and possibility of engaging religious Others. As such, it has often been those from a particularist standpoint who have been advocates of a broadly "post-modern" approach with its denial of commonality between different traditions. In contrast, those engaged in actual interreligious work have been aware that such abstract theorizing is far removed from any reality on the ground, not to mention the history of syncretism and encounter that characterizes all

religions. Moyaert suggests she turned to Ricoeur because he supplied the possibility for exploring this with more nuance, and she ably shows how he can be employed. Her book is therefore an important contribution both for showing that interreligious studies can engage continental philosophy in a meaningful way, and also for providing a sophisticated hermeneutical basis for its future development.

The book consists of six chapters that develop aspects of Ricoeur's thought in relation to different areas of interreligious engagement. The first chapter argues for Ricoeur's thought as an extension and return to Renaissance Humanism against another trend of modernism which she identifies with Descartes and the Enlightenment. Humanism, she argues, upholds the virtues of ambiguity given the limited nature of human knowledge, tied to a moral development and self-critical or reflexive approach. The Cartesian legacy, by contrast, she identifies as the search for certainty and big "T" Truth, which upholds the rational as the be all and end all, trumping even moral development. She seems to see this as exemplified in a particular modernist and liberal tradition both in philosophy and in theology. While a somewhat historical chapter it is clearly linked, via the issue of postcolonialism which she brings in, to her central focus on human beings, human knowledge, and religious traditions as marked by "vulnerability" or "fragility." An awareness of this is seen as key to engaging the religious Other, because it is not we who have the right answer or all the truth because that is simply impossible, and based upon a false epistemological quest. I feel that Moyaert here and elsewhere represents the Enlightenment, liberalism, or modernity as paper tiger targets, an issue I will address further below.

The next two chapters address specific issues, chapter two looking at religious violence, and chapter three Küng's notion of a Global Ethic. In the former she argues that following Ricoeur we can understand violence as based on a false notion of ideology as truth and certainty. While the fragile religious identity may seem weak and potentially vulnerable she argues that in fact it is a more authentic solution, and also avoids the possibility of ideological mastery of the Other which can result in violence.

In the next chapter she turns to Ricoeur's brief reflections, and even a dialogue with Küng, on the topic of the Global Ethic, centring upon what he termed his "inner resistance" (72) to the notion despite much sympathy for the underlying idea. While he did not explore the area at length, Moyaert uses a wide range of Ricoeur's thought, especially his so-called "little ethics," to show how and why the whole basis of

his thought develops the sympathy but “inner resistance” he spoke of. I would note, though, that while Moyaert develops a sophisticated critique of the Global Ethics notion and an alternative based upon Ricoeur, the substance of this is not very different from the liberal critique of Global Ethics developed by, for instance, John Hick. As such, I believe there is a failure to appreciate that the Enlightenment legacy is not as simplistic or all-embracing a worldview as she suggests.

Chapter four proceeds to develop a fuller theory of “fragile religious identities” based upon Ricoeur and developing ideas found in Moyaert’s previous work. It is an important chapter in terms of Moyaert’s development of her own Ricoeurian theory of religious identity, hospitality (a theme continued in subsequent chapters), and openness to the Other.

Chapter five, which I think is perhaps the most problematic chapter, further develops the notion of hospitality and she does this by reflecting upon the tension she has already raised above between openness to the Other and the desire to stay within one’s own tradition. To this end she picks up and employs the tension between the pluralist and particularist approaches within the theology of religions as a central theme, usefully echoing other recent arguments discussing this dialectic. Drawing primarily upon Hick she presents what seems to be a rather stereotyped notion of pluralism as making a “supraconfessional metatheory” (127) which ignores its own Kantian basis. This takes a narrow reading which ignores some of Hick’s own later nuances and subsequent pluralist developments which have sought to deal with this. She then proceeds to favourably assess particularisms, but in a way that, to my mind, fails to address the most serious criticisms against them raised by figures such as Paul Knitter, the current reviewer, and indeed Moyaert in her previous work. I find her argument in this chapter, which seems to employ a particularist reading of Lindbeck, although tempered by Ricoeurian theory around themes like “narrative flexibility” and “linguistic hospitality,” to be at odds with what she says in other chapters. As I read Ricoeur, through the lens Moyaert gives us, he is far more amenable to a contemporary pluralist position. Despite my reservations on this chapter, I fully concur with Moyaert that Ricoeur provides a useful set of hermeneutical tools to negotiate these issues and so this chapter can be read with benefit.

The final chapter makes something of a conclusion in which she argues for a Ricoeurian hermeneutics within comparative theology. Reprising the argument we have already noted that much theory in interreligious studies is often not hermeneutically sophisticated,

Moyaert notes that Clooney's comparative theology (the variety she addresses here) is likewise guilty of this charge and then proceeds both to interpret Clooney through the lens of Ricoeur, but also Ricoeur through the lens of Clooney. In this way she offers a rich and complex basis for a hermeneutical theory for comparative theology that takes seriously the "fragile" and "vulnerable" nature of religious identity in its ability to be open to the religious Other and learn from them.

Overall then, this is a significant and important book that adds much depth and sophistication to interreligious deliberation, especially in terms of a potential hermeneutical underpinning based in contemporary philosophy. Most issues that can be raised are mainly niggles; for instance, it appeared repetitious at times—although this may be a benefit for those who do not read the entire book straight through—while some minor referencing infelicities occur (e.g. note 27 of chapter 6 cites D'Costa's 1986 *Theology and Religious Pluralism* as support for the fourfold theology of religions typology of exclusivisms, inclusivisms, pluralisms, and particularities). My more serious concerns, moreover, do not detract from my deep appreciation of this excellent book, which will be essential reading to many concerned with interreligious dialogue, comparative theology, and cognate areas, and further confirms Moyaert's status as one of the leading theorists within interreligious studies.