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Keynote Address

Speculate to Disintegrate: The 'New' Idealism in Philosophy of Religion

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In recent years we have seen an upsurge in 'speculative' philosophy, which has had a notable impact on philosophy of religion. Speculative materialism and object-oriented ontologies have sought to side-step the epistemological limits imposed by Kantian thought, in a new effort to think the real apart from its correlation to a knowing human subject. New readings of canonical idealist thinkers such as Hegel and Schelling – not least by Žižek – have theorised an absolute which subverts both the unified human subject and the simple, transcendent God. This paper will argue that such approaches are promising for philosophy for religion, but remain constrained by residues of dogmatic empiricism. In particular, as Basile and others have argued, the programmatic proclamation of 'newness' is a political gesture to establish an identity by abjecting the 'old', crudely categorised as correlationist, textualist, or – horror of horrors – deconstructionist.

I will argue for a hybrid speculation, affirming the singularity of every existent and theorising that singularity as an expression of an unconditioned reality; but to do so in a way that takes seriously Derrida's critique of the purity or simplicity of origins and the inevitability of contamination. The 'new' idealist thinks the absolute, but knows that there is never any absolute 'as such'. It is within this disintegration that philosophy of religion takes place.

Steven Shakespeare is Associate Professor in Philosophy at Liverpool Hope University, UK. He is author of a number of books, including *Derrida and Theology* (T & T Clark, 2009) and *Kierkegaard and the Refusal of Transcendence* (Palgrave, 2015). He is co-facilitator of The Association for Continental Philosophy of Religion.

Panel 1.1 Messianism

An Exposition of Meillassoux's Concept of the Messianic

Claude Mangion

University of Malta

Few readers of contemporary western philosophy would consider the concept of the Messianic as relevant to the discourse or tradition of philosophy. And for those who consider the separation of philosophy from theology as a hard fought achievement, the notion that the messianic is somehow – even if only marginally – a feature of the contemporary discourse of philosophy strikes them as something completely incomprehensible. The shift in the deployment of the concept of the Messianic within the discourse of western philosophy can be attributed chiefly to Walter Benjamin but other notable figures such as Jacques Derrida and Giorgio Agamben have further contributed to the debate. The relative newcomer to this theorisation is Quentin Meillassoux, who – despite his emphasis on the centrality of reason in his philosophical speculations – introduces the concept of the Messianic within his philosophy, an introduction that some might consider irrational. Meillassoux achieved widespread recognition with his text *After Finitude*, where he argued for a return to the 'old fashioned' question of the subject and its relation to a world that exists independently of humans, a theme that has been disavowed for quite some time within Continental philosophy. However, while *After Finitude* deals with the structure of the world, the concept of the Messianic is introduced in "The Divine Inexistence" as an inherent and crucial part of Meillassoux's interest in the concept of justice. It is clear for him that the ontological and the ethical are intimately combined with the former providing the conditions of possibility for the latter. The philosophical vision that he is presenting hinges upon a vison of the world as a space of possibilities that might – or might not – be actualised. The figure of the Messiah is one of these possibilities and his/her role would be that of overturning the injustices that have been an inherent part of the human condition. The purpose of this paper will be that of providing an exposition of Meillassoux's views; this will entail a somewhat detailed overview of the text, "The Divine Inexistence" so as to demonstrate his claim that it is rational to hope in the figure of the Messiah just as it is irrational to believe in the God of revelation.

Claude Mangion is an Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Malta and his research interests are in the philosophy of communication, contemporary western philosophy, speculative metaphysics, the problem of evil and philosophy through film.

Messianism and Subjectivity: The Case of Giorgio Agamben

Piotr Sawczyński

Jagiellonian University in Krakow

The messianic turn is among the most interesting phenomena that mark the re-emerging relation between philosophy and religion. Rather than follow the inglorious path of secular messianisms, it seeks to deconstruct the very opposition of the secular and the messianic in modern philosophy, and—consequently—think the idiom of redemption anew. Giorgio Agamben's project of "profane" messianism has recently offered one of the most extensive applications of messianic discourse to critical theory; while it mostly aims at profanation and revision of well-established philosophical concepts, it also profanes the very idea of messianism so that it is freed from particular connotations and associated with "salvation" for everyone, not just the chosen ones. In my paper I demonstrate how Agamben's messianic profanation works to reconceptualize the problematic category of the subject. According to his widely discussed thesis, modern human subjectivity has been the domain of sovereign power over life, which must be deactivated if subjectivity is not to end up as total subjection. The perspective that helps Agamben confront the sovereign appropriation of the subject is Jewish messianism, tested as a theory of subjectivity whose ontological indeterminacy makes it escape the oppressive mechanisms of sovereignty. The relation of messianism and subjectivity is mostly elaborated in The Time that Remains where Agamben comes up with the notion of the remnant, supposed to conceptualize the subject beyond the sovereign opposition of individual and collective, and thus lay foundations for a new political ontology. Although The Time that Remains is a philosophical commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Romans, my guiding contention is that Agamben's messianic subject is structured by the conceptual apparatus of the Lurianic kabbalah—the most powerful antinomian tradition in Judaism. This kabbalistic lineage may not be revealed throughout his work, but I argue there are striking similarities between Luria's and Agamben's crucial messianic concepts. Specifically, I demonstrate that 1) Agamben's notion of contraction is modelled on the Lurianic tsimtsum, and 2) the figure of the remnant is inspired by the kabbalistic motif of reshimu. The aim of my crypto-kabbalistic reading is to meditate on the subject-making potential of Jewish antinomianism and explore the ambiguous nature of religious thinking: while "pure" theology is exposed by Agamben as a hidden matrix of sovereign power, its heterodox undercurrents seem to be valuable allies in thinking about the subject beyond the paradigm of sovereignty.

Piotr Sawczyński is a doctoral candidate in Political Philosophy at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow and a principal investigator for the research project "Jewish Messianism and Political Subjectivity in the Works of Walter Benjamin and Giorgio Agamben" funded by the National Science Center (NCN). He has been a visiting scholar at Heidelberg University, UCL, Princeton and the University of Chicago. He has published a monograph Polityczność podmiotu: Spór o podmiotowość w świetle zwrotu językowego [Subject and the Political: The Linguistic Turn and the Dispute over Subjectivity (Universitas, 2016), a chapter in the edited volume Subjectivity and the Political: Contemporary Perspectives (Routledge, 2018) and several articles in international journals including Etica e politica, Politeja and Religions. He specializes in political theology and is preparing his PhD dissertation on the political uses of messianism in Benjamin and Agamben.

Posthuman Realities – Moving Towards a Techno-messianic Vision of the Future

Francois Zammit

University of Malta

By defining the messianic as a transition from the human to the posthuman, this paper will present transhumanist thought as a form of political theology that utilises theologoumena as a means of envisaging and creating their own messianic vision. The paper will argue that ontological concepts from Giorgio Agamben are applicable to a posthumanist discourse in which human life is redefined through new bio-technologies and practices. Messianism, in all its religious or secular forms, delineates the transition from the Anthropocene towards a new Posthuman epoch. Those who inhabit the new realities predicated by messianic thought, are categorically different from their predecessors, they inhabit a world that offers new conditions of living and their very being has metamorphosed into a new form of life that extends beyond the human. Messianic thought offers the conceptualisation of the transition from one category of being towards an improved other, that is not only biologically but also ontologically different. Messianism operates on both the physical and the metaphysical planes leading towards radical changes in the conditions of existence, ushering in a new reality that supersedes its antecedents, creating a posthuman reality inhabited by a new form of life. Following from this, it may be argued that Transhumanism is to be read as a form of secular messianism, that looks at new technologies as the key towards achieving this transition. Authors like Max More and Ray Kurzweil, envision the transhumanist project, as a continuation of the humanist and enlightenment project which have defined western modernity and its zeitgeist. In the transhumanist project, technology allows for the transformative process of moving beyond the human and allowing for the transition from one evolutionary stage to another. Furthermore, this new technological state, does not only change the nature of humanity but also of the physical environment and reality itself. Through technological processes like digitisation and nanotechnology, there is the possibility of changing the nature of being like transforming dead matter, deceased bodies, into living matter, artificial minds. As a result of this all human phenomena and institutions must be redefined in terms of this new posthuman reality. From an Agambenian position, the posthuman condition has to be conceptualised as a new form of life constituted of a new ontological nature that differentiates it from other forms of human life. Furthermore, one may argue that posthumanism creates a new form of bios, qualified life, by restructuring zoe through the application of bio-technologies and practices that transcend the boundaries of the human. A further argument is that transhumanist thought envisions a new category of life that fulfils new potentialities that are created through the implementation of technological advances on human life. Ultimately, the posthuman condition entails new political possibilities comparable to Agamben's political messianism in which all categories of identity are transcended to create a 'Coming Community'.

Francois Zammit taught philosophy at post-secondary level for a number of years and currently works in the field of education. His latest work includes, The Camp and Modernity; A Modern Form of Racial Control; presented in May 2018 during a WIPSS seminar organised by the Anthropology Department at the University of Malta, and the paper Maltese Art and its Lack of Subversive Power in Engaging the Contemporary 2018. He has worked on the subjects of; Agamben, biopolitics, transhumanism, terrorism, Bataille, and education. Over the years he has presented papers on; Bataille's Interpretation of Mauss' The Gift', Ghost and Machines: The Concept of the Self in Contemporary Maltese Literature, and A Colonial Reading of Agamben's Homo Sacer, and Biopolitics as a (Re)Defining of Being. In 2015, he presented a research paper on ISIS foreign fighters in the Middle East in terms of theories of social disassociation (Camus and Wilson) and of excess (Bataille).

The Concept of Forgiveness in Walter Benjamin's «The Meaning of Time in the Moral World» (1921)

Yorgos Prodromou

Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences

The same year that Walter Benjamin wrote his famous text «Towards a Critique of Violence» (1921) he wrote another little-discussed fragment called «Die Bedeutung der Zeit in der moralischen Welt (The meaning of Time in the Moral World, 1921)». This fragment constitutes the concepts of forgiveness and time as propositionally opposed to reconciliation and to a «heathen (heidnisch)» conception of Last Judgement. In this essay I argue that we can get an insight on this concept of forgiveness, which by virtue of the fragment's small length could be called «mystical», by relating this text to Benjamin's other works of the same period. Essentially Benjamin's main argument in «The meaning of Time in the Moral World» is that (godly or not) forgiveness is the «hand that obliterates» the necessary conditions of the «heathen» form of Last Judgement. Consequently he proposes a radically different conception of Last Judgement which is not based on the «world of law» or legal institutions, on the contrary is based on the time of the moral world. The moral world in this text presents the condition which pursues the suspension and the deconstruction of the legal institutions. Forgiveness, understood in this way, is our potential to exit the circle that is being constituted by the practice of retribution, punishment and reconciliation. This idea of «exit» is being conceptualised in the sum of Benjamin's oeuvre by the notions of divine violence, justice and the state of exception. I believe that Benjamin understood the necessity to correspond this notion of exit from the world of law to a conception of time even in his early writing. In «The meaning of Time» Benjamin characterises his understanding of time as non-conceptual, this form of time is indicated by forgiveness. In this essay I argue that we are able to understand and use this notion of forgiveness in a rigorous conceptual form, taking into account the long standing tradition of this concept in Judaic theology and in the debates that arise in Europe in the years preceding the Holocaust and World War II. Benjamin understands the relation between legal institutions and, what he calls, «heathen» form of Last Judgement as a teleological one and as I read it this text is an attempt to found a nonteleological conception of time. This nonteleology corresponds to a new understanding of Last Judgment which is related to forgiveness. Through this, Benjamin is coming very close to an idea of Frantz Kafka, whom while discussing the coming of the Messiah he states that «the Messiah arrives not on the last day (Last Judgement) but on the very last (allerletzten) day». In the terms of «The meaning of Time» the arrival of the Messiah is constituted by (the «storm of») forgiveness, which is preceding the day of the Last Judgement, but it's not moving towards that final day as its telos.

Yorgos Prodromou was born and raised in Nicosia, Cyprus and he is currently based in Athens, Greece. He holds a BA degree on Political Science and History and he is currently doing his masters degree on Political Philosophy and Social Theory in Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences, Athens. He recently presented his dissertation thesis in the Seminar of Philosophy and Political Theory (Panteion) on «Philosophy and Forgiveness, the debate between Emmanuel Levinas, Vladimir Jankelevitch and Jacques Derrida». In general he is interested in contemporary receptions of the work of Georges Bataille and Jacques Derrida. He is currently working on the connection between Phenomenology and Derrida's oeuvre, particularly on the scope of Forgiveness. Also he is a member of two Oral History Groups, the first one is based in Cyprus and is involved with the relation between oral history, testimony and the possibility of Forgiveness in cypriot contemporary history. The second one is based in Athens and is concerned with LGBTQ+ and Feminist struggles in 1980's Athens.

Panel 1.2 Spirituality & Religious Identity

To Personalise or not to Personalise: Simone Weil's Struggle in her Understanding of God

Tyrone Grima

University of Malta

This paper will focus on the theology and the mystical experiences of the French philosopher Simone Weil (1909-43), outlining and analysing the inherent struggle between the notion of the impersonal and the personal God, strongly present in her writings. The paper will also demonstrate the relevance of this struggle to contemporary society. The first part of the paper will focus on Weil's point de départ. In this phase, Weil maintained that the relationship between humanity and God should not be a personal one. This premise is rooted firmly in Weil's apophatic spirituality. The human being is on a journey towards nothingness where all securities, including the security of the existence and presence of God, need to be detached from. God's manifestation can only be revealed through His hiddenness, through the impersonal and not through an ostentatious and personalised rapport. Weil also maintains that the finitude of the human reality does not allow it to understand the notion of God. Any notion of God is personalised and hence cannot reflect the reality of God. The first part of the paper will also include a brief analysis of the problematic dynamics in the notion of the impersonal God as presented by Weil. The image of a distant or a transcendent God, who is unrelated to the events that are relevant to humanity places God in a position of indifference. Consequently, the human being becomes helpless, and in fear of a seemingly malignant God. Is there a total chasm that separates the reality of humanity from the Divine reality that can never be reconciled? Is Weil's notion of God unpredictable, in such a way that the Divine is consistently and constantly aloof from humanity? Weil's spiritual journey and engagement with the religious experience eventually led her to acknowledge the possibility of a personal God. The second part of the paper will focus on this transition. The writings that describe her mystical experience, albeit ambiguous, shed light on her encounter and potential belief in a personal God, which contrasts dramatically with her original philosophical paradigm. The third paper of the paper will present the tension evident in the spiritual journey of Simone Weil by juxtaposing it against her 'spirituality of contradiction'. In the face of the struggle between diametrically opposite polarities, Weil believed in the importance of staying in the uncomfortable space of the unknown, without rejecting either polarity. Weil integrates the impersonal and the personal, the absent with the manifested, the transcendent with the immanent. In Weilian spirituality, the essence of the spiritual life consists in relating with the personal God by encountering and embracing the impersonal God. The key to understanding this struggle also needs to be placed within the context of the theme of diminution. The God that Weil attempts to relate with is not the majestic and haughty God. Weil's God is present, up to a degree, but present in His smallness. God is present in an infinitesimal way. It is this paradox of the absence-presence that is the crux of the relationship with God. God is present in His strongest manner when He 'reduces' Himself, in the act of kenosis. The 'reduction' of God is the pinnacle of a loving experience, since through this experience, humanity is being taught the dynamics of a relationship. It is only by diminishing space that intimacy can occur. The paper will conclude by demonstrating the relevance of the spirituality of diminution to contemporary society as a vehicle of integrity in the path towards wholeness.

Dr Tyrone Grima has successfully earned a doctorate in Theology in December 2018 at the University of Malta. His doctoral thesis was entitled 'The Dialectical Tension between Detachment and the Relational in the Life and the Writings of Simone Weil (1909-1943)'. Dr Grima is a theatre practitioner and is the Head of Care of Dar Osanna Pia and Dar Mamma Margherita, two homes for homeless young men run by the Salesians of Don Bosco. He is also a part-time lecturer at the Sixth Form of St Aloysius College and at the University of Malta. Dr Grima is also interested in researching further on the interface between spirituality and the theatrical act, as well as LGBTI spirituality in the local context.

Intentionalism and God's Fiction

Noel E. Boulting

Noboss (Kent)

The focus of this paper is upon the writings of Simone Weil. Can the world be conceived as an artwork as she sometimes suggests? And does this suggestion not imply examining the relation between the creator's intentions and what is created? In order to answer these questions, three approaches will be explored so as to ascertain Simone Weil's response in terms of her Decreation thesis: "Because he is the creator, God is not all-powerful. Creation is abdication." Again: "God has abandoned God. God has emptied himself." The first approach can be labelled a phenomenological perspective employing an insight from Sartre's existentialism, the Frankfurt school of philosophy and the German Literary tradition illustrating her concern for the significance of human experience. The second approach, the ontological, is illustrated through claims made by Luria – the Jewish mystic – and Von Schelling – arguably the founder of ecological philosophy – in establishing Simone Weil's claims on behalf of what "--- is absolutely independent of us", namely the Creator, Divine intentions and subsequently with what is Decreated. A third approach, an epistemic one, is manifested in her advocacy of Platonism and her serious concern with atheism alongside an advocacy of her experimental ontological proof. Here an appeal is made to what can be "--- easily recognized by the intelligence and the imagination". Given then an explication of these three approaches – the phenomenological, the ontological and the epistemic – which, and how far, can any of these approaches best provide the strongest illumination in dealing with our original question: how can creation be cast as God's fiction?

Brief Biography: BA (Philosophy), M.Sc. (Philos. of Science) – has taught philosophy as a qualified teacher for the Extra-Mural Dept. London University, Mid-Kent College of F & HE and at Great Falls University, Montana. He runs a philosophy club – Noboss 42 years old – initially promoting interest in the philosophies of A.N. Whitehead and C.S. Peirce. He has many published articles and two books: To Be Or Not To Be Philosophical (2001) and On Interpretative Activity (2006). The last two papers of his to be published are "In Defence of Iconic Reification" Constellations Vol. 21, Issue No. 1, March 2014 pp. 83-95 & "Scale Relative Ontology and Scientism" Philosophica No. 46 November 2015 pp. 99-118

Jankélévitch and the Philosophy of Jewish Religion

Lorenzo De Donato

Milan State University

French philosopher of Russian origin Vladimir Jankélévitch (1903-1985), belonging to the Jewish faith, is one of the thinkers of the Twentieth Century who wrote about the 'Jewish question' and produced a philosophical meditation on Jewish Religion. As many of them, he has set his philosophical reflexion starting at first by the enormous tragedy of Nazi Anti-Semitism, then by concentrationary horror and the Holocaust. Being a perspicacious philosopher who has left important contributions, among other fields, even in that one of Moral Philosophy, his Philosophy of the Jewish Religion presents itself as an intense and particularly original meditation on this topic. Truly a transdisciplinary philosophical theory, as it addresses the problem both by a metaphysical/ontological point of view, and by a more specifically moral point of view, specifically human and 'interior', investigating the complex theme of religious identity. In this case, the Jewish identity in comparison with the inner identity of those belonging to other religious faiths. All his writings on the topic have appeared for the very first time in a single volume only in 1984, the book «Sources. Ressembler, dissembler la conscience juiveé» (Seuil, Paris). An important document that gathers all its contributions on the subject since the 1950s. This talk aims to analyse the issue in its fundamental aspects in order to try to better understand the connection between Judaism, Religion and Philosophy. The central point of Jankélévitch's philosophical meditation on Jewish Religion is discovering the problem of the Jewish identity as an 'inner problem', defined as a 'complication' that does not afflict the rest of humanity and all those belonging to every other religion. A kind of 'plus', a kind of 'ineffective evidence', that also sets off such dramatic historical situations and such painful individual conditions. Interesting is the fact that Jewish identity is defined as an 'impalpable' quality of the human soul, definable also with the famous, controversial and very typical expression of the philosopher, utilized to express both the ontological and the inner condition of the human being: I-Don't-Know-What, the 'Je-ne-sais-quoi'.

Lorenzo De Donato works with the Aesthetics Chair at Milan State University. His main research interests are Jankélévitch's Philosophy, Philosophy of Art and Musical Aesthetics. He graduated in Philosophy at the same university (full marks with honors) and with full marks in Piano Performance at the Conservatory of Salerno, having given several concerts in Italy, Germany and Spain through the years. He also joined an Erasmus one-year-scholarship at Freie Universität Berlin (Germany). He is Foreign Member of the International Research Group "Ethics, Aesthetics and Philosophy of Literature" at Federal University of Rondonia (Brazil) and Member of AISBE (Accademia Internazionale di Scienza della Bellezza) of Milan.

"To Imagine Nothing": Georges Bataille's Challenge to Materialist and Atheistic Spirituality

Lieven De Maeyer

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The so-called religious turn in philosophy has also sparked a renewed interest in the notion of the sacred and mystical experience, often from new and unexpected angles: among many others, we could cite the names of Michel de Certeau, Luc Ferry, Hans Joas, Régis Debray, Charles Taylor and Marcel Gauchet. One of these (lesser explored) angles is the question whether atheistic mystical experience is possible and if so, what are its defining characteristics and on what grounds its authenticity should be evaluated (Leo Apostel, André Comte-Sponville, Jean-Claude Bologne). Remarkable is the prevalence of literary sources (Yves Bonnefoy, Henri Michaux, Maurice Blanchot, J.M.G Le Clézio, Sartre's Nausea and Camus' Nuptials.) This paper focusses on those authors that have engaged with the question of atheistic spirituality and/or mysticism from a strictly materialist point of view. A recurring thread we find in the more philosophically oriented authors is a critique of religious beliefs most poignantly formulated by Freud in The Future of an Illusion: […] it would be very nice if there were a God who created the world and was a benevolent Providence, and if there were a moral order in the universe and an after-life; but it is a very striking fact that all this is exactly as we are bound to wish it to be. But to what extent can atheistic and materialist spirituality itself avoid a similar criticism? Does it not also, in its own way, offer a comforting illusion to its practitioners? This paper will engage with this question along two lines: first, it will look at the role of the imagination in atheistic and materialist spirituality, and how it informs its proposed practices, while secondly, it will zoom in on the notions of death and the afterlife. If the assurance of a life after death can rightly be considered one of the defining aspects of religious spirituality, how is this taken up by the authors under consideration? The central aim of this paper will then be to formulate a critique or a correction of some contemporary atheistic authors through the work of Georges Bataille, who strictly speaking predates the religious turn in continental philosophy. The mystical experience (l'expérience intérieure) that Bataille describes in his Somme athéologique will be discussed as one that takes the notions of materialism, death and finitude to their limit, a limit that proves to be at the heart of his spiritual praxis.

Lieven De Maeyer has obtained degrees in Literature and Linguistics (MA), Western Literature (MRes) and Philosophy (BA). He is currently finishing his MA in Philosophy at the Catholic University of Leuven. He has compiled and translated an anthology of the spiritual works of Simone Weil, Leven op de rand van de wereld, published in 2018. He has taught French, English and Dutch at several schools and regularly gives lectures on Surrealism, mysticism and related topics. He is preparing a PhD-application on atheistic mystical experience in Georges Bataille and the members of the Grand Jeu group.

Paul Kahn's Political Theology and its Role in the Task of Redefining the Boundaries of Secularism

Vaida Baranovė

Vilnius University

Both, political theology and critique of secularism are making a comeback in contemporary political philosophy. In this paper, I will focus on a thinker, who analyzes both of them and whose thought doesn't seem to be getting the scholarly attention it deserves – Paul W. Kahn. In his works, such as "Putting Liberalism in its Place", "Political Theology: Four Chapters on Sovereignty", etc., Kahn uses Schmitt's political theology as a starting point in constructing what he calls a contemporary political theology. I claim that his theory, that is based on the critique of the primacy of rational thinking in the formal public sphere, can be the central tool in opposing secularism as an ideology and proving that it is based on false premises. To show this, I will first briefly introduce the main points of the most prominent proponents of secularism, J. Rawls and J. Habermas, that rely on the thought, central to most liberal thinkers, that rational thinking is the only form of thinking that should be used in the public sphere. Since religious discourse is not rational and is often based on experiences that the believer cannot explain to their fellow citizens who are secular, it has no place in the public sphere at all. After that, I will try to reject the argument of the primacy of rationalism in the public sphere by utilizing Kahn's interpretation of Schmitt's sociology of concepts. I will show that sociology of concepts is aimed against the rationalist idea that there is a one-sided causal relationship between concepts and their supposed causes, such as material desires or personal interests (the classical model of scientific thinking: x determines y). If there is no such causality, then we need a different understanding of how concepts arise. According to Kahn, they are formed in a common world of meanings and are based on many factors, among which, rationality does not have the primal position. Kahn discusses many of those factors but I claim that in order to fruitfully oppose secularism as an ideology, the most important ones are: 1) rhetoric, that, according to Kahn, is the main form of thought in both politics and philosophy, 2) analogical thinking, which is a mode of thinking that allows us to understand each other by comparing our experiences and explaining something in analogy to something else and, most importantly 2) sacrifice, the concept that proves that our relationship to the state and political actions is not based on rational thinking but rather on love and devotion. That is the case because the state's demand for citizens' lives in case of war doesn't apply to their rational reasoning, but rather to their love for their fellow citizens and their patriotism. The analysis of these three factors will help me prove that Kahn's contemporary political theology is the key to successful opposition of the primacy of rationality in politics and opens a gateway to new modes of understanding that may be useful in recalibrating the relationship between Church and State.

Vaida Kalkauskaitė is a Ph.D. candidate at Vilnius University. The title of her upcoming dissertation is „The Boundaries of Secularism". It is based on the philosophies of Charles Taylor and Paul Kahn. Vaida's primary fields of interest are political philosophy and philosophy of religion. Her most recent publication regarding the topic of secularism is „The (Im)possibility of Religious Reasoning in the Formal Public Sphere" (2018) that was published in an interdisciplinary journal „Religion And Culture" and focuses on the debate between J. Habermas and Charles Taylor regarding the legitimacy of religious reasoning in the formal public sphere. Currently, her main focus is the philosophy of Paul W. Kahn.

Habermas and the Presupposition of Reasonableness

Karim Barakat

American University of Beirut

The strong resurgence of religious discourse in the public sphere raises questions concerning the adequacy of traditional liberal views with regard to maintaining an insulated sphere based on the reasonableness of participants. Though post-secularist views have rejected the relegation of religious discourse to the private realm, it is still not clear whether the presupposition of reasonableness, which determines who can take part in public discourse, can be rationally grounded. My focus in this paper will be on Habermas's post-secularist view, which aims at dissolving the distinction between the public and private use of reason while offering a dialogical grounding for reasonableness. This paper, therefore, will focus on the presupposition of reasonableness that we find articulated in Habermas's later work. Habermas argues his view alleviates the undue burden placed on religious citizens by traditional accounts such as the one Rawls had introduced. Whereas Rawls maintains that religious reasons can be used in the private sphere and can inform the background culture of citizens, he maintains that religious reasons ought to be translated into the language of public reason through invoking shared reasons that can accepted by all reasonable members of the community. For Habermas, this move involves a degree of asymmetry between those who retain religious reasons, and thus are required to translate their religious reasons into public reasons, and those who hold secular doctrines which often overlap with the publicly accepted. Moreover, Habermas argues that we ought to value the social relations themselves that motivate individuals to have the reasons they hold, which involves incorporating religious reasons into the public sphere. Though Habermas's account has the advantage of recognizing the public role of religion, the recent rise of right wing groups raises questions concerning the use of religious discourse in order to promote unreasonable views. I argue that Habermas's view entails two problems. First, his account continues to presuppose a conception of reasonableness that cannot be grounded in communicative action. Habermas argues for rejecting the presupposition of reasonableness as a capacity of individuals and contends that we ought to recognize it as arising out of deliberative democratic procedures. However, I maintain that Habermas's view on democratic practices already presupposes what constitutes reasonable discourse. Second, I argue that, though recognizing the role communal (and religious) relations play in forming moral subjects is an improvement over traditional individualistic liberal views, this inclusion introduces a tension with the presupposition of reasonableness. Habermas cannot avoid the question of what social relation one ought to view as conducive for the well-being of the community without already invoking exclusionary frameworks.

I am currently a Lecturer at the American University of Beirut. My research focuses on non-ideal theory and in particular on the problem of deriving evaluative dictates beginning from an analysis of history. Rather than beginning with introducing political ideals, I argue that normative commitments should follow from recognizing how material practices have historically shaped the bodies and passions of individuals. I am also developing an account of the role of skepticism in politics and in contributing to less antagonism in political disagreement. Moreover, my research interests also include contemporary Arabic Political Philosophy.

The Ratzinger-Habermas Conversation: Epistemological Dead End and Practical Hope

Aaron Abdilla

University of Malta

On January 2004 a Joseph Ratzinger, who a year later would be the head of the Roman Catholic Church, and Jürgen Habermas, heir to the philosophical legacy of the Frankfurt School, agreed to share the same platform and engage in dialogue on the role of religion in modernity. Later the Ratzinger and Habermas encounter of 2004 in the Academy of Bavaria was published under the title of Dialectics of Secularization: Between Faith and Reason. The 2004 debate confirmed that an epistemological convergence between the two was not possible without at least one of the two sides abandoning the fundamentals of their respective position. The encounter, however, also confirmed that both of them had one common concern, namely the 'derailment' of the objectives of the Enlightenment whose goals constituted the ideals of the 'unfinished' project of Modernity. The absence of a mutually compatible epistemological foundation, however, does not preclude an ethical 'elective affinity' oriented towards practical outcomes. In the last decades Habermas has sought to articulate a post-secular philosophical stance. Within this perspective, he has expressed renewed interest in religious discourse in the public sphere, argued that religious discourse can provide a possible source of normative and cognitive content to enable the regeneration of democratic values and civic solidarity or motivation. Although some have interpreted this a retreat into conservatism or as an abandonment of his early position articulated in his Theory of Communicative Action, Habermas' dialogue intends to promote modern reason and redirect modernisation towards the completion of its morality of justice and emancipation through the reappreciation of normative cognitive content found in religious discourse which hitherto is an unexhausted source of meaning. The radicalization of the "dialectic of the Enlightenment," advocated by postmodernists, and the naïve faith in science, as Habermas puts it, has generated a defeatism within reason itself. Consequently, secular reason is being derailed from its own moral commitments of "universalistic and egalitarian concepts of morality and law which shape the freedom of the individual and interpersonal relations in a normatively plausible way". The Habermas-Ratzinger debate offers a critical insight in the issue of renewed influence of religion in the public sphere and the so called postsecular society. Indeed, Ratzinger's theological project offers an opposing perspective on the question of faith and reason. In his works Ratzinger offers a criticism of the secular project of modernity, and a scepticism towards the secular moral reason which are, in fact, at the foundations of modern democracy. The theologian proposes a different model, whereby faith and reason are integrated into contemporary socio-political life. Ratzinger criticises the notion of modern rationality as being independent from any metaphysical given, and instead suggests intrinsic interdependencies between faith and reason, which he argues are found in the Judeo-Christian tradition. In Ratzinger's view, although he admits that Christianity is de facto not universally accepted, reason needs to be open to faith as the only means of restoring the authority of moral reason within political practice. Ratzinger's proposed recovery of the moral foundations of the state is characterised by the emphasis on the primacy of truth, which calls for a Christian Augustinian-Platonic approach towards the de-Hellenization of modernity. This challenges an exclusive secular approach of moral reason. Consequently, Ratzinger, suggests a different project of translation from the one proposed by Habermas. For Ratzinger, moral reason can only be salvaged through a Christianised Enlightenment and therefore proposes the Pascal's Wager model and invites all non-believers to 'act as if God exists' and to accept the moral authority of the Christian tradition

Aaron Abdilla holds Master of Arts in Philosophy from the University of Malta with his main study area being contemporary western philosophy with a Masters' dissertation focusing on the 2004 Ratzinger-Habermas debate, entitled: A Choice of Worries: A Contextual Study of the Ratzinger-Habermas Debate. He also holds a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Philosophy from the Pontifical University Antonianum in Rome. During his studies in Rome, Abdilla formed part of the University Council. His research interests include ethics, philosophy of religion, political theory and democracy, philosophy of the enlightenment and multiculturalism with particular focus on critical theory.

Religious Dimensions in Transhumanist and Posthumanist Philosophies of Science

Evaldas Juozelis

Institute of Humanities, Mykolas Romeris University

In the presentation I will introduce transhumanism and posthumanism as a certain modus operandi in contemporary philosophy of science. I'll demonstrate that their often quite overt religious content plays a decisive role in the conceptualisation of cutting-edge scientific practices and ideals. Initially, the definition of religiosity will be discussed. Putting the trivial notion of religion as a belief in supernatural powers (god or gods, spirits, etc.) guiding our moral principles and shaping rituals that constitute that belief aside, I will rely on the definition of Clifford Geertz (The Interpretation of Cultures 1973: 90), who dispenses with the postulate of supernatural: "a religion is: (1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conception of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic." By additionally extrapolating the concepts of "civil religion" (Enn Kasak) and "invisible religion" (Thomas Luckmann), we gain a solid ground to interpolate scientific beliefs in a corporate modern worldview, where religious as well as scientific techniques of "uniquely realistic" meaning-formation overlap, for they are both sanctioned universally objective by culture, and both transcend immediate human experience. Here transhumanism and posthumanism (and their various subforms) unfold as the ideological exploiters of an apparently exhausted phenomenon of religion/religiosity and simultaneously re-define the nature of science, reality and human. Secondly, transhumanist and posthumanist attitudes towards the prospects of human development, their affinities and differences will be explored more thoroughly. I claim that insufficient consideration of the ideological basis of scientific practices undermines all the efforts to legitimate scientific worldview, increases the risk of negligent apprehension of human needs and eventually compromises integrative models of science, technology and society. These models quietly take their own ideas and ideals – effectiveness, education, cooperation, excellence, responsibility, awareness, progress, etc. – for granted and unreflectively operate them as aims but provide no reliable content. Therefore, by intending to reveal religious dimensions of scientific worldview I unfold scientifically engaged and ideologically contested human self-consciousness as secularly religious and argue that it basically emerges, is constituted, and evolves within interactive – post-humanist / trans-humanist - medium of cultural praxis. Religious dimensions of post/trans-humanist praxis translate biological, social, and cultural distinctions into conventional categories, and any efforts to separate scientific activity from broadly ideological environment, interpret praxis as self-justifying socially organized acts, rational decisions or individual capacities are considered as questionable and ill-founded. I claim that precisely this sort of attitude opens an opportunity to unveil the tacit aspect of scientific understanding we may call a secular religiosity, and the attitude itself as a post/trans-human condition. Said condition dictates that our worldview is irrevocably oriented towards the religious urge to transform humans into certain historical entities capable to rearrange their own present and future and constitute their own systems of order.

Assoc. prof. dr. Evaldas Juozelis, Mykolas Romeris university, Institute of Humanities, Ateities st. 20, LT-08303 Vilnius, Lithuania, ejuozelis@mruni.eu, m.p. +370 650 44214 Dr. Juozelis is a lecturer of philosophy at Mykolas Romeris university from 2010. In 2013 he was awarded PhD in philosophy of science at Vytautas Magnus university (Kaunas, Lithuania). During his professional career dr. Juozelis has published around 15 articles and a few book chapters in English and Lithuanian. His primary focus of interest is political philosophy of science, cultural studies of science, posthumanism, transhumanism, science and technology studies. Currently dr. Juozelis is carrying out the research project titled "New scientific knowledge: philosophical, political and ideological challenges", funded by the European Social Fund under the No 09.3.3-LMT-K-712 "Development of Competences of Scientists, other Researchers and Students through Practical Research Activities" measure.

Movements and forms of life

Zuzana Svobodová

Charles University, Prague

Based on the analysis of texts by Jan Patočka, Zuzana Svobodová wants to explore two concepts of human existence. The concept of three movements of life and the concept of two basic forms of life are examined in this paper, with the aim of referring to similarities and differences between them and to try to point out the essentials from these concepts. The motivating question that gives rise to the author's efforts in this conference paper is: "What kind of agreement can be found between different concepts?" Jan Patočka wrote in his third chapter of Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History that philosophy did not shake the modest or small meaning of life in order to impoverish humans, but on the contrary, it shook them with the will to enrich them. Being shaken involves a transformation or metamorphosis of life, which could be seen by others and from the outside as an impoverishment, because the shaken is no longer interested in such things or in such manners of being what they were before, they do not want to live only day by day; however, to those who have really been shaken towards transforming their lives, being shaken is enrichment, because they are now able to live their lives for real; they are led to discover a freedom to orientate their own lives, and to move from "LETHE" (covertness) to "ALETHEIA" (disclosedness, truth). Those who have been shaken in this way live an unsecure life and are no longer able to abide the confidences of their former lives. They are also unbridled by the fear of death because death is now consciously accepted as part of what is natural. Who or what is the origin of that shakenness? Patočka claims it is philosophy understood as the love of wisdom, or perhaps as the wisdom of love. How can we speak about a kind of shakenness in which all certainties are lost? What sort of shakenness is this? What is being shaken? And for what purpose? These will be the main issues of the current text. In connection with these inquiries, a further question must be asked about Patočka's theory of life movements. What kind of movements accompanies being shaken? How can each of these movements be described? A disciple of Husserl, Jan Patočka asks the question "What is phenomenology?". All of his lifelong work corresponds to this question. Therefore, he could not inquire about the natural world without also knowing that this question relates to the very essence of his being, which the philosopher encounters as a mystery; but at the same time, the answers to questions about the mystery of our being sometimes could and sometimes even should be rendered in words so that it could be possible to establish and to lead a dialogue with others.

Zuzana Svobodová, Ph.D. works at Charles University in Prague (Third Faculty of Medicine, Department of Ethics and Humanity Studies; Hussite Theological Faculty, Department of Education), Czech Republic, at the Jabok College of Social Pedagogy and Theology (Department of Theology and Philosophy), and at the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice (Faculty of Theology, Department of Education), Czech Republic. She deals with the philosophy of education, ethics, the history of education, theological anthropology, comeniology and studies relationships of religious and cultural erudition. She lives in Prague and is also active as a catechist. She published several books , chapters and articles, e.g. Non-indifference: Outlines of (Non)Religious Education / Nelhostejnost : Črty k (ne)náboženské výchově (her doctoral thesis), Paideia as Care of the Soul – the Potentials of Contemporary School, Jan Patočka's Concept of Fraternity and its Challenges vis-à-vis the World of Today, Natural Law and Integral Humanism by J. Maritain: Teaching Challenges, Ethics and Ecoethics by Josef Petr Ondok: Between the Sciences, Philosophy, and Theology, The Church as a Community of Indifferent, At the Beginning of Everything is the Word. About her books and articles see: https://cuni.academia.edu/ZuzanaSvobodov%C3%A1

Interiority and Economy in Michel Henry's Phenomenology of Life

Robert Farrugia

University of Malta

This presentation focuses on the intersection between phenomenology and Christian faith. Phenomenology, as an ego-centric philosophy, seeks as its starting point the immanence of consciousness, whilst Christian faith, being Theo-centric, starts from the transcendence of a Triune God. However, as will be argued in this presentation, the two are not mutually exclusive but, rather, should be held as complementary. Phenomenology, from its inception, has been concerned with the first person lived experience. Establishing itself as moving beyond mere biological life and scientism, this discipline was meant to salvage interiority from being swallowed up and getting lost in the world. Michel Henry, forming part of the 'Theological Turn', radicalizes phenomenology by putting forth the idea that a double manifestation is at work: the 'Truth of the World' and the 'Truth of Life'. The World, for Henry, turns out to be empty of the real substance of Life. To find its essence, the self must dive completely inward. This leaves us with a radical, absolute interiority enclosed in itself, undergoing self-experience. However, an 'inward turn' cannot simply stop short at ourselves but must reach beyond ourselves to find that wellspring of the relational Trinity, which is both immanent and transcendent. I will be here focusing on the doctrine of the Trinity, understood as being both about God's internal self-relatedness (the immanent inner workings of the Trinity) and God's relationship with all of creation (the transcendent economic workings of the Trinity). This means that the eternal being of God (*theologia*) and the economy of salvation history (*oikonimia*) should not be thought of as separable. An overemphasis on the former results in a non-experiential metaphysics of divine nature, whilst a philosophy built entirely around the latter leaves us baffled in relation to what God is. However, with a union of both, God can be understood both *in se* and *pro nobis*. In this sense, God is not self-contained and self-centred but overflowing love, desiring union with creation. In the Augustinian sense, traces of the Trinity can be found in our interiority, created in the image of God. In this sense, just as God is both *in se* and *pro nobis*, we must come to understand ourselves modelled on this divine life as having both this immanent and transcendent dimension. In light of all this, this paper aims at: 1) elucidating the significance of Henry's engagement, and confrontation, with the phenomenological tradition and his proposal of a phenomenology of Life as an immanent auto-affection, radically separate from the ek-static nature of intentionality, and 2) examining this separation in Henry's phenomenology in view of the tension between the absoluteness and relatedness of God, or God *in se* and *pro nobis*, in an attempt to question this fracture between interiority and economy for a possible conciliation.

Robert is currently a PhD student with the Department of Philosophy at the University of Malta. His main areas of research are Phenomenology, Philosophy of Religion, Modern Philosophy and Aesthetics. Robert has attended the summer school in Phenomenology and Philosophy of Mind at the Centre for Subjectivity Research (University of Copenhagen) in 2015 and is currently researching on contemporary French Phenomenology and the Theological Turn, focusing on the works of Michel Henry.

Phenomenological Spirituality and its Relationship to Religion

Neal DeRoo

The King's University, Edmonton

Philosophy of religion in the phenomenological tradition has long been associated with the Christian religion: analyses of revelation, givenness, liturgy and so on are situated within a broadly Christian understanding of divinity, the world, and the relationship between them. These analyses have proven immensely fruitful for our understanding of both phenomenology and Christianity, but they seem to fall short of a philosophy of religion, insofar as it is not religion itself that is being philosophized about, but rather a particular religion. In this paper, I will seek to elaborate a certain religious structure of human experience. I will begin by offering a phenomenological account of spirituality, understood as that most basic phenomenological level out of which both subject and world are expressed. Building on the work of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, this will explain spirituality as a supra-subjective force that affects both how subjects are able to bring the world to intuition and the material conditions of the world in which subjects are located. It will also suggest that expression within a tradition (Stiftung) is the primary mode of being of this spirituality (Section I). Then, I will explain how this spirituality is affective of and within material conditions. Drawing largely on Michel Henry, I will explain spirituality as affectivity, that is, as the subject's very mode of engaging with the world, with itself, and with 'Life' (in its phenomenological sense). This affectivity, we will see, is not an a priori condition of the subject, but is constituted within, even as it is itself essential in constituting, the material conditions of the subject. It is, we will see, through cultural expression that spirituality is both affective and affected (Section II). Finally, I will highlight a four-fold distinction in levels of phenomenological analysis that will have arisen in the previous sections, and apply it to the question of religion. In doing so, we will see the need to distinguish, in any phenomenological account of religion, between: 1) spirituality, as the most basic ür-phenomenon; 2) religiosity, as one particular way that spirit is expressed in culture (rather than, e.g., ethical, aesthetic, or scientific ways of expressing spirit); 3) religious traditions, such as Christianity, Buddhism, and consumerism, as particular ways that religiosity is expressed in particular material conditions; and 4) religious phenomenon (e.g., concrete beliefs, practices, objects, etc.), which are concrete expressions of those religions traditions. I will suggest that distinct philosophies can and should be offered for each of those levels of analysis, such that a philosophy of spirituality, for example, is related to, but distinct from, a philosophy of religiosity/religion, which is itself related to, but distinct from, a philosophy of a particular religious tradition or other. I will end by highlighting one significant implication this has for our understanding of religion, thereby allowing us to appreciate the religious dimensions of consumerism in ways that many contemporary theories of religion cannot accommodate.

Neal DeRoo is Canada Research Chair in Phenomenology and Philosophy of Religion and Professor of Philosophy at The King's University in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. He is the author of "Futurity in Phenomenology: Promise and Method in Husserl, Levinas, and Derrida," and has edited several books at the intersection of phenomenology and philosophy of religion, including "Phenomenology and Eschatology: Not Yet in the Now" and "Merleau-Ponty at the Limits of Art, Religion, and Perception." He has published and spoken extensively across North American and Europe, and is currently working on two book-length manuscripts, one in phenomenology tentatively titled "Expression in Phenomenology: Sense and Being in Husserl, Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze" and the other in philosophy of religion, entitled "Material Spirituality: A Phenomenology of Religion."

Hope and Necessity

Sarah Pawlett Jackson

The Open University and the University of London

In this paper look at a particular intersection of philosophy and religion by offering a phenomenological analysis of hope. I offer a comparative evaluation of two types of 'fundamental hope', drawn from the writing of secular essayist Rebecca Solnit and theologian Rowan Williams respectively. Arguments can be found in both, I argue, for the foundations of a dispositional existential hope. Examining and comparing the differences between these accounts, I focus on the consequences implied for hope's freedom and stability. I specifically focus on how these two accounts differ in their claims about the relationship between hope and (two types of) necessity. I argue that both Solnit and Williams base their claims for warranted fundamental hope on a sense of how reality is structured, taking this structure to provide grounds for a basic existential orientation that absolute despair is never the final word. For Solnit this structure is one of unpredictability, for Williams it is one of excess. In unpacking Williams' account of the 'excess' that grounds his fundamental hope I draw on insights from the phenomenological tradition, particularly those of Emmanuel Levinas and Jean-Luc Marion. Williams makes his case as a religious practitioner committed to Trinitarian theism. Solnit on the other hand rejects the Judeo-Christian God. Typically, the approach here might be to try to first establish the truth or falsity of theism or of a specific doctrinal claim or eschatological premise, and then to evaluate these two accounts on the basis of these presuppositions. In this paper I am somewhat flipping this methodology. My focus here is on a philosophical analysis of the structure, and implications of this structure, (rather than an analysis of theological content) of Solnit's hope and William's hope respectively. Their positions vis-à-vis theism are relevant to their accounts of fundamental hope, as I will draw out further. However, there are a distinct set of considerations which arise by initially bracketing the question of theism and theological or atheological conceptions of hope specifically. Approaching the question from this direction offers a different kind of perspective on the issue, one that can then feed back into the related questions of the details and persuasiveness of theological hope. This is a methodology which precisely aims to demonstrate a fruitful intersection between philosophy and religion. While this investigation finds both accounts of fundamental hope to be plausible and insightful, I argue that Williams' account is ultimately more satisfying on the grounds that it offers a realistic way of thinking about a hope necessitated by what it is responsive to, and substantial in responding to what is necessary. The way that necessity (or the lack thereof) is woven into these thinkers' respective accounts is important, I argue, for both our understanding of the internal coherence of our hope, but also for its surety and significance in our lives, and what it means to live in the light of this hope.

Sarah Pawlett Jackson is coming to completion of her PhD at The Open University, UK, where her primary research topic is the phenomenology of intersubjectivity in small groups. Her primary research interests are phenomenology, intersubjectivity, ethics and philosophy of religion. She is also a Formation Tutor at St Mellitus Theological College, London and a Tutor in Philosophy of Religion for the University of London's International Programme. She has previously worked as Philosophy of Religion Tutor for the University of Oxford's Department for Continuing Education, and as a Tutor and Visiting Lecturer at Heythrop College, University of London.

The Prepositions of Participation: An Examination of the Doctrine of Participation through an Analysis of its Correspondent Prepositions

Lara Zammit

University of Malta

It can be argued that what features within the practice of religiosity is the human capacity for Augustinian restlessness. It seems that religion is concerned with orienting its partakers "beyond" themselves in a manner that is, in the words of William Desmond, self-surpassing. The task of religion, it would seem, is to guide the human mind out of its immanent coils by creating the possibility for participation with the transcendent. The Greek preposition μεταξύ (metaxu) has come to belong to the metaphysical notion of participation following Diotima's invocation of this in Plato's Symposium (202a–208a) where she speaks about Love, Ἔρως (Eros), as being "μεταξύ ἐστι θεοῦ τε καὶ θνητοῦ" (metaxu esti theoῦ te kai thnētoῦ), "between a mortal and an immortal" (202e). Plato's μεταξύ (metaxu) responds to the space between immanence and transcendence by transfiguring itself as a form of mediation between the creaturely and the divine. With this presentation, I want to explore this immanent-transcendent divide that Diotima has spun into the history of thought with the intention of questioning the state of being of this form of mediation. We shall address the state of being of the event of participation by first considering the preposition that characterises it, namely the preposition μεταξύ (metaxu) itself. We shall begin by showing that, even if this preposition operationally means 'between', it contains within itself the presence of another preposition, namely the preposition 'with' in the form of ξύν (or σύν). We shall argue that this interconnection of senses—'with' and 'between'—is an integral organisational feature of the event of participation and that this cohabitation of senses in turn informs our understanding of the event itself. Here we shall look at these interrelated prepositions that inhabit μεταξύ (metaxu) to gauge their implications on the dynamics of participation. Is the immanent-transcendent divide one that retains the dualism of Plato's original formulation, or is it more akin to the dynamic reinterpretation put forward by Proclus, for example? Is participation merely an event characterised by 'between', which is static and neutral, or is it also informed by 'with' which is more active in its operation? We shall argue that participation is composed of both 'with' and 'between', as is the μεταξύ (metaxu) that begets it, and not only of 'between' as its definition insinuates. Indeed, we shall argue that wherever there is 'with' there is an event of participation and that, further to this, 'with' is the condition for that participation, and participation is what is permitted by the presence and direction of the preposition 'with'. The route that allows for mediation to occur is provided by the presence of 'between', where 'between' forms the topological encasement of the bridging of immanence and transcendence. Participation is not an event of either 'with' or 'between' but of both 'with' and 'between'. It has no agent and is itself not an action, but retains within itself the contradiction of being both a state and a dynamic activity. Participation is both received (through 'between') and then endeavoured (through 'with'). With this presentation, I hope to reflect on the religious invocation of participation by focusing on the prepositions that characterise it and to let these grammatical creatures articulate this notion into further extension.

Lara Zammit is set to graduate with a Master's degree in philosophy from the University of Malta in November 2019 after successfully defending a dissertation entitled "Prepositional Participation: An Inquiry into the Linguistic and Ontological Manifestations of the Indo-European Preposition 'With'". Her research interests include the domains of metaphysics and ethics, philology, philosophy of music, and medieval thought. She has served on the editorial board of the fourth volume of Threads, a journal of philosophy issued by the Students' Philosophy Society within the University of Malta, and as the general editor of the journal's third volume. She is also the editor of the monographs Vox Depicta (2017) and Vox Aspecta (2019) published by the Malta Classics Association. She is currently a copy-editor for Asymptote, an international magazine specialising in translations of world literature, and a sub-editor for the Times of Malta.

Pursuing the Truth and Confronting the Post-Truth – A Fruitful Lesson Taken from the Regensburg Religious Colloquy of 1601

Lukáš Kotala

Palacký University, Olomouc

The philosophical turn towards religions inquiry in the last decades acquires its own expression in the field of history of oral disputing (in a greater part) religious issues. Indeed, an unprecedented increase in monographs and articles can be seen in this field (E.g. Rodda, Public Religious Disputation…, 2014; Weijers, In Search of the Truth…, 2013, A Scholar's Paradise..., 2015; Novikoff, The Medieval Culture of Disputation…, 2013; Felipe, Post Medieval Ars Disputandi, 1991; "Ways of disputing…", 2010; "Notes On Some Early Disputation Handbooks", 2012, etc.). The early modern period is particularly attractive for the research. One of the reasons is that it was strikingly similar to the present. They suspected new mathematics and physics, we are suspicious of machine learning and supercomputers. They saw the Christendom torn into pieces, we feel tensions between Judeo-Christianity or secularism on the one hand and Islam on the other. Their renaissance minds appreciated usefulness of rhetoric (instead of sterile scholastic quibbles), our unquestioning minds devour post-truth (Cf. Oxford Dictionary) rhetorical performances that we call public debates. As they multiplied impact of all novelties by the unparalleled spread of information (thanks to letterpress), and, at the same time, printed offensive pamphlets (disinformation) on a large scale, so we have jumped on even higher level in this using our social networks. On the other hand, oral disputations were public forums and yet serious enough for scientific inquiry and critique. New ideas, like multiple universes, heliocentrism, colonialism, immigration etc. were discussed in this form (Shuger, Birth of the Public Sphere, 2009). Bacon, Descartes, Locke, Malebranche, and Leibniz expressed their stances as to the ability of disputations to approach truth (Cf. e.g. Dascal, G. W. Leibniz: The Art of Controversies, 2008). As we shall see, the public disputations on religion have been equally or even more scholarly and exciting. The main objective of my paper is to show on an example of historical colloquy between Jesuits and Protestants in Regensburg 1601 that and how the theologians and politicians attempted to pursue the truth and to confront the post-truth discourse (Cf. Oxford Dictionary). My paper, therefore, (1) briefly introduces aforementioned questions and the colloquy itself. Strangely enough, it reveals two completely different ways of disputing in turn. Portraits of these are exceptionally accurate and reliable as the exchanges were recorded verbatim by both Catholic and Protestant notaries (Cf. e.g. Acta Colloquii Ratisbonensis, 1602). It was politically important event so a large noble audience was present. A key religious theme was discussed: Holy Scripture as the only judge over controversies of religion... (2) As a core of my original contribution (based on the research of the latin records), the paper presents and compares instances of those two methods, showing the rational vs. rhetorical component of each. The Multi-thread method seems to heavily apply arguments from authorities and was advocated by Protestant party as the method most fitting to theology (the rhetorical component prevails). On the other hand, the Objection-solving method was urged by Catholics and it is characterized by syllogistic arguments and a set of key phrases that indicate various kinds of moves (the rational component prevails). Finally (3) my paper proves that both of these methods were actual applied not only in this particular disputation (Cf. e.g. Costello, The Scholastic Curriculum…, 1958; Weijers, In the Search of the Truth, 2013).

Lukáš Kotala completed his doctoral studies at Palacký University, Olomouc (Czech Republic) in 2017. Since then he has worked as assistant professor of philosophy, Department of Philosophy and Patristic Studies, Sts Cyril and Methodius Faculty of Theology at the same university. He lectures various courses like History of Philosophy, Philosophical Theology, Anthropology etc. Among others, Kotala holds a seminar called 'Disputace', at which he attempts to promote the 17th century form of disputing (sometimes in a practical manner). The submitter published monograph called Modern Viva Voce Disputation – Roots, Process, Difficulties and Possibilities (Novověká ústní disputace. Kořeny, proces, úskalí a možnosti, in Czech, Krystal 2014). In his previous enquiries, the submitter collaborated with foreign specialists (mainly via fruitful scholarly correspondence) such as Prof. Donald Felipe, Ignazio Angelelli, Eleonore Stump, Sara Uckelman, Paloma Perez-Ilzarbe, Olga Weijers and Stamatios Gerogiorgakisov. Prof. Felipe (Golden Gate University), whose Post Medieval Ars Disputandi (1991) makes him the leading authority in this subject, reviewed Kotala's PhD thesis as one of the regular opponents.

Dreaming Descartes: Subjectivity and the Imaginal in the Postmodern

Bettina Borg Cardona

Canterbury Christ Church

In the *Meditations on First Philosophy*, dreaming presents a particular problem for Descartes, against which he develops his conception of the subject. Attempting to exorcise the confounding demon of sense-perception that threatens to undermine rational certainty, Descartes erects what he perceives to be an unshakeable foundation for the thinking, singular subject. However, in a classic scenario of the 'return of the repressed', dreams have constituted the ground from which all that was left out by Descartes' formulation of the self has come back to haunt the field of subjectivity. The dreams of Freudian psychoanalysis offered one avenue for the defamiliarisation of the subject, opening the door for the return of a host of repressed subjects: the female, non-white or non-binary. In this paper, I would like to explore the manner in which the study of dreams - and the dream-like image - has continued to expand the notion of the subject beyond the categories just mentioned. Indeed, despite the attempted deconstruction of the Cartesian subject, the objectivity with which the non-human is perceived has remained relatively unchanged. Richard Tarnas, who frames this issue in the broadest possible terms of the cosmos itself, argues that we continue to view this as 'entirely impersonal and unconscious': a universe of objects perceived by human subjects. Psychoanalyst Robert Bosnak locates the potential subversion of this perspective in dreams, reversing the direction of Descartes' argument to suggest that both in dreaming and waking 'there is a primacy of the embodied condition'. To make such a move would however be to invite back in the demon banished by Descartes – one which Bosnak identifies as the substantive 'mercurial imagination'. Bosnak draws for his argument on the work of philosopher and theologian Henry Corbin, whose studies into the living imagination of mystics and visionaries draw him to describe the 'imaginal', a word he uses to distinguish the hyper-real world of the spiritual imagination from ordinary fantasy. Corbin here however engages pre-Cartesian modes of discourse: the Neoplatonic mode of imagination which has its roots in Platonic and pre-Platonic conceptions of knowledge, and which Corbin believes to have entirely disappeared since the rise of modernity. This paper will ask whether it could ever be possible to return, to gain entry into the pre-modern perspective described by Corbin. Would this constitute a return to the roots of philosophy, if 'philia' in 'philosophia' refers to the Platonic conception of the love between all things that binds the universe together in harmony: the animated, ensouled cosmos of Plato's *Timaeus*? In such a universe, the philosopher is necessarily a religious figure; one whose role is to assimilate him/herself to increasingly harmonious orders of existence. Or might this intra-subjective field be constituted differently, in a post-religious age?

Bettina Borg Cardona is currently pursuing a PhD in Education at Canterbury Christ Church University. Her research involves an inquiry into the manner in which pre-modern, 'non-rational' modes of knowledge might inform a contemporary perspective. More specifically, she is engaged in the exploration of mythic, archetypal imagery in an architectural structure at the healing sanctuary of Asclepius in ancient Epidauros, where forms of healing through music and dream took place. Her approach is self-reflexive, engaging the building as subject rather than object, and thus opening up a space of transference in which she is fully involved in the kinds of imaginal experience that such forms of healing involved. She has a background in English Literature and Critical Theory, and also holds a master's degree in Baroque Studies.

«Antaios»: A Mythical and Symbolic Hermeneutics

Luca Siniscalco

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The aim of my research is to define from a theoretical point of view the Hermeneutics that can be identified as the specific core of «Antaios» (1959-1971), the German journal directed by the historian of religions Mircea Eliade and the writer and philosopher Ernst Jünger. We'll focus on the philosophical interpretation of «Antaios» contents: the so called "mythical hermeneutics" is in my perspective the most interesting theoretical – but also aesthetic – theme connected to the Weltanschauung ("world view") of «Antaios», which should be considered not just as a cultural journal, but a genuine intellectual experiment, philosophical and multidisciplinary at the same time, in which scholars coordinated by Jünger and Eliade have attempted to develop a theoretical model that could establish a global cultural paradigm in opposition to the one prevailing in their contemporary age. The contemporary philosophical debate is in fact often disrupted by a rigid and fruitless opposition between analytic philosophy, in which the empiricist and positivist tradition converge, and postmodern philosophy, characterized by a prevalent pars destruens, in which genealogical analysis and critical perspectives summarize the history of the Western philosophy annihilating its main truthful contents. The first paradigm, destined to fall into naturalism – as Edmund Husserl denounced in his studies –, forgets the criticist perspective and the need for deeply philosophical questioning of the gnoseological requirements; this theoretical paradigm is opposed to the second one, that is linked to a relativistic and subjectivist view, which denies the objective pole of reality and the notion of truth itself, inevitably falling back in a solipsism that precludes any genuine philosophical speculation. In this scenario «Antaios» could embody a counter-philosophical perspective that is at the same time intrinsic to Western speculation. This position has been repeatedly emerged in many movements of our cultural history. I am referring to a mythical-symbolic thought, characterized by an analogical interpretation of the world, whose structure is considered as a stratification of truth levels, that are complementary ontological levels of reality. This tradition sees reality as a specific kind of totality (Ganzheit) that allows human perception to gnoseologically take place through the structures of myth and symbolism. The journal was a multidisciplinary one opened to the contributions of all the humanities areas. In spite of the specific factors relating to the individual disciplines and the characteristics of the individual authors, we can see how the adopted theoretical approach is characterized by a strong unity. This theoretical unity was focused on the will of promoting an intellectual development of a cultural paradigm new and at the same time rooted in the mythical-symbolic tradition that, starting from the religious and esoteric prephilosophical meditations, crosses the Platonic thought, the various neoplatonisms, passes through medieval mysticism and alchemy, reappears in Romanticism – particularly in the one of Heidelberg – and is revealed in the twentieth century by the reflections of the "thinkers of Tradition". My Master thesis was specifically devoted to the detailed study of these issues in the articles published by Eliade and Jünger inside the journal, contextualizing their speculations within the entire work of the two authors and summarizing a unified philosophical perspective, according to the respective peculiarities. With this paper I would like to communicate the main topics that from this Hermeneutics can be identified: speculations about symbol, myth, coincidentia oppositorum (coincidence of opposites), ontological pluralism, aesthetic forms and philosophy of art are at the core of this paradigm.

Luca Siniscalco graduated in Philosophical Sciences at the University of Milan, with an experience abroad at the Carl von Ossietzky Universität in Oldenburg (Germany). He is a Professor of Aesthetics at eCampus University. He collaborates with the Chair of Aesthetics (University Statale of Milan), developing researches on various philosophical topics, with a particular interest in the intersections between Aesthetics, Symbolical studies, Hermeneutics and History of Religions. His articles have been published in many magazines, newspapers and scientific journals. He is a member of the editorial board of the cultural magazine «Antarès. Prospettive antimoderne» (Bietti Edizioni); he also works in the publishing industry as editor and proof reader.

Translation between Religious Truth and Secular Society

Esther Hudson

The School of Philosophy, The Catholic University of America

Under the general question of the proper understanding of the relation between faith and reason, in this paper I will consider the issue of the translation between what is held as true within a religious tradition, particularly when it comes to ultimate first principles, and what a secular society holds as true. I was moved to consider this issue in greater detail upon reading Habermas and Ratzinger address the issue in The Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion, and in making my argument, I will also draw upon the thought of Aquinas and Edith Stein. In my paper, I will argue that, first, due to the limitations of human reason in itself and the claim of revealed knowledge to make known what is inaccessible to human reason alone, a public society that wishes to be tolerant of various religious traditions must first accept its own limitations. That is, secular beliefs in themselves cannot claim to be the only or ultimate truth in a society, in effect making themselves religious. Second, I argue that the prerogative for introducing the truth found in religious traditions lies primarily with the religious believers. That is not to deny that the secular person has an obligation to seek the truth; he does. Rather, it is to claim that when it comes to the translation, so to speak, from truth as expressed within a religious tradition and that truth as expressed in secular society, the prime obligation to translate falls on the believer, for reasons that I will elaborate on in my paper. That said, the secular person, or a secular society in general, is not obliged to accept uncritically all the claims of the religious believer; quite the contrary: in human society, the relation between faith and reason needs to be a real relationship in which both ways of knowing the truth hold as real and truth the need to affect and to be affected by the other. As it relates to the general theme of the conference, the scholars mentioned above acknowledge that faith claims to know a more complete, or even the complete, truth, going beyond what human reason can hold with certainty on its own. Even so, as Stein argues, if human reason is authentically open to an and pursuing the truth, then it must be open to the possibility of the light of faith breaking in upon it, illuminating and affecting it.

I am currently working on a Ph.D. dissertation in the School of Philosophy at the Catholic University of America. My dissertation will be on the notion of the self in the Enneads, more particularly the embodied self, and considering what self-knowledge means for the embodied soul and how Plotinus' theory of the self relates to the self-transcendence and the mystical dimensions of his philosophy. I am working with Dr. Matthias Vorwerk, and I hope to be finished by spring 2021. I am also interested in questions pertaining to philosophy of God and the relation of faith and reason, both in contemporary society but also in the ancient and late antique world. For the past three years I have taught a year-long introduction to the history of Western philosophy using primary texts at The Catholic University of America.

Caritas Takes Precedence over Veritas

Rogi Thomas

Pontificio Collegio Scozzese Roma

The objectivism of classical metaphysics, (and thus the absoluteness of 'truth' in Western thought) underwent a paradigm shift with the introduction of 'weak thought' by Gianni Vattimo. The weakening/secularisation/Verwindung of metaphysics leading to the dissolution of all strong truth claims parallels kenosis. "Vattimo takes kenosis as the model of the destiny of ontology," 'the God-returned' distances himself from the Eternal Origin and His transcendent divinity. Vattimo argues that truth becomes a purely 'worldly' matter without any external, metaphysical or sacred reference. The eventual nature of 'truth' and 'being' provides the dynamic for the ongoing process of the weakening of reality through secularisation/kenosis. For Vattimo, the only possible limit/end of secularisation/kenosis is the hermeneutic of caritas/charity. Caritas leads to a profound understanding of the biblical message, which has an impact on "all spheres of life as the post-modern and nihilistic outcome of modernisation seen effectively in cultural, political, and social pluralism. Significantly, caritas is one of the prominent features of the post-modern return to or reimagined religion. Vattimo, in Belief, articulates that the return of Christianity is possible through preference for love, rather than for justice, severity, and the majesty of God. The eventual nature of 'truth,' that diffused into the realm of ordinary experience and the distinctiveness gained by the hermeneutic of caritas in reimagined religion, is the hinge of my argument. Consequently, I argue that caritas takes precedence over truth. it pertains to the metaphysical violence of the truth claims of any religion or polity that should be replaced by and subordinated to charity and dialogue. This means that the hermeneutic of caritas assumes the truth of the reimagined returned religion of post-secular and post-modern Christianity. Postmodern nonreligious human, living with a 'weak' conception of truth, learns to live in his impermanency, and is able to practice solidarity and charity.

First Name: ROGI Last Name: Thomas Nationality: British Sex: M Date of Birth: 20-01-1974 Current address Pontificio Collegio Scozzese, Via Cassia 481, 00189 – Roma E Mail: rthomas@dundee.ac.uk, rogithomas@gmail.com Educational Background 1). PhD Faculty of Philosophy, School of Humanities, University of Dundee, Scotland, UK, DD1 4HN, Telephone: +44 (0)1382 388927 or 388625 Email: Fax: +44 (0)1382 38679 2). M Litt, in Continental Philosophy, University of Dundee, Scotland, UK 3): Master of Philosophy, INDIA 4): Bachelor's degree in English Literature, INDIA 4): Bachelor of Philosophy, INDIA 6): Bachelor of Theology, INDIA, Articles Published and Papers Presented: (1) Verwindung: A Note towards the Analysis of Gianni Vattimo's Concept of Kenosis (University of Dundee, Scotland, UK, School of Humanities Postgraduate Conference which is being held on 12-13th May 2014). (2) Overcoming Epistemology and Epiphany of Secularism (University of Dundee, Scotland, UK, School of Humanities Postgraduate Conference which is being held on 12-13th May 2015). (3) Post-Secular Return of Religion: A Religion of Being-for-the-Other (The Returning Angel (Council for Research in Values and Philosophy (RVP) Washington. D.C., University of Madras, Chennai Philosophical Forum, and Sri Vishnu Mohan Foundation, Chennai, 22-23 December 2016). (4) From Opposition to Complementarity: The Transition of Religious Self to Secular Self (International Conference on Religion & Spirituality in Society, University of California, Berkeley, USA, 17-20 April 2018). (5) Post-Secular Return of Religion: A Religion of Being-for-the-Other (IJRDO-Journal of Social Science and Humanities Research ISSN: 2456-2971, Volume-2 | Issue-7 | July, 2017).

The Concept of Imago Dei as a Symbol of Religious Inclusion and Human Dignity

Wojciech Szczerba

Evangelical School of Theology, Wroclaw / Von Hügel Institute, University of Cambridge

The Concept of Imago Dei as a Symbol of Religious Inclusion and Human Dignity The article aims to indicate how the theory of the image of God (imago Dei) can serve as a basis for the broadly understood religious inclusion and how it can work as a symbol of human dignity. The article renders the concept first of all from a protological perspective and analyzes its usage in Greek philosophy, the writings of the Old and New Testaments, theological tradition and modern philosophy. In the course of argumentation, the substantial, relational and functional meanings of the term are underlined. These three usages can be found in the treatises of Gregory of Nyssa, which serve as the important point of reference for the article. In the context of religious inclusion, the relational angle seems to be the most important. As Jürgen Moltmann indicates in his book God in the Creation, the concept of imago underlines the fundamental dignity and importance of every person. Since, according to the Christian tradition, every human being is created as the image of God, the concept transgresses the borders of religions and worldviews. This broad perspective underlines German philosopher, Jürgen Habermas noting that the humanistic-Kantian conviction about the equality of all the people and the need for respect of every person can be found in the Biblical concept of imago Dei. "One such translation", he writes, "that salvages the substance of the term is the translation of the concept of 'man in the image of God' into that of the identical dignity of all men that deserves unconditional respect. This goes beyond the borders of one particular religious fellowship and makes the substance of biblical concepts accessible to the general public." From this perspective, the concept of Imago Dei can be rendered as a symbol not only indicating the dignity of every person and human community, but also a symbol against any types of racism, nationalism or xenophobia. In his book God for Secular Society, Moltmann indicates that properly understood human rights – based on a broadly understood concept of Imago Dei – should include e.g. democratic relationships between people, cooperation and fellowship between societies, concern for the environment, in which people live, and responsibility for the future generations, which also can be seen as exemplifications of Imago Dei.

Wojciech Szczerba Ph.D. (habilitation) Graduate Christian Theological Academy in Warsaw (1996) and Economic Academy in Wroclaw (1997). He studied in Holland, Amsterdam at Theological Seminary and Belgium, Heverlee at Evangelische Theologische Faculteit. In 2000 he completed his Ph.D. in Patristics at the University of Wroclaw. In 2009 he defended his second Ph.D. in Ancient Philosophy at the same University. Wojciech wrote two books dealing with the issue of universal salvation in Greek Philosophy and early Christian thought and numerous articles dealing with such issues like anthropology, soteriology, Protestant tradition, ancient philosophy and theology. Wojciech became Academic Dean of Evangelical School of Theology in 2002 and served in this position until he became the Rector/President in 2006. He is also a Research Associate at Von Hügel Institute at St Edmund's College, University of Cambridge. Besides that, Wojciech serves as editor-in-chief of periodical *Theologica Vratislaviensia*. He is involved in various ecumenical initiatives and interreligious dialogue.

Post-Secular Politics? The Political and the Turn to Religion in Contemporary Political Theory

Spyridon Kaltsas

National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

One of the most significant current discussions in contemporary philosophy is related to the political significance of religion in contemporary society. Habermas defines contemporary Western societies as post-secular by stressing the continuing relevance of religion and its presence in the public sphere and develops a complex argument capable of taking the potential contributions of religion in political life seriously into account. In this view, the concept of the post-secular is related to a critical account of modernity without putting into question the fundamental tenets of secularization–such as social differentiation or the separation of church and state–or the experience of secularity as the unavoidable moral and cultural framework of modern democratic societies. Following this line of argument, my main objective in this paper is to explore the relationships between religion and the political in contemporary political theory. I draw on recent literature on the subject in order to show that the concept of the post-secular points to a normative understanding of our current situation and requires a rethinking of the boundaries of the political through its relation to the ongoing presence of religion in the public sphere and the recognition of its social and cultural value. This argument implies a radical break with the epistemological and political stance of dogmatic secularism that regards religion as an irrational social power belonging to the prehistory of modernity and takes the public presence of religion as a political threat to the public sphere. From this point of view, the concept of the post-secular is not simply a new way of interpreting the function of religion in the contemporary world and does not merely designate a sociological condition of modern societies. Rather, my main purpose is to show that the concept of the post-secular bears a normative significance since it exposes crucial aspects regarding our understanding of the relationship between modernity, the experience of being secular, and the political. These aspects include (1) the divide between modernity and postmodernity and its conceptual relation to the distinction between the secular and the post-secular; (2) the critique of secularism as a statecraft doctrine and its ideological derivations; and (3) the possibility of understanding post-secular politics as a critique of existing conditions, which requires an active engagement with the social pathologies of modernity.

Spyridon Kaltsas was born in Piraeus, Greece. He holds a PhD in Philosophy from the University of Paris-Sorbonne (Paris IV). He received his B.A. in Philosophy (Department of Philosophy, Psychology and Pedagogy) and his M.A. in Political Science and Sociology (Department of Political Science and Public Administration) from the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. His most recent research focused on the relationships between religion, pluralism, and the post-secular public sphere in contemporary political theory and was funded through a postdoctoral studies scholarship from the Hellenic State Scholarships Foundation (IKY) co-financed by the European Union (European Social Fund–ESF) and Greek national funds. He has published articles in Greek, in French, and in English and his main research interests are in the fields of contemporary political and social theory, Critical theory and the theory of communicative action. He is actually teaching political and social theory at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Department of Political Science and Public Administration.

Panel 3.1 Culture, Aesthetics & Neurotheology

The Complex Relationship between Sacred and Beauty: When Religion becomes Aesthetics and Aesthetics becomes Religion

Samanta Viziale

University of Torino

Can the aesthetic and the religious experience have something in common? Recent studies (Zeki, 2017) connect aesthetics to neurosciences in order to understand the roots of beauty. A similar path was followed by neurotheology (Newberg, 2010). Should those experiences only be linked from the "neuro-aspect"? Of course not. Thanks to a multidisciplinary research it's possible to outline the role of art in human societies; and, even if not all cultures possess an idea of aesthetics which is independent from art, as in the Asiatic continent (Terrosi, 2014), beauty plays a fundamental role in defining identities. Does aesthetics shape our lifestyle or it's the other way round? In 1917 Rudolf Otto published his famous work "The Idea of Holy", where he assumed a relationship between the Holy and the Sublime. This doesn't influence only the anthropology of religion, but it could offer new perspectives in the analysis of connections between aesthetics and religions. An ethnographical example of this connection could be found in the Waldensian religion. Waldensians are the only heretical movement who has survived until nowadays, their aesthetics is poor and austere; the concept of sacred doesn't belong to them, and apparently neither does beauty. After a deeper analysis of this community, it's possible to explore a new way of understanding beauty: as a vehicle of ethics and instrument of praise. It's different from what is normally argued: it's not the luxurious, glittering beauty full of decorations, but a modest and simple expression of values, inherited from history. Even though this non-common perception, the presence of a certain aesthetics is fundamental in this community. Religions need aesthetics in order to survive. The Waldensians show that it's possible for a culture to last without a great development of arts, but without the creation of an aesthetics there are few possibilities of survival. The emotions and the empathy, aroused from arts and beauty, lead to a feeling of communion that qualifies a community. What would become of religion without the feelings sparked by aesthetics? On the other hand we are witnessing an opposite tendency. The importance of the image in our society has led towards a sick perception of beauty and aesthetics, which have been transformed into something similar to a religion. This trend to "spiritualize" art is nothing new, something similar happened in Europe during the XIX century with Aestheticism. Probably the desecration of arts occurred in the XX century produced the conditions for the growth of an "aesthetic religion" devoid of values. These examples show how important it is to investigate the philosophical issue of beauty, from a religious point of view, connected with aspects of different societies. Aesthetics is an integral part of human life and approaching it in all its complexities is fundamental to understand the Contemporary.

Samanta Viziale was born in Pinerolo (Italy) in 1994, she graduated in painting at the Academy of Fine Arts of Cuneo in 2016 with a thesis entitled "Connections"; she continued her path at the University of Torino, in 2018 she finished her master's degree in Cultural Anthropology and Ethnology with a thesis entitled "Sacred and Beauty in Waldensian religion in Chisone, Germanasca and Pellice Valleys", in which she analysed the connections between the aesthetic and religious experiences in the Waldensian community. At the moment she is involved in the Advanced Training Course in Philosophy for Children and Community at the University of Florence. Her fields of study are anthropology of arts, aesthetics and the role of beauty in different aspects of human life. Her aim is to connect aesthetic and spiritual experiences. In September 2019 she will participate as a lecturer in the international conference "Re-enchanting the world: Spiritualities and religions of the third millennium", organized by CESNUR (Center for Studies on New Religions) in Torino. She collaborates with CeSMAP (Center of Research and Museum of Prehistoric Art).

Neurotheology as the New Hermeneutics of Body

Agnieszka Laddach

Independent Researcher

The aim of my paper is to present neurotheology studies as the new hermeneutics of body and the basis for a new reflection on the philosophy of religion. The structure of my presentation is as follows. First, I will characterize a development of body's hermeneutics in theology in second half of 20th century and at the beginning of 21 century. I will accentuate the popes' thought in terms of theology of body and theology of sexuality. Second, I am going to present the assumptions of neurotheology as a new hermeneutics of body. I also will describe it and as a new biotechnology studies of neural subjects with subjective experiences of spirituality. I will emphasize a concept of neurotheology also known as neuroscience of religion and spiritual neuroscience. I am going to point out close academic connection with neurotheology, medicine and art. I will present art as a stimulus for religious experience which can be measurable and comparable thanks to using neuroscience and medicine technology. In the last part of my paper, I will discuss how the neurotheology study influences on an idea of religion. I am going to answer the questions: what is the neurotheology rating in context of theological hermeneutics of body? has religion still contained mystery in the light of neurotheology? whether neurotheology creates or destroys a mature reflection on religion? The sources of my presentation will be: popes' documents on theology of body, academic publications on neurotheology, academic publiactions on neuroart history.

I have graduated from Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń (Poland). I have obtained Bachelor, Master and Doctorate degrees in History and a Master degree in Theology. I am interested in modern history, history of culture, theology of culture, theology of body, and theology of sexuality. I have done research on the theology of body, the queering theology, and relationship between the Roman-Catholic Church and LGBTIQ persons. I have presented my papers on numerous conferences in Great Britain, Ireland, Poland, and Latvia. I published over thirty research articles and three monographs. The last one is entitled „Janusz St. Pasierb - teolog, historyk sztuki, teoretyk kultury" („Janusz St. Pasierb - a theologian, an art historian, a culture theoretician"), Toruń 2019. The aim of my researches is to describe and emphasize common spaces of faith and embodiment.

A Tourist Walks into a Funeral...

Jodie Bonnici

University of Malta

This paper shall analyse the transformation occurring in the public perceptions of churches, temples and sacred spaces throughout contemporary capitalist societies. It will commence by setting the argument that globalisation and the ease of mobility it facilitated has increased the economic value of places that can be considered as monumental or historical for their ability to attract tourists and affluent residents. Churches, temples and sacred spaces, once valued for their spiritual and moral significance within the local community, have also become an example of the monumental and historical. This is partly due to their status as locations which gathered and protected the economic and aesthetic contributions of communities and individuals. In preserving material elements of local, national or international culture and patrimony, these sacred spaces are susceptible to have their potential economic value on a national level overshadow their spiritual and moral significance within the local community. The Global Village (McLuhan, 1962, 1995), defined as the hegemonizing force which dominates and subverts the idiosyncrasies of nations and cultures in the global market (Friedman, 2000; Poll, 2012), factors into this change in the role and significance of the sacred, as demonstrated by the capitalisation on efforts to preserve global heritage. In light of this, the criteria defined by UNESCO to constitute a World Heritage Site (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2019) will be analysed in relation to these spaces and determined to be the means by which they may elevate their social and national standing to be considered as monumental and historical, and thus worth economic investment with the expectation of greater returns. This shall lead to a more detailed examination of the standing of churches, temples and sacred spaces within contemporary capitalist societies as a by-product of the Culture Industry (Adorno and Bernstein, 2001; Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002, 2011). Upon outlining the significance of this term and illustrating it through examples, the focus shall then turn to the production, distribution and reception of entertainment as related to social capital amongst the digitally connected citizens of these capitalist societies. I shall then posit the argument that in capitalist societies the sacred is co-opted for entertainment and economic purposes which allow for the sacred to become a consumable commodity within the Culture Industry (Adorno and Bernstein, 2001; Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002, 2011). The paper concludes that in turning the sacred into a spectacle (Agamben, 1993), churches, temples and sacred spaces have become a simulacrum pertaining to the hyperreal (Baudrillard, 1981, 1994,1998, 2005, 2012, 2014).

Jodie Bonnici graduated with a Master of Arts in Contemporary Western Philosophy, and is currently reading for a M. Sc. in Digital Games at the University of Malta. Her work focuses on the socio-political and cognitive implications of the advent of the Internet and social media, with particular interest in ubiquitous computing and contemporary trends in media-usage. Her current research interests centre on the intersection of video games and media theory as a means to propagate and experiment with philosophical queries through digital creations and the experiences of their users.

Postsecular Challenges to the Unification of Islamic Discourses

Emi Goto

The University of Tokyo

'Islamic resurgence' and 'Islamism' have been key concepts used to describe the ideological currents of various societies during the last half century. The common recognition was that reorganization and reconstruction of Islamic orders and Islamic morals were the major elements of these concepts (Suechika 2013; Mandaville 2014). The term 'Islamic', though it may imply various types of public and social orders, systems and values which had been brought forth during the long history of Islam, has been used to mean a certain pattern of ideological discourses. Although changes and variations in the understanding of the discourses have occurred in recent years (Almasry Studies & Information Center 2011; Bayat 2013), the binary between 'Islamic' discourses and other discourses has not been questioned, even though the latter often refer to the same religious sources and vocabularies as the former. This paper highlights the latter, by taking up the life and works of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd (1943–2010), an Egyptian scholar of Arabic literature and Islamic studies. His works titled Mafhum al-Nass: Dirasa fi ʹUlum al-Qurʹan (The Concept of the Text: A Study in the Sciences of the Qurʾan [1990]) and Naqd al-Khitab al-Dini (The Critics of Religious Discourse [1992]), among others, were criticized before a professorship committee in the Department of Arabic Studies at Cairo University in 1992. One of the committee members, who was a professor of Islamic Studies department, accused him of being heretic, outside of the fold of Islam. Later, some lawyers joined in this accusation, and presented a lawsuit demanding the separation of Abu Zayd and his wife on the grounds of a traditional Islamic rule that annulled marriages between a Muslim woman and an apostate. In this paper I do not take for granted what is considered to be 'Islamic' in contemporary Egypt. Political and social actors have competed over defining the proper relation between religion and politics in a deeply contested national context. Abu Zayd was a participant in this context and his works presented a direct challenge to an Islamist hegemony that tried to 'fix' the definition of the Islamic to the exclusion of alternative interpretations. The life and works of Abu Zayd provide, I argue, an example of the contested nature of discourses under the label of Islam in the age of modernity. His works can be broadly identified as postsecular in his insistence on a self-reflexive understanding of Islam that accepts the role of religion in the public sphere but rejects a fixed conception of the Islamic. 'Islamic resurgence' and 'Islamism' are ideological discourses that have attempted to impose their hegemony while hiding the possibility of change and transformation in the collective self-conceptions of Muslims. Abu Zayd offered a different interpretation of the relation between the 'sacred' and the 'mundane' that redefined the former in an attempt to critique the conflation of state and religion.

Emi Goto is an associate professor of Network for Education and Research on Asia and Institute for Advanced Studies on Asia, The University of Tokyo, Japan. She received her doctorate (Ph.D.) in 2011 from Department of Area Studies, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, The University of Tokyo. Her main work in Japanese titled Veils for God: Women and Islam in Contemporary Egypt (Tokyo: Chuokoronshinsha, July 2014) dealt with the relationship between religious discourses and increase of veiled Muslim women during last four decades. Her works in English include "Qur'an and the Veil: Context and Interpretation of the Revelation," (International Journal of Asian Studies 1:2, 2004, pp. 277-295). From September 2003 to August 2005, she was a research fellow of Institute for Gender and Women's Studies, The American University in Cairo, Egypt. Her current interest in the contemporary Muslim intellectuals is broad, ranging from Salafi scholars to radical feminists and Arabic speakers to Japanese speakers.

Creating a Muslim Space in Postsecular Settings

Kei Takahashi

Toyo University

The arguments regarding the postsecular in the Muslim context are not only concerned with the relations between the private and the public or religion and politics, but they also are concerned with the 'authenticity' of religious ideas and practices. If the postsecular implies the return of Islam to politics and the public sphere, then it raises the question regarding the definition of authentic Islam and the modes of its manifestations in secular society. While these debates have primarily revolved around the interpretations of texts, some Muslim scholars have also emphasized the 'contexts' as a source of interpretation. One of the most remarkable examples of the latter approach, which we have observed, especially among US-based young Muslim leaders today, is the focus on the 'lived reality' of Muslims in a secular society in addressing the question of Islamic authenticity. Instead of advocating for a single, normative Islam from a purely theoretical point of view, these leaders attempt to promote an understanding of Islam that is relevant to the challenges and life experiences of Muslim Americans while still drawing on the scriptures. The present paper illustrates Muslim Americans' unique approach to the quest for authenticity in American society by drawing attention to the community space. Recently, we have observed the younger generation of Muslim Americans establishing a new type of community organization, often called a 'third place' or 'third space,' in which they attempt to create inclusive spaces where any kind of Muslims is welcomed. The concept of the third place/space was originally advocated by American sociologist Ray Oldenburg to designate informal gathering spaces in local communities. Based on an awareness that the American suburb has witnessed a collapse of community, Oldenburg proposed re-creating informal gathering spaces as a means of community revival. The adoption of the concept of third places/spaces into the Muslim context may reflect a sense of crisis shared by young Muslim Americans that the Muslim American community is facing disintegration due to intra-Muslim conflicts revolving around Islamic authenticity. By providing inclusive gathering spaces where any type of Muslims is accepted while carefully distancing themselves from specific ideological orientations, these Muslim third spaces (MTS) are attempting to bridge various competing ideological and theological views in a practical manner. Taking up several MTS groups as cases, this paper will identify the strategies and mechanisms in the associated organizations and activities that enable MTS to effectively function. It will also address the relationship between texts (scriptures) and contexts (lived reality) in Muslim Americans' understanding of Islam by analyzing MTSs leaders' discourses. Given that previous discussions on the postsecular in the Muslim context have focused on Islamist discourses and movements, it is hoped that this paper will shed new light on the issue.

Kei Takahashi is an Assistant Professor in the Department of History at Toyo University in Tokyo, Japan. His major research interest is Sufism and tariqas in modern and post-modern societies. His present research topic is Islam and Sufism in the United States, and he conducted the field research on Muslim communities in the San Francisco Bay Area between 2016 and 2017. His publications include Sufi Orders: Traditions and Revival of Popular Islam (in Japanese, Tokyo: Yamakawa Shuppansha, 2014) and "Between the Tradition and the Reality: Neo-Traditionalist Discourses on Gender in the United States," Gender Studies 21 (in Japanese, The Tokai Foundation for Gender Studies, 2019).

Nonviolence in an Islamic Repertoire as 'Postsecular' Critique

Mohammed Moussa

Istanbul Sabahattin Zaim University

Although the role of the modern state in the Arab world has been accepted uncritically by Islamists, socialists and nationalists, I seek to illustrate its problemising by a prominent Muslim thinker. Jawdat Said is a Syrian intellectual whose writings span seven decades. His ideas are committed to the principled advocacy of nonviolence among Muslims and he is known as the 'Arab Gandhi' (Burrell 2011: 157). However, my paper is primarily concerned with how Said's writings may also be interpreted to consist of a 'postsecular' critique of violence and the modern state Said also questions some Islamists' preoccupation with political violence in the capture of the state for the eventual purpose of Islamising society. In his writings, he alludes to an alternative to both secular Arab and Islamist narratives of the ideal society. Such allusions, I argue, present an opportunity to discern a postsecular critique by a Muslim thinker in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Two areas of discussion divide my paper on Said's postsecular critique: first, the relation of 'religion' and nonviolence; second, revolution as a simultaneously rejection of the secular reason of the modern state and a collective performance of religious piety. Explicitly secular ideals are not evinced in Said's writings. On the contrary, the Syrian intellectual refers to the monotheistic prophets present in Qur'anic and biblical texts. An Islamic repertoire of images, values and norms allows Said to invoke religion to not only justify nonviolence but also to seek to demonstrate moral precedents in a religious faith for it. Nonviolence is accepted by Said in a fashion that combines both doctrine and "authentic commitments" (Lyons 2010: 655-656). For Said, faith animates the content and form of authentic commitments to nonviolence. Faith encompasses din (religion) and dunya (world) with the latter characterised by different species of human affairs and enjoys relative autonomy (Pasha 2012: 1044). A postsecular pursuit, including commitments to, of nonviolence thus dwells in world that is made normatively significant through a religious repertoire. Revolution is not a culmination of a secular linear process. For Said, the motivations and acts of revolution can be religious in nature. Moreover, the imperatives of nonviolence guiding the collective mobilising of people are to be found in an Islamic repertoire. Revolutionary acts of disobedience, echoing Leo Tolstoy and Mahatma Gandhi, are a religious duty in politics. Islamist or secular notions of loyalty to the state are also found wanting. The central role of the modern state in Muslim societies is demoted. Said's stance towards the state in this postsecular critique can be read alongside the persistence of one-party states in the Arab world and the desire of some Islamist movements to capture these states using violence. In this paper, I propose to illustrate a postsecular moment or critique in Said's writings which consists of expanding the realm of the religious to circumscribe a peculiar type of the modern state: authoritarianism.

Mohammed Moussa is currently an Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science and International Relations at Istanbul Sabahattin Zaim University. He was previously a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. Mohammed completed his doctorate at the University of Exeter. He has engaged with the challenging questions posed by tradition, the ubiquity of power and Islam in the contemporary world in a variety of forums. His publications include a monograph on the political thought of Shaykh Muhammad al-Ghazali (2015) and has published articles in Journal of North African Studies, Journal of Arab & Muslim Media Research and Critical Muslim.

Panel 3.3 Religion, Politics & Post-Truth

Alternative Epistemologies in the Context of 'Post-Truth': Enlightenment Philosophy, Constructed Validity, and the Case Study of Astrology

Abigail Klinkenberg

Humboldt Universität zu Berlin

Western secular modernity can be seen as partially originating in the Western 'Enlightenment' and the concurrent adoption of its epistemological standards as the sole measures of 'truth', 'rationality', and 'objectivity'. This paper considers the ways in which the current public debate surrounding the phenomenon of a 'post-truth' society relates to the breakdown of the Enlightenment project's epistemological hegemony and the concomitant post-secular acknowledgment of religion as playing a complex role in contemporary culture. Reading 'religion' loosely as those practices that depend on a non-scientific and non-objective affective basis, the case study of astrology presents itself as a meaningful instantiation of the intersection between philosophy and religion that this conference aims to interrogate. Drawing upon feminist and queer theory, this paper analyzes the extent to which Western Enlightenment epistemology constructs certain practices, including religious practices and ways-of-knowing, as 'irrational' and thereby discardable based on political interest in maintaining hegemonic power. Following the case study of astrology, a practice typically dismissed as 'unscientific' and 'irrational' by followers of Enlightenment thought and as part of the 'post-truth problem' by contemporary defenders of 'objectivity', this paper aims to construct a progressive critique of contemporary 'rational' society, arguing for the reassessment of dismissed epistemological practices in order to navigate the current neoliberal impasse. Along this axis, the re-emerging relationship between philosophy and religion can be seen as an opportunity to revise assumptions regarding the validity (or lack thereof) of certain practices with a view towards re-valorizing identities and communities traditionally marginalized by the hegemonic order. Non-'rational' practices like astrology, which have a history of being coded as feminine, queer, and even racialized (in that it is 'superstitious' and 'primitive') in the 'Enlightened' West, are being taken more seriously in this context. When viewed from the position of the modern eurocentric tradition, astrology is seen as 'irrational' in that it is 'unscientific' and thus it can be wholly discarded. From the position of the marginalized, however, astrology's irrationality is more readily recuperated and reclaimed given that individuals belonging to these groups already understand themselves as 'irrational' actors by virtue of their femininity, queerness, blackness, etc. Astrological epistemology, as an example of a religiously-inflected practice that relies on a non-Enlightenment way-of-knowing, implies a very different set of relations to the world from those familiar to those in the so-called 'Global North' in which nature and matter are passive and the subject and object are definitively split. Recognizing the world ('nature') as an active agent that wields influence over human subjects, encapsulating subject-object continuity, and operating according to cyclical visions of history and egalitarian social relations are all part of an ethics that can be read as emerging from accepting such an alternative epistemological stance as originary. Ultimately, this paper seeks to problematize the purely negative conceptions of the 'post-truth' information age by suggesting the relevance of epistemologies and practices that have been dismissed and produced as invisible by Enlightenment philosophy and epistemology.

Abigail Klinkenberg is a master's student with the Global Studies Programme at Humboldt Universität zu Berlin. She graduated summa cum laude from the University of California, Los Angeles, (UCLA) in 2015 with degrees in Political Science and English Literature as well as with a minor in Global Studies. Her master's thesis, supervised by Dr. Prof. Boike Rehbein and Prof. Benjamin Baumann of Humboldt Universität, concerns the liberatory potential of alternative epistemologies in a globalized world, taking the case study of astrology as a point of departure. More generally, her research focuses on the production of certain identities and practices as illegitimate, irrational, or invisible by hegemonic forces, especially as informed by feminist, queer, and post-colonial theory. She is interested in the ways in which positionality and embodied knowledge can be mobilized for progressive ethical and political ends. Originally from Lafayette, California, she is currently based in Berlin, Germany.

The Conflict in Ukraine as a Religious and Cultural War in Aleksandr G. Dugin's Political Theology

Marcin Skladanowski

The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin

The proposed presentation regards the religious and cultural aspects of the ongoing conflict in Ukraine as seen by Aleksandr Dugin, a representative of an ultra-right, nationalist, and anti-Occidental group of Russian intellectuals. Dugin is the supporter of neoeurasianism, according to which Russia is not a part of Western civilization but an independent civilizational entity connected to Eurasian cultures and religions. In this light, he considers the war in Ukraine as a conflict not only political and military but, most of all, religious and cultural. This is the conflict that will decide the destiny of Ukraine which, according to Dugin and many other conservative Russian intellectuals, is allowed to exist only within the area of influence of Russian culture and Russian Orthodoxy. The "revolution of dignity" of 2013 and the resulting conflict with Russia is, from such a perspective, an expression of cultural and religious aggression of the West toward Russia. The presentation will indicate the main elements of Dugin's philosophical and religious views which justify his engagement in pro-war propaganda and his support towards the separatist movement in the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics. In Dugin's approach, philosophy and religion unite in one vision of the human person, society, and state. The central elements of this vision are the rejection of individualism, the subordination of an individual to society and state, the primacy of spiritual over material values and the rejection of the idea of social and religious progress. Similarly, Rus' and Russian Orthodoxy, deeply transformed by Asian influences, is the carrier of these elements as fundamental spiritual values of Rus' cultural community. Dugin believes, therefore, that the fight to retain Russian influences in Ukraine, especially in the domain of culture and religion, is the fight for the Rus' identity of Ukraine and, consequently, for the cultural and religious unity of Rus' ethnic community (Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine). The presentation also demonstrates the significance of Dugin's concepts. In his most extreme statements, one can find threads that are also present in the statements of some representatives of Russian Federation authorities and the hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church. This is how, in Dugin's work, one can observe the structure and main elements of Russian political theology, albeit in a more radical and controversial form. According to that view, the state is perceived as a key factor supporting the Church and, at the same time, the Church's role is interpreted most of all in sociocultural categories: as a structure promoting traditional Russian values, integrating Russian society and promoting a wider Rus' cultural community. In this concept, the Russian Orthodox Church becomes more "Russian" than "Orthodox," but at the same time, it becomes a necessary element of Russian national identity as well as the identity policy of authorities.

Marcin Skladanowski is a professor of Russian Religion and Society in the Department of the History of Dogmas and Historical Theology at the Faculty of Theology of the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin (Poland). His research interests are ecumenical ethics and anthropology, history of Russian Christianity, Russian national and confessional identity, State–Church relations in Russia, Russian religious historiosophy, Russian political theology.

Buddhist Activism: Boundaries Blurred in Post-Secular America and the Relevancy of Buddhist Ethics

Stacey Mitchell

Union Theological Seminary

I will make a presentation on the intersection of Buddhist communities (with a focus on the public sphere highlighting secular and post-secular Buddhism) and Buddhist ethics in the United States. How is American Buddhism influencing moral activism in the United States? How has foundational Buddhist religious thought evolved into 21st Buddhist activism post-secular movements within the United States? In order to understand post-secular American Buddhism actions in activism over the last couple of decades, I will address three aspects: first, arguments of whether Buddhism is a religion or philosophy; secondly, the moral arguments for engaged Buddhism compared to Christian morals for activism and Humanist morals for activism; and third, to understand basic cosmological rules of Christianity, Buddhism, and science, highlighting their similarities and differences. With civil wars, interstate wars, and genocides happening across the Earth, including the Rohingya genocide, the Syrian Civil War, the Somalian Civil War, genocide in Darfur, as well as decimation of the Earth (i.e. the Amazon forest), people are suffering at a massive scale. People in privileged countries have the liberty of engaging in ethical behavior in order to help those who are suffering. How has secular or non-secular responses been impactful, or not, in effectiveness? And is this even the right question? How have secular and non-secular activist approaches differed in the past? Where are commonalities being found in a post-secular world within the United States? How is a post-secular approach different within Buddhism? There has been a "secular" approach to Buddhism that has developed in the United States over recent decades, as well as more traditional East Asian teachers who brought Buddhist teachings directly to the United States (i.e. Tibetan masters, Zen Priests, and other Asian Buddhist masters, such as monastic Thich Nhat Hanh from Vietnam). I will address common foundations of the secular Buddhist movement in the United States and how self-described secular Buddhists, as well as traditional non-secular Buddhists, are engaged in activism. The Dalai Lama promotes secular ethics, stating that inner values, regardless of religious doctrine, are where humanity can find common ground. This is a primary example of how Buddhism is adapting to the post-secular world. Thich Nhat Hanh coined the term "engaged Buddhism." Engaged Buddhism is an aspect of Buddhism that highlights the inter-dependence of humanity and the ethics to act upon these convictions based on the moral precepts of Buddhism, including engaging in the relief of universal suffering. Several engaged Buddhist groups have been founded in the last 40 years in the United States. I will provide detail in what the impetus was for many of these organizations and look at secular, non-secular, and post-secular approaches to current engaged Buddhist actions in the United States. Buddhists in the United States are currently engaged in immigration advocacy (such as at the border with Mexico), advocating to the end of the Rohingya genocide in Myanmar, or advocating for substantial environmental protection. This is often done within inter-faith contexts—it isn't necessarily defining a particular form of morality, but the morality we share, regardless of faith or non-faith, is what is highlighted.

Stacey Mitchell is currently a Buddhist theology student at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. She has a B.A. in International Studies from Western Washington University. She is involved in public square activist theology in the United States. She is also in the ordination process for the Unitarian Universalist church as part of her graduate studies. Initially from Seattle in the United States, she now resides in New York City. Her career has been in non-profit management for organizations that work on environmental protection, immigration rights, and civil rights issues. Her positions include recent former Board Member of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (an international inter-faith peace organization that is headquartered in the Netherlands) and current Board President for a health organization, Centro Mujeres, which focuses on Latina rights in the United States (with offices in Mexico). She is also a current active member of the Buddhist Action Coalition, a newly formed Buddhist activist group, based in New York City. Stacey has been a Buddhist for about 15 years, studying under several Buddhist teachers in these years.

Rationalistic Value Realism as a Religion Without God

Stelios Virvidakis

National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

There are various conceptions of religion without god, often drawing on the resources of great spiritual traditions, such as Buddhism and Confucianism, or moving in the direction of versions of pantheism and panentheism. Ronald Dworkin's alternative comprehensive worldview, put forth in his posthumous Religion without God, is essentially constituted by his strong value realism, which is supposed to provide the basis of the main guidelines for living well, elaborated earlier in his Justice for Hedgehogs. My analysis focuses on Dworkin's conception with a view to highlighting its peculiar characteristics and to assessing his claims as a contribution to both philosophy of religion and metaethics. According to Dworkin, a religious worldview holds that "inherent, objective value permeates everything, that universe and its creatures are awe-inspiring, that human life has purpose and the universe order" (Religion without God, p.1). What really matters for genuine faith are not ontological doctrines concerning the existence of a Supreme Being or supernatural beings, but rather a set of intrinsic values which are regarded as sacred and as regulating our lives. Thus, one could be a religious atheist as long as one adopts the proper attitude towards our own selves and our fellow human beings and towards the universe a whole. This attitude entails the acceptance of certain ethical and moral principles telling us how to live and how to act towards others, as well as the recognition of aesthetic properties of the universe, which may also turn out to have epistemological significance for expanding our knowledge of the world. Now, one wonders whether this does justice to the main dimensions of religion, which, apart from implying the eventual commitment to certain metaphysical beliefs, and involving an ethical and moral attitude, usually requires participation in communal, ritual practices of some kind, corresponding to what Wittgenstein would describe as a distinctive form of life. Dworkin's conception of religion and of its practical significance seems rather limited. He not only downplays the importance of doctrinal elements, but also seems to neglect the function of ritual and worship. In fact, his account, laying almost exclusive emphasis on morality and ethics, may be construed as an attempt to sustain his value realism without ontological foundations, which, in his previous works, he didn't want to present as a metaethical theory. Thus, one could approach Dworkin's brief and succinct defense of a religion without god as a coda or appendix to his rationalistic, cognitivist and realist positions regarding norms and values at all levels, in all domains of normative thought (epistemic, ethical, moral, political and aesthetic). His reference to a religious stance towards the realm of intrinsic value, sounds like a rather dogmatic gloss on the proper understanding of our attitude towards its objectivity. "We should better believe it!", as he had put it in a much earlier paper. Our discussion aims at an overall critical appraisal of his combined approach to the philosophical study of religion and value.

Stelios Virvidakis studied philosophy at the University of Athens, at the University of Paris I and at Princeton University. He has taught at various universities in Greece and abroad and is currently Professor of Philosophy at the Department of History and Philosophy of Science of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. His publications include books in metaethics, textbooks for the teaching of philosophy in Greek high schools and many articles in Greek, in French and in English, mainly in the areas of ethics, epistemology, metaphilosophy and the history of philosophy. He is a member of many philosophical societies, and of the Steering Committee of the Fédération Internationale des Sociétés Philosophiques (FISP), representing the Greek Philosophical Society. In 2006, he was awarded the title of Chevalier dans l'Ordre des Palmes Académiques by the French Government.

Something Other than Oneself is Real

Robert Govus

University of Malta

The Murdochian Virtuous Life "Art and morals are … one. Their essence is the same. The essence of both … is love. Love is the extreme realisation that something other than oneself is real. Love, and so art and morals, is the discovery of reality". It is for this reason that Iris Murdoch also writes elsewhere: "We need a moral philosophy in which the concept of love, so rarely mentioned now by philosophers, can once again be made central". In this paper, what I will be looking at is the way Murdoch manages to connect love with a transcendent Good together with an orientation for the particular. In other words, I will be examining Murdoch's understanding of what 'virtue' is and how it is to be obtained. From the quote above, it becomes quite obvious that for her, reality is something external to the agent which needs to be discovered; it is transcendent. However, the detail of our life should become instrumental to achieving this end. It seems to me that Murdoch, in the light of the central claim, is connecting the two by suggesting that [virtuous] human beings ought to: 1.   See the Good in others 2.   See the Good through others 3.   See others in the light of the Good All the three instances reflect a link between the 'transcendent' and the 'particular'. Murdoch writes: "Contingent particulars, objects […] can shake us with their reality" if they are seen for what and as what they are. She also says: "In particular situations 'reality' as that which is revealed to the patient eye of love is an idea entirely comprehensible to the ordinary person". This can only happen if one 'unselfs' which is another word for 'love'. Hence, a central Murdochian task for the virtuous agent is to do battle with the "fat relentless ego" and only in doing so can the three suggestions above be actualised. An attachment to the self will distort reality and consequently, we will not be able to 'attend' to it if we cannot first 'see' it. It is here that the analogies of the great artist and the mother of a large family (amongst others) become central to Murdoch's moral vision. Both the artist and the mother have to be able to 'unself' in order to: 1.   Read the detail around them 2.   Attend to it The last thing that I will be looking at is whether the three suggestions above create any tension between them. For example, which one of the three should come first in order for the rest to follow [if one should come first, that is]. Moreover, I will be paying particular attention to the notion of love in the light of the three: 1.   What is its role? 2.   Can it really be called love? [Martha Nussbaum does not seem to think that seeing the Good in others in an act of love] 3.   Is   Iris Murdoch suggesting that love should be the end of virtue or that love is a pre-requisite to virtue?

Robert Govus is a Philosophy lecturer at the University of Malta, Junior College. He has been lecturing there since 2011. He completed his BA Philosophy at the University of Malta in 2001. Deciding to continue his Philosophy studies further, he completed his MA in the Ethics of Life and Death at the University Trinity Saint David, Wales in 2010.

The Myth of the Psychological Dependence of Morality on Religion

Andrei Zavaliy

American University of Kuwait

Many people see a close connection between religion and a virtuous living to the extent that it became a part of the 'common-sense view' in some quarters. Moreover, a number of ethical terms have clear religious connotation or can trace their origin to a religious framework. In everyday dealings, the notion of moral wrongness is often equated with the religious notion of sin, and it seems significant that various religious texts contain specific moral rules, while religious institutions often endorse certain ethical positions or doctrines. Should we then admit that there is an essential dependence of morality on religion? In this paper I shall start by clarifying the three senses in which morality might be conceived as dependent on religion – (1) religion being the main source of moral knowledge (epistemological dependence), (2) religion providing a sufficient incentive for acting morally (psychological dependence), and (3) citing religious notions (e.g., God's will) as necessary for elucidating the deep meaning of the key terms of 'rightness' and 'wrongness' (semantic or ontological dependence). While making a few brief comments on the epistemological and ontological senses of such dependence, I shall focus on the topic of the alleged psychological dependence of morality on religious beliefs. The analysis of motivational efficiency of religion bifurcates into two distinct questions, the empirical and the normative one. With regard to the first one, it will be argued that, as the matter of fact, there no reliable evidence which would allow us to correlate the presence of religious convictions with improved moral performance, or a decreased number of moral failings on the part of a religious individual. Unlike the more mundane forms of punishments, the threat of postmortem retribution has a negligible statistical effect on the general population and fails to be an effective deterrent. The fact of a widely popular belief that that such correlation does exist calls for a special comment itself, and several explanatory hypotheses will be offered and analyzed. With the regard to the second question, it will be argued that the very essence of morality is undermined once we recognize the need for the external incentives of any kind, whether coming from a religious or a purely secular source. I will conclude the paper by suggesting a plausible way in which religion might still be relevant for pursuing a moral way of life. The main role of a religion in the moral domain, I maintain, is inspirational rather than motivational. Whereas motivational reason refers to an incentive that is essentially tied a person's deep interest (e.g., pleasure) or a strong aversion (e.g., pain), an inspirational reason provides a model for behavioral emulation and thereby creates an appropriate ideal, which might become the final goal of the moral action itself. Only in the latter case, acting morally can be seen as an end in itself rather than as a means for achieving further non-moral goals.

Andrei G. Zavaliy is currently an Associate Professor of philosophy at the American University of Kuwait. He received his B.A. from Nyack College, NY, and his Ph.D. in philosophy from the City University of New York in 2008. His research interests include the history of the world religions, moral psychology, philosophy of religion, and the applicability of the experimental methods to philosophical controversies, especially in ethical theory. He has published in the subjects of moral psychology, history of ancient philosophy, philosophy of science and religious studies. His upcoming book explores the evolution of the concepts of courage and cowardice in Ancient Greece from Homer till Aristotle.

Panel 4.2 Religion & Science

Can there be a Conflict between Science and Religion? The Pragmatist's Answer and a Truth-based Response to it.

Joe Friggieri

University of Malta

Can there be a conflict between Science and Religion? The Pragmatist's answer and a truth-based response to it. The old question of whether or not there is a God has traditionally been presented as a clash between two different belief systems. Atheists argue that theism is untenable and that the existence of the cosmos can be fully explained in scientific terms. Theists, on the contrary, affirm that the existence of the world depends on the existence of a Creator. The two sides see themselves as engaging in a genuine debate on the issue by putting forward arguments for their case and rejecting or rebutting those of their opponents. They see themselves as pursuing a rational kind of discourse aimed at arriving at the truth. Pragmatists and Neo-pragmatists consider this way of presenting the problem as fundamentally misguided. They think the issue cannot be decided on intellectual grounds. They base their claim on the view that the value of an idea does not depend on its truth but on its practical consequences. They also claim that we do not have an obligation to produce evidence for our beliefs, that beliefs are just habits of action, that creedal statements are secondary to practice, and that, therefore, where religious beliefs are concerned, the question to ask is not whether they are true or false, but whether they work for us, whether they enable us to cope. My presentation offers a critique of these views and an assessment of their consequences for religion and religious discourse.

Joe Friggieri is a Professor with the Department of Philosophy at the University of Malta. His research interests are in analytic philosophy (with particular interest in Austin, Searle, Grice and Davidson), aesthetics and modern philosophy.

Same Words, Different Worlds

Zainab Sabra

University of Southampton

My paper is concerned with the nature of the dialogue that goes in between a theist and an atheist. I am interested in the possibility of an atheist contradicting the theist's account or vice versa. The possibility of the dialogue is determined by the semantic theory that one presupposes in interpreting religious language. My aim is to argue that Wittgenstein's account along with Kierkegaard's insight allow such a dialogue to be possible without assuming that one of the speakers is describing reality correctly and the other isn't i.e. without assuming that we can extract a descriptive content from religious language and compare it with the atheist's claim; nor assuming that they are both expressing their feeling of approval or disapproval regarding the content of the sentence. The atheist naysayer cannot fully grasp the theist's claims because he/she lacks a level of understanding of such a religious statement which is present in the theist's case ; this level is that of practice. By rejecting the representational and non-cognitive accounts regarding religious language, the paper tries to show how Wittgenstein's account appears to give us a better account of religious language that overcomes the difficulties faced by the formers. Religious language will not be taken in its theoretical form as offering an explanatory hypothesis about the world, rather it will be taken as a life. One will not convert to christianity through arguments and theoretical exercise rather through a change in the shape of his/her life. This leads us to argue that we ought not to distinguish between the content of a religious belief and the attitude which follows from it. In order to grasp the meaning of a religious expression one need not only to understand each word in the statement, rather it can only be understood by looking at how the words are functioning in a specific context. Although this entails that a dialogue between a theist and an atheist will barely make sense, yet the paper wants to argue that their use of language isn't incommensurable. Religious discourse is not alien to ordinary language, it is only an extension of it. The same as how ethical, scientific psychological language are different extensions of ordinary language, religious language is but a different instance of these extensions. The more one's spiritual development is, the better he/she is at grasping the meaning of a religious doctrine, the same way as how the scientist's understanding of scientific language develops with the more practice he/she acquires in the field. Therefore, the paper wants to conclude that the atheist can have a pre-mature kind of understanding of the theist's religious discourse, that can only be matured by looking at the context and "living it". Yet, this doesn't mean one have to be Christian to understand the Christian's belief, one can understand that the theist's commitments are legitimate and justified, this doesn't entail that he/she will adopt them as true. Only appropriating a religious utterance requires a change in one's life.

I am a PhD candidate in the Philosophy department in Southampton (UK). My work focuses primarily on a Wittgensteinian account of religious language that is compatible with the work of Soren Kierkegaard and Robert Brandom. I am a philosophy instructor in the American University of Beirut, from which i graduated with distinction with a BA and a Masters in philosophy. I was the organizer of the first international graduate conference in the MENA region at the American University of Beirut and the president of the philosophy student society for 4 years. My research interest includes philosophy of religion, philosophy of language and specifically a contemporary reading of Arabic religious texts in light of the progress made in the philosophy of language.

How Natural is Natural Selection: An Examination of Appeals to Kant's Philosophy in Contemporary Biology?

Andrew Jones

University of Exeter, United Kingdom

Darwin's theory of natural selection is often considered as a turning point that fissures science from religion. One can see this in the opening pages of Kitcher's 'Abusing Science: The Case Against Creationism'. He recites a dispute between Bishop Wilberforce and "Darwin's bulldog", Thomas Huxley. Wilberforce asked whether it was Huxley's grandfather or grandmother that was descended from apes. Huxley retorted that 'he would prefer an ape for a grandparent to a man, blessed with intellect and education, who used rhetorical tricks to confuse an important scientific issue.' Kitcher sets the stage for the long-standing opposition between religion and science as the precursor to the dispute between evolutionary theory and creation science. I argue this contributes to an inherently misleading account of Darwin which sets him in opposition to religion. In a letter to Asa Grey in 1860, Darwin notes his bewilderment to the charge of atheism against him, claiming that he had 'no intention to write atheistically.' This is in tension with the predominant interpretation of Darwin's theory of natural selection as a non-intentional industrious entity bearing strong analogy with the industrial revolution of Victorian England. When pressed on the issue of the status of the selector behind natural selection, some commentators argue this is merely a metaphor based on an analogy with our capacity for artificial selection. The analogy between artificial and natural selection is considerably weakened if only the former is considered as an intentional force. In contrast, Robert Richards argues that German Romanticism convinced Darwin that natural selection was essentially a creative intentional process 'produced by an intelligent mind governing the universe', rather than mechanistic. I critically examine recent appeals to Kant's philosophy from contemporary interpretations of Darwin. In relation to the former, it has been argued Darwin should be understood in accordance with Kant's heuristic account of biological design in the '3rd Critique'. I argue that Ruse's caricature of Kant's philosophy in 'Darwin and Design' is fundamentally misguided. Kant regarded his analysis of biology (or teleological judgment) as part of his attempt to unify theoretical and practical reason. His discussion concludes with an analysis of the relationship between this mode of teleological judgment and the physicotheological argument for the existence of God. He argues that although physical teleology cannot offer proof for the existence of God, it does offer corroboration. Thus, Kant maintains there is strong link between the ideas required for both biology and theology. This reveals that recent appeals to Kant's philosophy as supporting the interpretation of Darwin as a strong secular naturalist are deeply misleading. In fact, Kant's philosophy exposes the strong parallels between ideas that underpin both biology and theology. Moreover, the continued appeals to Kant in contemporary biological scholarship demonstrates the continued significance of these parallels.

Panel 4.3 Morality, Religious Diversity & Faith

The Ontological Nature of Morality: Overcoming the Ontological Divide

Sergei Sushkov

University of Central Asia / Presidential Academy Moscow (RANEPA)

The Turn of Philosophy Towards Religion Dr Sergei Sushkov University of Central Asia/ Presidential Academy Moscow The Ontological Nature of Morality: Overcoming the Ontological Divide ABSTRACT The major premise for a philosophical approach to the issue indicated is provided by a conceptual reading of Genasis1, giving an account of the reality of creation origin. The clue uncovered by this reading consists in a dialectically justified understanding of the problem of Identity (a contradiction-centred vision of unity in difference), central for a coherently philosophical approach to the notions of Goodness and infinite Being, seen from the perspective of the Universal Principle of all. While treating the reality of creation as that of self-disclosure (in consonance with Heidegger's Dasein), this approach ascertains the principle of lacking discrepancy between essence and existence, which allows philosophy to interpret the Genesis message in terms of the fundamental ontology of self-identity, moral by nature. Due to this, morality and moral perfection come to be understood as the way of being in conformity with the true being (taking its origin from the self-identical Principle of all), which proves to be attainable by means of adequate manifestation of the essential nature. The conception of unity of true philosophy and true religion, first articulated by Eriugena (Treatise on Divine Predestination) and expressly confirmed by Hegel (History of Philosophy and Philosophy of Religion), gives impetus to a profoundly philosophical reinterpretation of religion. It, in turn, allows the current philosophical discourse – by clearly distinguishing between Verstand and Vernunft – to break shackles of the empirical paradigm of thinking. In this way philosophy is enabled to break through to the infinite subject-matter, no longer appropriate to the sense-dependent language of the institutionalized religion, resting upon the dualistic ontology of metaphysics and hierarchical structure of society. The post-secular age is the time of spiritual regeneration, not of restoration of the old religious practices; and philosophy, when brought together with religion addressed to human transformation and perfection, is responsible for leading the way beyond the horizon of the fragmented world of the lost meaning, imposed upon the true reality of creation by metaphysical empiricism.

Dr Sergei Sushkov: MPhil (Moscow State University, Russia), MTh and PhD (University of Glasgow, UK). Author of Being and Creation in the Theology of John Scottus Eriugena: An Approach to a New Way of Thinking (Wipf and Stock, US: 2017). Visiting Professor of Philosophy at the University of Central Asia and the Presidential Academy Moscow (RANEPA). Research interest: a possibility of synthesis of Philosophy and Religion (translation of the sense-dependent language of religion into the philosophical language of thought: the paradigmatic shift from the metaphysical type of mentality to the dialectical one). Research area: theology of God's Unity and philosophical rethinking of religion (Eriugena, Mu'tazilites, Ismaili philosophy, Hegel, John and Edward Cairds, Vladimir Soloviev and Sergei Trubetskoy); morality from the perspective of overcoming the ontological divide (ontology of Goodness and Self-disclosure, infinite self-identity versus the dichotomy-centred vision of reality); a theory of civilization (analytic and holistic approaches as the competing paradigms).

Kabbalah and Religious Diversity: Contemporary Socioeconomic Aspects

Rui Samarcos Lora

University of Coimbra / Center of Social Studies

The Kabbalah over the last few years have been increasingly detached from the hermeticism and occultism of the Middle Ages and spread as a philosophy in the contemporary world. This is due to two main factors: firstly, because its teachings permeate and intertwine with various religions and secondly because of the contemporary socioeconomic situation of the globe, where more and more people have sought to overcome everyday injustices, disasters and personal difficulties their way (Huss 2007). It is also important to point out that, because of its Jewish origin, as well as the way in which it arouses interest in the oral and spiritual tradition of the Old Testament - not approached by other monotheistic religions - Kabbalah can pass through other religions and spiritual fields with ease, providing answers and exclusive concepts of Kabbalistic doctrine, which justifies the religious diversity and capillarity inherent in the contemporaneousness of matter (Telmo 2015). Thus, the present summary aims to show that, given the globalization process and the economic situation of the world, as well as the deep social chasms occurring on the global stage (Bauman, 2011: 66), people are increasingly seeking in Kabbalah answers to problems and alternatives to continuing to live a life of greater significance (Huss 116: 2007), mainly because of its roots and doctrine in the Old Testament, the same basis of most of the monotheistic religions, and its way of discussing the existence of humanity. In this sense, unlike the Middle Ages, where Kabbalah was a hidden and often exclusive subject of Judaism, it is nowadays studied within and outside Judaism and constituted of philosophical elements that support it as an independent doctrine (Dan 2007). In addition to basing itself on the existence of a single God as the emanating source of the infinite, in Hebrew the Ein Sof (Kohler, Broydé, Kaufmann, Isaac 1906) has as its main study the oral and spiritual aspects of the Old Testament, completing the written aspect known by the religions. And it is through these traditions that Kabbalah seeks to explain the creation of the world, the purpose of human existence, and the various ways to better lead the way in life (Dan 2007). For this reason, it is possible to affirm that, in addition to moving on the terrain of religious diversity and becoming a new field of study in different areas of knowledge in the XXI Century, due to its various centers of study, extensive literature and penetration in the different media and channels social relations, Kabbalah retakes, after centuries of darkness, the spiritual study of the ontology of monotheism as something innovative, accessible and contemporary, as an alternative way of overcoming the daily problems largely caused by the current socioeconomic context of globalization (Myers 2008). With routine economic difficulties, where more and more people are seeking alternatives and spiritual solutions to life, Kabbalah seems to assume a preponderant role for its dialogue with which it studies without convincing which religion is right or wrong, mainly because it has elements of the main religions, western and Eastern.

Rui Samarcos Lora is a Brazilian and Italian citizen. Was born on 15th August 1983, in Brasília – Brazil. He is married and has as complementary activities the study of languages and interest in areas of religion, poetry and spiritual knowledge. Is PhD student in Political Science at the Center of Social Studies (CES) of the University of Coimbra, where he is dedicating to the study of cooperativism and democracy. He is also Specialist in Political Science by the University of Brasilia (UnB) and bachelor's in international Relations by the Universitary Center of Brasilia (UniCEUB). During his professional career, held different positions as civil servant at the Brazilian Federal Government from 2003 to 2018, where he was responsible to provide direct assistance to the Minister of Agriculture of Brazil (MAPA) in issues related to international relations and public affairs. There he was also Advisor of International Affairs, Deputy Head of Staff at the Department of International Relations (SRI/MAPA) and recently occupied the position of General-Coordinator for Institutional Affairs, being responsible for issues relate to international cooperation, public relations and public policies.

'Blessed are thou amongst women':Interpreting Mary's Blessing in light of Kierkegaard

Michael Grech

University of Malta Junior College

Kierkegaard considers faith in God as involving a leap in the dark; a leap that considered objectively and in terms of rational parameters appears to be absurd and illogical. The dark where faith leads however, may conceal what the light of reason and science cannot find in the universe, meaning. Many, especially within the Catholic tradition, have reacted against this characterization of faith, considering the consistency (not the reducibility) of faith and reason as a non-negotiable canon. I will not enter the debate as to which side captures the gist of religious faith, particularly Christian faith. Nonetheless, I argue that Kierkegaard does grasp something fundamental about faith, the fact that this involves leaps and commitments in one's life (not necessarily concerning the propositions one believes) that seem absurd. I do this by focusing on the Marian narrative, especially as spelled out in the first part of the 'Hail Mary'. Rather than in relation to existential themes concerning whether existence as a whole is meaningless or absurd, I consider the notion of what it meant to be blessed and blessed as a woman in Biblical tradition and in 1st century Judea, and claim that in light of episodes involving her in the gospels, (with the exception of one which redeems the whole narrative), the belief that Mary was blessed amongst women must have appeared, especially to Mary herself, as thoroughly absurd; something to believe against what evidence and practical wisdom suggest.

I am a lecturer with the Department of Philosophy of the University of Malta Junior College. My research interests are in analytic philosophy, metaphysics, political and social theory.

Panel 5.1 The Problem of Evil

Is an Unpopulated Hell Problematic?

Alex Gillham

St. Bonaventure University

The problem of evil posits the mutual exclusivity of a perfect God and the existence of evil. One specific version of the problem of evil is the problem of Hell, which claims that a perfect God could not have morally sufficient reasons for damning someone for all eternity, and so it follows from God's perfections that no one goes to Hell. There are three major responses to the problem of Hell. The first is that there is no way for humans to be sure that God could not have morally sufficient reasons to damn someone for all eternity; perhaps the best possible world requires that some end up damned for all eternity, although only God could know why this is. The second claims that God has morally sufficient reasons for damning individuals to hell: one such reason is that if God did not punish the wicked, then he would be acting unjustly. The third claims that God could have other morally sufficient reasons for eternal damnation: if God did not punish the wicked, then he would necessitate the salvation of everyone, which fails to do justice to the significance of human freedom on Earth. I have two aims in this paper. The first is to show that none of the major solutions to the problem of Hell is very good. The first response is bad because there is an attractive explanation available to humans for why God would allow eternal damnation in principle. He does not know, in the beginning, whether anyone will be wicked enough to deserve eternal damnation, but since the amount of evil that the most wicked can cause on Earth is not disproportionate to the amount of suffering they experience in Hell, God could have reasons to damn someone eternally. The second response is bad because God does not need eternal damnation in order to punish the wicked. The third response is unattractive because failing to damn the wicked eternally does not entail the salvation of everyone. This presupposes a false dichotomy between eternal damnation and salvation. The second and larger aim of this paper is to show that even if the problem of Hell succeeds in showing that God does not damn anyone to Hell eternally, it does not follow from this that there is no Hell understood as a place where eternal punishment can take place. Many sympathizers with the problem of Hell forget this, assuming that the mutual exclusivity of a perfect God and the eternal damnation of individuals is identical to the mutual exclusivity a perfect God and a place where eternal damnation can take place, although this is mistaken. One can defend the claim that Hell exists but is unpopulated without running into the problem of Hell, and God could have good reasons to have a place where eternal punishment may take place, although as it turns out God never sends anyone there.

Alex R Gillham is an Assistant Professor of Philosophy at St. Bonaventure University, where he teaches Ancient Philosophy and Ethics, and also runs the Center for Law & Society. Gillham studied under Patricia Curd at Purdue University. His recent research focuses on Epicurean Ethics and Objective List Theory. In his free time, Gillham enjoys playing basketball and seeing Phish live in concert.

Evolution, Middle Knowledge, and Theodicy: A Philosophical Reflection

Daniel Spencer

University of St Andrews

In this presentation, I will be investigating the relationship between an evolutionary account of the origin of sin and the various issues this raises for theodicy. I will begin by reviving an early evolutionary model and then discuss the most prominent objection which it elicits, an objection I dub the 'Responsibility Argument'. In essence, the Responsibility Argument states that if sin is merely the anachronistic misuse of natural animal passions and habits, then God is ultimately answerable for the existence of sin and evil in the human sphere. Though I will suggest that this argument misfires, my concern in this presentation ultimately lies elsewhere. For the proponent of the Responsibility Argument will customarily reject an evolutionary account of sin's origin and instead endorse something like the traditional Fall account—the doctrine of Original Sin. I will argue, however, that this explanation of the origin of sin is also vulnerable to the Responsibility Argument: if we take God to possess middle knowledge—or something very much like it—then God, too, appears responsible for the existence of sin. My discussion of Molinism will engage with some of the leading thinkers in this debate; while I will not pretend to have solved every issue, still my desired conclusion will emerge unscathed: if the Responsibility Argument is a problem for an evolutionary account of sin's origin, then it is a problem for the Fall doctrine, too. My suggestion, then, is that even if an evolutionary account is in the end rejected, it must be recognized that the doctrine of Original Sin is by no means impervious to some powerful objections, and so cannot be a simple, uncontroversial fallback for the theodicist. Such is the argument of this presentation, which shall conclude with the briefest of reflections on theodicy more generally.

Daniel Spencer is a PhD candidate at the Logos Institute for Analytic and Exegetical Theology, University of St Andrews, UK. His current research focuses on the intersection of the Christian doctrine of sin and evolutionary biology/psychology, the first stage of which is currently under preparation for publication as a monograph. He is also interested in metaphysics, theological ethics, and comparative religion/phenomenology of religious experience.

The Dialectic of Evil in Paul Ricoeur: The Philosophical Value of Religious Narrations

Martina Nicolai

Università degli Studi di Roma Tor Vergata

This contribution belongs to the reflection about the origin and the reason of the evil in the thought of Paul Ricoeur. As an encyclopaedic philosopher he gives his own metaphysical, psychological and especially hermeneutical interpretation of this human matter during all his production, from the first "Philosophy of Will" to his last works, such as "Thinking biblically", analyzing different aspects implied with it. In "The Conflict of interpretations" Ricoeur shows that the mystery of evil is present in the human speculation since the time of the most ancient cultures (Sumerians with "Gilgamesh", Babylonians with the "Enûma Eliš", Jewish with the "Bible"). Even if the philosophical conceptualization of evil is not negligible, Ricoeur prefers the signification of symbols, referring to specific matters like this one. Indeed, symbols have a power of signification which never ends, because it is always possible saying something more about them: they cannot be conceptualized completely by the philosophical speculation and for this reason they never lose their "exploratory function" , i.e. being explained; their mystery remains the same throughout all the ages and is enriched by the history of their interpretations, as Gadamer also asserts. Moreover, considering religious meaningful images, people become more conscious of themselves, beginning a new and ethical perspective on their life. Ricoeur shows, therefore, how symbols "give rise to thought", helping effectively in a both metaphysical and ethical reflection. Starting from the interpretation of symbolic stories, people can better understand also their own experience: for example, the reader of the "Bible" has the possibility to identify himself with the characters described and, through the interpretation of the biblical symbolism, he can learn something new also about himself. In "The Symbolism of evil", in particular, through the adamitic myth and the interpretation of the figures of the snake, Adam and Eve, the evil appears as an unsolved paradox: it reveals itself as "something inherited, something already there" and readers can understand that their own nature is deeply and indissolubly weakened by evil, even against their will. A Kantian moral in this perspective is impossible to found: human beings are fallible because of their constitutive imperfect nature which no one can avoid. As Ricoeur shows in "Fallible Man", people find, reflecting of evil through myths, instead of a logic solution to the failure, their natural "servile will". How is it possible to answer to this absurdity of the consciousness and at the same time to be ethical? Only a religious perspective, in which the memory of the undergone or perpetrated evil is saved by a "superior point of view", can give a strong hope for a ethical behaviour. This supernatural hope can forgive without completely forgetting, remaining faithful to the moral duty of remembering, as Ricoeur underlines at the end of "Memory, History, Forgetting". The memory is allow to remember "the inextricable, the irreconcilable, the irreparable" of evil through a cathartic narration only in a teleological religious perspective, since God alone can really forgive what is unforgivable. In this current contribute it is investigated how Ricoeur addresses the problem of evil through narrations: in the dialectic between the origin of evil and the possibility of forgiveness, it is discussed in particular the philosophical value of his religious perspective. Referring to these two aspects in particular, it is questioned if a real foundation of an ethical "religious hermeneutics" is possible.

Martina Nicolai, born on the 14/03/1992 in Rome, received a Bachelor Degree (2013) in Theoretical Philosophy and a Master Degree (2016) in Hermeneutics, both in "Università degli Studi di Roma di Roma Tor Vergata" cum Laude. She took part in an Erasmus exchange programm at the "Ruprecht-Karls-Universität" in Heidelberg (DE) (2016). She is interested in Theoretical Philosophy, Hermeneutics, Philosophy of Religions and Theology: Plato, saint Augustine, Gadamer and Ricoeur are the main subjects of her studies. In particular, she analyzes the interpretations of the modern hermeneutics of classic matters and the actualization of this questions in the current debate. An example of that is the process of the anamnesis and the memory in Augustinian and Platonic thoughts about knowledge, or the interpretation of evil of Ricouer. Martina Nicolai published four academic articles (one forthcoming) and she attended two philosophical international conferences (Constellations Herméneutiques - Interprétation et liberté, Accademia di Ungheria", Roma 30-31 gennaio 2014 and III International Congress of Greek Philosophy, Universidade de Lisboa, 20-22 aprile 2016) and two philosophical national congresses. Her additional interests are languages (English, German, French, Latin, old Greek), other cultures, politics, ancient history, anthropology and pedagogy. If you are interested in her publications, you can visit the website: https://mondodomani.academia.edu/MartinaNicolai

Panel 5.2 Religion & Modernity

Charles Taylor and Durkheimian Dispensations

Ranier Fsadni

University of Malta

Charles Taylor has offered a distinguished account of religion, self and modernity that combines philosophical anthropology with historical sociology – a dialectical revision of Max Weber's secularization thesis, drawing upon the philosophy of language and Émile Durkheim's theory of religion. As Taylor himself frequently indicates, it is a necessarily schematic account that is virtually limited to Euro-American historical experience. This paper takes a socio-anthropological approach to enrich the scheme by exploring some aspects of Taylor's 'Durkheimian dispensations', particularly his treatment of the sacred-profane distinction in 'enchanted' and 'disenchanted' societies. Ethnographic cases drawn from Maltese Catholicism and Libyan Islam will be used to show that Taylor's account needs to be refined for reasons that are significant for his own portrait of modernity (e.g. to reassess the ethical meaning of 'choice' in neo- and post-Durkheimian religion). Taylor's philosophy of language proves helpful not just in formulating socio-anthropological answers but also in glimpsing what philosophical questions those answers raise.

Ranier Fsadni is Assistant Lecturer in the Department of Anthropological Sciences at the University of Malta.

Sources of the Possibility of the Contemporary Turn towards Religion

Antoni Torzewski

Casmir the Great University

The return of religion in the philosophical reflection can be observed in the contemporary world. Thinkers like Richard Rorty, Gianni Vattimo or Charles Taylor can substantially exemplify that phenomenon. In this paper however, we would not like to focus as much on the contemporary philosophy of religion, but on the sources that made it even possible. That is why at first we point out three critiques of religion present mostly in the XVIII-th and XIX-th century. The first was a critique developed for example by Kant, Lessing or Fichte which connected religion closely to morality. The second can be expressed in the thought of, as Ricoeur calls them, "the masters of suspicions" (Marx, Freud and Nietzsche) who looked for a hidden (mostly pejorative) meaning in religion. The third one was strictly associated with positivism and the names of Carnap or Neurath and was critisising religion as metaphysics. Those three critiques made religion dissapear (or at least lessened its philosophical value) from philosophy. Then, what was the thing that enabled its return? There were three diffirent philosophies that overcame those critiques. The first critique was overcome by the philosophy of the religious experience developed by for instance Schleiermacher, Kierkegaard or James, which focused on the other, more individual and contemplative side of religion. The second was lifted by phenomenology (of for example Max Scheler) and its postulate of investigating phenomena as they apear to the subject. Lastly, postmetaphysical attitude of hermeneutics of Heidegger or Vattimo and its concept of truth as an opening overcame the third critique. Because of that religion was able to reappear in philosophy as an important topic which is discussed by contemporary thinkers of both the continental and analytical current.

Antoni Torzewski is a student at the Institute of Philosophy at the Casmir the Great University in Bydgoszcz, Poland. His interests are mostly: philosophy of religion, ethics, contemporary philosophy, concept of moral religion, problem of secularism, hermeneutics and the weak thought. He is an author of several articles on contemporary philosophy of religion, particularly the thoughts of Gianni Vattimo, Richard Rorty and Charles Taylor. He has also written about the enlightenment's concept of moral religion, which was his bachelor thesis. Torzewski was an active participant of a few conferences, both international and domestic. In 2017 he gave a speech about bioethical problems of prenatal diagnostics at the symposium in Ulm, Germany. In 2018 he participated of a conference dedicated to the problems of Christianity in Opole, Poland and in 2019 he was a speaker at the conference "Reason and Religion" in Poznań, Poland. Also in 2019, he is to present his latest research on religious pluralism at the XI-th Polish Philosophical Congress. Furthermore, Torzewski was granted multiple scholarships and the award for the best student at the Faculty of Administration and Social Sciences at the Casmir the Great University.

The Religious Foundations of Modernity

Mark Camilleri

University of Malta

This paper will use Hegel, Marx, Habermas and Adorno to explain how Modern philosophy and especially the philosophy related to the end of history theory in the West has roots in Christian religion and why the Enlightenment was a development of core Christian principles rather than a complete break from it. Teleology is present in both Christian beliefs and theology and Modern philosophy Hegel argues should supposedly bring us closer to religion. Hegel himself criticised the French Revolution for not actually liberating Europe from the fetters of religion and Marx himself underscored the ideological progression with religious thinking and Modern capitalist thinking. Habermas had claimed that the foundations of the core principles of religion may be religious while Adorno finds a strong consistency to the ideology of the West throughout historical times beginning from Classical times. The case for common concepts in history to different historical epochs is very strong and this case is made stronger by religion. The end of history theory (Fukuyama and Kojève) has a teleological similarity to universal and trans-ethnic religions, namely Christianity and Islam. In the Book of Revelations, written by St. John we find an eschatological narrative for the end of history which was widely commented upon by St. Augstine's City of God, and so is in Islam that the end of the world is described and predicted according to the Quran. Islamic eschatology, as some other of its other theological principles was influenced by the eschatology of Christianity and the Christian Eastern Roman Empire, while Christian eschatology was based on the Judaic model of eschatology. With relation to the Fukuyama's end of history theory, the fact that the Western from of civilisation originated from the Christian world can not be overlooked. Further more, even in Modern times, the end of history theory was not necessarily restricted to one form civilisation. At the height of the Cold War no one believed that the Soviet Union would have collapsed, and Soviet Union Marxist scholars too interpreted Hegelian dialectics as a rational progressive development which was reflected into history. It may be argued that teleology and the end of history theory in various forms may not necessarily be restricted to the West, but may actually exist in other parts of the world which are Christian or have similar religions such as Islam.

I am a PhD candidate at the University of Malta working on the philosophy of history using mainly, Hegel, Marx and Adorno and some contemporaries as well such as Taylor, Harris, Pinker, Zizek and Comay. I graduated with a masters in history with a focus on economic and political history. I am the executive chairman of the National Book Council and have also written and edited several laws including anti-censorship laws and the press and defamation law. I have also written several history books.

Panel 5.3 Metaphysics & the Other

Failing to think God. Transformative Experience in Negative Theology

Rico Gutschmidt

University of Konstanz, Germany

There is a problem about the status of religious or mystical experience in the tradition of negative henology or theology in Neoplatonism and Christianity. On the one hand, the via negativa is supposed to lead to the experience of henosis or unio mystica and is understood as a way to approach the One or God. On the other hand, both traditions emphasize that the One or God are inconceivable and do not even exist. According to Plotinus, the One is not even "a something" and there is thus, strictly speaking, nothing that can be approached. What, then, is the religious experience of the via negativa all about? In my paper, I will argue that the religious experience in negative henology or theology can be understood as a transformative experience. I will refer to L.A. Paul's notion of 'epistemically transformative experience' and argue that the experience of failing to think the absolute (the One or God) is epistemically transformative and leads to a form of non-propositional understanding of the absolute. More precisely, I will argue that the failure of the attempt to think the absolute makes us release this attempt, which is a form of self-surrender. Moreover, the experience of this surrender is epistemically transformative, since it yields a new way of seeing the world with respect to the incomprehensibility of the absolute, and my argument is that this just is a form of understanding of the absolute, albeit a non-propositional form. We still fail to think the absolute, but the experience of this failure is epistemically transformative and, thus, does not end in sheer ignorance, but in learned ignorance. As a matter of fact, Cusa's notion of 'learned ignorance' just describes a form of knowledge of God that is attained through the insight in his incomprehensibility. On my reading, Cusa's concept of God "showing Godself to us as incomprehensible" is best understood as a reference to the epistemically transformative experience of the failure to think God. Accordingly, I want to suggest that the One in negative henology and the religious god-talk in negative theology refer to these transformative experiences.

2009 PhD in Philosophy, University of Bonn, Dissertation on reductionism in Physics 2015 Habilitation in Philosophy, Dresden University of Technology, Thesis about the late Heidegger and a post-theistic understanding of religiosity Currently Assistant Professor at the University of Konstanz My academic field of activity is theoretical philosophy in many different branches. My dissertation on analytic philosophy of physics argues for a pluralist conception of modern physical theories. In my Habilitation thesis, I propose a new reading of Heidegger's later philosophy against the background of negative theology. Furthermore, I've been working on epistemology, particularly on skepticism in ancient philosophy and in Wittgenstein and Cavell. In simplified terms, I argued in these projects against a foundational theory of physics, against a foundation of being, and against a foundation of knowledge. Accordingly, in my future research I am interested in forms of philosophy that do not aim at foundational justifications, but that challenge our supposed foundations and transform our self-understanding respectively. To this end, I will explore philosophy as a kind of transformative practice as it can be found in such diverse areas as ancient philosophy, pragmatism, and postmodernism.

Heidegger, the Other and Sameness.

A Reading of Ex 3, 14 in the light of Heidegger's Notion of Tautophasis

Miriam Metze

University of Vienna

Martin Heidegger's works could be read as leading the way to a renewed understanding of religion (as hexis or ethos) and the question of God, challenging the omnipotence of Pico della Mirandola's plastes et fictor. In my contribution I want to elaborate on the confinements given to this interpretation. I suggest that despite his efforts to challenge the Ancient thinking of parousia, Heidegger overlooked the ontological dimension of alterity. Sketching these questions, I want to encourage to reflect on the greatest scandal of philosophy, Heidegger's sympathy for the National Socialist regime. Obviously enough, Heidegger did not think about the Other as the Other. But as Marlène Zarader stresses, it is „after all rather difficult" „to reduce Heidegger to a thinking of the Same" (The Unthought Debt, 2006, 147), as Emmanuel Lévinas would claim in "La Trace du l'Autre" (1967, 188). Answering these accusations by Lévinas, I want to draw attention to the notion of tautophasis ("Zeit und Sein", 2007, 30), which can be read as an alternative to the logical understanding of sameness, as it implicates a becoming, and so a difference is being exposed in identity itself. Most surprisingly, a perfect example for this notion is Ex 3,14 (אהיה אשר אהיה, „I am/will be who I am/will be") which displays a negotiation of identity and identification between God and Moses. A reading of this sentence according to the understanding of tautophasis challenges the interpretation of the Greek translation ego eimo ho on as mere parousia. God's being fundamentally is a being with or being for (Ex 3,11: עמך אהיה, "I will be with you"), thus making explicit the difference towards the Greek ethics of heautarkeia. This way, I agree to Zarader's hypothesis that Heidegger overtook "an essence or structures, which were originally those of the Bible", but would "evacuate the entire ethical dimension of the Bible" (51, italic. in the original). This way one might suggest Heidegger was much closer to the Greek narration of the Being (as to be found in Plato's Timaio), since the consequence of the very Biblical idea of the word as a spoken word and its performativity (Gen 1,3: אור ויהי אור יהי אלהים ויאמר, "and God said, Let there be light, and there was light") was to reflect on language in the frame of the other to whom it is said. Quoted literature: Heidegger, Martin: „Zeit und Sein", in: Zur Sache des Denkens (1962-1968). Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann 2007 [GA 14]. (transl. by Joan Stambaugh, New York: Harper & Row 1972, without the commentaries by Heidegger) Lèvinas, Emmanuel: "La Trace du l'Autre", in: En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger. Paris: Vrin 1967. Zarader, Marlène: The Unthought Debt. Heidegger and the Hebraic Heritage. Transl. By Bettina Bergo. Stanford (California): Stanford University Press 2006.

Étienne Gilson as a Critical Reader of Phenomenology

Tsun Sang Chong

The University of Jean Moulin Lyon 3

When we are considering whether the metaphysics gives his seat to the ontology, we always just focus on how Heidegger accused of the history of metaphysics mistaking the comprehension of Being. In the prologue of "On Time and Being" in 1962, Heidegger affirmed there was an attempt of thinking Being without any support of the foundation of beings. The ontological question moves beyond every single existence of human beings, to the without any subjective character of Being, which Heidegger called 'There is' (Es gibt Sein). The Being without beings, the ontology of event or the "Die Kehre" are both considered as the most radical vision of the ontology than fundamental ontology in "Being and Time" in 1927. It is obvious that the philosophical project of radical ontology based on a series of the critics of metaphysic in the decade of 30 to 40, especially Heidegger's reading on Nietzsche. The position against the metaphysics has complained about how the metaphysics disregards the truth of Being in the history of philosophy. The oblivion of Being is the human who never asks for in what way the essence of humans belonging to the truth of Being. The question for Heidegger leads the metaphysical being to be overcome or suppressed, which is expressed in the "what is the metaphysics?" in 1929. This paper will firstly start from Etienne Gilson's critical reading on Heidegger in his work of "Being and Essence" (L'Etre et l'essence) as a critic to ask if the metaphysics can be overcome. Is it possible of the truth of the being without any foundation of the metaphysics? Gilson stood for the position of metaphysics to defend the necessity of metaphysics that "human is a metaphysical animal", rather than "rational animal". And then, Gilson admitted that 'the metaphysics always proposes for the essence of beings which is non-stopped against to overcome the beings for searching the foundation where is beyond to the beings.' (p. 371). This means that for Gilson the search of the essence of beings must bring out from the beings itself, rather than only identity with Being itself. This paper will reread the act of "overcome" (Uberwindung) be interpreted as "sublate", which is a conception reserved in the Hegel's philosophy, and the act of overcoming is not a mere negation or an abolishment, which corresponds to the view of Gilson that 'overcoming the metaphysics will not consist for eliminating it. The discourse on Being should beware of the human being having their possibilities to beyond themselves, in which the act of the being still detains with the ontic entity (for every subject being or the subjective experience), not purely is absorbed to the ontological projection. Furthermore, I will explain the ontological discourse on Being cannot absolutely discharge the metaphysics, especially for the possibility of intelligence, the metaphysical experience of reality and the existence of esprit, etc. Those realities of being are invisible, but solid, fundamental, grounded by themselves and without any splits or crack by the 'ekstasis' of Being. As like as Gilson described them in the text of 'Encounter the experiences of the being' in the posthumous work of "Philosophical constants of the being" in 1983. The reality of the experience of being by the metaphysical language can dissolve an ontological illusion.

Tsun Sang Chong is a Ph.D. student of philosophy at the University of Jean Moulin Lyon3 and the member of Institution of Philosophical Research of Lyon (Irphil). The research interest is the current movement of the phenomenology with relation to the historical language of philosophy on the Being and Essence. The redefinition of the usage of language about being and essence in the phenomenology is the first condition to renewal of the concept of the individual subject. The title of the Ph.D. thesis ongoing is "Michel Henry et la question de l'être" under the supervision of Prof Bruno Pinchard. This thesis will argue the condition of the human is the essence prior to the existence according to the phenomenology of life by Michel Henry on the debate with the ontological language of the phenomenology.

Panel 6.1 The Nature & Existence of God

God in the Center of Philosophy: Karl Jaspers and Panagiotis Kanellopoulos

Andreas Antoniou

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

It is common observation that today's society moves towards religion, with various amounts of dedication, sometimes reaching the boundaries of fanaticism. For many, especially physical scientists and philosophers, this is a step back from the progress we have made since Enlightenment. The sapere aude that made human beings free to search the truth of the world, the death of God that freed the human spirit from the will of an external authoritarian God, hold nowadays less and less meaning. This is not the case in my opinion. This turn towards religion could also be interpreted as an attempt to rediscover our spirituality, not by denying the scientific progress, but by tackling the modern day challenges with a greater variety of tools. It is the task of philosophy to shape and direct this turn, by bringing forth the authentic spiritual experience of the human existence. In this shaping, I believe we should turn to the works of two existential philosophers, namely the German philosopher, Karl Jaspers, and the Greek philosopher, Panagiotis Kanellopoulos. One of Kanellopoulos' known quotes is a suggestion about making the infinity of God the center of philosophy, instead of humanity's finite comprehension of the world. This peculiar suggestion defies in a way important acquisitions of philosophy such as the "Death of God" in Nietzsche's work and the boundaries of language (and why we cannot speak of metaphysics) in Wittgenstein's. What would it mean to replace human's subjectivity with God's infinity in the center of our philosophical universe? I would try to argue that making God the center of philosophy – even as a hypothesis – could make us face issues of our spirituality, to see ourselves and our place in the world in a different light. The task is to rediscover or to reestablish our relation with the Transcendence, to acknowledge that there is something more in human nature than its physically explorable attributes. This effort will lead us to the questions of the meaning of life, our purpose in the world, and the authentic aspects of ourselves. Acknowledging that there is something more to the world and to us, it can make us ask questions that science is not entitled to answer. This expansion of the human experience and this immersion towards the spiritual nature of the Transcendence can be interpreted as counterbalance to the rapidly advancing scientific research and technological progress. "For all those that can be known and understood, for them there is Science. For all those that can't be known and grasped, for them there is Philosophy". This quote of Kanellopoulos shows the current turn in society, a turn that accepts the findings of science but also wishes to go beyond, to discover and experience the full potentiality of the human spirit, to reconnect and recommunicate with the (divine) force that transcends us.

Andreas Antoniou has studied philosophy in the Department of Classical Studies and Philosophy of University of Cyprus and earned his MA and PhD from the Department of Philosophy and Education of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. His academia interests are metaphysics, aesthetics and philosophy of existence. He was awarded two scholarships, one as an undergraduate student and one for his PhD research. His PhD thesis on the literary work of Panagiotis Kanellopoulos focuses on the relationship between him and philosophy of existence – especially Nietzsche and Jaspers.

Hard God, Soft God

John Thorp

Department of Philosophy, University of Western Ontario

Theologians notoriously disagree about the meaning of 'omniscience'. Some take a hard view of it, namely that omniscience is knowing all things. Others soften the idea and say that omniscience is knowing all things that can be known (and typically add that the future is one of the things that cannot be known). This debate has been acrimonious. Interestingly, however, there has been far less disagreement in the parallel case of omnipotence. It is generally understood along soft lines to mean the ability to do all things that can be done; excluded from the things that can be done are mathematical or logical impossibilities. So understood, God's omnipotence is compatible with his lacking the power to square the circle, or to violate the Principle of Non-Contradiction. Descartes thought that God had those powers—that the "eternal truths" are subject to his will—but very few theologians have followed him: very few have been willing to understand God's omnipotence as hard, as the ability to do everything, including things that cannot be done. And yet, and yet…. This soft version of God's omnipotence seems to reduce and limit God in a way that I, at any rate, find somehow uncomfortable. It means that God has to play by the rules, at least the rules of logic and mathematics. God may have created the universe, but the laws of logic and mathematics were already there: God didn't create those. This seems to diminish God; it seems even to verge on blasphemy—at least it does so if there is an alternative. This paper is a tentative and programmatic exploration of the alternative. I will briefly describe some useful work that has been done, distinguishing cases of 'contingent necessity' like "zebras are necessarily striped", from cases of absolute necessity, like the Principle of Non-contradiction: only the latter are finally at issue. I will then criticize the view, both Scholastic and recent, according to which absolute necessities are not prior to God, but simply part of the nature of God himself—a position known (oddly) as 'deity'. God, then, as Rowan Williams famously put it, would be "some combination of love and mathematics"! But, rejecting 'deity', we face the stark question: is it conceivable that God could revise the eternal truths? Is it conceivable that he could make PNC false, or π rational? Absolutely not, is the traditional reply. I will chip away at this traditional reply, working from opposite directions. The first direction involves the truths themselves: we know that some logicians have come to suspect that PNC is not universally valid. If they are right, then PNC is not, indeed, one of the 'eternal truths'. And, from the other direction, I will consider how we have learned, from the last century of work in physics and cosmology, that humans are given to projecting the contingent limits of their own experience onto the universe as a whole—wrongly, as it turns out. So, could divine omnipotence be hard after all? Maybe it could.

John Thorp is Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at the University of Western Ontario in London, Canada. He earned his BA at Trent University; his graduate degrees are from the University of Oxford, where he wrote his BPhil thesis on Aristotle's ontology, and his DPhil thesis on Free will. The latter was published by Routledge as Free Will: a defence against neurophysiological determinism. His academic appointments include the University of Ottawa, where he was chair of Classics, and the University of Western Ontario, where he was chair of Philosophy; he also held adjunct appointments to the graduate programs in Classical Studies and in Theology. He has been a Visiting Professor at Université de Montréal. He served as Executive Director of the Canadian Federation for the Humanities, and as president of the Canadian Philosophical Association. His principal academic interests are in ancient philosophy, in metaphysics and epistemology, and in the philosophy of religion. He has been honoured by Western, which conferred on him its highest recognition for university teaching, the Pleva Award, and by the Republic of France, which made him a chevalier in the Ordre des palmes académiques. Website: http://viculi.com

Exploring Badiou's Approach to Religion

Duncan Sant

University of Malta

Alain Badiou is one of the leading contemporary thinkers whose ideas have influenced to varying degrees many theological discourses. This paper aims to identify Alain Badiou's critical approach to Religion even though he himself never intended to create an ordered explanation of religion itself. He does however provide a vague definition as 'everything that presupposes that there is a continuity between truths and the circulation of meaning.' Following from the Nietzschean claim of the death of God, through which concept is implied 'values', 'truth' and even the 'good', he attempts to establish what is sometimes called Axiomatic Atheism. This latter concept is based on Badiou's two main ideas: his mathematically-based ontology and the theory of the Event. The idea of an over-arching One is removed in his ontology and replaced by the multiple-without-One or a multiplicity. The One is simply a product of an operation or a process of 'counting-as-one' and thus it is never an essential property of being. He also believes in an absolute truth, which must stand its ground under all circumstances. However, this is not to be mixed with knowledge. The latter is a product as a result of a 'stumbling' discovery, an encounter via the subject, through the four conditions of love, politics, art and science. Through this process philosophy is able to establish new knowledge and create a new situation. For Badiou, identifying ontology with mathematics, particularly axiomatic Set Theory in relation to the infinite sets, rescues philosophy away from the notion of God and thus religion, as a way of understanding reality through inconsistent multiplicity; anything that exists mathematically emerges always as a multiple.

Duncan Sant graduated from the University of Malta in Philosophy and Psychology in 2009. He then obtained his Master's degree in Philosophy in 2012. The research conducted was based on Alain Badiou's ontology and his concept of the Event coupled with the concept of the Post-human. He has been teaching Philosophy at De La Salle College in Malta for the past five years. Among his interests are Ontology, Post-humanism, Future studies and Digital Game theory.

Existence and Reality Encore

Nebojsa Kujundzic

University of Prince Edward Island

Common sense seems to dictate that existence and reality stand and fall together. A logician would say that existence is both a sufficient and necessary condition of reality. In simple words, if anything happens to exist then it is real and conversely if anything happens to be real then it exists as well. The 20th century Austrian school of philosophy endorsed a version of realism that carves out enough conceptual "elbow room" to allow the non-existent states of affairs to be something else than simply figments of one's imagination or contents of one's intentionality. The development of technology, especially towards the end of the 20th century and in the 21st century, seems to force humanity to contend with phenomena hitherto not even found in the English language vocabulary: virtual reality, cloud storage, social media, and so forth. These expressions, in my opinion, reinforce the subtleties and intricacies of the relationship between existence and reality. For example, the emergence of digital photography has added a powerful means of illustrating the potential of existent non-real phenomena. Consider an image of Charles Darwin meeting John Von Neumann. It is not difficult to bring into existence a digital photo showing these two intellectual giants sitting at the same table; yet their meeting could not have happened in reality since their life spans did not overlap I shall take the liberty, with the comments above in mind, to suggest that a fresh look at the Ontological Argument may afford a more reasonable case to establish the existence of God.

Neb Kujundzic studied Philosophy and Literature at the University of Sarajevo, ex-Yugoslavia. His philosophical mindset has always been characterized by the desire to bridge the divide between the so-called Continental, European and the Analytic, Anglo-Saxon style of philosophy. He earned his PhD at the University of Wateroo, Ontario and his teaching experience includes Wilfrid Laurier University, Cape Breton University, the University of Prince Edward Island, and the University of Belgrade. His research interests include Philosophy of Technology, Philosophy of Science, Philosophy of Language and Metaphysics. His administrative experience at the University of Prince Edward Island includes serving as the Philosophy Department Chair, as a member of the Board of Governors, and as the Dean of Arts.

Panel 6.2 Religious Experience & Empathy

The Religious Experience and the Search for God.

John Berry

University of Malta

One of the main problems in the philosophy of religion is related to the possibility of basing that which is defined as 'religion' on human experience. Expressions like 'to have an experience of God', or even 'to have a religious experience' are somewhat common. Such an 'experience' is treated differently according to the various philosophical systems that interpret every experience in the light of their own principles, with different emphases or opposed to each other. The problem is that these experiences vary according to the individual thinkers within the said philosophical system. The aim of this paper is to explore the perspective of a rational search for God (natural theology, rational or philosophical). What will be presented are the arguments that claim that religion lies more within the sphere of the immediate experience of the human subject, rather than the objective sphere of value, with the consequence that the referential object of the asserted 'experience', i.e., God, is anthropologically derived and not (necessarily) ontological.

Rev. Dr John Anthony Berry is the Dean of the Faculty of Theology and Head of Department of Fundamental & Dogmatic Theology. He is President of the standing committee of *Societas Oecumenica*, a European Society for Ecumenical Research and a member on the international presidium that coordinates the actions of a European wide organization known as *The European Society for Catholic Theology* (ESCT).

How Do Religious Conversions Change our Life-world? A Phenomenological Analysis

Martin Nitsche

Institute of Philosophy at the Czech Academy of Sciences in Prague

The presentation concentrates on the transformative impact of religious conversions. I understand here religious conversions as all individual spiritual transformations that either create an essentially new religious experience, or substantially intensify an existing religiosity. The transformative impact of these transformations consists not only in modifying life perspectives or values, but also (and more substantially) in altering the very structure of personal experience. It can bring even significant changes in phenomenal character of individual life-world, which is then experienced as perceived "differently". My presentation has two basic goals. Firstly, it wants to reflect the possibilities that the phenomenological method posses to describe (and understand) religious experience as such. This means, in the phenomenological framework, religious experience as an embodied, lived and intersubjective experience. The talk discusses mainly the applicability of Husserl's analyses of double constitution of body in Ideas 2. On this basis, it suggests an explanatory model of transformative localizing/layering. Secondly, more particularly, this talk aims to present a phenomenological way to theorize changes in the very sensory appearing of religious converts' life-worlds. After a religious conversion, converts sometimes claim that they not only perceive the "reality" differently, but that they even experience a "new" reality. To understand the status of this new reality, I apply the proposed explanatory model of the transformative localizing/layering. This model focuses on spatial aspects of new stimuli for perception caused by religious conversions. It describes primarily the ways how the place moments of these stimuli coincide with the spatiality of convert's existing life-environment. It pays attention to how localization of the new stimuli affects layering of the existing life-environment, most importantly the emergence of both new layers of experience and new places for the "new" reality.

Martin Nitsche - Senior researcher in the Department of Contemporary Continental Philosophy at the Institute of Philosophy at the Czech Academy of Sciences in Prague. - Associate professor of philosophy at the Jan Evangelista Purkyne University in Usti nad Labem (CZ), Faculty of Philosophy. - Vice-president of the Society for Phenomenology of Religious Experience (international, based in Berkeley, USA). Nitsche (1975) received PhD in philosophy in 2007 from the Charles University Prague. In 2016 he was named an associate professor at the Charles University in Prague (habilitation). 2016/17 he worked as a Fulbright Visiting Researcher at the University of California, Los Angeles, Department of Political Science. His research focuses on phenomenology, phenomenological topology (Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty), philosophy of art, aesthetics, political philosophy, theory of media, phenomenology of religion. Nitsche formulated the "transitive-topological model of phenomenology" (see in his recent book Methodical Precedence of Intertwining. An Introduction to a Transitive - Topological Phenomenology, Königshausen u. Neumann, 2018). He also published Die Ortschaft des Seins. Martin Heideggers phänomenologische Topologie (2013), 3 other books in Czech, and more than 30 papers or chapters. He is the editor of a volume Image in Space. Contributions to a Topology of Images (in a phenomenological series Libri Nigri, Bautz Verlag, 2015).

On The Im/Possibility Of Empathy

Charles Nweke, Stephen Chukwubuikem Okeke, Remigius Ezeokonkwo, Jude Onebunne

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka-Nigeria

The capacity to share and understand another's state of mind, or the ability to put oneself into another's shoes or in some way, experience the outlook or emotions of another being within oneself has been referred to as empathy. It is a presumed ability to burrow into another person's structures of consciousness and experience oneself as another. Hence it involves the capacity of one to understand or feel what another is experiencing from within their frame of reference. This paper investigates the im/possibility of empathy. The question of the im/possibility of empathy finds expression in the question of the possibility of a subject's access into the subjective conscious experiences of another. The paper appraises various positions accruing from the basic Husserlian/Steinian views. It also highlights the optimists' belief that empathy puts us in touch with others in a way that generates a compassionate concern that forms the foundation of morality and the pessimists' view that empathy merely blurs the distinction between oneself and others, yielding self-interested motivation or at least precluding genuine altruism. This paper suggests that the problem of the im/possibility of empathy would persist in so far as the definition of empathy involves 'feeling with' rather than 'feeling for'. As Diana Meyers puts it, 'the metaphor of putting oneself in the other's shoes is misleading, for it is a mistake to assume that the other feels the same way as one would oneself feel in the same circumstances.' Thus, it is either that empathy is unreal or what is considered as empathy requires a redefinition.

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Empathy Versus Humility: Three Ways To Deal With The Other

Elizaveta Kostrova

St Tikhon's Orthodox University, Moscow

It has been a widely shared view in phenomenology that there is a way to experience other minds non-inferentially. Supposedly, in the early childhood one develops the skill that enables her to understand the other's mental states with a certain degree of accuracy (see Merleau-Ponty 1964). Although we tend to discuss the problem of empathy from the first-person perspective, our normal everyday experience generally gives more of a reciprocal picture – thus attributing Sartre's account of the face-to-face encounter to the borderline situations. We generally exist in a kind of "empathic environment", in which I presumably grasp mental states of the others around me with a certain degree of accuracy as well as they presumably grasp my mental states with a certain degree of accuracy. In this sense, empathy appears to be linked to the ontological equality. This interpretation still leaves us with a gap of "a certain degree of accuracy". However negligible it might be for our everyday occupations, it acquires tremendous significance in some cases and makes the same appeal for philosophical consideration as all the gaps usually do. From this standpoint, the other can be called the Other in the proper sense only if he does not belong to the "empathic environment"; the more difficult he is to understand and sympathize with, the more "other" the Other is. The radical otherness requires a different perspective as we cannot rely on the "natural", involuntary empathy any more. I propose to distinguish three alternative approaches that address this issue. The first answer is the "rational empathy", which implies an inferential extension of the "natural" empathy (see Arendt 1963). The ontological equality is still in place, but an intellectual effort is needed to appropriate the other perspective. I declare myself ready to imagine what another person must be thinking or feeling under certain circumstances, what I would think or feel if I were she. Whereas the first approach strives for justice, the two others belong to another dimension – and consistently turn to religious sources. Here empathy yields to humility, and justice gives way to equity (in the sense of Piaget 1932). The "rational empathy" has an obvious weakness in that it must still refer to one's limited personal experience. Meanwhile, in the encounter with the radical Other one might be expected to confront something beyond one's experiential resources. The next two approaches attend to this problem. The "love-thy-neighbor"-approach places the other above myself and orders me to follow the commandment while the empathy is suspended (see Levinas 1961). After all, the actual help is worth more than some idle compassion. The "they-know-not-what-they-do"-approach, on the contrary, assumes some indulgence and clemency towards the other. From the previous perspective, this one would seem perilously intrusive and condescending; still, this forgiving fatherly self-restraint probably constitutes the beginning of any empathy. Each of the three approaches could probably be preferable depending on the peculiarities of the personalities and the situation. All of them are challenging, though in quite a different way, and involve an above average degree of moral excellence.

Elizaveta Kostrova is a research fellow at Sociology of Religion research seminar at St Tikhon's Orthodox University, Moscow. Her research focuses on philosophical interpretations of the Other and intersubjectivity, as well as their possible connections to social sciences and religion. She is interested in how social interaction (especially "unselfish" and "disinterested" kind of it) can be conceptualized and grounded philosophically.

Until Death does not do us Part. Or on what the Afterlife can still Teach us Today

Kristof K.P. Vanhoutte

Paris Institute for Critical Thinking/Pontifical University Antoniantum/University of the Free State

In antiquity and well into the late Middle Ages death was omnipresent, and the dead played an active role whilst interacting with the members of the society they had left behind. The border between the earthly spheres and the realms in the beyond was, in fact, a very porous one. Today, on the contrary, death, the dead, and the spaces in the afterlife have either become reduced to an urbanistic problem, simply been gobbled up by the tourism industry, or even plainly become shameful, part of a 'primitive' belief system. This constant attempt to efface, even ban the discourse on death and the afterlife has, however, overseen a number of important facets. First of all, this discourse is, for as much as we can attest, as old as mankind itself. Secondly, it is not just part of man's religious heritage, it is above all part of humankind's humanist legacy. In fact, thirdly, and more importantly, it is (this discourse) related, in a reflective, that is, mirroring, way, to two fundamentally intertwined cardinal aspects of human life, namely its socio-political organization and its purpose. The here and the beyond, from the very beginning were thus connected in a reflective symmetry, parallelism. They functioned as some sort of hermeneutical and reflective tool to understand one another. The attempts to efface the reflective discourse on the afterlife, has, fortunately, also not been constantly successful. And where the second half of the past century already saw the sporadic resurfacing of this discourse (f.e. in Hannah Arendt), the interest in and the renewed production of the (reflective) discourse of almost all the realms of the afterlife has known a remarkable revival in the past decade in both Continental as well as Analytic Philosophy (going from Jerry Walls' work on the triptych of Heaven-Hell-Purgatory, over Giorgio Agamben's appropriation of Hell as the paradigm of contemporary democratic politics, to some of the more recent publications on Hell by McCraw and Arp [2015], on Heaven by Byerly and Silverman [2017], on Purgatory by Vanhoutte and McCraw [2017], and on Limbo by Vanhoutte [2018]). In this presentation I will, first of all, give a summary of the work that has already been done in the past years by the various scholars that have touched upon the various spheres in the beyond. Secondly, I will indicate some of the fundamental positive aspects of this discourse in the attempt to understand our epoch in a better or simply in a different way (particularly the importance of the reflective epistemology related to the various spheres of the beyond for the socio-political organization of [contemporary] life). I will conclude by delineating some of the themes that are still open to discussion.

Kristof K.P. Vanhoutte is a Core Faculty member at the Paris Institute for Critical Thinking, Paris, France, an Invited Professor of Philosophy at the Pontifical University Antonianum, Rome, Italy, and a Research Fellow at the International Studies Group of the University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa. He started his studies in Philosophy at the Higher Institute for Philosophy, Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium and obtained his Ph.D. in Philosophy at the Pontifical University Antonianum, Rome, Italy. He studied Spiritual Theology at the Pontifical University Gregoriana and was Postdoctoral Research Fellow at University of Edinburgh's Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities. In 2010 he was awarded the European Philosophy from Kant to the Present Prize, issued by the University of Kentucky. He has published on topics in continental philosophy, philosophy of literature, patristics, theology-philosophy-politics interdependencies, educational theory, and soccer. His latest books are Limbo Reapplied. On Living in Perennial Crisis and the Immanent Afterlife (Palgrave Macmillan 2018), Saramago's Philosophical Heritage (Palgrave Macmillan 2018, co-edited with Carlo Salzani), and Purgatory: Philosophical Dimensions (Palgrave Macmillan 2017, co-edited with Benjamin W. McCraw).

Is The Theology of Immanence of Giorgio Agamben a Path out of Political Theology?

Kohei Nagashima

Keio University

The spectatorial terrorist attacks based on religious fundamentalism, ever increasingly heated debate son religiosity in public space, and the rise of populist quasi-religious nationalism worldwide. Facing these torrents, the shelved problem of secularisation gains importance more than ever. Thus, it is of crucial importance to explore the thought of Giorgio Agamben, who is already one of the most prominent thinkers in contemporary thought, with an emphasis on his consideration on theology. Agamben, once described by Heidegger as talented, began his career by studying aesthetics, ontology, and philosophy of language. It is his series of works on political philosophy called "Homo Sacer Project" that made him world-renowned. While Agamben incorporates a variety of motif into his philosophy and expands its range, his so-called theological turn took place. Agamben had occasionally worked on theological themes in his previous works. However, it is after "The Time That Remains — a Commentary on the Letter to the Romans" in 2000 that he substantially started focusing on theology. In "The Kingdom and the Glory- For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and government" published in 2007, Agamben embarks on redeveloping his entire politico-philosophical project from the theological perspective. Agamben attempts to explore the economic genealogy in comparison with political theology, which a German kronjurist, Carl Schmitt effectively reinvented for an analogical relation between the sovereign and almighty God. Agamben reconstructs the genealogy of economy from ancient Greek thinkers through St. Paul and early Christian fathers to St. Thomas Aquinas by casting a new right on what was missing in the debate between Schmitt and his former best friend, Erik Peterson on the possibility of political theology. Agamben receives lots of reaction for his audacious analysis. That said, it is arduous to verify or refute his scheme for its theoretical complexity and riches of references. Therefore, this presentation is going to work on what is missing in Agamben's outlining of political theology, i.e., the argument between Schmitt and Hans Blumenberg on the legitimacy of secularization. To put it another way, Blumenberg once criticized Schmitt for supposing the structural continuity between the medieval and the modernity in the name of political theology and consequently failing to recognize the political and conceptual legitimacy of the latter. Although it is to be studied whether Schmitt responded to the judgment convincingly or not, the problem here is that it is highly likely that Agamben also presupposes the theological continuity among the ages. Some people, including an even Agamben's disciple, Elettra Stimilli have pointed out that the entire political project of Agamben is doomed to fail for its lack of practicality. However, it is reckless to discard Agamben at all. C. Dickinson once mentioned that the philosophy of Agamben stems from the theology of immanence. Therefore, it is worthwhile to examine whether the Agambenian philosophy of immanence resolves or overcomes political theology or not. In sum, this presentation contrives to scrutinize Agamben in the context of debates on secularisation and draw a normative conclusion.

Kohei Nagashima is a Ph.D. Candidate at Keio University Graduate school of Law in Tokyo, Japan. He also works as a Research fellow at JSPS Research division and receives full grants for his study from the Japanese Ministry of Science and Education. He graduated with remarkable scholastic records with the B.A. in Law and the M.A. in Law from the same university. He has published some peer-reviewed articles, for one of which he received the award for an outstanding young researcher from The Japanese Conference for the Study of Political Thought. He also has translated a book on American politics by Michael Walzer. Besides, Kohei has experience of giving academic presentations internally and internationally, such as New York University, Kyoto University, and so on. His academic interest lies in the contemporary political theory or philosophy with an emphasis on political theology. He hitherto has attempted to explore the theoretical relations between Carl Schmitt, Jacques Derrida, and Giorgio Agamben in the context of the return of the religious in recent politics.

The Radical Political Theology of John D. Caputo

Calvin Dieter Ullrich

Ecumenical Institute, Ruhr Universität Bochum

The 'theological turn' in continental philosophy has beckoned several new possibilities for theoretical discourse. Materialist projects have been concerned with political potentialities, while more theologically inclined approaches have focused on an ethics of alterity and on phenomenological-deconstructive readings consistent with Christian religious motifs. More recently, the absence of a political theology with respect to the latter has been raised, i.e. can an ethics of alterity offer a more 'substantive' politics? Mediated through the important concept of sovereignty, this paper follows this question by considering the work of John D. Caputo. It argues that contrary to caricatures of his 'theology of event', the notion of theopoetics evinces a 'materialist turn' in his mature thought that can be considered the beginnings of a 'radical political theology.' This position is not without it challenges, however, raising concerns over Deconstruction's ability to navigate the immanent but necessary dangers of politics. On the one hand, this entails the avoidance of conceptual slippages which devolve into potentially vulgar materialisms, and on the other hand, the circumvention of idealist distance that might be read into the political event (i.e. the 'to come'). To render a coherent 'radical political theology', then, this paper proceeds in three steps: First, I will begin by briefly outlining the trajectory of political theology as it is taken up in the work of Carl Schmitt and its subsequent treatment by Jacques Derrida. This initial step will allow us to open the discussion of Caputo's radical theology and in particular, his formulation of 'theopoetics' as the discourse which 'imitates' a god without sovereignty. Secondly, I turn to Caputo's debate with the Slovenian philosopher, Slavoj Žižek, in order to clarify the stakes involved in articulating a 'radical political theology'. The latter's cultural hermeneutic coupled with his philosophy of 'double negation,' challenges the former's theopoetics as being 'aseptic, lifeless and bloodless.' However, even though it becomes clear in Caputo's later response to Žižek that this critique is somewhat overstated, it does, nonetheless, force Caputo to clarify his relationship with materialism. While others have argued that the relationship between these thinkers is more complementary than contradictory, I wish to take up the challenge of giving a certain 'political viscerality' to Caputo's theopoetics that harnesses the insights of Žižek's materialist project but which also critically moves beyond it. In the third and final step, then, I argue that a proper 'praxis of politics' which most adequately corresponds to Caputo's radical political theology is one which, following the work of Simon Critchley, articulates an 'interstitial distance.' Such a politics is modelled on the 'power of powerlessness' experienced as a response to the ethical demand of the 'least of these,' and thereby expresses a political realism that is neither utopian nor defeatist. By making this argument, therefore, I conclude that Caputo may indeed be read as a 'political theologian' granted that we uphold the maxim that a 'theopoetics without politics is empty, and politics without a theopoetics is blind.'

Calvin Dieter Ullrich, is a postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Ecumenical Institute, Ruhr University in Bochum, Germany. Earlier this year he successfully defended without corrections, a doctoral dissertation on the work of John D. Caputo at Stellenbosch University, South Africa. Along with finalizing a book project based on the dissertation for publication next year, Calvin has also published several articles in international journals, as well as presented papers at a number of international conferences. During his doctoral studies, he was fortunate enough to receive funding for research visits spent in Tübingen, Germany and Christ Church College in Oxford, England. His current interests revolve around deconstruction, phenomenology, hermeneutics, political theology and contemporary political theory. The paper to be presented at the 'Engaging the Contemporary' conference is partially based on the doctoral research, but also seeks to investigate a number of new avenues.

Religious Atheism: Assessing Critchley's Faith of the Faithless

Dennis Vanden Auweele

KU Leuven

In the last decade, a number of denominationally atheist philosophers have become interested in religious topics. This takes many forms, such as the interest in St. Paul by such as Agamben, Badiou and Žižek; the psycho-analytic turn to religious needs in Kristeva; the instrumentalist turn to religion in de Botton (and many more). These figures, and others, seem to engage religion as if they were a 'raiding party', that is, they briefly leave the confines of their safe and familiar soil so as to expedite into religious territory and take what they can utilize. Such strategies have been criticized by more traditional theologians, who tend to point out that the beneficial fruits of religions cannot be picked without respecting the entirety of religion. One cannot pick and choose one's religion and, furthermore, one cannot hope to enjoy the beneficial elements of religion without honest faith. Simon Critchley's Faith of the Faithless has to be understood as emerging from within this particular debate, namely whether an atheist can enjoy some positive elements of religion (such as community and commitment). Often arguing with de Botton, Critchley argues that his political theology is not vulnerable to the above critique. In his view, an atheist can enjoy the fruits of religion by means of the cultivation of – an image taken from Oscar Wilde's De Profundis – a faithless religion. In Critchley's view, liberal democracies benefit from the sense of community enjoyed by religion as only within such a community can certain moral values and commitment to (political) ideals become more than legal imposition. A religious commitment to the ideals of liberalism is what makes these in fact possible. But such commitment is not in opposition to political liberalism but, in fact, its very essence. Political liberalism is a faithless religion – if approached properly. Critchley then objects to the classical story of secularization where religious authority is overtaken by democratic freedom and instead sees the progression of political forms in modernity as different metamorphoses of religious sacralization. My paper will expound Critchley's argument and engage Critchley's political re-interpretation of a Pauline sense of Messianism. I will investigate whether he succeeds in avoiding the abovementioned trap of instrumentalizing religion. Critchley remains a mostly marginalized voice in these debates whose argument should, I believe, be more widely engaged.

Dennis Vanden Auweele is postdoctoral researcher of the Research Foundation Flanders (FWO) in philosophy at KU Leuven (University of Leuven). He has published mainly on 19th- and 20th- century philosophy of religion, focussing on figures such as Kant, Schopenhauer, Schelling and Nietzsche. He has recently published the books Pessimism in Kant's Ethics and Rational Religion (Lexington Books, 2019) and The Kantian Foundation of Schopenhauer's Pessimism (Routledge, 2017). He has edited the volume Thinking Metaxologically: William Desmond's Philosophy between Metaphysics, Religion, Ethics and Aesthetics (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018) and was guest editor for a special issue for Tijdschrift voor theologie 'Does Philosophy need Theology?' (Contributions by William Desmond, Jean Luc Marion, Robyn Horner, Henning Tegtmeyer and Dennis Vanden Auweele).

Panel 6.4 Religion, Phenomenology & Hermeneutics

Towards a Metaphysics of the Bond and a Phenomenology of Force: Ontology and the Philosophical Parameters of Religious Experience

William L. Connelly

The Catholic University of Paris

The question of phenomenology's limits, as much as its capacities, has come to be the leading question of how religious experience is to be understood through contemporary continental thought. Prompted by Domique Janicaud's 1991 *Phenomenology and the Theological Turn*, this debate has centered on the question of how phenomenological method may be open to questions of transcendence more generally, and the question of God and religious tradition more specifically. While Janicaud notes that phenomenology is open to questions of metaphysics, he questions the capacity of phenomenology to remain within "imminent phenomenality" in exploring questions of religion. He claims Maurice Merleau-Ponty represents a phenomenologist who never brakes with imminent phenomenality, but still pushes phenomenological method to its limits. This is most evident in Merleau-Ponty's later work, which develops a philosophy of nature and becomes engaged in an ontology—all cohering together into a nascent metaphysical philosophy. Despite his sudden and tragic death, Merleau-Ponty already laid out the terrain for developing these ontological themes; and emerging here we find that Maurice Blondel served as a *pivotal* figure in Merleau-Ponty's ontological enterprise. It is at this point where we can discern an opening within phenomenology where a link can be made with a phenomenological understanding of religious experience. In connecting together, the philosophy of Maurice Blondel with that of the Husserlian phenomenological tradition, we can find there to be a "backlash" of Maurice Blondel's philosophy upon phenomenological method. Just as Emmanuel Falque has recently proclaimed the backlash of psychoanalysis upon phenomenology, we assert there to be a second and just as fundamental re-structuring of phenomenology though this time under the influence of Maurice Blondel's philosophy of action. This paper will explore this "backlash" by showing how Maurice Blondel's philosophy constitutes a metaphysics of the bond, which is in essence a philosophy of power, or of force or dynamism, this illustrating the activity at work both in nature and in human life and human thought which culminates together in a religious revelation. The metaphysical implications of this "binding activity" which constitutes an ontology of nature is made to bear when Maurice Merleau-Ponty adopts both Maurice Blondel's critique "against the assaults of phenomenology in attempting to arrive at an ontology" as well as his philosophical propaedeutic to "reduce ontological double vision to the unity of binocular vision." Merleau-Ponty's engagement with Blondel provides seminal insight for understanding how phenomenology can understand its own limits, helping to fulfill the ultimate task for Husserlian phenomenology to accomplish, as announced by Merleau-Ponty in his essay *Signs,* that is to understand what "resists phenomenology within us" and to nevertheless show how "it cannot remains outside phenomenology and should have its place within it." This paper will argue for Maurice Blondel's philosophy as a key pillar of support in accomplishing this task, here opening up a new chapter in the development of phenomenological method, which better demonstrates the capacities and limits of phenomenology in describing religious experience.

I am currently a doctoral student at the Catholic University of Paris. I've been studying under and working with professor Emmanuel Falque for some two years now and have been made aware of the key debates in the field of phenomenology in France. I am writing my doctoral dissertation on Maurice Blondel's notions of 'theandric action' and 'pneumatic thought', which I am employing to develop a doctrine of inspiration. I am an American with three years of masters study in theology and philosophy of religion (two years Emory University and One year Holy Spirit College, earning both a M.T.S and MTh degree.) I am the secretary of the International Network in Philosophy of Religion (INPR) and have wide contacts in this field and am keenly interested in meeting new researchers and connecting with professors and institutions to help create links between various research centers. The paper I've proposed is part of an already developed larger project and I will enjoy sharing a summary of it within a 15 to 20 minute session. I am interested in the possibility of publishing this material and would profit from the chance of sharing some of my ideas with the assembled group.

Hermeneutical Plays with Body and Voice: Critical Encounters with Gadamer and Falque

Katerina Koci

Charles University, Prague

The French phenomenologist Emmanuel Falque presents a unique hermeneutical approach to the religious life. In a critical distance from the hermeneutics of his compatriots – Paul Ricoeur and Emmanuel Lévinas – Falque formulates his project of a 'hermeneutics of the body and voice'. Although Falque presents his approach as overtly new, similar ideas are traceable in the phenomenological hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer. Gadamer's concept of 'play', which is realized through various media (human voice, movement, reading process etc.), acts similarly to Falque's concept of the embodied voice. This voice fills the space between the interacting subjects as well as carries out the message. This paper will carry out a detailed analysis of Falque's hermeneutics of the body and voice and pay special attention to the mediatory function of the incarnated voice. To support Falque's attempt to restore the respectable position of the voice in hermeneutics, I put forward and comment upon biblical verses suggesting that not only the message, in Falque's words the language, but already the voice is a self-contained unit worthy of interpretation (Iz 40,6; Mk 1,3 par.). The role of the voice is significant and unique because it bears traces of the body in which it originated. In other words, it constantly reminds us of our embodiment. By comparing Gadamer's hermeneutics as play and Falque's hermeneutics of the body and voice I will raise the following questions: Could we read Falque in continuity with Gadamer? Or, does the French author establish a radically new, the so-called 'catholic hermeneutics'? Last but not least, does Falque's hermeneutical project bring any fresh insights for theology, philosophy of religion and religious experience?

Katerina Koci is a postdoctoral researcher at the Protestant Theological Faculty, Charles University in Prague. Katerina was awarded the Jan Patočka scholarship for her project on sacrifice and gender and since September 2018 until now is on the visiting fellowship at the Institute of Human Sciences in Vienna. Her main research interests focus on postmodern biblical hermeneutics and interdisciplinary studies of the Bible and literature. From 2011 to 2017, Katerina studied at the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, KU Leuven. In Leuven, she pursued her doctoral project "From Promised Land to Slavery: John Steinbeck and Walter Brueggemann in Dialogue about the Biblical Text".

Interruptive Encounters between Phenomenology and Theology: Case Emmanuel Falque

Martin Koci

University of Vienna / Institute for Philosophy

Continental philosophers of religion have been engaging with theological issues, concepts and questions for several decades now. As a consequence, they have begun to blur the borders between the domains of philosophy and theology. In particular, this is the case for the tradition of phenomenology. Dominique Janicaud infamously calls this, in his opinion, irregular development "the theological turn." For Janicaud, the appeal to the Christian revelation distorts the orthodox phenomenological method. In contrast, Hent de Vries (and with him the majority of the American philosophers of religion rooted in the continental philosophical tradition) claims that "the theological turn" never happened. Rather, in the turn towards religion, phenomenology exercises its natural inclination towards the theological. Or, as Jean-Yves Lacoste puts it, the theological questions do not belong to theology only. The field of the theological significantly contributes to the phenomenological inquiry, that is, to describing and understanding the structures of experience. Hence, the phenomenology's turn to religion is a regular development exploring the fecundity of the thought. Nonetheless, between these two polar opposites, a third reading seems to be possible. In this paper, I will argue for the mutually interruptive encounters between phenomenology and theology. In particular, I will critically engage with the alternative as it is developed in the work of the recent French author Emmanuel Falque. "The more we theologize, the better we philosophize," claims Falque. In his Crossing the Rubicon: The Borderlands of Philosophy and Theology (Fordham 2016), he seeks to push the debate beyond the perennial questions that have plagued it; namely, concerning the legitimacy of philosophical uses of theology and, vice-versa, theological uses of philosophy and its concepts. Nevertheless, is it possible to be the philosophers and the theologian? What are the benefits of travelling between the philosophical and the theological? And, is it possible to come back to philosophy, once the Rubicon is crossed and the field of theology enters into the discussion? Firstly, I will present Falque's thought-provoking discourse on the method which challenges both parts to leave the security of their respective camps and cross the Rubicon as it were. For philosophers, it is scandalous to accept the invitation to theologizing in order to better philosophize. Similarly, for theologians, it is difficult to cope with the proposition, going against the tradition of philosophia ancilla theologiae, that "theology must be liberated by philosophy." Secondly, on this background, I will argue that Falque's challenge provides us with the possibility to engage with the interruptive encounters between phenomenology and theology while maintaining their borders and at the same time allowing their mutual transformation. Finally, I will propose that a critical reading of Falque's methodological challenge opens a new chapter in the contemporary debate on the philosophical turn towards religion which overcomes both Janicaud's critique of the theological turn and at the same time a one-sided philosophical inquiry into the theological as the source inspiration. After Falque, the turn towards religion needs to be read through the prism of the interruptive encounters.

Martin Koci is a post-doctoral researcher at the Institute for Philosophy at the University of Vienna. His research focuses on the theological turns in contemporary continental philosophy and theology in a postmodern context. He specialises in the French phenomenology, its Anglo-American reception and the work of the Czech phenomenologist Jan Patočka (a monograph to be published with SUNY Press in 2020). From 2011 to 2016, Martin studied and then worked as a research assistant at KU Leuven (Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, Research Group "Theology in a Postmodern Context"). In 2016, he was granted a Junior Patočka Fellowship at the IWM in Vienna. Between 2016 and 2018, Martin co-ordinated the Centre of Theology, Philosophy and Media Theory (Charles University in Prague). He has been currently a researcher on the research project "The Revenge of the Sacred: Phenomenology and the Ends of Christianity in Europe" (supported by the Austrian Science Fund - FWF).

Gadamer on the Sensus Communis

Barry Stephenson

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A foundation stone in Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is the notion of the sensus communis. Discussion of the philosophical significance of a "sensus communis" (common sense) dates to the work of Aristotle, who offered scattered reflections. The topic was taken up in earnest in Enlightenment thought and in German idealism, but it became more of an individual faculty, lacking the deep sense of community and tradition found in other schools of thought. To date, Gadamer's discussion of the sensus communis has been linked only to the thought of Vico and Kant. In this paper, the author demonstrates Gadamer's debt to Pietist thought, examining his appropriation and use of the theology of Friedrich Christoph Oetinger (1702-1782), a leading figure in Swabain Pietism, whose ideas had a significant impact in theological circles as well as broader cultural traditions. Oetinger was one of Gadamer's minor (though important) conversation partners, but his appropriation of Oetinger has, to my knowledge, received no attention; moreover, considering Gadamer's assimilation of Oetinger exemplifies the very working of the sensus communis, as well as aspects of Gadamer's hermeneutical method. In Truth and Method, Gadamer refers to Pietism in his discussion of the sensus communis, the hermeneutical notion of application, and the relevance of the beautiful to ontology. Gadamer's discussion of "aesthetic consciousness" is shaped by his conception of the sensus communis, as developed by Oetinger. Gadamer poses the question of how we might transcend aesthetic consciousness (or the "aesthetic dimension") so formative of modern sensibilities. To do so, Gadamer looks to guiding notions of the tradition of humanism prior to the Kantian revolution. He takes up such concepts as Bildung, taste, tact, judgment, memory and imagination, pushing these beyond Kantian aesthetics by setting them in a non-subjectivized context. Each of these notions (taste, judgment, tact) Gadamer then subsumes under the broader purview of the sensus communis, referring to both Vico's defence and use of it in setting limits to rational, scientific method as a means of acquiring knowledge, but also to the Piestists Friedrich Christoph Oetinger's and J.J Rambach's concern to defend religious knowledge in the face of rationalist critiques of tradition. There is a further reference to Oetinger and Pietism in the final part of T&M, in a complex discussion of the beautiful, language, and ontology. Gadamer also wrote an essay on Oetinger, "Oetinger als Philosoph," published in 1964 as the introduction to the republication of Oetinger's Inquisitio in sesnsum communen et rationem, which first appeared in 1753. To my knowledge there is one other brief mention of Pietism in Gadamer's writings, in an essay titled "Hermeneutics and Logocentricism" (1986), which emerged out of the famously failed discussion between Gadamer and Derrida that took place in 1981.

Barry Stephenson is Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Memorial University, in St. John's, Canada. His research and teaching deal with the study of ritual, the intersection of religion and the arts, and the history of Christian thought and culture.