



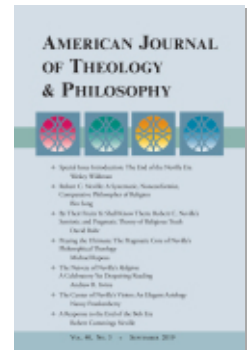
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A Response to the End of the Bob Era

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A Response to the End of the Bob Era

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Abstract

This is a response to essays on the thought of Robert Cummings Neville written by Wesley J. Wildman, Bin Song, David Rohr, Michael Raposa, Andrew Irvine, and Nancy Frankenberry.

Introduction

Both individually and collectively, the five essays in this groups are brilliant. Each of the authors has worked with extraordinary care and success to represent my position, and they all succeed. The essays work to expound my thought in a progressive order. Bin Song's lays out my approach to comparison, setting it within the larger whole of my philosophy. David Rohr's explores in depth my epistemology and shows its relevance to my philosophy as a whole and also to its application to Christian sermons. Michael Raposa's works through my specific claims about how "praying the ultimate" is its real meaning. Andrew Irvine's carries that thought through to religionless religion, asking: What if that is really meaningful? And Nancy Frankenberry's pushes the question that Wesley Wildman initially identified as the heart of my theory, the theory of the ontological act: What if this is really wrong? Not one of the essays addresses the fact that I am retired now from Boston University, and so I guess that this is a nonissue. I shall return to Wesley Wildman's commentary on the Bob Era at the end.

Bin Song

Bin Song's essay makes the point that my approach to comparison fits within my larger philosophy. If you do not have such a larger philosophy, you cannot justify my approach to comparison. But I do have it, and therefore I am justified. Moreover, any lesser approaches will end up with an arbitrary stopping point, which itself cannot be criticized except by going outside comparison. I am already outside the comparison, and so can avail myself of points discovered there. Now, this is usually just a ploy to criticize me for working on the larger philosophical scale, and that is indeed a flaw. But here, it is something on my side of comparison.

Song begins by asking whether my comparison is of theology, religion, or philosophy of religion. Of course, I answer contextually, as is appropriate,

not normatively, as Francis X. Clooney and Catherine Cornille may be read as doing. Song points out that when Clooney and Cornille appeal to a “home tradition” to do their theology, this limits them and prevents them from slowly abandoning that tradition should they actually find something better. I rather would pursue theology based on vague categories defining the subject matter rather than extending a home base. Song is right in this. But actually, I am far more tolerant of partial starts than Clooney and Cornille, just not calling them “faith seeking understanding.” Suppose an English professor, commenting on the language used in Ricci’s debates with Neo-Confucians, makes a brilliant point, but does not develop it. Is he not doing comparison? Legitimately? Is not our world filled with all sorts of comparisons, some useful when integrated in larger comparative schemes, but all useful along the way? Although I agree with Clooney and Cornille that theology ought to go on to make *theologically* interesting comparisons, this is not to denigrate the much less fulsome kinds of comparisons going on.

Next Song moves to consideration of the comparative categories. If they do not come from one’s home tradition, how are they developed? He considers two candidate ideas: Lee Yearley’s analogical ones and Aaron Stalnaker’s bridge concepts. Yearley’s analogical concepts are fairly elaborate correlations of different parts of Aquinas’s and Mencius’s systems. In fact, aside from the analogies, they do not indicate how the systems as wholes relate. This makes any move beyond the analogies difficult. Stalnaker’s bridge concepts are equally limited. Whereas they are not just analogues, they also are not yet connected with a larger system of categories. Stalnaker gets the point about vague categories, recognizing that the vagueness of the categories allows for comparison of different ideas that remain different while allowing similarities. Yet he rejects “transcultural universals” no matter how vague, and so has no place to integrate the comparisons. Starting from the universals alone, one never gets to generalizations about tradition where the generalizations have their own sources. I do have those generalizations and can suggest comparative categories that do not arise strictly out of the items being compared.

Again, I want to stress that philosophical comparisons that do not even live up to the virtues of Yearley and Stalnaker still can be useful. Comparisons can come on the spur of the moment. Yearley’s and Stalnaker’s comparisons themselves are worthwhile so far as they go. I appreciate Song’s placing their conclusions in the limitations of their theories, but also see how they can go further with differently oriented comparative categories. In particular, I appreciate Song’s point that the great thinkers cannot be compared just in certain respects but need to be compared in just about all respects. Of course, nobody does this. But then, nobody finishes a comparison.

Song moves finally to consider how my categories would resolve the Confucian-Christian transcendence debate, with Roger Ames as my adversary. Ames (and David Hall, with whom he first worked out this idea) holds that transcendence holds for Greek and Abrahamic cultures but not so much for Chinese culture. The strict definition of transcendence, Ames says, is that “A is transcendent with respect to B if the existence, meaning, or import of B cannot be fully accounted for without recourse to A, but the reverse is not true.” So, for Ames the Western notion of God has plenty of transcendence, but the Chinese notion of Heaven does not: Heaven is defined in terms of Earth and vice versa, whereas God is what He is irrespective of Earth. To this, Song cites my larger definition of transcendence as the ontological creative act that accounts for everything in the world that is determinate but is not determinate itself, a sheer givenness. This allows me to see the entire world as determinate and hence created, and the transcendent act as visible only in its product. We can make reference to the transcendent only through finite/infinite contrasts. For me, China has as much “transcendence” as the West. Of course, Roger Ames has a rejoinder, namely, that the derivation of something from nothing that I see in China simply is not there, or is so obscure as to be inconsequential. I say it is there, in the *Daodejing*, in Wang Bi, and in Zhou Dunyi. However that debate comes out, my system can represent the West and China as having different versions of transcendence, whereas Ames’s does not.

Song’s conclusion is that my approach to comparison is set within an attempt to build a philosophy of the whole. That philosophy might be totally cockamamie. But I think not, and have given multiple arguments for it from many directions. I have never been a comparative theologian only, or a comparative philosopher of religion, or a philosopher of culture. All of these are disciplines I have practiced within the larger context of philosophy as such, however crazy that might be. Song has this right. The question is, is my larger philosophy on the mark, flying to the right end, correctible until it gets there?

David Rohr

David Rohr’s contribution backs up to my straightforward epistemology. His first step is to examine Charles S. Peirce’s semiotic theory as the background to my own. He details at least one version of Peirce’s theory of signs, objects, and interpretants, showing how three examples of an interpretive judgment give rise to pragmatic truth. Riane is diagnosed as having strep throat and prescribed antibiotics, Dan hears a rattlesnake ahead and hikes around it, and Dey’veon takes a different route to work having heard of the traffic jam on the usual route. How he modernizes Peirce with exemplars of our pluralistic culture!

Then he moves to my version of this to say that I believe truth is the carryover of what is valuable or important in the object into the interpreter, in the respects in which the sign interprets the object, as qualified by the biological, cultural, semiotic, and purposive nature of the interpreters. Because, on my theory of religious objects, such objects have no nature to be represented directly, I claim that they are represented in finite/infinite contrasts. On the metaphysical/cosmological level, I hold that there are five basic finite/infinite contrasts: the ontological one that addresses the sheer existence of the world, and four cosmological ones, the necessary traits of any world that has determinate elements. Those traits of cosmology I affirm are harmonies having form, components formed, existential location of determinate things relative to one another, and the value achieved by integrating these components with this form relative to the other things with respect to which a harmony is determinate. This situation must hold with regard to any conceivable cosmos, and gives rise to the cosmological finite/infinite contrasts of form, plurality, diversity, and value-identity. Within our specific cosmos, these give rise to the finite/infinite contrasts of righteousness, wholeness, love, and our value-identities. Within our cosmos, each of us has much more specific tasks of righteousness, wholeness, love, and value.

Is this analysis true? Rohr has greatly summarized my many and not always consistent accounts of this structure, and I have summarized his summary here. He also cites my sermons for how Christianity is true with my particular kind of theology. He goes so far as to quote my passage about the Wildness of God:

The world God has created is largely a whirl of expanding gases where the elements for human habitation clump briefly between the initial fire and the final dissolution. The creation that reveals God's nature is wild, untamed, not domestic at all. The domesticated God of Kingship and War against Evil is but a tiny prismatic ray of that great Wild Light. . . . Late-modern science has created new images of the Wild God of infinite blasts, dances of expanding gases, and a cosmic finish more profound than any kings' imagined tortures of final retribution and fulfilling peace. . . . That Wild God has a different holiness from the Heavenly Court holiness of biblical images based upon pharaohs and emperors, a much greater, truer, and now inescapable holiness. (Even more abbreviated than Rohr's quotation.)

This quotation actually criticizes the biblical images as too domesticated. In the eyes of most Christians, it is heretical. It is not from one of my sermons but from a scholar's book on Jesus. And it is not the last step in my theology, which is to abandon nearly all images of God to appeal to the very abstract concept of the ontological act of creation. Rohr opens a dangerous part of my philosophy.

What if this set of images is just plain wrong? Just about every theologian has said that the ultimate is beyond his or her characterization. But what if I am wrong about space and time (surely I am)? What if I am wrong about the four traits of determinate things (surely I am)? What if I am wrong about a creation based on blind forces rather than kingship (surely I am, am I not)? Rohr has done a wonderful job explicating and bringing together epistemological themes from a wide variety of sources. But he does not ask whether I am right.

Now, I have been refining many of these ideas since long before Rohr was born. Of course, I have made them increasingly sophisticated. My system of the whole is huge, and I am too old to start over again. So I will continue with the epistemology he has sketched. Nevertheless, I worry about the pragmatic conclusion toward which I am tending. Perhaps it has been an ingenious fabrication that leads people away from the truth rather than toward it. I don't think so, but then what do I know?

Michael Raposa

Pray about it. That's what I know to do. Michael Raposa recognizes this and brings out a dimension of my thinking that is more a spiritual exercise than a theological logic or practical concern. Far more than Rohr, he intensifies my experience of the ultimate as such, with all its limitations. Do I introduce certain points not found in Peirce?

Raposa repeats some of the same ground that Rohr does in his explication of Peirce, and I am going to let that pass despite some small differences between them as Peirce scholars. Rather, I shall take up the very subtle criticism that Raposa makes that he thinks should incline me to say that the habit virtuosi form should be something like the belief that God is a person, with intentionality, agency, and the like. I want to resist this, and still say that, when we imagine what God is like in creating the world, we can affirm God as Lover.

Let me begin by affirming Peirce's distinction between semiosis, which stresses the triadic relation of signs, objects, and interpretants, and pragmatic outcomes of an interpretive process, which are the pragmatic outcomes of many semiotic processes and exhibit, in the case of religious interpretation, a lot more will in their formation. Many semiotic processes go into the formation through time of the "pragmatic outcome" of the religious quest. Let me also acknowledge that many, many forms of semiosis are involved in making up one's religious character. I would say that all concerns with righteousness that contemplate what might be the case if there were no such thing, all concerns with compositing things into one's own harmony that contemplate the failure of that need, all concerns for engaging other things on their own that contemplate the neglect of that fact, all concerns for meaning or value to life that contemplate its

absence, even all concerns for the existence of the cosmos that contemplate its absence, provide multitudes of items of content for making up one's character as a religious person. These might have to do also with contemplating how we are affected by this, but need not do so. All of these schematically listed items are generally present as part of the background of the very specific pragmatic outcome of thinking the ultimate as such. What I want to say is that, when praying the ultimate, the pragmatic outcome is inclusive of very broad tissues of semiosis whose object is the ultimate.

But praying the ultimate involves a twist in the final steps. As we dialectically, or practically, come closer to attending to the ultimate, we attempt to switch directions of the semiosis. When there is very little distance between the object, sign, and interpretant, we make little moves to assume for ourselves the role of religious object and to see ourselves as the real object of creativity. This is by no means to assume the indeterminate character of the act of creation. It is rather to feel ourselves to be the interpretive act issuing in the created world. This switching is always fleeting, but repeatable. It is always false in the sense that the world we see to be created is always broad (but broad enough), always particular (but particular enough), always freely made (but free enough), always loving (but loving enough). Our vision of the created world is always too small, too isolated in the particulars it sees created, too vague in what it denies of an antecedent character to the ultimate, and too narrow completely in what it sees as loved into existence. And there are the countless different ways in which different cultures elaborate these diverse forms of the created world.

All of these failures of knowing enough are about the world. What about knowing the creator as indeterminate? In a sense this is easy. Just think about abstracting the creator from the created projects, something possible for any smart person, and it turns out to be indeterminate. But try to carry along the sense of the world created, and it is very difficult indeed. The ontological creative act can only be interpreted as creator. One backs up into it, with the twist in interpretation. If one turns around and tries to grasp the act as not creating in any sense whatsoever, one does not face the blank unknown. One faces nothing. Without the created product, there is no creative act.

Another way to put this is to see that the ultimate is *given* just as much as the various traits of the world are given. What is given about the ultimate is the determinate world with its universal traits. But it is given together in an ontological sense of togetherness. The act is not in time because it is the measure of time—the same for space and causation. Actually, our representations of space, time, and all measures are dependent on our imaginations from physics, and will likely improve. Whatever the “ultimate” representations of the world, the ultimate is the creation of them.

What about the pragmatic outcome of our interpretation of ultimacy? I agree with Raposa that it is a Peircean habitus, something built up through time. I also agree, but with differences, that it can be an abstraction from the notion of the person. The differences are two large ones. In addition to the person as intentional, derived from the West, I think it also derives from the person as not intentional at all but from a rarified version of consciousness. This is the use of “person” elaborated in South Asian religions. It can also be the use of nonpersons, as in East Asian systems of spontaneous emergence. In all three of these senses, we find ways of signifying the ultimate that can organize life. Nevertheless, as Raposa notes, they all must be declared off the mark, false, because we know that they attribute a character to what has no character. They are fine for penultimate treatments of the ultimate, but not for ultimate ones. For ultimate knowledge of the ultimate, we need to turn ourselves around and face the creation.

Andrew Irvine

Andrew Irvine gets my point. Whereas Raposa focuses on the end of volume 1 of my *Philosophical Theology*, Irvine focuses on the theory of religion in volume 3 (so far no one has taken up volume 2). He recognizes the statement of the theory in part 1, the illustration of the theory in the historical religions of part 2, and the theory of goodness or value in religions in part 3. Then he engages part 4 of *Religion*, which I call “Religionless Religion.” This is where I argue that all our religious worldviews or sacred canopies are fallible, and in fact fall short of adequacy. Some, of course, are *very* fallible and should be given up. But others are far subtler and are conscious of their fallibility. Moreover, several different fine religions exist, and we do well to follow as many as possible. I argue that all major religions are attempts to express what I called the most sophisticated sacred worldview, namely, the one dominated by my idea of the ontological creative act. Yet, even the ontological creative act is only my (highly advanced and surely the best) hypothesis! How twenty-first century! How Earthborn! Certainly it will be improved upon!

Perhaps the improvements will reverse judgment on Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Daoism, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism (to name the biggies in alphabetical order). Where I see these religions as morphing into new versions that incorporate ever more of my vision, perhaps the successor to the ontological creative act hypothesis will call for their dismissal. Perhaps where I see the ontological ultimate as a unifying act that brings together all the things of the world, it will rather be just chaos, with brief good luck to see our part of the cosmos as unified, briefly and falsely. When this happens, I call for ontological

courage to continue the inquiry. That ontological courage needs to pick up on the concrete realities and make them holy, whatever holiness means. But what if “holiness” means just chaos? What if *everything* we understand about religion today is just nothing? What if the character in Leunig’s cartoon has it right: enjoy ourselves today because tomorrow might be very different, maybe just nothing. Maybe the joyous exuberance of the little girl in Rhode Island is just temporary, and doesn’t mean anything long run. Irvine gets my point.

Or part of my point. Everything he says is true, and said much more gracefully than I. But is it to say anything more than that our best hypotheses are fallible? Charles Peirce was born exactly a hundred years before me, and he had a hypothesis about the ultimate that was a hundred years older than mine. Mine is far more cosmopolitan than his. Mine knows far more about the dislocation of the ontological creative act from most religious sacred worldviews and yet how they need that conception. Mine is a hundred years more advanced than Peirce’s. Isn’t this to say enough?

Irvine asks, what if the future holds a reversal or strong deviation from my trajectory? He cites as evidence the fact that many people already assume that my main hypotheses are wrong and simply withdraw from religion. To this I answer, look at my arguments. Most of those who read them carefully are carried along to something like my tentative conclusions. Many people simply do not think about these matters. Many others do, but, within the various cults of religions, stick to some authoritative middle position, being unwilling to move from there toward the ontological creative act hypothesis. A few do move beyond that authoritative position, whatever it might be, toward some transcendent goal but insist that it has to be a thing, something determinate. I’m interested in speaking with these last people, arguing that the ultimate is an act, not a thing; but this is a delicate matter. And have I not yet just about won the argument when we get to that late stage? Where I think there is a huge difference between an ontological creative act and a transcendent in-itself indeterminate deity, perhaps I am deluded: we just have to see.

So I ask Irvine, who has the more powerful trajectory of argument? Is it the possibility that all my repriming of religions and pushing them toward my ontological creative act theory is wrong? While admitting, as I do, that religions have been used for very deleterious goals, including belief that God is on our side in wars, in oppressions, in every sort of nasty thing, the religions are right that religions also have been used to make peace, to fight oppressions, and to clean up every nasty thing. Add to this that religions are always on the next step toward anti-idolatry (admittedly also on the next step toward idolatry), and religions in the long run look good. Why not promote them and urge their improvement? Or does the more powerful trajectory of argument balance neatly

between the ontological creative act hypothesis and the hypothesis that this is all a joke?

I believe that my argument has always been that fallibility means the whole enterprise is in jeopardy. But in jeopardy of what? I think that any skeptical argument is good only insofar as it has evidence on its side. The evidence on the side of skepticism is very frail. The evidence on the side of my argument taken in its most inclusive modes is very strong. Therefore, I stay with my point.

Irvine's cartoon character shows at least four, maybe six characters: the one depicted, the author/painter, those who see it, those who do not see it, and among the last two, those who agree and those who do not. Does not the author/painter suppose that the depicted character and all the others have ontological faith? It would not be funny otherwise.

We now turn back to examine my arguments for the "simple" hypothesis of the ontological creative act, for that is what we have left, admitting that we still might have to give the whole thing up.

Frankenberry

Although all the contributors to this volume are well-known to and loved by me, Nancy Frankenberry is the longest known and loved. In the mid-1980s I read her *Religion and Radical Empiricism* for my series at SUNY Press and published it proudly in 1987. We knew one another at the Institute for American Religious and Philosophical thought and for over thirty years have been arguing over the topic of her essay here, including at the last meeting in 2019. I'm pleased to learn here that she has been reading my work for fifty years and she still is not convinced! As she quotes Eliot at the end of her essay, "Not fare well, But fare forward, voyager." So I shall try again.

As down payment, let me express my great thanks to her for dedicating her essay here to my wife, Beth Neville. Beth is the artist who has interpreted most of my books with covers, and Nancy is the only one of the commentators here to notice this.

Nancy begins with an extraordinary summary of my *Axiology of Thinking*, pointing out its architectonic and poetry. I thank her very much for this and am amazed at what my work looks like so long after the fact. Let me get immediately to her questions for me, however.

The first theme concerns the "vague" character of my discussion. In almost an aside, she characterizes reality as "infinitely dense, insistently particular, and everywhere contingent." I agree with that, except for the middle portion, insistent particularity. I hold, with Charles Peirce, that reality is somewhat particular but also vague in itself. So, reality as it moves along is particular in its stand at the moment but equally real in its vagueness, indeed sometimes

generality, of traits that are particular only as instances of vagueness. At any moment, things are also vague, and this determines in part the future. A person, for instance, is not only insistently particular but also vague, and more importantly so. Therefore, vagueness can dictate the content of the world as well as its form. In fact, some forms are particular and others are also vague.

Second, Nancy then gives a brilliantly accurate account of the derivation of my ontological creative act from the ontological context of mutual relevance. She points out that this act is itself wholly contingent. But she says, "Rather than a once-and-for-all creation, Neville envisions an ongoing process in the Whiteheadian sense." This I do not do, however. Whereas what is created might be like Whitehead's process, I say that the ontological creative act is eternal, not at each moment. Wherever there is a difference in time, or in space, or in any other dimension, the ontological creative act must be beyond this. I call it "eternal" just to have a transcendent word for it. My complaint about Whitehead is that he thinks that creativity mediates between moments of time, making the new many a new one, whereas he needs to recognize that moments and their mediation themselves need to be held apart and united. What gets created really is the whole of space/time (or whatever other dimensions of reality there are, were, or will be), and its process of unfolding, changing myriads of ways within time. The ultimate needs to guarantee differences.

Third, Nancy asks how the ontological creative act is indeterminate and also contingent. The answer is simple. It is not something determinate over and above the determinate things it creates. It is something determinate in that the determinate things are its composite product. If it did not create, it would not exist as an act. But it is an act productive of novel determinations (including vague ones) and hence is the creator of this world.

Fourth, she says that "an explanation, in order to explain a range of data, cannot be more opaque than the explanans." But of course it is. Otherwise nothing novel would ever be created. How would Whitehead's category of the ultimate ever get to be what it is, acting with every moment of change, if it were not created? To the extent Whitehead is right in his cosmology, his God plus the world constitutes the created order, and needs an ontological created act.

Fifth, Nancy raises the question about the dyadic character of my definition of truth, namely, the "carryover of value *from* the object interpreted *into* the interpreter's experience in the respect in which the interpretive signs stand for the object" (her italics). She believes that the carryover becomes triadic only when the interpretant asserts the truth of the claim. But this only adds to the already triadic character of the carryover. She misses the triadic character of the sign, Peirce's major point. This leads her to miss the fact of perceptual and other more or less forced interpretations that are all triadic. Now, Nancy

believes that everything in this discourse is linguistic, whereas Peirce believed it was all natural. The interpretant is always in a triadic relation to the object by means of the sign, and it might be wrong.

Sixth, Nancy asks whether the interpretant is only pragmatic in the sense of bestowing benefits on the interpreter. Yes, and the benefits might be fully natural, utilitarian, or functional. We can judge the truth or falsity of our value judgments (all judgments are value-laden) by a variety of means, most of which are unconscious. But suppose we philosophers ask whether a value-judgment is true. Then we need to ask about the surrounding judgments, which for Peirce and me means we need to look around. If the argument is mainly utilitarian, then the consequences might be very bad for human life; this might indeed be the case, though we should check the surrounding judgments. If the argument is mainly functionalist, then it is always vulnerable to being an affirmation of the consequent. Nevertheless, the signs connecting the object and interpretant make that very unlikely. The relation of the object and interpretant is always triadic by means of the signs.

Seventh, regarding Wildman's essay, so neatly summarized by Nancy, Wesley first argues that my ontological argument can be accepted and any other cosmological argument might be affirmed (that's not entirely true, if one takes the cosmological traits of any determinate world as given). Suppose Whitehead's cosmology might be accepted. Then I would have to say that my ontological creative act creates God plus the world, and process theologians would be happy. Nancy, however, draws a different conclusion, namely that this would make the ontological creative act determinate *a se*, which I deny. Against this, I would argue that the ontological creative act is not prior to the created determinate world. Within the temporality of the world, the creative act is temporally relevant wherever changes are being made; but this is not the mode of the eternal being. From the standpoint of the act, it has no time.

Wesley second argues that you could simply drop my interest in the univocity of being and the problem of the one and many and stick dogmatically to some cosmology, for instance, Whitehead's. But then you would lose the clarity of my position. (Wesley does not like this, nor do I.) Wesley third offers the option of dropping my essential features as a character trait of determinate things. But then you would get what Nancy calls an "undifferentiated mashup," which would be terribly unappealing. After all, what are us philosophers to do?

Eighth, Nancy goes back to an otherwise undefended version of Wesley's second point. Why not simply take up Whitehead's notion of ultimacy as "creativity as the 'ultimate of ultimates,' signifying a dynamism that is the very actuality of things, their act of being there at all"? This is like my account of ultimacy, but differently located. It is immanent within each thing, she says.

This is precisely the problem: as immanent, it cannot mediate or connect up the before and afters of the world, or earlier and later. Some of the followers of Whitehead even allow for the past to be gone and the future not yet, so the present alone is real. I want to say, cosmologically speaking, that the past and future are just as real as the present, though problematically actual.

My disagreement with Nancy Frankenberry is about contingency, in the long run. Whereas she sees it everywhere within time, I see it mainly in eternity with perhaps some contingency within time. The arguments between us for and against our positions are all about the cosmological. I think time requires a creator who creates the independent modes of past, present, and future. I think we need essential features to acknowledge the externality of things. I think we need to acknowledge that the ontological act is not prior to or related in any temporal way to things. I think that judgments of value are all natural and are mainly right because of our signs, and that our signs are mainly more or less right. Yet value judgments might still be wrong, I want to say. I think that any explanation by means of an act of creation necessarily requires the creation of novelty, although that is after the fact, as it were. I think that the distinction between the indeterminacy of the ontological creative act is out of relation to the determinate things, and in relation to those things, it is their determinate creator. I think that the relation of the ontological act to the created world is not a once-for-all act, but an act without temporality, resulting in a world replete with temporality and other dimensions. Most of Nancy's mistakes, I think, result from her nominalism or belief that everything is insistent act.

Or, perhaps I am mistaken. But the result would be a shift of view, a different philosophy, not the adoption of skepticism.

Wesley Wildman

Wesley Wildman has lamented the passing of the Bob Era and done an excellent job of ordering these essays. I have followed his order to build my argument. Bin Song discusses my epistemology in relation to my theory of comparison in relation to my larger philosophy, and concludes with some questions about the theory; specifically, he notes my affirmation of the transcendence of the ontological creative act in comparing Confucianism and Christianity. David Rohr then treats my epistemology as deriving from that of Charles S. Peirce, and raises questions about that. Michael L. Raposa is the first to undertake a very serious exploration with criticism; he explores approvingly my "praying the ultimate" and then offers a very strong argument that I should abandon the indeterminacy of my concept of the ontological creative act. Then Andrew Irvine offers an impassioned cry for something more than I offer concerning

the possibility of the failure of my place for ontological love in the face of the fallibility of my theory. I give my answers to all of these questions, which amount to the claim that I really go back to my arguments for the ontological creative act. Nancy Frankenberry graciously recounts the aesthetic structure of my *Axiology of Freedom* and raises all of her long questions about the ontological creative act, to which I give answers. Readers will have to determine how good my answers are.

The *Axiology of Thinking* was a project I developed on the drive from Yonkers to Stony Brook for a job talk. (Job talks have become much more complex these days.) It took me about seventeen years to complete writing that project, but it was at the end pretty much the same project I envisioned at the beginning. That project illustrates a good many of Wesley's points about me. First, I was hired and appreciated as an administrator, and so people took distant pride in my work without carefully reading it; consequently I just published a lot. Second, his remarks about my "mind palace" are a fancy way of saying that I could choose what to write about and so developed my own views. Third, he is right about my one basic idea, developed in graduate school, but that idea is almost entirely missing from the three large volumes of my *Axiology of Thinking*. It is in nearly everything else I wrote. Fourth, he certainly is right about my love of system. Nancy Frankenberry describes it well in these papers. It surely is out of date. But, fifth, my publisher loves me and continues to publish the system, in the big monographs as well as the collections of essays.

As for his acknowledgment of my sins, I protest. I sing much better than I had hoped. My libretto is exactly as long as *Peter Grimes*. I treat analytic philosophy and postmodern philosophy in precise detail where they bear upon my topics. Knowledge of the natural and social sciences is changing so fast it is better to work around it. What is cricket?

Who would think that an Australian/Californian philosopher of religion, who TA'd for Huston Smith and took all of John Searle's graduate classes and whose advisor got me to hire him by getting me drunk on white wine, would turn out to be a miracle? When I met him in 1993, I became involved with a person who was my companion, both academically and in life. I have learned as much from him as he from I. We are not finished yet. Watch for the (non) Festschrift on Wildman, edited by LeRon Shults and me, yet to come.