Conclusion

It is my hope that this monograph has accomplished a number of related goals. In the first place, this study has aimed to further the process of filling in the gaping holes that still remain in our knowledge of the history of philosophical thinking in early modern South Asia. Particularly in the case of Arabic philosophical writing, modern scholarship has hardly begun to reconstruct the intellectual conversations that pervaded the landscape of Mughal India; the rise of Persian (not to mention the myriad Indian vernaculars) as emerging media of philosophical reflection in this period has also not received the attention it deserves, particularly in the case of authors writing at the fringe or outside of the imperial courts. Through the case-studies of Madhusūdana Sarasvatī, Muḥibb Allāh Ilāhābādī, and Mīr Findiriskī, I have sought in this study to retrace a small sampling of the philosophical conversations that were occupying Sanskrit-, Arabic-, and Persian-writing intellectuals of the time, both in an attempt to recover the contents of these discussions and debates, on the one hand, and in order to furnish some picture of the "schools" and networks of scholars who participated in these conversations, on the other. As we have seen, these three authors engaged in numerous questions of philosophical import, including, among others: the nature of being (*wujūd*), the ontological status of universals and particulars, the proper roles of reason and revelation in the pursuit of knowledge, the God-world relationship, the nature of the soul, and the metaphysical roots of religious diversity.

Along the way, I have emphasized the importance of the fact that, by the early modern period, Arabic and Sanskrit had served as the foundational languages of Islamic and Hindu philosophical inquiry for nearly a millennium, in the case of Arabic, and well over a millennium, in the case of Sanskrit. This long, continuous

history meant that any early modern South Asian thinker who wanted to seriously engage either Hindu or Islamic philosophy had to become well-versed in staggeringly deep traditions of erudite scholastic material, likely demanding a lifetime's worth of effort to learning the writings of generations of forebears even while mastering new developments, positions, arguments, and counter-arguments being produced in the present day. This long history also meant that the basic disciplinary procedures and technical vocabulary of Sanskrit and Arabic philosophy had already become thoroughly crystallized by the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, rendering both disciplines resistant to the sorts of linguistic and conceptual gymnastics that would be required to initiate a "dialogue" with another, historically distinct scholarly tradition. Given this situation, in which the two "jet streams" of Sanskrit and Arabic intellectual activity were already so well-established in their respective forms even while participants in both jet streams already had so much scholarly material to digest, synthesize, and respond to, it should come as little surprise that Sanskrit and Arabic philosophers of the Mughal period overwhelmingly tended to ignore one another, writing in such a way that they betrayed hardly any awareness of the other's existence.

Most modern Euro-American philosophy departments, although lacking a comparable exegetical bent, are otherwise little different, having such a weighty, exacting historical discipline already before them that the idea of seriously including "non-Western" philosophy within their fold has only been inchoately entertained in recent years—and, even then, the idea is not typically a disciplinary priority. Compounding this scenario is the confidence (at times even haughtiness) shared by both Sanskrit and Arabic jet streams that their own tradition is sufficient unto itself to attain to the completeness of the philosophical project, which means that engaging a "foreign" intellectual tradition would serve, according to most thinkers, at best a secondary or supplemental philosophical purpose. This view is reflected even in Muḥibb Allāh's otherwise capacious framework for comprehending religious diversity, wherein, even if all the prophets uniformly came to establish authentic paths back to the Real, it is nevertheless incumbent upon each individual to follow in *one* particular prophet's footsteps. Each pathway up the mountain has its own sherpa; while other sherpas situated upon other paths might have some worthwhile wisdom to impart, in principle, the sherpa of one's own path should be sufficient and, unlike the other sherpas, offers guidance tailor-made for the particular path upon which one currently stands. Indeed, guidance derived from experience gained upon *other* pathways might prove misleading for the unique exigencies of one's own particular path. Meanwhile, the stakes and consequences of a mistake only increase the higher one ascends.

Especially important for the sorts of intellectual transformations examined in this study, in turn, is the phenomenon of the gradual elevation of Persian to a language of scholastic philosophical activity during the course of the early modern period in South Asia. Though there had been notable examples of Muslim

intellectuals composing philosophical treatises in Persian before the sixteenth century—Ibn Sīnā, Nāṣir-i Khusraw, Suhrawardī, and Ṭūsī, for instance, all wrote a minority of their philosophical treatises in Persian, even if they clearly favored Arabic for the most technical subjects[1]—early modern intellectuals are unique in the degree to which they favor Persian, at times even over Arabic, as a preferred medium of philosophical expression. Hence, we encounter Muḥibb Allāh fearing that his Arabic treatise, the *Taswiyah*, might be too inaccessible for his South Asian contemporaries, and so penning a Persian auto-commentary in the hopes of making it more broadly comprehensible; for his second and third commentaries on the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam,* he similarly opted to write in Persian for the sake of accessibility. A great many of Muḥibb Allāh's Indian contemporaries, including many of the later commentators on the *Taswiyah*, made the same choice. We also find the Safavid Iranian intellectual, Mīr Findiriskī, composing the majority of his philosophical treatises in Persian, a fact which only further corroborates the notion that Persian was growing as an effective scholastic medium at this point in time. Complementing this increasing use of Persian among Muslim intellectuals was Emperor Akbar's establishment of Persian as the official administrative language of the Mughal Empire, on account of which generations of both Muslim and non-Muslim Indians would choose to learn Persian and to submit themselves to a Persianate literary and cultural curriculum. In the generations subsequent to the time-period of this study, Persian-writing Hindu scholars would only increase in prominence.[2] Such circumstances created a genuine space for Persian to develop into a scholarly language that Muslims and Hindus could both share and lay claim to.

And so, as the Mughal court convened teams of Hindu and Muslim scholars to undertake the task of translating Sanskrit texts, Persian emerged as a natural choice for the target language. Persian's unique possession of sufficiently scholarly registers alongside an abiding plasticity rendered it a capable "host" to Sanskrit material. Moreover, Persian alone was pan-imperial in its scope while also remaining relatively neutral in terms of which religious communities it could successfully "belong" to. When these Hindu and Muslim translation teams thus endeavored collectively to convey Sanskritic thoughts via a non-Sanskrit medium, and to re-fashion the Persian language for this end, they unsurprisingly and inevitably brought their intellectual and literary backgrounds to bear upon the task. Such variables help to explain some of what distinguishes the Mughal translation movement from the other great "translation moment" of Islamic history, namely, the ʿAbbāsid-sponsored translation of the massive corpus of Greek philosophical and scientific texts into Arabic during the eighth to tenth centuries.[3] The contrast between a young, ʿAbbāsid-era Arabic—still in its infancy as an emerging medium of philosophical and general academic inquiry—versus the fully matured, scholastic Arabic of the Mughal period helps to illustrate why the latter could not easily vehicle the early modern Hindu-Muslim encounter, leaving Persian as the more viable option. At the same time, Islamic philosophy itself had developed

considerably in the intervening seven or eight centuries, embracing the imaginal (*khayālī*) and the literary in ways that were simply not the case at the time of the translation of the Greek corpus. Hence, while the Greek-to-Arabic translation movement favored technical, scientific materials to the near complete exclusion of poetry and literature, the Mughal translation movement, in sharp contrast, opted overwhelmingly for the literary and the sapiential, eschewing technical, dialectical Sanskrit philosophical materials while creatively re-imagining Hindu wisdom within a Persian Sufi mold, "philosophical" in only the more capacious sense of the word. The influence of Ibn ʿArabī's Sufism, particularly his metaphysics, is a central factor in this story, as can also be seen in the roughly contemporaneous translations then taking place in China in the context of the Muslim-Neo-Confucian encounter.[4]

Accordingly, in a text such as the *Jūg Bāsisht,* we find two thitherto largely distinct traditions of scholarship—a slice of the Sanskrit jet stream represented by Jagannātha Miśra and Paṭhān Miśra, on the one hand, and a subsection of the Arabo-Persian jet stream represented by Pānīpatī, on the other—convening to accomplish a single feat of translation. As I have sought to illustrate in this study, restricting the inquiry to only certain textual contents relevant to the subject of metaphysics, the scholastic elements at play in this particular project of translation were complex, exhibiting the confluence of Advaita, Śaiva non-dualist, *wujūdī*, Islamic Peripatetic, and Sufi poetic traditions, in addition to the *Laghu-Yoga-Vāsiṣṭha*'s own unique philosophical synthesis, which drew from and innovated on Upaniṣadic, Yogic, Sāṃkhya, and Buddhist resources, among others. In the face of all of these variegated philosophical universes, the members of the translation team each contributed something in order to make the translation "work." The contributions that came from the two sides were certainly not equivalent in scope, as the overarching framework and approach to translation, for instance, owes far more to the Arabo-Persian jet stream, even while both jet streams contributed, in their own ways, to the challenge of articulating particular Sanskrit concepts via an Arabo-Persian terminology. Yet, the joint participation of both parties is nonetheless evident, especially in the particular metaphysical confluence that would homologize the Hindu Sanskrit notions of *saṃkalpa* and *brahman*'s self-awareness, on the one hand, with the Islamic conception of God's desire in the *ḥadīth* of the hidden treasure, on the other.

It is my hope, however, that this examination of a particular moment of interaction between early modern South Asian religio-philosophical traditions might additionally convey something useful for the analysis of other times and contexts. More specifically, I would suggest that the phenomenon of what I have labeled scholarly "jet streams" might provide a viable framework for the examination of other historical moments. Indeed, I would suggest that this model is not too far removed from our own academic departments in a modern university: just as an economist, qua economist, replete with her own disciplinary vocabulary and

field-specific queries, will largely only be able to speak with her fellow economists, in the same way, a Muḥibb Allāh or a Madhusūdana, deeply invested within his own philosophical tradition, may only be inclined to write to the fellow members of his own discipline. A modern economist and anthropologist could attempt a conversation about their respective research projects, but this act would typically require them to drop their discipline-specific vocabularies to a large extent, searching for a way to communicate their ideas in a more accessible and less technical language, that is to say, in "plain English." Indeed, even though the economist and anthropologist might be studying the same region, working in neighboring buildings, walking the same sidewalks, and using the same libraries—they might even be researching the same *topic,* say, poverty or global capitalism—nevertheless they may almost never speak with one another, as their disciplinary languages and vantage-points render it difficult for them to engage one another as scholars in their respective disciplines. Neither discipline, within itself, possesses the necessary tools for communicating regularly and effectively with the other. Similarly, it seems perfectly possible that the likes of Muḥibb Allāh/Findiriskī and Madhusūdana could have discussed their thoughts and religious views with one another through the medium of a shared vernacular, but, necessarily, in more informal terms. Such conversations would not constitute a "scholastic" conversation, nor would there likely be a written record of such "unofficial" interactions.[5]

Faced with this scenario, one can attempt to dig up some evidence of such interactions from each scholar's writings, but, as I have endeavored to show particularly in the case of Madhusūdana, making strong inferences on that basis is often tenuous, especially when the author in question is writing in accordance with the normative conventions of his discipline. As much as we might like to view the *Prasthānabheda* as "proof" of Madhusūdana's responding to an encroaching Muslim presence, at best such suggestions can only remain within the domain of conjecture, given that other plausible explanations can also be given for why the text looks the way that it does, without a clear means to affirm one explanation over another.

What, then, would it take to facilitate, for instance, Muḥibb Allāh and Madhusūdana's conversation at the level of a technical, scholastic exchange? The simple answer, it seems to me from the foregoing, is that a new interdisciplinary language would have to be fashioned. If our economist and anthropologist were truly committed to facilitating a sustained, trenchant conversation between their two disciplines, one of the most ready options would be to initiate an interdisciplinary workshop or interdepartmental colloquium. In such a colloquium, scholars from both fields could, together, draw on materials from their respective disciplines and backgrounds in an attempt to craft a new, shared vocabulary for interdisciplinary communication and learning. In my reading, such was one of the basic goals of scholars such as Pānīpatī, Findiriskī, and perhaps even Jagannātha Miśra and Paṭhān Miśra: a considerable proportion of Findiriskī's *Sharḥ-i Jūg*,

for instance, consists of glosses of Sanskrit technical terms, while Findiriskī also composed a Persian glossary of Sanskrit words in the *Laghu*; Pānīpatī, similarly, peppers the *Jūg Bāsisht* with glosses, definitions, and more informal conceptual linkages, as seen in its opening pages. Beyond this treatise, one could additionally cite the efforts of figures such as Dārā Shikōh, who, in his *Majmaʿ al-baḥrayn,* also sought to produce a comprehensive glossary of Hindu Sanskrit terms and their Islamic Arabo-Persian equivalents.

We could conceive such scholarly efforts, I would argue, as something akin to the establishment of an interdepartmental colloquium with its own interdisciplinary vocabulary, the participants perhaps hoping that their "colloquium" might eventually grow into a new (sub)discipline in its own right, complete with its own disciplinary inquiries and technical lexicon. In other words, when wisps from two jet streams meet, the resulting current may fizzle out immediately, or it might endure; eventually, perhaps it could become its own independent jet stream/discipline. Such processes, however, require time and circumstance, and, for a number of reasons beyond this study's scope, this particular early modern attempt at establishing a new "interdisciplinary" Persian jet stream did not quite have the opportunity to properly establish its foundations and persist and grow. Emperor Awrangzēb's (real but exaggerated) shift in policy away from such translation projects was certainly a factor—perhaps akin to an interdisciplinary colloquium losing its funding and institutional support—while the general undermining of Persianate institutional learning during the colonial period was likely the decisive death knell.

Now, it should also be emphasized that not all interdisciplinary colloquia are created equal, nor does every participant enter into such a conversation with the same intentions. Some of our economists or anthropologists might actually be interested in learning something from the other discipline so as to benefit their own work; others, however, are already convinced of the superiority of their own disciplines, and may participate more out of interest in the spectacle, or else, to learn something deemed to be of only secondary value. At worst, a scholar may attend the colloquium simply with the intention of refuting the other side, so as to demonstrate the superiority of her own jet stream. It must be pointed out that a similar spectrum of intentions could also be found amongst the courtiers of the Mughal court. Akbar's court historian ʿAbd al-Qādir Badāʾūnī (d. 1615), for instance, could scarcely hide his disdain for the emperor's translation projects, but nevertheless participated in the early *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* translations under the direct orders of Akbar. Abū al-Fażl mentions numerous motivations behind Akbar's commissioned translation of the *Mahābhārata*, including the socio-political ideal of attenuating the ignorance and squabbling between Indian Muslims and Hindus at the time. None of these broad varieties of motivation should be ruled out from the analyses of modern scholars; one of my main goals in this study has been to highlight and detail some of the varieties of motivations that have not yet received sufficient attention.

To take one more example, we have already had occasion to mention Muḥibb Allāh's friend ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Chishtī, who translated the *Bhagavad-Gītā* under the title *Mirʾāt al-ḥaqāʾiq*. In his preface, the translator affirms that the *Gītā* is a text that elucidates the "secrets of *tawḥīd*," that is, "*waḥdat al-wujūd*."[6] ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, however, does not shy away from critiquing what he perceives to be the doctrinal errors of the *Gītā*, such as the divinity of Kṛṣṇa (who was "really" only a human prophet), while Chishtī, moreover, avoids the question of reincarnation, casting it instead in terms of the Islamic doctrine of the resurrection of humankind on the Day of Judgment.[7] As Vassie concisely states the matter, the "sort of treatment [effected by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān] could not have been motivated by the same syncretistic urge of which Akbar and his 'Divine Religion' (*Dīn-i ilāhī*) have stood accused . . . [For ʿAbd al-Raḥmān,] [t]he Bhagavadgita was right only insofar as it either was, or could be forced to appear, in accord with the Islamic faith and practice of the Sufis; and it was unequivocally wrong insofar as it diverged from that perceived norm."[8] In the case of the *Mirʾāt al-ḥaqāʾiq,* it seems, the motivation for studying non-Muslim materials was more a matter of finding confirmation for ʿAbd al-Raḥmān's own theological views, rather than necessarily appreciating Hindu teachings in their own terms.

Such a diversity of views and intentions is natural, just as there is a diversity of aims and motivations within most any modern academic department. Accordingly, even though ʿAbd al-Raḥmān's attitude might differ markedly from that of Dārā Shikōh, this does not at all undermine the idea of both belonging to a fledgling "interdisciplinary colloquium," as evidenced by the fact that ʿAbd al-Raḥmān's explicit purpose in producing the *Mirʾāt al-ḥaqāʾiq* was "to do for the Bhagavadgita what Shaykh Ṣūfī Qubjahānī had done for the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*" (when he translated it some decades prior); Dārā Shikōh, notably, cites the same translation of Qubjahānī as his motivation for producing a new translation of the *Laghu*,[9] declaring the former to contain too many deficiencies.[10] One could regard such connections and developments as the evolution of a disciplinary "field," wherein participating scholars cite a common body or growing "canon" of foundational scholarship and seek to refine and build off it in their own new works. The 1597 *Jūg Bāsisht*, accordingly, provides perhaps the first such example of the attempt to establish and refine the Persian world's comprehension of the *Laghu-Yoga-Vāsiṣṭha* (and Hindu Sanskrit thought more generally). Furthermore, given the three translators' exceptional willingness to repeatedly depict those aspects of Hindu thought that would most typically be deemed to contradict Islamic thought (*avatāras, yugas,* reincarnation, *vāsanās,* etc.) without any apparent criticism, we could best categorize the *Jūg Bāsisht* as a comparatively less theologically-driven enterprise than the works of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān or Dārā Shikōh. Rather, in the *Jūg Bāsisht,* we find a generally concerted and consistent effort to present Hindu thought, to a significant extent, in its own terms and terminology, while simultaneously seeking to show how Islam/Sufism promulgates essentially the same teachings, even if the

two diverge markedly at the level of form and manifestation—a divergence from which the translation team typically did not shy away.

Nevertheless, it bears repeating that an interdisciplinary colloquium is just a colloquium, while the parent disciplines continue on their usual way, most often without being greatly impacted. And so, just as economics remains economics and anthropology remains anthropology, similarly, the wider Sanskrit and Arabo-Persian jet streams stayed their respective courses throughout the early modern period without much reference to the "wisps" that coalesced within the Mughal translation movement. Irrespective of the existence of an interdisciplinary colloquium, even among the most devoted participants, most of the scholars in a modern economics or anthropology department would persist in their usual research conduct; most of the conversations generated between the two departments would remain informal, casual, and far less technical. The additional complication in the South Asian case was that, not only were the *disciplinary* languages distinct, but, even further, the very languages of communication—Sanskrit, Arabic, and Persian—that mediated the disciplines were different, hence posing an even grander barrier. Nonetheless, despite these considerable challenges, this shared Hindu-Muslim Persian philosophical discourse did reach considerably sophisticated heights over the course of the Mughal period. Unfortunately, this momentum lasted only for so many decades, for the complex reasons briefly indicated above.

FROM HISTORY TO THEORY? POSSIBILITIES FOR THE ACADEMIC STUDY OF RELIGION

Before at last concluding this book, allow me to suggest some further reflections for what this study in early modern dialogical translation might have to offer to scholars today. For decades now within the field of religious studies, a persistent question has been variously proposed and debated, at times treated as an issue that concerns the very future of the academic study of religion: namely, whether "non-Western" religions must remain strictly objects of study, or else—particularly in light of religious studies' Orientalist and imperialist legacies—whether other ("non-Western") civilizational epistemologies might be allowed a more genuine place at the table. That is to say, can religious studies, as a field, allow space for the perspectives and methodologies of, for example, an indigenous African philosopher, or a Native American theory of ritual, not merely as *objects* of study, but as voices and perspectives that can be legitimately learned from and dialogued with for the crafting of theory and method, despite the relative absence of shared disciplinary categories, norms, assumptions, and goals between "their" discourses and "our" own? A quick glance, for instance, at the past several years of the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* (*JAAR*)—the leading journal for the discipline within the United States—reveals this debate to be recurring, fervent, and, in some ways, at a bit of an impasse. In a 2011 issue of the *JAAR* dedicated to a roundtable on

Arvind Sharma's *A Primal Perspective on the Philosophy of Religion* (79, no. 4), for example, one finds the respondents alternately praising Sharma's book for finally attempting to bring indigenous (largely oral) philosophical traditions into the purview of the philosophy of religion, while also expressing a certain frustration that the volume effectively inserts indigenous philosophies into the pre-existent paradigms, queries, and frameworks of the current, still deeply Eurocentric field, as opposed to "*critique[ing]* the traditional formulation of philosophy of religion" or "*shifting* the foundational paradigms of the discipline in light of the insights of primal religions."[11] Sharma replies out of a sort of disciplinary necessity and pragmatism: the study of religion operates "in a world that has been Europeanized to such an extent that the very response to such a Europeanization must perforce often be articulated through the use of the terms (both literally and figuratively) imposed by Europe . . . . [Some scholars] even seem to maintain that such an enterprise as is represented by this book must accept the paradigmatic status of Western concepts[,] at least for the time being."[12] Despite a vague, widespread sentiment that the study of religion should someday exhibit a less exclusively Eurocentric paradigm, the path forward to successfully reshaping the field's foundational questions and categories, it seems, remains elusive.

A number of similar disciplinary themes and debates emerged in the articles, responses, and rejoinders published in a 2006 special issue of the *JAAR* on "the future of the Study of Religion in the academy" (74, no. 1). In the back-and-forth between José Ignacio Cabezón and William Schweiker, for instance, the two authors discuss the possibilities of examining the religious traditions of "the Other" not just as a source of *data*, but also as a source of *theory*, in light of contemporary questioning over whether "western/secular theoretical apparatuses" are exclusively appropriate for studying "non-western" cultures, or whether it is desirable to seek to "liberate" religious studies from the theories and categories of "just one socio-historical-religious context" among many. While Schweiker rightly critiques a number of Cabezón's conceptual "dyads" (e.g., "us" vs. "the other"), both scholars agree that "casting the theoretical net a bit wider" would be a welcome development in the field—and one that has already begun in some measure—though such "theory pluralism" should not fall prey to a kind of "knee-jerk inclusivism." Rather, theories of any variety should be included only if they "work."[13] Gavin Flood, writing in a similar vein, emphasizes that the study of religion can become an arena in which religious traditions' self-representations and self-inquiries can take place within a framework of rational discourse, but that it is vital for such inquiry to become a cross-disciplinary *conversation,* such that even the more conventional subfields—anthropology, sociology, text-history, philology, etc.—are allowed to weigh in, challenge, and offer corrective readings through external critique (and *vice versa*).[14]

In her response, however, Nancy Levene laments that such proposals simply perpetuate some version of the same interminable, decades-old "religious studies

vs. theology" debate, without anything new being offered to actually help the field move forward in any practical, constructive way.[15] Indeed, Flood does admit that the study of religion has yet to craft a vocabulary with which to facilitate the conversations he proposes: "Religious Studies . . . needs to be able to discuss and articulate ideas of shared concern in forms of language, whereby different world religions and discre[te] subject-specific areas can communicate and illumine each other. We need to overcome the inadequate choice of using either problematic universal categories in understanding religions or a relativistic reversion to purely area-specific study."[16] Perhaps sensing that a new approach and a new vocabulary are required, Peter Ochs proposes, among other strategies, starting with how two traditions, in their mutual interactions, historically characterized one another.[17]

In some ways, this study has taken up Flood's and Ochs' respective calls for action. The core of my analysis has offered a sustained consideration, in primarily (aspirationally) emic terms, of the historical interaction (or, as Ochs might phrase it, "dialogue") between South Asian Muslim and Hindu philosophical cultures in the very moments when they were collaboratively crafting the language with which to understand one another. The fruits of their labors, one could argue, may well constitute a third option distinguishable from Flood's dilemmic "universal categories" vs. "relativism," as the translation team deployed their specific traditions' intellectual resources in ways that allowed them to posit genuine difference at the level of form and manifestation, but shared, universal truth and content within more transcendent levels of reality and meaning. In a word, echoing many of the calls for broadening the methodological bases of religious studies, I have sought to take seriously the concepts and comparative insights of these early modern Muslim and Hindu thinkers as resources for potentially more than a mere "archaeology of (outdated) ideas."

As Elizabeth Pritchard challengingly queries the discipline, however: "but, seriously, what does it mean to take religion seriously?"[18] Critiquing some of the field's more influential iterations of this idea from the likes of Amy Hollywood, Robert Orsi, and Dipesh Chakrabarty—who variously champion such methodological priorities as "radical openness," non-reductionism, emphasizing yet coming to terms with difference, etc.—Pritchard perceptively cautions that, while displays of "taking the other seriously" are "frequently posed as an antidote to or rebuttal of secular liberalism," the gesture is often actually "more about avoiding conflict . . . . Thus rather than being an antidote to secular liberalism, such calls are, instead, an insidious reinscription of a secular liberal assumption," namely, "that a nonconflictual, liminal space free of power can be created."[19] In the name of undermining one's own paradigm via openness to another paradigm, in other words, this "taking seriously" ends up only largely reaffirming—and subsuming the "other" within—one's own paradigm, in this case the "good, liberal" politics of much of the academic humanities, knowingly or unknowingly promoting values of "tolerance," "solidarity," and "openness" over the recognition of genuine conflict and

incommensurability. As scholars writing in a comparable vein to Pritchard, such as Russell McCutcheon, Bruce Lincoln, and Aaron Hughes, have forcefully and usefully interjected, normatively projecting *any* given political agenda is simply not the proper job of the historian of religion.[20] On McCutcheon's articulation of the matter, far too many scholars, unreflectively or else under the guise of "scholarly critique," merely "dislodge one set of normative values only to reinstate [our] own in their place . . . in step with our own liberal democratic/free market interests"; the proper "scholar of religion qua critic," in contrast, "has no interest in determining which social formation is right or true or just or best and she does not practice conflict management. Instead, she is an equal opportunity historicizer."[21] It is precisely in an attempt to avoid subsuming the Mughal translation movement within a modern Western liberal pluralism that this study has striven not only to cleave close to emic terms and categories situated in their historical contexts (impossible as this may be to achieve perfectly), but has also spent considerable time with the *exclusivistic* trajectories of Hindu and Islamic thought: the preponderant moments when Madhusūdana, Muḥibb Allāh, or Findiriskī utterly ignore the religious "other" or affirm the superiority or exclusive salvific efficacy of their own traditions, on the one hand, should be just as interesting to us and worthy of attention as their far more exceptional and infrequent moments of "dialogue," on the other. I have endeavored in the above to turn the lens of the intellectual historian upon both.

And yet, though a welcome intervention, McCutcheon's and Lincoln's respective agendas for religious studies serve to dramatically thicken the barrier between scholar and object of study: "history" (i.e., what historians of religion do), according to Lincoln, is the "sharpest possible contrast" from "religion,"[22] while, for McCutcheon, the roles of "critic" vs. "caretaker" are "mutually exclusive,"[23] thus leaving no space whatsoever, it seems, for the likes of Madhusūdana, Muḥibb Allāh, Findiriskī, or the translation team to ever find themselves on the "theory" side of the enterprise. What form of "taking religion seriously" is still available to us, under such circumstances? A second variety of call for explicit and critical self-awareness could point to a possible way forward: in addition to increased cognizance of our own political interests and agendas, à la Pritchard, McCutcheon, and Lincoln, religious studies would also benefit from its scholars being more cognizant of their *philosophical* and *metaphysical* presuppositions. As Kevin Schilbrack has argued in several venues (including the *JAAR*), "historians, anthropologists, and others who develop theories about religion always also develop philosophies. In order to study religions, one must at least implicitly have answered certain questions about what one takes to be real and not real, knowable and not knowable, and good and not good. In other words, scholars of religion . . . live and act with certain metaphysical, epistemological, and axiological presuppositions."[24]

Schilbrack's call for scholars to pay attention to metaphysics and to our own metaphysical presuppositions is significant in the context of a discipline that has

largely turned away from metaphysics, prevailingly treating it as a misguided or impossible endeavor or else incompatible with the requirements of religious studies or the secular university more broadly.[25] At the same time, a compelling case can be made that even the most "anti-metaphysical" of religious studies scholars end up taking implicit metaphysical stances: although one might expect, for instance, a metaphysically neutral or agnostic lens to approach "sameness" and "difference" as equally real or equally constructed by human cognitive processes, the field's current aversion to and distrust (particularly on postmodern grounds) of religious comparison arguably betrays an implicit metaphysical presumption that difference is somehow prior or more fundamentally real than sameness or similarity.[26] Such a stance cannot simply be assumed, however, as self-evident—plenty of rational or even scientific evidence could be leveled against it—but should be acknowledged, reflected upon, and even justified, as necessary.

Now, Lincoln and McCutcheon are of course quite aware, to an extent, that their chosen methods, unflinching historicism, and enthusiastic reductionism involve certain presumptions that are not metaphysically neutral. They justify their methods as wholly appropriate to the academic context (and religious/theological approaches as wholly inappropriate), however, on the grounds that their methods have the upper hand in being evidence-based and hence publicly verifiable, open to critical inquiry, and grounded in history and a certain commonsensicality that religious claims (being grounded in an ahistorical, infallible, invisible authority) lack. It is open to question, however, whether such a justification really stands up to scrutiny: McCutcheon, for instance, articulates the difference between objects of scholarly vs. theological inquiry through appeals to a naturalist distinction between "obvious" vs. "non-obvious" objects (i.e., things you do vs. don't "bump into")[27] or Daniel Dennett's analogy of "skyhooks" vs. "cranes" ("immaterial or imaginary devices . . . for attaching objects to the sky" vs. "materially based . . . mechanical devices.")[28]

Just what counts as "obvious" and open to public scrutiny, however, is, well, not so very obvious! The field of analytic philosophy, for instance—a discipline utterly opposed to appeals to invisible, publicly inscrutable authorities if there ever was one—also inquires regularly and energetically into "abstract" (as opposed to "concrete") objects of an arguably ahistorical and "non-obvious" nature;[29] as outlined above, for more than a millennium, premodern Arabo-Persian and Sanskrit philosophical traditions too have explored similar metaphysical queries (are numbers real? Physical objects/particulars? Universals? Causation? Freedom? Mind/Consciousness? Being?) by means of publicly debatable rational argumentation, without relying on the sort of appeals to invisible, "infallible" authorities that so concerns McCutcheon. Thus, from the vantage point of both premodern and contemporary analytic philosophy, a compelling case can be made that far more of metaphysics falls within the realm of rational, publicly debatable, evidence-based inquiry than McCutcheon's account would suggest, and yet, it is the

not-quite-sufficiently examined metaphysical presumptions and implications of his methodology that render him unable or unwilling to entertain this.[30] Hence, if, in fact, religious studies scholars are routinely taking explicit or implicit metaphysical stances, and if metaphysical inquiry is indeed more compatible with academic inquiry than the discipline usually recognizes, then, perhaps, it turns out, there is some space for the likes of Madhusūdana, Muḥibb Allāh, Findiriskī, or the translation team on the "theorizing" side of the enterprise after all.

Lincoln and McCutcheon furthermore deploy another theoretical insight with which they can further insulate themselves from the charge of affirmatively making metaphysical or "truth" claims, namely, the epistemological assertion (one that, again, however intuitive it may seem, is not self-evident and stands in need of demonstration) that "scholarly" explanations of religion are not necessarily any more objectively "true" than theological explanations, for *any* explanation only bears meaning in relation to the shared theories, interests, systems, and lenses of value of the given community within which that explanation participates. Putting aside, for the moment, the privileged, context-transcending vantage point that would seem to be required to make this ostensibly universal claim, this sort of theoretical affirmation allows scholars the space to back off from declaring, for example, "the purpose of ritual is x," opting instead for the more relativistic formulation, "*given my theory y,* ritual functions to x."[31] Such a tendency is exhibited in McCutcheon's appeals to discursive relativity or the "game" of discursive rules,[32] or else in Lincoln's well-known affirmation that "scholarship is myth with footnotes";[33] also in a similar vein is J.Z. Smith's influential take on the fundamental task of the religious studies scholar, namely, to "imagine religion," for religion is "solely the creation of the scholar's study . . . for the scholar's analytic purposes by his imaginative acts of comparison and generalization. Religion has no independent existence apart from the academy."[34]

Indeed, this move to step back from making any claim about the way the world *really is,* and instead rendering explanatory analyses as meaningful only within the confines of their specific discursive contexts, extends far beyond a McCutcheon-Lincoln-Smith orientation and into the discipline at large, including even the most enthusiastic supporters (contra McCutcheon and Lincoln) of opening up the gates of theory to the religious "other." In a recent contribution to the *JAAR,* Jacob Sherman, reflecting on the legacy of the field's prevailing "linguistic turn," identifies this theoretical tendency as perhaps the least appreciated but most significant obstacle against "taking seriously" the religious other: "one can argue that strong versions of the linguistic turn in fact covertly continue and compound the problem of an a priori privileging [of] the scholar's etic viewpoint over that of his or her emic subjects. Why? Because strong versions of the linguistic turn seem to know ahead of time how thoroughly language can or cannot refer to that which exists before, beyond, or beneath language."[35] It is a welcome development, to be sure, that much of the study of religion has become more receptive to an emic

"postcolonial revaluing" of non-Western epistemologies, to cite Sherman's phrasing, but the majority of these emic epistemologies—certainly those represented by Madhusūdana, Muḥibb Allāh, and Findiriskī—view their philosophical traditions to be accessing and capturing something objectively *real*. To the extent that the study of religion is only willing or able to entertain that such philosophers are merely articulating something real *for them* or relative to *their* particular cultural/social/political/ideological system or context, however, to that same extent, it would seem, we would fail to really take these figures seriously.

Although Sherman's account of the "linguistic turn" is surely oversimplified,[36] I take it that he has a real point of considerable consequence for the discipline. Now, there are excellent, indeed urgent, moral and political reasons for retaining a methodology that insists upon the relativity of differing conceptual schemes and prioritizes the understanding of "other" social, intellectual, and cultural worlds on their own terms, without immediate evaluation according to some etic criteria of "our" own devising. So as to never repeat the hubristic pretensions to universal, all-encompassing knowledge (in reality overwhelmingly Eurocentric and Orientalist) characteristic of the civilization-shattering age of imperialism, a theoretical insistence on *some* degree of linguistic relativism and the epistemological limits of any given knowledge-claim is a matter of crucial importance. Nevertheless, insofar as such theoretical frameworks, and their accompanying aversion to metaphysics or objective truth-claims, should be deemed normative for the discipline without any particular consultation with "other" ("non-Western") voices, it arguably represents, despite many good intentions, simply the latest in several centuries of the "Western canon" continuing to dictate the basic terms of what counts as knowledge.[37] For both Schilbrack and Sherman, the best way out of the conundrum is for the field to take metaphysics seriously again, though in decidedly less insular ways, allowing every religious tradition a place at the table so long as their truth claims are able to be formulated in a way that is supported by some form of evidence or reason-giving available for public evaluation and critique—a public that should now be considerably more diverse than it once was. To achieve this end would require the field to be open and willing to experiment with potentially new forms of rationality and reason-giving as inhabited by other religious and intellectual traditions, such as narrative or praxis, thus creating the broad potential for "non-Western" traditions to at last have a say in the fundamental intellectual criteria of the discipline.[38]

Although somewhat nervous at the prospect of reauthorizing the robust critical evaluation of non-Christian truth claims within a religious studies discipline still dominated by Christian-centered inquiry—would the "public" that would engage in Schilbrack's "public evaluation" really be sufficiently diverse to overcome the threat of a lingering Eurocentric bias?—nevertheless, if "taking the other seriously" is to be a methodological priority, as I think it should be, then I am hard-pressed to envision a better alternative. More important than my opinion, if we

really are to allow the likes of Madhusūdana, Muḥibb Allāh, or Findiriskī to have a say in "theory," then their own careers would seem to confirm this particular course of action: each of these three figures, alongside countless others in the intellectual history of Hindu and Muslim thought, have engaged in detailed rational polemics on metaphysics and related philosophical queries. Indeed, numerous of these Hindu and Muslim philosophers have not infrequently deployed the discursive norms of Sanskrit or Arabo-Persian reason-giving practices precisely in order to discuss and debate across religious boundaries, whether it be the encounter with primarily Greek, Christian, and Jewish thought in the case of Islamic philosophy, or polemics with Buddhist, Jains, and other Indian intellectual traditions in the case of Hindu philosophy. If these distinct religious and intellectual traditions, often without appeal to scripture, personal experience, or any other "invisible" authority, could manage to craft shared discursive norms with which to evaluate one another's truth claims, then it seems we should be able to accomplish something similar for our own purposes today. At the very least, it could safely be said that we have hardly begun to mine the vast "non-Western" philosophical resources with which one could possibly attempt such an endeavor, and so it would seem unjustified to reject the effort out of hand when, to date, it has hardly begun.[39]

And yet, the translation team of Jagannātha Miśra, Paṭhān Miśra, and Pānīpatī, most fascinatingly, took an entirely different route for putting the Hindu and Islamic intellectual traditions into "conversation" with one another, an approach from which we should also consider learning. Although drawing from dialectically-oriented intellectual traditions, the three translators deployed these philosophical resources in a more "sapiential" mode, that is to say, the language of narrative, poetry, and "imagination" (*khayāl*). As I hope the previous chapters have shown, the translation team's resort to the "imagination" was itself deeply interconnected with their respective worldviews and cosmologies—and, thus, metaphysics remained a central part of the picture—but the emphasis on argumentation and dialectical reason-giving is largely absent from this scenario. Instead, the three translators creatively "imagined" correlations and homologies between Hindu and Muslim thought, though this was an imagining that still claimed to track onto objective reality, something crucially distinct, it seems, from a J.Z. Smith-esque "imagining" of religion within the scholar's study. For many in the contemporary study of religion, to mimic such an approach for our present-day purposes would surely raise the specter of normative theology; on the other hand, for a discipline that has been spinning its wheels for decades, largely desirous of some sort of conversation with the religious "other" but having little constructive program for how to pursue it, the translation team offers a concrete historical example of a comparable dialogue being forged by means of a deliberate, reflective negotiation of sameness and difference. Once again, rather than rejecting out of hand the idea that there is something to learn from such historical precedents, I would encourage

the study of religion today, bearing all of the above admonitions in mind, to be willing to try to think *with* (rather than simply *about*) this historical case study of encounter between two disparate religio-philosophical traditions. In order to facilitate similar cross-civilizational learning within the contemporary academy, we would do well to reflect on the processes through which the translation team found the words and the means to put their respective intellectual traditions into a certain conversation with one another. Or else, perhaps theology would be a more hospitable disciplinary home for such developments to take place: I would certainly welcome the development if insights from this study might take on a life within the realm of theological inquiries, though I must leave such explorations to other scholars better trained within that discipline.

Accordingly, let us then preliminarily consider some of the crucial points of reflection that emerge from this South Asian case study, in pursuit of a method for forging our own cross-civilizational conversations in the study of religion today. One feature of the production of the *Jūg Bāsisht* that quickly stands out is the sorts of questions that the intellectuals involved felt should be answered at the outset of the project: in addressing the issue of other intellectual traditions or religious paths, our entire cast of scholars chose to focus on fundamental questions of metaphysics and ontology as their initial, *starting* impulse. Though we in the academy today need not follow their example slavishly, it does seem plausible to me, in light of recent trends in the field—notably, what Sherman identifies as the "linguistic turn"—that a renewed attention to metaphysics and its related concerns could be crucial in facilitating the next step forward. The nature of human language, for instance, and whether it is contextually-bounded to the point of forestalling true cross-cultural communication and understanding, would be a critical question to re-open in dialogue with other "non-Western" intellectual traditions. The Arabo-Persian scholars examined in this study promoted a theory of language and meaning that offers clear space for the possibility of profound intercultural comprehension, for, according to Muḥibb Allāh, Findiriskī, and, it seems, Pānīpatī, the human intellect is able, potentially, to penetrate the contingent forms (*ṣūrat*) of the world so as to access the universal meanings (*maʿnā*) that underlie them. Such an account of language may well be too "Neoplatonic" for most contemporary academic tastes, but this should not prevent modern scholars from engaging in the debate nonetheless, as neither side can simply be taken for granted. Plenty of premodern Sanskrit theories of language, in turn, demand a bare minimum of metaphysical presuppositions. Even if one ends up siding with the view that human knowledge is simply too contextually-bound to allow for "true" cross-cultural comprehension, there are nevertheless productive conversations to be had regarding how a scholar should best seek to cultivate herself in service of a "fusion of horizons" (à la Gadamer) that is both fruitful and ethical. On the topic of self-cultivation, once again, many an insightful dialogue can be had with any of a number of non-Euro-American traditions, within which a seemingly endless array of

diverse models of human flourishing could be consulted as we seek to work out these issues in our own academic disciplines today.

Perhaps even more significant, however, is what the example of Mughal scholarship might be able to teach us at the level of procedure and ethics. The Muslim translators and their patrons have sometimes been likened to Orientalists insofar as they appear to simply fashion Sanskrit writing in their own image, continuously replacing Sanskrit thoughts with Islamic ideas and Sufi terminology. Whatever the value of this critique—I have already suggested, in chapters 4 and 5, how I think our early modern thinkers might have responded—the fact still remains that this purported "Muslim Orientalism" shows few signs of having engendered the crippling, deleterious effects upon South Asian intellectual cultures that would typify the age of European imperialism. In the writings of Madhusūdana, for instance, one would be hard-pressed to detect anything approaching the sort of "epistemological crisis"[40] that would become so common during the era of British colonialism; quite to the contrary, Sanskrit scholarship seems to have flourished in the early modern period under Mughal Muslim rule.

While many reasons could be proffered to explain this phenomenon—patterns of Mughal patronage to Sanskrit learning come quickly to mind[41]—one significant insight that emerges from the early modern case-study examined here is that, without the presence of the jet streams, the *Jūg Bāsisht* would not have been possible. In other words, while it may seem, on first consideration, that the predominantly autonomous and "isolationist" Sanskrit and Arabo-Persian jet streams of early modern South Asia would have posed an *obstacle* to interdisciplinary learning, at the same time, the "strength" of the wisps that emerged from the jet streams was, in large part, a consequence of the vitality of those jet streams themselves. The *inter*disciplinary work, in other words, would have been impoverished had the isolated source disciplines themselves been compromised. Disciplines tend to be strongest when they can stand on their own legs, remaining in conversation with their own members without constant preoccupation with those outside of the discipline. Contemporary conditions are such that a great many traditions of knowledge in the world today do not enjoy this autonomy, making it all the more worthwhile for those of us in the study of religion today to think deeply on what the proper response(s) to this seemingly global epistemological crisis should be.

In light of this study, if cross-cultural learning is indeed one of our goals, then we can ask: in what way could we strike up a conversation with another jet stream, could we choose a "neutral" language, and could we begin to shape that language into a new *disciplinary* language? The flourishing of Sanskrit under Mughal rule depended crucially on the continued functioning of Sanskrit institutions of learning: can the study of religion play a role in preserving or promoting similar such institutions across the globe, and would it be "just" or "acceptably academic" to do so? Or could religious studies departments more actively seek out representatives of other knowledge-systems to join the department, even temporarily, with

the goal of crafting the necessary lexicon to think *between* knowledge-systems in a way that gives sufficient voice to the intellectual commitments of all parties involved? We need also to ask whether our current disciplinary language is still malleable enough, as early modern Persian arguably was, to serve as the medium for this dialogue, or whether a more "neutral" language would have to be adopted.

What that language could be would vary from conversation-case to conversation-case, I imagine, but, certainly, at the level of *disciplinary* language, a scholar interested in pursuing this dialogue might have to adopt a less technical mode of discourse, at least at the early stages of the conversation. Building up an interdisciplinary language, after all, takes considerable time and sustained effort, and may not achieve the desired goals immediately. One of the striking features of the *Jūg Bāsisht*, however, is the predominantly poetic and literary language employed therein, as opposed to a more reason-giving mode of expression; similarly, Findiriskī, a thoroughgoing philosopher in other contexts, suddenly adopted a prevailingly poetic mode for the sake of engaging the "Hindu other" in his *Muntakhab.* If the implication is that cross-civilizational conversation somehow benefits from a literary mode of discourse, then what possibilities could that leave for a modern academic? Can we consider more literary or aesthetic approaches to academic discourse that could serve as the base lexicon for this conversation?[42] Perhaps we need not extend the matter this far, as other moments of historical encounter between scholastic disciplines would suggest: it is an intriguing contrast, for example, that, in comparison with the Hindu-Muslim encounter that took place in the Mughal court, Buddhist and Hindu philosophers *began* their centuries of debates via a robustly dialectical mode of discourse, once Dignāga, Kumārila, and others had formulated the *pramāṇa*-framework that would then serve as the basic language of disputation between most Sanskrit-writing philosophers thenceforth. Somewhat comparably, it was the Greek Aristotelian and Neoplatonic tradition that provided the basic shared epistemological framework which would allow Muslims such as Fārābī and Avicenna, a Jewish thinker like Maimonides (d. 1204), and a Christian such as Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) to read one another's works and respond to and debate one another's ideas over centuries, again, in a decidedly philosophical, argumentative mode. Historical models like these, and many others, could also be consulted for additional insight into how we could craft a new interdisciplinary-intercultural lexicon for our needs today.

Here I have likely raised more questions than I have provided answers, but such is the nature of venturing into uncharted territories. Whatever the best procedure may be going forward, the starting point is nonetheless clear: in the interests of avoiding the perpetuation of the iniquities of Orientalism and imperialism, a position of epistemic humility must be adopted alongside a position of contextual sensitivity. This should not be controversial—as we have seen, contemporary scholars of South Asian religions are effectively unanimous in their goal to cease projecting modern categories back into the premodern past—but I would argue that this goal

has remained insufficiently realized. The building block of any contextually-sensitive study is the "local, emic analysis" that aims, in the first place, to understand, as far as possible, the perspectives and worldviews of those whom we would seek to study in their own terms.[43] This task is far from accomplished in the case of early modern South Asian thinkers, and so a great deal more work has to been done to reconstruct the various social, political, cultural, and intellectual contexts in which these remarkable figures lived, and to recover what exactly it was that they had to say. It is my hope that this study has been at least a small step in service of this important task.