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IAHR Tokyo Conference Proceedings 2023: 1–5

Satoko Fujiwara

Preface

The International Association for the History of Religions (hereafter IAHR) annually holds Special Conferences on the initiatives of its member associations. In 2023, the IAHR granted this status to a conference hosted by the Japanese Association for Religious Studies (hereafter JARS). This event, held in Tokyo on 16–17 December, was followed by an International Committee Meeting of the IAHR consisting of delegates from IAHR member associations and affiliates. The call for papers of the conference was thus primarily addressed to these representatives, who attended both the conference and the subsequent meeting at the University of Tokyo campus. Delegates, as well as all other members from member associations and affiliates, were welcome to participate either in-person or online.

Unlike recent IAHR Special Conferences, which have coincided with regular (annual) meetings of IAHR member associations or affiliates, this 2023 Tokyo Conference was exceptional as it was planned and organized independently of an annual meeting of the JARS. As Secretary General of the IAHR, I recognized the need to hold a conference for IAHR members to address critical issues, particularly urgent issues that have been on the backburner since the Extended Executive Committee Meeting in 2019, and following the IAHR Executive Committee's 2022 public statement regarding Russia's war on Ukraine. The 2023 International Committee Meeting was planned to decide matters pertaining to these critical issues and would hopefully benefit from substantial preparatory discussions as typically only three hours are allotted to International Committee Meetings. Therefore, after consulting with the JARS board, it was proposed that JARS provide a venue for IAHR members to engage in in-depth discussions and reflections. Given that Tokyo had previously hosted significant IAHR events

in 1958 and 2005, sparking debates on the future direction of the IAHR, the JARS board agreed to offer another occasion for an academic gathering outside Europe. The Organizing Committee was formed, including the then JARS President, the General Secretary, representatives from JARS's International Connections Committee, and members of a research group sponsoring the conference (details are in the Organizing Committee section of these proceedings).

The conference theme was "Can the IAHR be engaged and relevant without being political or confessional? The position of 'science (*Wissenschaft*)' in 2023." The purpose of the conference, as described in the "Call for Papers" published on 7 March 2023, is reproduced below for historical record.

> The purpose of the IAHR is stated in Article 1 of its Constitution as "the promotion of the academic study of religions through the international collaboration of all scholars whose research has a bearing on the subject. The IAHR is not a forum for confessional, apologetical, or other similar concerns." While Article 1 was accepted and confirmed by the previous General Assemblies of the IAHR, it has recently become clear that IAHR members do not have a shared understanding of the meaning of the article. There are three different yet interrelated contexts that have shown the lack of consensus.
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> First, the former Executive Committee of the IAHR discussed inserting the term "science" either in the name of the association or in Article 1. After long deliberations, the EC suggested that IAHR members vote to change the association's name to "International Association for the Study of Religions" while adding, "...the promotion of the scientific study of religions (*Religionswissenschaft*)" to Article 1 (*IAHR e-Bulletin Supplement*, September 2019). The current EC, during its meeting in Cork in 2022, decided not to propose a change of name nor the insertion of the word "scientific." One of many reasons for the decision was the ambiguity of the English word "science," which may be used to refer to the natural and social sciences in contrast to the humanities or in the more inclusive German sense of *Religionswissenschaft*. As a result, there are a number of scholars of religion who do not identify as "scientists." Before discussing the name of the association and the phrasing of the article further, therefore, we need to form a clearer consensus as to how "science" should be articulated for IAHR members.
>
> Second, the IAHR EC issued a public statement concerning the Russian War against Ukraine on 28 February 2022. The statement raised questions about the neutrality of "science" and the position of the IAHR. Do "other similar concerns" in Article 1 include political ones? Should the IAHR take a political stance in critical situations? If neutrality implies the affirmation of the status quo, what can the IAHR do in such situations?

Third, more broadly, the value of the study of religions has increasingly been challenged in the past few decades along with other subjects in the humanities/social sciences that do not have direct economic utility. Efforts to make our research more socially relevant often generate tension with Article 1. Moreover, globalization has made us realize that the study of religion has developed differently in different local contexts. The question thus emerges as to whether the "science" in the study of religions is singular or plural, universal, or culturally relative. Will the incorporation of "indigenous" science threaten the academic integrity of the IAHR? Does positivistic "pure" science become Western-centric in certain contexts?

While many of these questions have been addressed from time to time throughout the history of the IAHR, the above three contexts have made it an immediate issue that needs to be discussed by current IAHR members in light of the recent developments of science studies. This conference serves as a platform for open discussion.

The program of the conference was as follows.

Saturday, 16 December (JST)
15:30–16:00 Opening Session

Welcome Speech
Tim Jensen, IAHR President

Welcome from the local host & Introduction
Satoko Fujiwara, Secretary General of the IAHR and President of JARS

16:00–17:10 Keynote Session
Chair
Satoko Fujiwara
Keynote speaker
Nancy Cartwright, Durham University, President of the IUHPS (International Union of History and Philosophy of Science and Technology): "Objectivity, Values and Commitment in Science"
Discussants
Jeppe Sinding Jensen, Aarhus University, Denmark
Kevin Schilbrack, Appalachian State University, USA

17:15–18:50 Roundtable Session
Chair
Satoko Fujiwara
Speakers
Amy Allocco, Elon University, USA, IAHR-WSN coordinator

Blanca Solares Altamirano, National Autonomous University of Mexico, Mexico, IAHR-EC
Denzil Chetty, University of South Africa, South Africa, IAHR Book Series editor
Shahnaj Husne Jahan, University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh, Bangladesh
David G. Robertson, the Open University, UK
Shusuke Yamane, National Institute of Technology, Maizuru College, Japan

Sunday, 17 December
9:30–12:30 Individual Paper Session
Chairs
Abel Ugba, University of Leeds, African Association for the Study of Religions
Mar Marcos, University of Cantabria, Spanish Association for the Sciences of Religions
Paweł Kusiak, Polish Naval Academy, Polish Society for the Study of Religions
Presenters
Vibha Agnihotri, University of Lucknow, Indian Association for the Study of Religion
"The Scientific Study of Religions: Exploring Methodologies, Perspectives, and Implications"
Gritt Klinkhammer, University of Bremen, German Association for the Study of Religions
"The Study of Religion: Objective Inquiry and Politics"
Mokhlesur Rahman, Bangladesh Tourism Foundation, Dhaka, Bangladesh Society for the Study of Culture and Religion
"Study on Religious Thoughts and Cultural Diversity through Tourism"
Trylis Serhii Ivanovych, Whole-Ukraine Buddhist Center, Ukrainian Association of Researchers of Religion
"Change of Paradigms of Methodological Thinking in Modern Religious Studies: The Experience of Ukrainian Scientists"
Slawomir Sztajer, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Polish Society for the Study of Religions
"Charting the Course: Advancements and Challenges in the Scientific Study of Religion"
Andrea Rota, University of Oslo, IAHR-EC
"Neutral. All Too Neutral? Contemporary (?) Challenges in the Study of Religion"

13:30–15:00 JARS Young Members Roundtable Session

"Why Study Religion? Young JARS members' perspectives"

Chair

Katja Triplett, Leipzig University, IAHR-EC

Speakers

Aki Murakami
Aya Oba
Mina Lee
Hiroki Tanaka
Ikuo Tsuboko

Discussants

Milda Ališauskienė, Vytautas Magnus University, IAHR-EC
David Thurfjell, Södertörn University, IAHR-EC

15:30–18:00 International Committee Meeting

These proceedings consist of:

- Transcripts of the sessions from the first day (some parts have been revised by speakers for clarification)
- Six abstracts and three papers from the Individual Paper Session of the second day
- A summary of the JARS Young Members Roundtable Session

After the conference, the Publications Officer of the IAHR, Katja Triplett, suggested developing selected papers of the conference into a volume for the IAHR Book Series. This suggestion was welcomed by the conference host, which has also enabled a swift online publication of the proceedings as a plain historical record of exactly what happened and what was discussed at the two-day conference. Thoughts invoked at the conference could be reflected upon and eventually crystalized as full-length papers in the Book Series volume. This publication project is currently in progress (May 2024), with Denzil Chetty, Satoko Fujiwara, and Katja Triplett serving as coeditors.

On behalf of the Organizing Committee of the conference, I thank all the speakers and participants, both in-person and online, for their rich presentations and lively discussions.

Tokyo, May 2024
Satoko Fujiwara
Chair of the Organizing Committee of the Tokyo Special Conference
President of the JARS, Secretary General of the IAHR

IAHR Tokyo Conference Proceedings 2023: 7–13

IAHR President Tim JENSEN

Welcome Speech

JARS, the Japanese Association for Religious Studies (or "Study of Religion[s]")[1] was established as early as 1930, with the first chair in the study of religion(s) in Japan dating back to 1905.

As early as in 1955, only five years after the establishment of the International Association for the (Study of the) History of Religions (I.A.S.H.R.) in Amsterdam, the IASHR World Congress was held in Rome (when, *inter alia*, the name was changed to IAHR). JARS was among the twelve-member associations, and Shoson Miyamoto was elected by the International Committee (in which Japan had two representatives, Shoson Miyamoto and Enkichi Kan), as a member of the IAHR Executive Committee (Bureau Executif). Aside from a member association from the USA, the JARS was the only one from outside Europe.[2]

I stress the "earliness" because it is, comparatively seen, remarkably early, and not just regarding the adoption of other non-European members. Take for example (I happen to be from that country) the DAHR, the Danish Association for the History of Religions, today DASR, the Danish Association for the Study of Religions: it was established in 1982 and became a member of the IAHR in Sydney in 1985.

So, as rightly stressed also by Professor Satoko Fujiwara, the president of JARS, currently serving as the IAHR Secretary General and our gracious host

1. This is as the former IAHR Secretary General and President, Michael Pye, has it in one of his articles on the study of religion(s) in Japan, noting that the "Japanese term *shūkyōgaku* does not distinguish between the singular and the plural" (PYE 2003, 1).

2. See the minutes from the meetings in the IAHR Bulletin, *NVMEN*, vol. II, 1955: 236–24, reprinted in JENSEN and GEERTZ (2015, 55–59). In the same report, mention is made of the efforts to arrange a congress in Tokyo in 1958.

here in Tokyo, JARS is one of the oldest associations for the academic study of religion(s), and one of the earliest IAHR member associations.

Moreover, with its some two thousand individual members, it ranks as the second largest IAHR member association, with the AAR, the American Academy of Religion, as number one, and the DVRW, the German Association for the Study of Religions, as number three.

As noted by Professor Fujiwara in a forthcoming article ("Academia") dealing with the "history and proclivities of the Japanese religious studies academy," the number of Japanese participants at the most recent IAHR World Congress in Erfurt, Germany, 2015 (the planned 2020 World Congress was canceled due to COVID-19) was 113. Quite a lot if compared to other countries..

Added to this international activity and the presence of Japanese scholarship on religion is the fact that JARS has hosted two famous IAHR World Congresses: the 1958 one in Tokyo (and Kyoto), and the 2005 World Congress in Tokyo. As also noted in the same article, with a certain pride, I think, by Professor Fujiwara, those two IAHR world congresses were the only ones out of the fifteen congresses between 1950–2015 that took place in Asia.

Moreover, many JARS scholars have engaged actively not just in JARS organizational matters but also in the work of the IAHR as IAHR officers. Some, moreover, became IAHR Honorary Life Members (such as the late Michio Araki and Noriyoshi Tamaru) and, presently, Susumu Shimazono and Akio Tsukimoto. Mention must also be made of the fact that Teruji Ishizu as of 1965 served as IAHR Vice-President.

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Many present here today (in person as well as online) will know that the 1958 IAHR World Congress, with its adjunct UNESCO symposium, particularly if seen in line with the following 1960 Marburg World Congress, must be characterized, as also the Marburg 1960 one, as a milestone or landmark in the history of the IAHR.[3]

I know that the criticism raised against some aspects (intercultural or interreligious, religious or apologetical), especially if linked to what may be seen as examples of Orientalism and stereotypical notions of an East-West divide, to some Japanese scholars constitutes what Professor Fujiwara in the aforementioned critical and excellently balanced article calls a "traumatic history" within the history of Japanese religious studies scholarship and international relations. Notwithstanding the fact that the criticism, as for example formulated by former IAHR Secretary General and Honorary Life Member R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, was

3. As for such "landmarks" or "milestones" see, for example, the 2015 "IAHR Landmarks and Connections" by Michael PYE (2015), and JENSEN (2015).

not directed primarily or solely at Japanese scholars and scholarship but at Japanese as well as non-Japanese IAHR scholarship.[4]

Werblowsky, in his "Impressions" (see note 4) ends: "By and large the Tokyo Congress was a memorable event and a great success—because of what it actually gave as well as because of the problems which it helped to see more clearly" (WERBLOWSKY 1958, 237)

No matter what: the 1958 Tokyo/Kyoto Congress, one way or the other, may be seen as having contributed to paving the way for the famous 1960 Marburg Werblowsky statement on the *raison d'ĕtre* and methodological "basic minimum presuppositions" of the IAHR. A statement which has served as the foundational statement regarding what Michael Pye has called the "institutional consensus" about the identity of the IAHR, a consensus and a standpoint reflected time and again in IAHR-related publications as well as in a series of talks by IAHR secretary generals and presidents—this current president (and former secretary general) included.

The importance of the Werblowsky statement as regards the kind of *Religionswissenschaft* to be supported and promoted by the IAHR also showed clearly and explicitly in the invitations to an IAHR extended Executive Committee meeting held in Delphi in 2019. It also showed, to the best of my conviction—and as stated in several responses from the IAHR Secretary General and President to criticism voiced by former IAHR Honorary Life Member Professor Donald Wiebe—in the proposal from the then IAHR Executive Committee to not "just" change the name of the IAHR (to the "study of religion/s" instead of "history of religions") but also, in the same proposal, to add *Religionswissenschaft* to what in

4. In his brief "report" (called "Impressions") from "The 9th International Congress for the History of Religions, Tokyo 1958," in the [IAHR] Bulletin in *NVMEN* 5, 1958, 233–37, R. J. Zwi Werblowsky makes this point very clear. It is, actually, equally clear from Werblowsky's famous "Marburg—And After ?," *NVMEN*, vol. VII, fasc. 2, December 1960, 215–20 (reprint in JENSEN and GEERTZ 2015, 62–66), as well as in the equally famous (Werblowsky) Marburg 1960 statement (see A. Schimmel, "Summary of the Discussion, *NVMEN*, vol. VII, fasc. 2, December 1960, 235–39 (reprint in JENSEN and GEERTZ 2015, 81–85), for decades serving as the "basic minimum presuppositions" (see for example, *inter alia,* GEERTZ and MCCUTCHEON 2015) for the kind of study of religion to be promoted by the IAHR. As for the discussions about an East-West "grand divide" (or not), as well as the—linked or not—much more general and principal methodological issues being debated almost all through the history of the IAHR, see also JENSEN (2015); JENSEN and GEERTZ (2015); FUJIWARA (2015); and WIEBE (2015), as well as C. J. Bleeker's "The Future Task of the History of Religions," presented as a paper to the General Assembly of the IAHR in Marburg 1960 in which Bleeker presents his reflections as somehow prompted by the Tokyo 1958 conference(s). The paper, originally printed in *NVMEN*, vol. VII, fasc. 2, December 1960, 221–34, is reprinted in JENSEN and GEERTZ (2015, 67–80). See also PYE (2015).

Article 1 is called the "academic study of religions," in order to point back to the Werblowsky statement.[5]

As articles by Professors Fujiwara and Pye on religious studies in Japan indicate, scholarship on religion in Japan is variegated and, as scholarship elsewhere, contended and discussed with regard to methodology, to what the academic and scientific study of religion is (or should be), as well as to what the academic study of religion (also the one promoted by the IAHR) should be regarding the often asked for "social relevance." Is it to provide knowledge, mainly or solely, for the development of academic research on religion, or is it there to also provide scientifically based knowledge and material for (more) qualified, knowledge-based public and political discourses (*and* maybe even political decisions) regarding religion(s) and state handling of religions? And, are religion scholars themselves supposed to enter and qualify public debates on religion, not to speak of participating in intercultural or interreligious debates or dialogues? We find various positions regarding these questions among Japanese scholars and the JARS membership—just like we find various positions worldwide.

As stated by Professor Fujiwara in the introduction to the key thematics of this IAHR Tokyo 2023 Special Conference, the methodological issues and questions to be discussed most certainly have been raised and discussed before, both in Japan and in the JARS and within the IAHR at large.[6] What you, participants and invited speakers, are going to discuss, one way or the other, is thus to be seen as in line with a longstanding discussion, tradition, and context of JARS and the IAHR.

No matter what agreements or disagreements you may reach or not, I am certain that we all agree that for something to call itself science, including what might be termed the human and social sciences, including the science of religion (study of religion/s, history of religions, academic scientific historical study of religion, and so on), then, hopefully, there will be no end to the discussions.

As written by Ann BARANOWSKI and John MORGAN (1989), doctoral students from the then Toronto Centre for Religious Studies and founding editors of *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*:

5. Article 1, the core article as regards the aims and methodological stance of the IAHR, ends with this sentence: "The IAHR is not a forum for confessional, apologetical, or other similar concerns"—a sentence added to Article 1 in 2010 in Toronto following discussions in Tokyo 2005. As for the response to Professor Wiebe, see the summary with detailed references to relevant material, both for the public at large and for IAHR members and officers, in FUJIWARA and JENSEN (2022). See also WIEBE (2020; 2021); and FUJIWARA and JENSEN (2020).

6. Solid referencing to the many scholarly debates of these or linked questions are beyond the scope of this opening talk. See JENSEN and GEERTZ (2015) and each reprint and new contribution to the *NVMEN* 60th Anniversary volume edited by JENSEN and GEERTZ (2015) for relevant discussions within the IAHR.

> To the extent that the academic study is characterized by the on-going questioning of its own premises and presuppositions, and since fields of research are never, or at least, should never be relaxed concerning methods of study and theories about the focus of the study, we believe this journal addresses an important component of the study of religion.
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> (Quoted in GEERTZ and MCCUTCHEON 2015, 139)

I believe that this IAHR Special Conference addresses several important questions linked to the kind of study of religion promoted by the IAHR, boasting of being "the preeminent international forum for the critical, analytical and cross-cultural study of religion, past and present."

To judge from the forthcoming article by Professor Fujiwara, one of the many characteristics of what she calls "the big tent" of the JARS seems to be that the JARS is open to discussions and disagreements, even conflicts. The JARS is providing the discussants with a "shared platform" for disagreements presented as academic debates, as exemplified by those such as "between a philological historian of religion and an activist scholar who boldly interprets religious texts to achieve extra-scientific goals […]"

I thank JARS and Professor Fujiwara, President of JARS and IAHR Secretary General, for providing the IAHR and this IAHR Tokyo Special Conference with such a "shared platform," thus assisting the IAHR in its efforts to stay preeminent and true to its obligations as an international learned society focused on the academic, scientific study of religion. It is an international learned society, and not (cf. Article 1) "a forum for confessional, apologetical, or other similar concerns."

I also thank the Department of Religious Studies at Tokyo University and the many students who have assisted Professor Fujiwara, students with amazingly varied and internationally orientated research interests, promising a bright future for Japanese scholarship on religion.

I wish you all, whether here in person or online, a fine conference.

Tim Jensen
IAHR President

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IAHR Tokyo Conference Proceedings 2023: 15–19

Satoko Fujiwara, IAHR Secretary General/JARS President

Welcome from the Local Host and Introduction

Esteemed guests, distinguished scholars, and delegates from around the world, it is my great honor and privilege to extend a warm and formal welcome to all of you gathered here at this momentous occasion—the Special Conference of the IAHR. The Japanese Association for Religious Studies and I are deeply honored to have IAHR executives as well as representatives of IAHR member associations here in Tokyo.

I would also like to extend my heartfelt thanks to individual members of national and regional associations who have taken interest in this conference and are attending either in-person or online. Some of the online participants are accessing this conference at midnight in their local time zones.

I would also like to express my profound gratitude to the sponsor of this conference, the Japan Federation of Societies for the Study of Religions.

Following President Jensen's thorough review of the history of the IAHR and its relationship with the Japanese Association, I would like to provide the background and the purpose of this Special Conference, titled "Can the IAHR be engaged and relevant without being political or confessional? The position of 'science (*Wissenschaft*)' in 2023."[1]

1. As the text represents a transcription of an oral address designed to captivate and put the international audience at ease with a touch of humor, it might exhibit some redundancy. For those who favor a more streamlined and direct approach, here I provide the document distributed to the speakers during the conference's preparatory phase.

Keynote session

Aim

Update the understanding of the science-ness of the study of religion in light of the current philosophy of science that has developed since the Science Wars in the 1990s (that is, debates

As around thirty international delegates are now in Tokyo, I would like to introduce a unique Japanese concept, "*garapagosu*." By the time you arrived from the airport at your hotel, you may have noticed two contradictory features of Japanese society. On one hand, you may have been surprised to see that Japan remains a cash-based society, in contrast to many other countries that have embraced cashless transactions. On the other hand, you may also have been surprised to see that technologies have strangely developed on particular items, for example, toilets. Japanese toilets, public and private ones alike, have numerous buttons that provide a variety of hot water cleansing, heated seats, and even the sound of running water for privacy.

"*Garapagosu*" is a word Japanese people use to make fun of ourselves; it derives from the Galápagos Islands in the Eastern Pacific (no offense to the original Galápagos Islands!). The islands are famous for their large number of endemic species. They have those unique species because the islands have been isolated, being separated from the continents. Japanese people think that they and their society are like endemic species on the Galápagos Islands because of their insular mentality. Mentally and physically disconnected from the rest of the world, Japan is extremely advanced in certain areas while lagging behind in others.

Since I became the Acting Secretary General of the IAHR in 2017, this question has come to mind from time to time: "Isn't the IAHR *garapagosu*, too?"

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over postmodernism and modern positivism) and be mindful of global diversities (that is, whether science is universal or context-dependent). This is an attempt to express the "ethos" of Werblowsky's statement of 1960 using contemporary, sophisticated terms and arguments.

Goal

- Find a way to articulate the above, without using negative expressions deriving from theology (for example, non-confessional, non-apologetic).
- If such articulation is deemed impossible, identify the specific challenges for further discussion toward and during the 2025 World Congress of the IAHR.

How to proceed

Lecture by Nancy Cartwright

- Provide an overview of the discussions on the nature and the definition of "science" in science studies, including the philosophy of science, over the last thirty to forty years. Specifically, explore whether the understanding and the articulation of the neutrality or objectivity of "science" have changed. If opinions are divided among scholars of science, identify the dividing lines (for example, global North/South, East/West).
- Discuss whether scholars of science consider the distinction between religious studies (studies based on and guided by one's religious faith, including theology) and the study of religion (where religion is solely the object of study) to be significant or merely a minor difference that does not affect the integrity of scientific studies.

Discussion with Jeppe Jensen and Kevin Schilbrack

- Engage in a free discussion with the main purpose of making Nancy Cartwright's lecture more relevant for scholars of religion and the IAHR.

Whenever the IAHR Executive Committee discusses the nature and purpose of the IAHR, President Jensen refers to Werblowsky's definition of the study of religion that was composed during the Marburg Congress in 1960.[2] I do not know any other international academic association that has maintained the definition of their field for over sixty years. There have been a great deal of debates and discussions on what "science" is and what makes a science a science during all those years. Professor Jensen says what the IAHR should take over is the ethos of Werblowsky's statement, not the exact sentences he composed. However, we have not created a new statement that incorporates updated ideas that describe science. Even if we all agree to uphold Werblowsky's ethos, we need to express it using contemporary vocabulary.

My fear that the IAHR has been repeating isolated arguments of the nature of science is also shared by some of the other IAHR Executives. In particular, during the pandemic, we had extra time to exchange our straightforward opinions on the issue online and by email. One symbolic example is the term "non-confessional." The IAHR introduced a new sentence, "The IAHR is not a forum for confessional, apologetical, or other similar concerns," to its Constitution in 2010. When scholars of religions try to articulate the objectivity and neutrality of their study, they often use the word "non-confessional." However, "confessional" is originally a religious—and also a Christian—term. That is, their definition of the study of religion as distinct from theology relies on theological concepts. Quite ironically, in the effort to separate themselves from theologians and religionists, self-proclaimed scientific scholars of religions have been determined by religious and theological concepts, that is, *garapagosu*. As you can well imagine, there is no other academic field in which the objectivity and the neutrality of science is defined with terms like "non-confessional" or "secular." Then how is science defined in a more cross-disciplinary relevant way today? Some IAHR executives and I started wondering about this question out of pure intellectual curiosity. This is why I started to think that we need to refer to the updated views of experts on science. And I have managed to invite an expert among experts, the president of the International Union of History and Philosophy of Science and Technology, to deliver a keynote lecture to us.

That is the broadest background to this conference. More specifically, there are three contexts behind this conference, as I described in the program. To go over them briefly:

First, the former Executive Committee contemplated whether to include the word "science" in our association's name or in Article 1. This sparked a debate

2. Annemarie Schimmel, "Summary of the Discussion." In *NVMEN*. *The Academic Study of Religion, and the IAHR: Past, Present, and Prospects*, Tim Jensen and Armin W. Geertz, eds. (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2015, 82). Originally published in *NVMEN*, vol. VII, 1960.

about the nature of "science" itself, particularly its scope, which led to the current committee's decision not to modify the name or the article.[3] The question arises: How should we, as a diverse group of scholars, interpret and articulate "science" within our context?

Second, the Executive Committee's public statement on the Russian war with Ukraine in February 2022 raised significant questions about the neutrality of "science" and the IAHR's position.[4] This leads us to ponder: Should the IAHR take a political stance in critical situations, and how does this align with our dedication to neutrality?

The third context is the broader challenge facing the value of religious studies and similar disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, particularly in a world increasingly focused on direct economic utility. This raises the question of whether the concept of "science" in the study of religions is universal or culturally relative, and how this impacts our academic integrity and inclusivity.

These three contexts have made it clear that there is an urgent need for a contemporary discussion among IAHR members. This conference serves as an essential platform for us to engage in open and meaningful dialogue about these issues. Let us use this opportunity to clarify our shared vision and mission, shaping the future of the IAHR in a way that reflects both our diverse perspectives and our collective goals.

Today's symposium consists of a keynote session and a roundtable session. As stated, for the important role of keynote speaker, I have invited the President of IUHPS, Professor Nancy Cartwright from Durham University in England. She specializes in the philosophy of science, with a special focus on objectivity in not only the natural sciences but also in the social sciences. I contacted her via the IAHR's partnership with the CIPSH, the International Council for Philosophy and Human Sciences, of which both the IAHR and the IUHPS are members.

I asked her to give a lecture focusing on the evolving definitions and articulations of science, particularly in the context of science studies. I told her that we are especially interested in how these definitions have shifted since the 1960s and whether they vary across disciplines like the natural sciences, humanities, and social sciences.

Furthermore, I told her that we are keen to explore the dichotomy between the universality of scientific truth and the cultural-historical context of sciences. Is "science" singular or plural in its nature? How do we reconcile different forms of science, such as Western modern, traditional Eastern, and indigenous sciences, in a world increasingly aware of post-truth challenges?

3. *IAHR e-Bulletin Supplement*, Tokyo edition, November 2023, 25–26, 47–48. https://www.iahrweb.org/bulletins/IAHR_e-Bull_Suppl_Nov_2023.pdf.

4. *IAHR e-Bulletin Supplement*, Tokyo edition, November 2023, 49–57.

I also gave her some background, saying that the IAHR is currently grappling with a dichotomy within its members. One group emphasizes scientific objectivity in the study of religion, often excluding approaches with religious or political inclinations. The other seeks to make religious studies more socially relevant, addressing direct societal or spiritual issues. This divide raises questions about the IAHR's future direction, particularly its stance on science and its role in a diverse, global context.

I also gave her the IAHR's historical context. The study of religions, having separated from theology, has often been seen through a positivistic lens. However, with the evolving landscape of science and society, it is time to revisit these foundational concepts.

Our current Constitution, particularly Article 1, which was amended in 2010, stands at the center of this debate. It is not just about the phrase "the academic study of religions" but how we articulate and interpret "science" within our collective ethos.

And, more recently, ethical-political events like the Russian invasion of Ukraine have intensified these discussions. The IAHR, traditionally refraining from political statements, found itself at a crossroads. Some executives now demand a more nuanced understanding of our role in such global contexts.

Upon receiving our invitation, Professor Cartwright expressed a keen interest in our discussions and graciously accepted to contribute her expertise, which is vital for enhancing our understanding of science.

Joining her as discussants are Professor Jeppe Sinding Jensen from Aarhus University, Denmark, and Professor Kevin Schilbrack from Appalachian State University, USA. Professor Jensen, a leading figure in the European IAHR community, has made significant contributions to philosophical reflections upon the study of religion. One of his most relevant works on this issue, *The Study of Religion in a New Key: Theoretical and Philosophical Soundings in the Comparative and General Study of Religion*, first published in 2003, is now available online. While initially planning to attend in person, Professor Jensen, due to health reasons, will instead join us virtually from Denmark.

Professor Schilbrack, our second discussant, brings a deep philosophical perspective to the study of religions. A graduate of the University of Chicago Divinity School, he is the author of *Philosophy and the Study of Religions: A Manifesto*, published in 2014, contributing significantly to the field.

We are indeed fortunate to have such distinguished speakers and discussants for this session. First, let's extend a warm welcome to Professor Cartwright, who has joined us early in the morning from England. Professor Cartwright, we sincerely appreciate your presence at this early hour. The floor is now yours, and you may begin at your convenience.

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Nancy Cartwright with Omar El Mawas

Keynote Lecture

Objectivity, Values, and Commitment in Science

Thank you very much for inviting me. This talk was researched and written with the help of Omar El Mawas, who is currently a postdoctoral researcher in philosophy of science and policy at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris.

The question that I started with was, "Why ask me?" Satoko's reason was that I'm President of the International Union of History and Philosophy of Science and Technology's Division of Logic, Methodology and Philosophy of Science and Technology. But perhaps among philosophers of science, the choice was fortuitous as well because I have recently worked on objectivity subject to analogous problems to yours. Also, when I moved from Stanford to the London School of Economics, I moved from the philosophy of physics to the philosophy of the economic and social sciences. That's relevant because history is a social science. The bad news though is that the social sciences and the philosophy of social science grapple with exactly the same problems that you have. And philosophers do not have uniform opinions about them. Nor is it clear to me that we have opinions that are going to help you resolve your issues, but let me tell you what I can.

My remit was to give my views on what we, as philosophers of science, understand by objectivity, neutrality, positivism, values, and so on, as well as on "should science be considered singular or plural?" I'm going specifically to talk about objectivity, values, and whether science is singular or plural, as I think that's where we have the most to say that you might not yet be familiar with.

Let's start with values. I want to note that these comments on values are directly from my undergraduate philosophy of social science lectures at the University of California at San Diego, where I work, as well as at Durham University

in the UK. I say that because in teaching materials I attempt to give a balanced treatment rather than just my own views.

Heather Douglas, the big guru who reintroduced seriously very detailed considerations about the role of values in science into the philosophy of science and to other thinkers who work in the area.

Douglas notes that there are legitimate locales for values in science, which is widely agreed. In the early and the end stages values can and should be invoked. Early, for instance: what projects to undertake, what to invest, what questions to ask. These will depend very heavily on what our social and scientific values are, on what we are trying to achieve with our sciences. At this stage, values should also be involved for settling various aspects of the methodology: Are there research questions that we should not pursue or are there ones that we really must pursue? The issue of neglected diseases is an example. Shouldn't we be pursuing more of the diseases that affect more of the global community? Are there methods we should not employ? Then at the end stages, surely value should enter in deciding what you do with the results when you've achieved them and even whether to publish and in what form using what concepts.

Beware though, says Heather Douglas:

> One cannot use values to direct the selection of a problem and a formulation of a methodology that in combination predetermines the outcomes of a study. Such an approach undermines the core value of science, to produce reliable knowledge... (Douglas 2009, 100)

That, I think, is something that philosophers of science have uncontroversially (or at least widely) agreed on. This may be one statement that can be of help to you.

Nevertheless, even though we don't want the values to influence the methodology in such a way that you choose a methodology that determines or helps determine exactly what the outcome will be, values nevertheless enter "ineliminably" in the very conduct of science, not just in the early stages and the late stages. They enter in the choice, and in the implementation, of method. Most methods are specified in abstract terms. What that actually amounts to, doing it on the ground, takes judgment and often that judgment will be affected by values. What studies to conduct and how to design them? What kinds of models to employ? What measures to use?

Consider measures. Different measures focus on different aspects of a problem. For instance, imagine your poverty measure is going to be used to help alleviate poverty. Then if you measure it one way, it will disadvantage the old. If you measure it another way, it will disadvantage the young. If you measure it using an absolute poverty line, that allows countries to get their poverty numbers down significantly by pushing the least poor above the poverty line. So you

might want a "depth of poverty" measure. The point is that there's often no basis on which to make the decision about what measure to use except values.

Or look at modeling choices in economics. It is typical to use rational choice models and models that assume that one should be acting to maximize expected utility. That already assumes a utilitarian scheme, which is a value choice. Once you've made that choice, you obviously aren't going to model every single member of the society that's affected by the application of the model. So you have to have representative agents. But once you have a representative agent for a whole group of people, that conceals distributive issues among them. So that's a value choice, whether to use a representative agent model or not. Also if you're maximizing expected utility, you've got to sum the utilities over these representative agents and you have to put a weight on them in the sum. If you don't put a number in front of it, that means you're weighting each equally, which may or may not be a good thing to do. At any rate, that's a value choice. There are similar examples with respect to rules of evidence and inference.

Also, the choice of language and concepts that we use often reflects values as well as how we actually interpret the results, both the results of the study itself and more broadly, what we think the study can help us understand more broadly.

All this is material that I'm perfectly happy to teach just like this in my philosophy of social science course. So I think it reflects fairly standard views in the philosophy of social science right now.

Let us turn now to the issue of "Is science singular or plural?" where philosophers have had a lot to say lately. I take it Thomas Kuhn's notion of paradigms you know about, so I'm going to talk instead about *perspectives* and *standpoints*. This much at least is relatively uncontroversial in the philosophy of social science: from Kant, Vienna Circle positivists, and Kuhn, they all agree that we always perceive and study the world from within one or another conceptual scheme or a combination of different ones. We don't see the world directly as it is, but rather through our conceptualizations. A second thing that's widely agreed is that our concepts are socially constructed. They may or may not match the way the world is, but the concepts themselves are socially constructed. Third is that social behaviours and kinds—social kinds, like marriage and money—depend on social understandings, and the social kinds that exist in a society are different where the societies have different social understandings. Those are relatively uncontroversial claims in the philosophy of social science. But what are the implications of them for single versus plural social science that Satoko asked me to talk about, and for truth?

There are three well-known approaches to this that I'd like to tell you about. One is *perspectivism*. The Lakatos Award is a distinguished award in the philosophy of science that's presented through the London School of Economics every year. Michela Massimi won it this year for a book on perspectival realism.

Realism has to do with thinking we're getting things as they really are in science. I'm not going to talk so much about Massimi's book but rather about an earlier work that's a little simpler to understand because Massimi's notion is very much interwoven with the kind of Kantian background she has.

The earlier work is by Ronald Giere, an American philosopher of science who died fairly recently. His scientific perspectivism is meant to mediate between objectivism and constructivism. Constructivism, according to Giere, claims

> the process of doing science is so infused with human judgments and values that what ends up being proclaimed to be the structure of reality may bear little resemblance to the real structure of the world. (Giere 2006, 7)

That was a kind of lesson that the social constructivists tended to draw. So that's constructivism. The opposition is objectivism. Science discovers truths. We're really getting at the way it is. Scientific progress accumulates toward truth.

So either what we're doing has little resemblance to the real structure of the world because it is always seen through our constructed concepts, as the strong version of constructivism that concern Giere has it, or science actually begins to reflect the real structure of the world and gets better and better at it as objectivism as Giere maintains.

Giere looks for something that mediates between them. That's the doctrine of scientific perspectivism. As Giere expresses it, claims are of a qualified conditional form:

> According to this highly confirmed theory, the world seems to be roughly such and such. According to a different highly confirmed theory, it may seem to be roughly different. (Giere 2006, 6)

The two theories/conceptual structures may be complementary. They may not talk about the same things, and so on. But Giere thinks that claims are properly formulated in this highly qualified conditional form, conditioning on theory, concepts, methods, and so on. He continues:

> There is no legitimate way to take the further objectivist step and declare unconditionally, "This theory provides us with a literally correct picture of the world itself." (Giere 2006, 6)

Giere then likens scientific perspectivism to color vision, which is perspectival. Colors, says Giere, are neither completely objective nor purely subjective. Neither are the properties developed in science either parts of the material world or of subjective experience, but rather they are properties of interaction between the material world and human observers—just as "red" is. So that's scientific perspectivism.

Another way of thinking about whether science is, or how science might be, plural is *pragmatic realism*. This is championed by the philosopher/historian of

science, Hasok Chang, who is Professor of History and Philosophy of Science at Cambridge University. His recent book, *Realism for Realistic People,* argues for a doctrine he's been developing that many people are very interested in, and against:

> The impossible ideal of scientific knowledge as proven universal truth about some ultimate reality. (CHANG 2022, 1)

Why does Chang call it an impossible ideal? He does so because, he says, reality is not accessible. That's the view of Kant, Kuhn, the Vienna Circle, and so on, that we aren't seeing through to the world just as it is, but we're seeing it through our conceptual lenses. Further, there are no actual methods by which we could attain assured knowledge about the world, Chang argues. We have methods that are more or less good for finding out this or that kind of thing, using this and that set of concepts.

In the face of this claim that having scientific knowledge as proven universal truth about ultimate reality is an impossible ideal, Chang offers a more operational alternative: a practice-based picture. Chang encourages us to focus on *what we do with science*. Knowledge is an ability, according to Chang, and not just the possession of information. So it's not just that we're not assessing the literal word-by-word truth of scientific claims, but rather we should be thinking of the claims along with everything else as providing us with an ability to do things. So Chang thinks of science as systems of practice. Different systems are good at different jobs. So he urges us, don't pick one system for all, but pick what will work best task by task, where what that is can even depend on the skills of the practitioners available. One of the things that Chang has noticed is that old scientific theories—that is, ones that in the standard realist way of looking at it in the philosophy of science we have learned aren't true and we have replaced by our newer, "better" theories—many of these older theories he has studied were able to do things that we cannot do with our current science or cannot do nearly so easily, simply, or intelligibly. And he's been on a campaign to try and resurrect some of the abilities we used to have, so that we can do even more by using our discarded sciences than we can with our contemporary ones alone.

The third way of thinking about science being plural rather than singular that I'll discuss is *standpoint theory*. Science is always conducted not just within implicit and explicit scientific conceptual frames—which is what I've been discussing and is almost universally agreed upon. In addition, it is conducted by real people with real experiences that shape what they see, what they know, and how they know it. This matters especially for the social sciences that study human social and institutional behaviour. In saying this I am quoting a leading philosopher of social science, Alison Wylie, who works at the University of British Columbia. What I shall share with you now are essentially my lectures from

my philosophy of social science course on standpoint theory, which I've taken from some work by Professor Wylie.

Standpoint theory underlines the fact that knowledge and knowledge production are situated within a hierarchically structured system of power relations. We've agreed that scientific knowledge and knowledge production is always situated in some conceptual schemes or sets of conceptual schemes and methods from which we often move on to new ones. They are also situated within a system of power relations that involve the material conditions of the lives of individuals, the relations of production and reproduction that structure their social practices and the conceptual resources they have available to represent and interpret these relations. We are social beings in social situations, and in any social science study, social beings studying ourselves.

What standpoint theorists often stress is the *epistemic advantages* one sometimes has from being disadvantaged in this social structure, especially the epistemic advantages one has in studying that structure. These theorists talk about the power structure that can lead to critical consciousness that can then lead to taking a new perspective that can give you an epistemic advantage. Of course, all of this requires achievement to actually be able to critically reflect on the situation you're in. But one of the points of standpoint theory when it's looking at the advantaged and disadvantaged is that in order to survive in hierarchically-structured power relations, the disadvantaged usually have to understand how the advantaged are seeing the world as well as understand what it is like from their point of view.

This has led to a notion of *strong objectivity*, developed by leading feminist thinker Sandra Harding, a notion that is widely adopted among feminists and standpoint theorists. It is called "strong" objectivity by comparison with what Harding labels "weak objectivity." Weak objectivity is the value neutrality that we were often taught we should aim for in science, but which (as I have already noted with the arguments of Heather Douglas and twenty years following her initial work) is widely thought now among philosophers of science not really to be viable. Strong objectivity admits that values are involved in scientific research willy-nilly. Wylie explains that standpoint theory invites us to examine the social, political, and cultural values that shape our scientific knowledge rather than hide behind a pretence of value neutrality.

Now, when it comes to worrying about these issues, you folks are not alone. The people embedded in standpoint theory and feminist theory have exactly the same questions. "[…] Questions raised to the theoretical position of standpoint theorists: […] Is it possible to have multiple changing standpoints?" (Gurung 2020, 106). So this is an issue that they, like a good many other philosophers of science, are worried about and are disputing as much as you are. What I thought

might be useful is to look at some cases where people do try to admit and deal with multiple perspectives.

I have edited a textbook on the philosophy of social science with Eleanora Montuschi, a philosopher of social science from the University of Venice Ca' Foscari, with different chapters written by different philosophers of social science. There's one on interdisciplinarity by Sofia Efstathiou that I think might be useful to you. What to do with multiple perspectives is a standard problem in interdisciplinary work in social science. Each discipline has its own perspective and does not understand the others. When I was at the LSE, I could eat lunch with the economists and with the anthropologists, but they'd never eat lunch with each other. They didn't understand what the others were doing and really often privately thought it wasn't worthwhile. So, each discipline has its own perspective and does not much understand the others and frequently does not respect them. This is the notorious problem of interdisciplinary research, and there is quite a lot of work on how to encourage and promote interdisciplinary research and how to get interdisciplinary groups to work together despite these differences in perspectives, and you might want to look at this as it could be of use to you.

Another suggestion is that maybe you are dealing with what science studies scholars call "boundary objects." The following is directly from the philosophy of social science undergraduate lectures by Eleanora Montuschi, with whom I edited that textbook. She describes "boundary objects," quoting two science study specialists, Susan Leigh Star and James Griesemer:

> Boundary objects [...] have different meanings in different social worlds, but their structure is common enough to more than one world to make them recognizable, at least recognizable as a means of translation. The creation and management of boundary objects is key in developing and maintaining coherence across intersecting social worlds. (STAR and GRIESEMER 1989, 393)

Here's an example.

> The maps of California created by the amateur collectors and the conservationists resemble traditional road maps familiar to us all, and emphasized campsites, trails and places to collect. The maps created by the professional biologists, however, shared the same outline of the state (with the same geopolitical boundaries), but were filled in with a highly abstract, ecologically-based series of shaded areas representing "life zones," which was an ecological concept. (STAR and GRIESEMER 1989, 410)

So a boundary object is a common point of reference that yet entails layers of differences. You may just want to have a look at some cases of it. Montuschi suggests *happiness* and *climate change* as examples, which she refers to because there are chapters on them in our textbook. In the case of happiness or well-

being, measuring well-being is done in the psychological sciences, in development economics, in gerontology, and in medicine. There are also the concepts of *national well-being* and *child well-being*. Happiness is then a boundary object. It seems very much as if we are looking variously at what we think to be roughly the same thing from different perspectives, though the thing that is in common is a very stripped-down version of what each of the perspectives see. Race too is a boundary object, argues Sophia Efstathiou, who has also written about this in the textbook.

Let's then assume that science is often taking many different perspectives on something that looks like it might be the same thing, though stripped down considerably. How do we police these perspectives? How do we decide which perspectives are better and worse, which ones are acceptable, and which ones not? As I said, the work on interdisciplinary research can help figure out ways to get lessons that can be shared across these different perspectives. I am particularly interested in symptoms that a particular social science perspective is reasonable to include *for the job at hand*, since which ones are acceptable will depend on what we want to accomplish by using them. Here we have a variety of proposals.

We might start with the idea that acceptable perspectives follow the scientific method. The scientific method, I think, was one of the things I was initially asked about: what philosophers of science think about the scientific method and how can it be articulated so that it might be of help to you. I think the answer is we think it can't. It may be tempting to say, "Some of these perspectives are following the scientific method and others aren't and it is the ones that follow the scientific method that we want to use." But doing so won't help much. This is an old lesson taught by the American philosopher of science Hilary Putnam, whose heyday was in the 1960s and 1970s. Putnam tells us that by the time he was writing virtually no one believed that there is a purely formal scientific method. For a long time we tried to come up with a list or a canon on what constitutes the scientific method or some kind of formal system for making inferences, like Bayesianism or inference to the best explanation or falsifiability. What Putnam concludes from many, many studies on this is that, once you try to get something that's reasonably inclusive, it's going to be so abstract as to end up with something as loose as "the conscious application of certain loose methodological maxims." That's what he thinks is the most we can say about what the scientific method consists in (Putnam 1981, 199).

What Putnam ends up with from these considerations is what he thinks of as a unified scientific-ethical enterprise. He draws a very strong conclusion from these loose maxims. As one philosopher of science (Lorenz Krüger) summarizes: "There's a unified coherent cognitive enterprise that comprises values and facts, decisions and insights, ethics and science alike" (Krüger 1993, 158). It is a unified domain of *rationally assertable truths*. So what he's concluded from his work

on the scientific method is that basically what it consists of is rational assertability, where rational has to do with a number of maxims like critical reflection, being open to and actively pursuing where you might be going wrong, and so on. He concludes this because of the elusiveness of the scientific method and the death of the correspondence theory of truth where we could hope that what we are doing with our concepts is just seeing through and matching them right onto the world one-to-one. Putnam says rational assertability is all there is, and rational assertability, according to Putnam, happens alike in science and ethics, and it also happens across different perspectives and different sciences. This, as I said, is a strong conclusion, leaving many looking for what more we might expect of an admissible scientific perspective than just rational assertability.

A recent book by the American philosopher of science, Michael Strevens (Strevens 2020), answers with a theme that is familiar, that the distinguishing feature of science is a procedural agreement on what he calls the "iron rule of explanation," the ultimate judge of explanations: differences in scientific opinions must be *settled by empirical testing alone*. I'm not sure how much help that is to you, how much empirical testing is possible in your field. I do know that because you're doing genuine history that there will be lots of empirical facts by which to test different perspectives. Something that still has a grip (if we're not too narrow in how we interpret it) is Karl Popper's dictum that scientific claims and scientific perspectives be falsifiable. I take it that (interpreted more generously than Popper might have) this is intended to rule out "loose talk": your perspective and the assumptions made within it must be precise enough, concrete enough, and rich and thick enough with respect to the facts you claim in evidence for them that they fix those facts. Suppose I claim, "Look, I've got this set of claims and look here, this fact or that fact supports them." There has to be enough within the theory to see why on the basis of the theory itself the supporting facts should be exactly as we discover them to be. Looking at it this way then, a scientific perspective does not provide an acceptable way to deal with the concrete problem at hand if it is not tightly enough connected with the facts that are supposed to support it and its application to that kind of problem. Of course, while you're developing perspectives—theories, concepts, methods, measurement schemes, and so on—there will be quite a lot of loose talk.

I have done some work on this in a book called *The Tangle of Science* (Cartwright et al. 2023) written with Eleanora Montuschi, whom I've already mentioned, and several other authors. In the book, we're interested in what makes scientific products reliable. What we argue is that they should be supported by a thick, interwoven network of other work, recalling that there are lots and lots of kinds of work that go on in science besides "the accumulation of information," as Chang puts it. There's a huge variety of methods, there are measurement techniques, there's evaluation, evidence, narratives, data (where you must tend

not just to the production of data but to its curation, preservation, and classification as well), rules of application, concepts (where you must consider not just whether they are properly characterized but whether they are consistent and well validated), and so on. So, when you have a particular scientific product—for example, a theory or a measure or an experiment—and you want it to be reliable to do the job you expect of it, what we found is that usually for the ones that are consistently reliable, there's a big, thick, interwoven network—a tangle—of these other kinds of scientific activities and products that back them up.

But what makes for a good tangle? Well, it's a metaphor, but rather than reading the whole book, I'll just give you the metaphor. A good tangle is a tangle woven well enough that the precious eggs—the scientific product that you need to be reliable for the job at hand—won't fall through. The logo for our view is the South African jacana bird. The jacana bird builds its nest from a variety of different kinds of ingredients woven together in quite different ways. And it supports what we think of as the precious eggs of scientific results. I think that this is something you can see, even without going into that kind of philosophical discussion we invoke to defend it in the book, because building in redundancies and filling in gaps is just business as usual in science. For example, if you have a concept that figures in one of the principles you want to put forward and that concept hasn't been subjected to much concept validation, it is standard practice to first try to validate the concept before relying on the principle. So I think it's business as usual to try to build one of these very thick and tangled nests. And I note that these are nests that float, like Neurath's boat (Neurath [1921] 1973, 199), without foundations. (I don't know if you know about the philosopher Otto Neurath. In trying to give us an image contrary to the foundations of science, Neurath argued that we are like sailors having to rebuild our ships at sea without ever being able to go to dry land to build them solidly from scratch. That's a reflection of the fact I have already discussed here, that we are always operating from within the conceptual scheme we have inherited to try to make it better.)

Finally on *objectivity*. I thought we might have a look at what philosophers of science have said about objectivity in an area facing some of the same challenges as you: objectivity in social activist research. The downsides of social activist research with respect to the possibility of being objective have been recently laid out by political philosopher Bas van der Vossen. Citing research from behavioural economics and social psychology, van der Vossen argues that being committed to a cause makes you subject to many, many cognitive biases in researching matters related to it (van der Vossen 2015; 2020). And Africana philosopher Tommy Curry (Curry 2017), from his concerns with intersectionality, argues that activist research with a distinct agenda cannot only be subject to cognitive biases, but it can further reproduce and solidify harmful theoretical frameworks. For example, it may assume a social hierarchy or distribution of

power that obscures unique ways in which individuals in the intersection of different marginalized categories can be victimized or further marginalized.

So those are two advertised downsides and reasons to think that social activist research is going to have a hard time being objective in whatever your favorite sense of objective is. It also has upsides, however. Caring about the welfare of a cause produces an additional incentive to get your methods and results right. And also, *à la* standpoint theory, your standpoint can provide special epistemic access. You see things outsiders don't see and don't understand, and you understand things about them that outsiders are not in a position to.

In this regard it is worth taking note of lessons from general objectivity studies. Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, historians and philosophers of science, show in their history of objectivity (Daston and Galison 2007) how what counts as standards of objectivity in different periods and different domains is different. It is fixed, they claim, by what kinds of truths are thought important to aim for, which changes over time and domain, and what epistemic—and moral—threats are seen as looming. Taking up this kind of claim, philosopher of social science Inkeri Koskinen says that objectivity equals effectively averting the important epistemic risks arising from our imperfections as epistemic agents (Koskinen [2018] 2020).

So in my work with a large team of others, we looked at a special epistemic threat to social activist research, the "ostrich effect." "Activists may be prone... to not notice suggestions that there might be information indicating unpleasant conclusions, or from among all acceptable methods, be prone to choose ones that are less likely to turn up such unpleasantries" (Cartwright et al. forthcoming). But there can be specific strategies to offset the ostrich effect. Foster pluralism. Ensure the work meets ordinary high standards for the disciplines. Actively seek out uncomfortable truths. Continually engage with the ethics and politics of the research. Undertake critical, regular self-reflection. And make concerted efforts at transparency about what was settled on, and why, at each choice point in the research. So these are some strategies to offset a threat. Yes, social activist research has both upsides and downsides with respect to objectivity. But the problems raised by the downsides can in part be averted by making efforts and devising strategies to meet and offset threats, like those we proposed for protecting from the ostrich effect.

In conclusion. I'm really sorry that philosophy of science is not more helpful to you. My two positive suggestions are, first, that you can try to identify specific epistemic threats that you're worried about and devise strategies to offset them, and second, build thick, tangled nests for the historical claims you embrace, emulating the jacana bird.

Jeppe Sinding Jensen, Comments

I have some very positive comments, but I also have some, well, I wouldn't say critical, but inquisitive points that I would like us to clarify in relation to the study of religion, which is perhaps a very special subject area in the academy.

So my response to "objectivity, values, and commitment" as the title goes will focus on some of the issues that certainly touch on Nancy's presentation, but perhaps expand them a bit in the direction of the study of religion, which is where I come from. I started with very traditional studies in the history of religions and then gradually more toward philosophy. So, I may not be the most skilled philosopher, but then again, I do have some experience with the study of religion. I was in that for about forty years. So here we are now. I should comment on the most relevant ideas about what matters for the study of religion, which was for many years called the history of religions. It's a German remnant from when all things had a "Geschichte" and everything was, you know, a history of art, the history of literature, history. But gradually this has been changed into the study of religion. And in my own country, we even dare to say that we talk about *Religionsvidenskab*, which is precisely what is meant by the German *Religionswissenschaft*. So, we are very generous here with the term *Wissenschaft*. It's been with us for a long time.

And in the study of religion, or the science of religion as I might even call it, we usually see two kinds of normativity operating; the one which I favor most is *methodological* normativity, which concerns how we best do research, and the second is *moral-political* normativity, which is about how we are to behave to be good humans. Now these are very often conflated. I shall say no more about it for now, but they *are* very often conflated. Nancy quoted that "One cannot use values to direct the selection of a problem and a formulation of a methodology that in combination predetermines (or substantially restricts) the outcomes of a study. Such an approach undermines the core value of science, to produce reliable knowledge […]" But we do know that we need values simply to get us started. We have to find something interesting. And then of course we have now, these days, postmodern, postcolonial, and all other kinds of very critical studies say that what used to be seen as just simple curiosity has to do with colonialism, and so on. But then again, what we can learn from that is, I'm quoting here, Jonathan Z. Smith, a great hero of mine, I should say, to be open to scrutiny, criticism, and relentless self-criticism. And it is widely agreed, you know, on the issue of objectivity and the issue of value.

And now, when some people will not leave their values out of the picture, then I would say that this is more of a psychological problem because the people there, with something other than science, they have different aims. And one could ask, what is it that you really want? If you think that, then science or as

it seems to be seen in the invitation, pure science or positivistic science. If you don't like that, what is it that you want instead? So, I think we should keep this in mind because some of the criticism that I find of the scientific endeavors of the study of religion also in IAHR are criticisms that are launched from quarters, from people, from groups, that are not really trying to or willing to pursue scientific paths. So, I think we shall ask, well, if you're not satisfied, what is it you want instead? Then of course, we always have values to say like, why do we do it? Why did, why did the people in the British colonial administration study religion in India? Well, you know, historical studies have proved why and how and so on. Why were there so many British anthropologists in the colonial administration? And for what, for whom and for which interest do we or did they work? Who pays? Who pays your bills? Who pays for your research? And what institutions have the power to promote you, for instance? So, science is always conducted, not just within implicit and explicit scientific conceptual frames, but by real people with real experiences that shape what they see, what they know, and how they know it. So, we're all entangled in institutional political mazes, you could say, not always easy to escape because it's not just what individuals want. It depends on where you are. Institutions and organizations have programs. Some are normatively religious, for instance, Catholic universities. A friend of mine recently applied for a chair in a Catholic university. He'd just forgotten that he himself was not a Catholic, and then he didn't get the job as a matter of course. Now, these things matter especially for the social sciences that study human social behavior. We all know we have think tanks studying whatever in the social sciences and one is conservative and one is liberal and neither trust the other.

That brings me to the notion of the boundary objects. I think this is really an interesting point because it is a common point of reference that entails layers of differences. I mean, religion is an example of a very complex boundary object. What is the *explans*? By what means do you explain religion? And what is the *explanandum*? What really is the thing to be explained? Is there a thing or is religion simply beyond our epistemic grasp in its entirety because it is really such a composite complex? So perhaps we need pluralistic epistemologies for complex topics. And then I would like to introduce, or here just continue using, the distinction between e-religion and i-religion as known from linguistics; the *external* religion is pilgrimages, churches, cathedrals, books, and rituals, and i-religion as the *internal*, internal to the body, internal to the person, the participant, religion as beliefs and psychological. All the psychological states, you may say. And then ask, is it possible to have multiple changing standpoints? I think yes. And to be provocative, I think it's good to have as many as possible, to have a pluralist epistemology or perhaps even a "promiscuous realism." I didn't invent those terms, the philosopher of science, John Dupré, to whom I shall return in a minute, did.

Then again, I would like once more to quote Michael Strevens, who Nancy also mentions. The distinguishing feature of science is a procedural agreement on the "iron rule of explanation," which is precisely to uncover or generate new evidence. Now, normally we don't see much in the way of progress in the study of religion. Perhaps someone discovers a new manuscript somewhere in a cave, but otherwise new knowledge is not often produced, and if it is, it's not often agreed upon, because there are so many different ways of weighing or assessing the evidence of new explanations. In the study of religion, I have often encountered the stance where someone says, "Well, that sounds interesting, but I don't like it," as if that's enough to discard a new achievement. But then again, we see what kind of explanation it is that we want, or that we can have, in the humanities. And Strevens said, "Differences in scientific opinion must be settled by empirical testing alone." I'm not so familiar with or not so happy with the "alone." And I would say "no." And we must remember the idea of the underdetermination of theory by evidence. Getting concepts right must be settled first. Are we, for instance, talking about the mind or the brain? Are we talking about religion as if it were the same as revelation? So, I certainly agree with Strevens, but before we can get to the empirical testing, we need some conceptual clarification, it often seems.

I certainly agree with Nancy and Karl Popper, who's a shining star in my universe, that scientific perspectives must be falsifiable. "No loose talk." Yes, I agree with that. Your perspective and assumptions must be precise enough, concrete enough, and rich/thick enough with respect to facts you claim in evidence for them that they fix those facts. But then again, what is your theoretical object in the study of religion? What is it that you really want to know? What is possible in your chosen or favorite theoretical universe? Some people, though, want to know what the believers think or do here and there, some want to go beyond that. It's not unusual for participants in the study of religion, to really want to go beyond that which we can say anything sensible about, that is to go into, to be blunt, to go from talk about God to what God really is, or all sorts of spiritual interests. So, what is your theoretical object? It has to be something that appears within the bounds of the falsifiable. And what is possible in a religious worldview? Well, I think we could say that in contrast to a scientific worldview, where thinking is actually open, then what is possible in your religious worldview is that which is already in it. And no more.

We have mentioned philosophers before, like Bas van der Vossen and Tommy Curry. And all I can say, if you want to do activist research, because one could reasonably, you know, be called to do that, you must again be relentlessly self-critical and consider the criticism of others. If you want to do activist research, you should be very careful about getting it right. And now to John Dupré, whose work was a great inspiration for me at one point, and he still is. He says there's no

single final demarcation line between science and no-science. And as the word "science" is used today in the modern Anglophone community, the study of religion would not be considered a science, which I think is a problem. And to be honest, I think the problem with science and no-science is actually a problem of the English language being the lingua franca, sorry, in the modern scientific world, because what we do is, hopefully, that's what we strive for, is to be, to get it as good as we can. So there are epistemic virtues, as John Dupré calls it. The sciences are fields of "knowledge-gathering practices," and they're closer to each other than conventionally conceived. The natural sciences now tend toward the "subjective," in the sense that the influences of human factors are acknowledged in all kinds of science. And the human sciences have become much more "objective" with the existence of cultural, linguistic, or semiotic systems through which human affairs are mediated. And these systems are objective, social facts. Anyone who would doubt that should visit Sanskrit grammar. So here are a few quotes from John Dupré's book on epistemic virtues. He says,

> Sensitivity to empirical fact, plausible background, assumptions, coherence with other things we know, exposure to criticism from the widest variety of sources, and no doubt others. Some of the things we call "science" have many such virtues, others very few. (DUPRÉ 1993, 242)

And he gives an example of the works of philosophy or literary criticism more closely connected to empirical fact, coherent with other things we know, and exposed to criticism from different sources than large parts of, say, macroeconomics or theoretical ecology. Then, "there is no sharp distinction between science and lesser forms of knowledge, but it might fairly be said, if paradoxically, that with the disunity of science comes a kind of unity of knowledge." I think this is fairly profound and ought to be remembered.

And then Nancy's final comment is that she is sorry that the philosophy of science is not more helpful. Well, I say, good, thank you. But then again, we in the study of religion must remember to relentlessly question what it is that we study. And how does the object shape the discipline? In the past, the object was not just religion, it was religious scriptures, by and large. And you know, the kind of qualifications you needed to be a member of the club were philological competences. And this of course means that the object shapes the discipline [in what concerns methodological normativity]. The object has moved today from sacred scriptures to religious behaviors, for instance, religious institutions, and others, religious cognition, for instance. So we, at the best.... When someone asks me, "What is the object of the study of religion?," I will say, well, in contrast to what you may think, that although we have the word "religion," we don't really have the thing. And then the best I can say is that it's obscure. But it's okay. And it's messy. And that means that we may sometimes have to adjust our opinions,

change our minds about things. And then we get to a problem that seems to be perennial, [namely] that it's difficult to change one's mind. Why is it so difficult to change one's mind or those of others?

Kevin Schilbrack, Comments

PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE AND THE ACADEMIC STUDY OF RELIGION: A RESPONSE TO NANCY CARTWRIGHT

From my perspective in the academic study of religions, I would like to make three supportive comments on points that were made by Nancy Cartwright in her presentation. The first comment has to do with values being ineliminable from the scientific study of religion. The second comment has to do with something that Jeppe Jensen also brought up, namely, the proposed distinction between values that are merely procedural or methodological on the one hand, and values that are moral or political on the other. And the third comment has to do with the relationship between values and realism, a relationship that connects my comments to the recent works in philosophy of science that Nancy recommended.

Here is the first of the three points which, as I said, has to do with the question of whether values are ineliminable from the scientific study of religion. Since I was fourteen, and even before I had a word for this, I have been an ontological naturalist. I do not believe that supernatural entities exist. If I were to list everything that I think is real, I would not include God. I also would not include gods in the plural, nor any disembodied spirits. In addition, this ontological commitment to naturalism also shapes the explanations that I consider plausible. I do not use supernatural entities to explain events that happen. For example, if there was a battle that was won against all expectations, I would not explain that in terms of a divine aid. If someone who recovered from an illness despite what the doctors predicted, I would not explain that in terms of the prayers of their loved ones. Given my commitment to naturalism, I would not explain events as the result of karma, the zodiac, angels, or, as one of my students recently told me, a special kind of crystal that brings love into her life. I am not persuaded by René Descartes' arguments that the mind can exist independent of any biological ground. I would not explain the difference between the inorganic molecules of chemistry and the first simple organisms of biology, with Henri Bergson, in terms of *élan vital*. And I would not explain the course of the course of nations in history, with G. W. F. Hegel, in terms of *Geist*. All of this means that I am not only an ontological naturalist, but also a methodological naturalist.

It is an interesting question whether methodological naturalism should be adopted as a rule for the academic study of religion—or perhaps as a rule for the university as a whole. Should academics only accept explanations in terms of

natural entities when we decide who gets published, who gets hired, what classes we teach, and so on? I have found that there is a lot of resistance to this idea about making the normative commitment to methodological naturalism that I have for my own work into a university-wide rule for everyone (See SCHILBRACK forthcoming). There is resistance from theologians, unsurprisingly, but also there is also resistance from those who think that the university should not have a *de jure* rule for every kind of academic scholarship, a universal rule that would be officially sanctioned. How best to settle this *de jure* question is an interesting issue for the academy. No matter how that question is settled, however, my sense is that methodological naturalism is already a *de facto* rule at most universities. That is, I am not the only one who will not accept explanations like the supernatural ones I mentioned concerning disembodied spirits, an *élan vital*, or *Geist*, and the resistance to supernatural causes is not found only in the departments of the academic study of religion. If you go to the history department, no scholars there explain things in terms of *Geist*. If you go to the political science department, no scholars there explain things in terms of the hand of God. No scholars in the physics or biology departments explain phenomena as miracles.

To return to the focus of our discussion, my point is that the methodological naturalism that is widely shared in the academic study of religion, and that is widely shared in the academy as a whole, is a value. It is a personal commitment. Given this commitment to naturalism, I cannot describe my work as value-free. Similarly, I cannot describe the scholarship created by other scholars who share this commitment to methodological naturalism as value-free. If someone did not hold this view, and they permitted explanations in terms of supernatural entities, their work would reflect that value. I am therefore agreeing, then, with Nancy and others who say that all inquiry, including all science, is value-laden. Her point was that endorsing values is inevitable in the academy, and I am agreeing with that. I hope that this example of methodological naturalism is persuasive in particular to scholars of religion.

My second comment has to do with the distinction that Jeppe makes between values that are merely procedural or methodological and values that are moral or political. One hears a distinction like this fairly often. This is another live issue in the academy and in the academic study of religion. If one agrees with Nancy, that is, if one agrees with any post-positivist philosophy of science between the 1950s and the present, the overwhelming consensus, as Nancy said, is that values are ineliminable. However, some have proposed, as Jeppe mentions, that procedural or methodological values are ineliminable, but moral or political values can be eliminated. Perhaps the naturalism just mentioned is a procedural or methodological value. One might propose that letting one's work be guided by procedural or methodological values enables good scientific inquiry, and so these values are unproblematic, but letting one's work be guided by moral

or political values disables good scientific inquiry. But I am skeptical of this proposal. As Jeppe said, these two allegedly distinct kinds of values are mixed together, and there is no clear guidance yet about exactly how one might be able to pull them apart. As with my first comment, I want not only to state a position but also to provide an example that I hope helps us think about this issue. The issue has to do with whether moral values disable good scientific inquiry, and I want to share an example that is adapted from the work of Roy Bhaskar. Bhaskar is the founder of the critical realist movement, a philosopher of science who offers a realist theory of science. *A Realist Theory of Science* ([1975] 2008) is in fact the title of his first book, which focused on the natural sciences. The example that I want to share comes from his second book, *The Possibility of Naturalism* ([1979] 2015) which focused on the social sciences, and I think that he drew it from Isaiah Berlin (2000). The comment I am making is that letting one's work be guided by moral and political values need not incapacitate, disable, harm, or distort one's scientific inquiry. Here is Bhaskar's example.

I am going to make three statements about the Holocaust, and the question is: which of the three statements is the most objective, precise, and accurate? The first statement is that *in World War II, six million Jews lost their lives*. The second statement is that *in World War II, six million Jews were killed*. And the third statement is that *in World War II, six million Jews were systematically murdered*. The difference between the statements turns on the morally charged verbs, "lost their lives," "killed," or "murdered." The first phrase is relatively neutral. How did the six million die? From the first statement, one cannot tell. They might have died of heart attacks. The second statement eliminates that possibility, and it is more precise. The six million were killed. Was the killing just? From the second statement, we cannot tell. They might have been killed in self-defense. But the third one uses the verb, "murdered." To say that someone was murdered means that they were killed unjustly. Injustice is part of the definition of the term "murder." "Murder" is a morally evaluative term. I would propose that the second statement captures the specific character of the event better than the first, and the third captures that character even more perspicuously than the second. The third statement is the most objective, precise, and accurate. The statement that *in World War II, six million Jews lost their lives* is the least objective, accurate, and precise. If this is right, then it turns out that the value-free language of the first statement actually obscures the facts. The morally charged, value-laden language of the third statement illuminates those facts. When one is talking about murders, then the third statement offers us the most accurate grasp of that object. Jeppe asked the good ontological question: What is the object that we are studying? When one is talking about unjust killing, that is, a value-laden reality, then one of those three statements is more objective than the other two. It follows that it is not true that letting one's work be guided by moral or political values

always disables good scientific inquiry. On the contrary, value-free language can obscure the objective facts. That is my second comment.

Related to this second comment, Nancy has a paper that I would recommend to those interested in how to think of objectivity when it is coupled with the scholar's moral values. To prepare for our meeting, I read Nancy's newest book, *A Philosopher Looks at Science* (Cartwright 2022), which is very accessible and could be taught in undergraduate classrooms. But Nancy is also one of the authors of a paper entitled "Toward a Theory of Objectivity for Activist Research" (forthcoming). The second point that I am making—that moral values can enable and empower good scientific inquiry and so-called neutral statements that leave moral and political values out of the equation can disable good scientific inquiry—supports the argument in her paper that bringing activist values into one's social descriptions can sometimes distort but in some cases can enable a properly objective account of the phenomena in question.

My third and last comment has to do with realism, that is, the view that we study things in the world whose existence is independent of our inquiries in them. My first comment was that I agree with Nancy that values are inevitable in scholarship. My second comment was that even moral or political values need not incapacitate or invalidate one's work. However, balancing one's values with accurate descriptions of the world is tricky. It is not always clear how to admit the role of value commitments without undermining the pursuit of truth and sliding into relativism. I think that we can say that a claim is objectively true when the claim accurately describes its object. A scientific explanation would then be objectively true when it accurately describes the causal mechanisms that explain the phenomenon in question. If that is what we mean by being objective, then it is possible for a claim to combine objectivity and subjectivity. A scholar may make a descriptive or explanatory claim because it seems true from their standpoint. If a scholar makes that claim because they want it to be true, but the claim does not accurately describe its object, then we can say that the claim is distorted by the subjective values of the scholar. But subjective values and objectivity are not always opposed. A claim can describe the way the world seems from a particular perspective and also be true of the phenomenon in question. A claim can be what the scholar wants to be true and still also be true. There will be claims made from a particular, value-laden standpoint that are accurate about the object, and others that are not. There will be claims made from a particular, value-laden standpoint that are inaccurate because of that standpoint, and others that are accurate precisely because of that standpoint. The contribution of a scholar's standpoint to what they are able to see is part of the thesis of Nancy's paper on objectivity for activist researchers. I think we in the academic study of religion want to defend objectivity without claiming that we are studying religion from no location, that we have no political preferences, that we work without presup-

positions, or that we have a God's eye view or a view from nowhere. We want to defend objectivity without claiming that we have no subjectivity. The benefit of such a "both/and" position would be an appreciation of inquiries in the academic study of religion that are both value-laden and objective. This "both/and" goal is one that Nancy shares and (to repeat some of the names she gave us) this goal is also shared by Helen Longino, Sandra Harding, Donna Haraway, "standpoint theory," Ronald Giere's "scientific perspectivism" (2006) and Michela Massimi's "perspectival realism" (2022). All of these thinkers are seeking a post-positivist, "both/and" position that defends objectivity without hiding or denying one's own value-laden perspective. I am not equally confident about Hasok Chang's "pragmatic realism" (2022). I am not sure whether his philosophy of science is too pragmatist to be realist in the full sense that I would want, but this is nitpicking. My third and closing comment is that the position that Nancy is sketching—namely, a "both/and" approach that does not deny that we work with value-laden perspectives while it nevertheless seeks objectivity in its account of real causal mechanisms operating in our social lives—offers a balanced foundation for the inquiries of value-committed scholars. A realist philosophy of science like this can provide a healthy framework for the academic study of religion.

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Roundtable

Chair: Welcome to this session, featuring a roundtable with six esteemed members representing diverse perspectives within the IAHR, each from different continents or islands. Let me introduce our speakers, from left to right:

First, Professor Amy Allocco from Elon University, USA. Professor Allocco has chaired the International Connections Committee of the American Academy of Religion (AAR) and coordinates the IAHR's Women Scholars Network.

Next to her is Professor Blanca Solares Altamirano from the National Autonomous University of Mexico. Since 2020 she has been an active member of the IAHR's Executive Committee.

Next, Dr. Denzil Chetty from the University of South Africa. He is a member of the IAHR group of Study-of-Religion-based Religious Education. He has been an editor for the IAHR book series since 2020.

Next, Professor Shahnaj Husne Jahan, from the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh. Professor Jahan hosted the 8th SSEASR conference and currently serves as the Secretary General of the South and Southeast Asian Association for the Study of Culture and Religion (SSEASR), a regional association of the IAHR, as well as the Secretary General of BSSCR, a national association of the IAHR.

Next, Dr. David G. Robertson from the Open University, UK. He is the cofounder of the Religious Studies Project supported by the IAHR. He is also an editor for the BASR (British Association for the Study of Religions) bulletin and has reviewed Professor Donald Wiebe's critical book on the IAHR.

Lastly, Professor Shusuke Yamane from the National Institute of Technology, Maizuru College, Japan. He is a graduate of the religious studies department of

Kyoto University, which is known for having produced prominent philosophers of religion called the Kyoto school. When I brought the former EC's proposal to the board members of the JARS, the proposal to insert the word "science" into the IAHR's constitution, it was the members of the current Kyoto school who were most vehemently opposed to it. Professor Yamane represents the younger generation of Kyoto's philosophers of religion.

For this roundtable I have asked each speaker to deliver a 5- to 10-minute presentation addressing any combination of the following topics:[1]

1. Here is a more comprehensive document that I distributed to the speakers when planning the conference.

Roundtable session

Aim

Discuss how such an understanding (or understandings) of the science-ness of the study of religion can achieve a broad consensus among the IAHR member associations. Previous attempts have at times been seen as a one-way process from Europe to the rest of the world, or even as an act of controlling or policing member associations, which is inappropriate for an international academic federation. (Is the problem a matter of procedure or that of contents of the definition of the science-ness?)

Goal

- Raise awareness of the importance of the issue across different national and regional associations.
- Explore how "science" and the science-ness of the study of religion are understood and articulated in each other's national and regional contexts.
- Share findings as to whether the call for social relevance of the humanities and social sciences is viewed as a possible threat to the study of religion in each national or regional context or whether meeting such a call is considered routine. Additionally, whether such a call includes taking a political position.

How to proceed

A. 5–10 minute presentation by each of the 6 speakers, discussing any combination of the following topics:

- Whether calling the study of religion "science" is problematic in their local academic and linguistic contexts.
- How their associations have reacted or not reacted to the IAHR EC's idea of changing the name of the IAHR and a part of its constitution, which was announced in 2019.
- How their associations have reacted or not reacted to the IAHR EC statement about the Russian war against Ukraine.
- What their associations and/or they expect from the IAHR.
- How the IAHR can better promote the academic study of religion globally.

B. Questions from Jeppe Sinding Jensen and Kevin Schilbrack and responses from roundtable speakers

C. Questions from the floor and responses from all

- The appropriateness of labeling the study of religion as a "science" in their respective local academic and linguistic contexts.
- The reactions or lack thereof from their associations to the IAHR Executive Committee's (EC) proposal to change the IAHR's name and a part of its constitution, as announced in 2019.
- The responses or non-responses of their associations to the IAHR EC's statement regarding the Russian war against Ukraine.
- Expectations their associations and/or they themselves have from the IAHR.
- Suggestions on how the IAHR can more effectively promote the academic study of religion globally.

Following these six presentations, there will be a question-and-answer session with Professor Jeppe Sinding Jensen and Professor Kevin Schilbrack. After approximately 30 minutes of discussion, we will open the floor to the audience for further questions and comments.

Allocco: I am here representing the American Academy of Religion as a delegate, so I will give you a few perspectives from the American academy. The AAR understands itself as a mission-centric organization and here I want to break the mission statement down into two parts: (1) fostering excellence in the academic study of religion, and (2) enhancing the public understanding of religion. Professor Tim Jensen in his opening remarks mentioned the size of the AAR, and it's difficult to think about generalizing the opinions of this number of people, but I did spend some time talking with the new Executive Director, Claudia Schippert, during my preparations, as well as with current and past AAR board members about some of the questions that Professor Fujiwara has set for us today. But I think it's also relevant to think about the fact that although it is called the American Academy of Religion, 10 to 15 percent of its membership is international. There has been a lot of emphasis on values in the presentation so far today. Similarly, when I spoke with Claudia Schippert, they also mentioned the values of the AAR as something worth highlighting here today. As you can see in the AAR Professional Conduct Statement that was adopted in 2018, eight values that guide and energize our scholarship and teaching were enumerated. I won't read these aloud for you here because we have such limited time, but I think it's relevant as we think about terms like "non-confessional" and "non-apologetical" to think about the fact that at least for the AAR, they chose to go the route here in naming values rather than identifying conduct that was inconsistent with values, such as discrimination, harassment, exploitation, violence, and so on.

There is also the Statement on Responsible Research Practices, which was issued in 2016. And here what I want to highlight rather than reading all of this

to you is diversity. This large body of scholars, though smaller than it was even ten years ago because of shrinking resources and the increasing reliance on part-time and contingent labor in the United States, displays great diversity in the ways that our institutions are configured, we engage various audiences, and employ different methods. And this theoretical and methodological pluralism is part of what gives rise to what we hope will be constructive and generative debate about the diversity of approaches. And here again, we have a set of values that were outlined around honesty, justice, fairness, and accountability in our statement on research practices. Germane to our focus here in these two days, on the slide there is a line from the statement that talks about the ways that we recognize that religion, our chosen focus, stirs passions and shapes cultures and influences politics. The AAR board tries to decide where to weigh in on political issues guided by its mission statement.

The second half of the AAR's mission statement talks about the public understanding of religion and advancing it. To that end, it has a standing committee that fosters attention to the broad public understanding of religion and the role of religion in public life. That group is actually aiming toward engaging these issues and equipping members to engage these issues in public contexts and in the public sphere. As such, that committee organizes webinars and conference sessions and media skills workshops—very practical endeavors to equip members. It also gives awards. It participates in the selection process for the AAR's journalism award to recognize excellence in religion reporting in a time of contracting print media and reporting on journalism, where we see the loss of religion beats at many newspapers. We can see in these activities that the AAR understands advancing the public understanding of religion as principal work that members are engaged in doing.

I want to highlight two initiatives that are public-facing that have come about in recent years and have really shaped the way that a lot of American academics and members of the American Academy of Religion who might not be American are approaching their work. One set or cluster of them is around religion and journalism, and I'm highlighting here one initiative called Sacred Writes, which was founded in 2018 at Northeastern University, funded by the Luce and the Carpenter Foundations, headed up by Professor Liz Bucar, with the goals of combatting misinformation and prejudice and improving public religious literacy. It accomplishes these goals through two main aims. First is public scholarship training programs for religion scholars so that they can speak to the public about their work. Speaking broadly and accessibly about our research and expertise is not something that is taught to us in graduate school and not something that many of us are particularly good at, in fact. Second is media partnerships, where journalists are paired with scholars. To date, since Sacred Writes was founded in 2018, they have trained ninety scholars through these

funded fellowships, established seventeen media partnerships, and published 430 pieces of public scholarship that have scholarly perspectives infused. This kind of training and exposure is something that we are seeing in the crop of graduate students who are being hired into tenure track (and other) lines in our departments, and which is considered a desirable set of skills to come into the academy with right now in the American context.

The second initiative, which might be familiar to many of you, is now called Interfaith America, founded in 2002 by Eboo Patel. It's a common good project that emphasizes the positive effects of religious diversity with a very U.S.-American focus. Interfaith America really emphasizes both inclusion of religiously diverse communities as well as the contribution to diverse democracy. And it says that its mission is to inspire, equip, and connect leaders and institutions. Essentially this organization is trying to leverage the power and potential of America's religious diversity. As one approach to emphasizing America's religious diversity, the organization provides a whole range of consultation, training, and curricular resources. It has endeavored to and has now published peer-reviewed scholarship in and on the emerging field of interreligious studies. Interfaith America also offers a number of grants, some of which are aimed at colleges and universities establishing minors and academic pathways in interreligious and interfaith studies. This organization definitely has normative goals and motivations. Although some uneasiness has certainly been voiced about being involved in these normative goals, scholars have largely embraced these aims and projects. Why? Because they share many of these goals about diversity and bridge-building as well as an appreciation for religious difference. As a result of this support, there are now a number of academic minors in interfaith and interreligious studies, including at our own university at Elon.

So to focus specifically on the prompt that Professor Fujiwara has set for us, I want to just say that calling the study of religion "scientific" is not a term that largely resonates for most AAR members, in part because we understand the study of religion largely in terms of its location in the humanities, but also because of the simple sort of etymological and linguistic weight or connotation of "science." I've talked with others in the American academy about this just to make sure that my leanings on this resonate with them. Some have used words like "alienating" about the idea of calling themselves "scientists" as scholars of religion. Undoubtedly, the U.S.-centric focus of some members is a factor, but there has been very little to none in terms of a reaction to the IAHR's EC's proposed name change as well as to their statement about the Russian war on Ukraine. So these are not things that were widely discussed in the American academy. I'll say a little bit more about that in a moment.

The IAHR and the AAR became formally intertwined in 2010, a partnership which is now quite established, although "pandemic time" sort of shrinks that

thirteen-year period and makes it a bit smaller. This has also been a time of constrained resources. Travel to conferences and exchange across international borders for U.S.-based academics has constricted in this period. I have already mentioned the reliance on part-time and contingent labor. It is worth talking more about how those trends and practices affect both U.S.-based AAR members and international members, noting that our largest contingent from that second group of 10 to 15 percent of international members come from Canada. Despite really important work by Professor Rosalind Hackett and Professor Tim Jensen and the years that I chaired the International Connections Committee of the AAR, we still labor to have scholars in the American Academy of Religion understand themselves also as members of the IAHR and to understand and realize the potential of that partnership. Advancing that awareness remains a set of challenges to which we are committed.

When we think about statements such as the one that the EC issued on the Russian war against Ukraine, we should think about this in dialogue with the policy that the AAR has established on letters and board statements and resolutions just over a year ago. Because enhancing the public understanding of religion is a key part of the mission, the AAR board has often found itself in a position of making public pronouncements. And these generally, and this is bullet point one, concern issues that are mission-centric, that are concerning the academic study of religion in very particular ways. But there are also times that they have stepped beyond that mandate. I include for you here on the slide a list of some of the recent statements. Conspicuously absent, obviously, is a statement on the Russian war against Ukraine. Note that the most recent one is focused on the crisis in Israel and Palestine. The AAR board has recently adopted a new policy, as you see listed there, where members need to propose the language and a draft statement if they would like to see the AAR board adopt a resolution or a statement. This shift was in part because a board of volunteers was besieged by requests for statements and had difficulty responding to this number of requests. Since adopting this policy they have seen a rapid downturn in the number of requests since members who are proposing that statements be issued would have to then draft the language and propose it themselves. This information might be relevant to our conversations here in Tokyo.

I need to conclude here, so I'll just say by way of closing that there are a number of ways forward that I can think about for the AAR and the IAHR. I have been deeply invested in this work. Communication obviously is key and leaders from each organization have prioritized in-person meetings. For example, at every American Academy of Religion conference, Professor Tim Jensen makes time to meet with the Executive Director of the AAR to make sure that communication pathways are open. We have worked assiduously to make sure that IAHR e-Bulletins are shared with the AAR membership. We have also had a number of people

informally operating in ambassadorial roles. Conference participation is key and I hope to see many members of the AAR in Kraków in 2025; we will work to make sure that is publicized well. But even sending delegates, as Professor Schilbrack and I have learned, has been challenging in some ways because the AAR finds itself in a resource-constrained environment and does not always have the budget to support the travel for delegates. Having virtual options like we do for this meeting and opening up further hybrid options is really important. More publicity could be drawn to the opportunities of publishing with NVMEN and its relationship to the IAHR for American Academy of Religion members. The IAHR could also help raise awareness of the AAR grant program through the International Connections Committee, which is open to all IAHR members and indeed designed to have at least one IAHR member as part of every collaborative grant team. That program deserves additional publicity. The nature of our collaboration and partnership needs to be thought about as dynamic. For example, the AAR will host its first virtual meeting this June, and that might be another opportunity for IAHR members to participate in the American Academy of Religion as accessibility options become more and more widespread with virtual meetings taking on a new role as we move forward. Thank you.

Solares: My intervention is going to be centered on the role of science in 2023 in the current context of the war (particularly in Ukraine and now in Gaza) and the global ecological crisis that affects the Third World. What is religion? How do studies of religion open their methodological approach to understand the "Other"? In what way can studies of religion contribute to the understanding of the spiritual crisis or "loss of meaning" in our time? Can the study of religions counteract the forces of market, media, and states?

In relation to these questions, I want to preserve the theoretical and methodological spirit of the founders of IAHR and its development in our time. I will try to put on the table some theoretical arguments that could support our decision about the role of science in the IAHR for the study of religions and the possible changes in its constitution.

1. The study of religions has a long history in the same way as the notion of science. We are not dealing, now, with one or the other. However, it is important to keep in mind that both are evolving concepts related to a context and geography. Thus, the positive science of the eighteenth century in Europe is not the same as the conception of knowledge as "sacred science" in premodern societies before Christ, and that even today it tries to survive particularly in non-European territories. It is important to take this into account, it seems to me, when answering the question that summons us today regarding whether the IAHR can be engaged and relevant without being a political or confessional

instance, as well as the subsequent question regarding the place of science (or *Wissenschaft* in the German sense) nowadays.

2. Following the historian of religions Henri Charles Puech,[2] we can say that the scientific study of religious facts in and of themselves, as simple facts accessible to direct observation, calls into question religion itself. For religion alludes to the life of men and women in connection with the transcendent, that is, with the empirically unrepresentable, and whose expression is not exhausted in a conventional meaning. This feature undoubtedly explains the distrust with which, in the institutionalized field of positive sciences, the study of religion, as well as the history of art, literature, and philosophy have been treated, marginally and with scarce resources at all levels and in all countries. But in addition to this suspicion and declared fear of what we can call "sciences of man"[3] is added another major obstacle: skepticism about the theoretical viability or autonomy of the history of religions as a scientific discipline.

3. The history of the International ssociation for the History of Religions (IAHR), however, which cannot be separated from the edition of *Numen*, an international journal dedicated to publishing works focused on the scientific and non-confessional study of religions, denies these ideas. This is deduced from the important collection of documents offered by the magnificent book edited by Tim Jensen and Armin W. Geertz, *Numen. The Academic Study of Religion and the IAHR: Past, Present, and Prospects* (2015).

In this already long history of the IAHR, which goes from 1950 to the present day, it is significant that Raffaele Pettazzoni, Italian anthropologist, archaeologist, professor, and historian of religions proposed a name change from the International Association for the Study of History of Religions (IASHR) to the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR, 1955) and introduced phenomenology as a theoretical proposal for the study of religions.

Pettazzoni, a well-known precursor of the scientific studies (*Wissenschaft*) of religion, points to phenomenology as one of the most important steps in the method for the study of religious phenomenon. In our opinion, it is this development that the IAHR must continue to promote today in the same spirit.

4. In this sense and in order to enrich our debate, it seems to me that we should not overlook the contributions of symbolic hermeneutics to the study of the history of religions, developed by the Eranos Circle, throughout much of the twentieth century. In short, I will try to provide arguments in favor of this statement. The Eranos Circle was undoubtedly the work of Olga Fröbe. Between 1933–1988, she managed to gather on the shores of Lake Maggiore, in Azcona, Switzerland, an important group of scholars of religion, among them Hugo

2. Henri Charles Puech, *Histoire des religions*, 3 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1971–1977).

3. Gilbert Durand, *Science de l'homme et tradition* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1979).

Rahner, Paul Tillich, Martin Buber, Gerardus van der Leew, Gershom Scholem, Henri Corbin, Hayao Kawai, D. T. Suzuki, the founder of the IAHR Raffaelo Petazzoni and one of his disciples, and the outstanding historian of religions M. Eliade. It should be remembered that the very name of "Eranos" was suggested to Fröbe by the renowned theologian and phenomenologist of religions Rudolph Otto, author of several books including *The Holy* (1917), and whose subtitle also puts us immediately in connection with the ambiguity of our object of study: "On the rational and the irrational in the idea of God."[4]

Undoubtedly, it can be said that the fundamental theoretical feature that characterized the meetings of Eranos was the study of religious expressions considered to be irrational in the field of scientific-positive thought prevailing at the time.

The first meetings of the Eranos Circle, between 1933–1939, began with the contrast of religious attitudes and feelings between East and West. They were focused on the lived experiences of the sacred in ancient Eastern and Western cultures and their survival in modernity from a scientific perspective rather than dogmatic or confessional, esoteric or theosophical.[5] Thus, among the topics discussed, we can mention yoga, meditation, the idea of liberation, and the symbolism of rebirth.[6]

During the war years of 1940–1945, despite the imminent dangers of National Socialism, and together with the physician and psychologist C. G. Jung, Olga Fröbe makes the decision to continue the lectures dedicated on this occasion to the study of Christian symbolism. After a period of seven years dedicated to Eastern and especially Indian religiosity, they both believe that 1939 marks the end of a phase and the beginning of a new cycle. We know that, in some way, this change of course also had to do, above all, with the visit to Rome of Karl Kerényi, the Hungarian scholar, philologist, and scholar of Greek mythology, assiduous attendee of the meetings of Eranos, who put Olga Fröbe in contact with various professors who were linked to the Vatican while interested in attending the Azcona Conferences. Outstanding among the topics covered were Hermeticism, early Christianity, gnosis, solar and light symbolism, alchemy, the soul, nature, and mysteries.

From 1947 to 1971, according to Andrés Ortiz-Osés, a Spanish member of this elite group of scientists and who, in addition, assumed the responsibility of disseminating his thought through the edition of its *Yearbooks* (Jaharbucher)

4. Rudolf Otto, *Das Heilige. Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen* (1917). See also Blanca Solares, "Rudolf Otto: la experiencia religiosa de lo sagrado," in B. Solares, ed., *Homo religiosus. Sociología y Antropología de las religiones* (México: UNAM, 67–84).

5. This perspective was defended by H. Blavatsky in the early twentieth century.

6. Andrés Ortiz-Osés, *Hermenéutica de Eranos. Las estructuras simbólicas del mundo* (Barcelona: Anthropos, 2012).

into Spanish, an important phase of the meetings of Eranos focuses on the construction of the basic concepts of a cultural anthropology, articulated around the problem of man and its essential determinants: time, rite, myth, and sense.[7]

The last phase of this founding period, between 1972–1986, is articulated, according to Ortiz-Osés, in the elaboration of a symbolic hermeneutic as a theoretical perspective of analysis of the set of cultural phenomena, religion, science, and art. Some of the topics discussed were the sense of imperfection, the correspondences between men/women and world, in time and out of time, extremes and borders, ascent and descent, material and imaginal bodies, the realms of color, the beauty of the world, and the hidden course of events.

5. In this way, we can note that, after long years of interdisciplinary collaboration initially guided by a historical and phenomenological method of religion, the works of Eranos lead, after more than thirty years, to a symbolic hermeneutic of culture that in the field of philosophy converges with the linguistic turn fundamentally theorized by Hans Georg Gadamer in his book *Truth and Method* (1960). In the 1970s the humanities recognized the importance of language as a structuring agent of reality and, for what concerns us here, that all historical research must also necessarily be interested in language. That is, words do not simply reflect reality nor can they reproduce it. Rather, meanings are derived from the speakers, their circumstances, their motives, and the attitudes that are manifested when language is put into action. Gadamer's hermeneutics, in a profound way, considers language as an ontological reality and that in fact every statement (wording) springs from a dialogical context. Being occurs in language as truth, as the unveiling of meaning in a dialogical context: the being that can be understood is language. This language that pretends to let the object speak is at the same time the language of its interpreter.

6. The most significant contribution of the Circle of Eranos to philosophical hermeneutics and cultural studies in general and in particular to the studies of religion was the discovery of the symbol, or symbolic language, as a constitutive dimension of the anthropos. Man (and woman) is now understood not only as homo sapiens, homo faber, homo speaker and *zoon politikon*, but at the same time and with the same status as homo *symbolicus* or *religiosus*, *capax symbolorum*, or in other words urged by the need to translate the meaning of his existence, his symbolic images of meaning (god, demon, fairy, genius), through a medium that is not reduced to simple spoken and consensual language. This medium is the symbol or perhaps better to say the languages of the symbol (myth, rite, science, and arts) that make symbolization a structural (innate)

7. The Eranos Conferences have produced over six hundred original works published in sixty-six volumes of *Eranos Yearbooks*.

feature of being-man-in-the-world [*sic*] with all his historical and cultural nuances.[8]

Through the mediation of the languages of the symbol, under the auspices of Hermes, the conductor of souls in Greek mythology, it becomes possible, as Paul Ricoeur will theorize, as well as Andrés Ortiz-Osés and Gilbert Durand, along with other Eranosians, to establish a link between world and underworld, life and death, and immanence and transcendence. In other words, it is through the construction and contemplation of his symbolic images that man/woman establishes a form of religation (*religio*) with the afterlife.

Symbolic hermeneutics, as a theoretical aspect for the study and understanding of religious phenomenon, is the result of a slow incubation process. It is the product of long years of work and collaboration of an interdisciplinary group of philosophers, historians of art and religions, scientists and theologians, undoubtedly in permanent dialogue with the scientific study of the religion of the psychology of C. G. Jung, key animator of the meetings in Azcona.

Religion for Jung, in contrast to Freud, more than an expression of an obsessive neurosis, is considered as an energy or "natural force" that can be either negative or positive for the physical and spiritual health of man and woman, personal and collective.

The psyche, for Jung, has a religious function. Both the conscious projections and the symbols and archetypes arising from the unconscious—which are revealed above all in dreams and crystallize in myths and religions—operate as experiences of meaning, a key aspect in the study of religions pointed out by R. J. Zwei Werblowsky, also director of the IAHR, and one of whose works was prefaced by Jung.[9]

> For Eranos, from an interdisciplinary perspective, the question is the homo religiosus, his characteristics, affections, intuitions, dreams and efforts to know and deal with their gods, demons, ghosts or spirits.

This hermeneutic, as we have been saying, is nothing but the result of a phenomenology of religion that attends to the understanding of religious facts as symbolic languages or numinous messages of the psyche, consciousness, and unconscious.

The study of religious expressions of ancient cultures (rites, myths, and sacred books) and their projection in diverse cultural configurations today (in art and science but also in demonic actions such as the murder of millions of

8. Lluis Duch, "Precedentes prehumanos de la simbolización," "La inevitabilidad de la simbolización," in *Antropología de la vida cotidiana. Simbolismo y salud* (Madrid: Trotta, 2002). See also B. Solares, "Prólogo" a *Los lenguajes del símbolo* (Barcelona: Anthropos, 2001).

9. R. J. Zwi Werblowski (1924–2015), *Lucifer and Prometheus*, with an introduction written by Carl Jung (Great Britain: Psychology Press, 1952).

Jews in the Second World War or the persecution derived from the dictatorship of Stalinism) resulted in the elaboration of concepts which were generally unacceptable by official science but which have increasingly sparked a greater interest in the scientific community of our days: the symbol, the image, the archetype, the myth, and the symbolic imagination.

One of the most important contributions of Eranos to the study of religion is to have highlighted that a life without meaningful contact and regulated by the (divine) powers that transcend man/woman (fear, lust for power, ambition), lead to the loss of meaning, intolerance, and pathologies. War, fascism, slavery, and totalitarianism, among other terrible aspects of human action, are not alien to the manipulation and distorted use of the symbolic or religious imaginary of which the transnational corporations make use (subliminally) in our daily lives, particularly through the mass media. The control and management of the images defines "the reality" and not reality itself.

7. The study and critical examination of the different monotheistic traditions (Christianity, Islam, Judaism) in an environment free from confessional dogmas and ecclesiastical commitments was a characteristic feature of the Eranos meetings. Also, the study of ancient Greek religion, Egyptian, Taoist, and Buddhist traditions, their myths, symbols, and forms of worship. All this in an atmosphere of collaboration from different fields, art, history, psychology, biology, and so on. This unusual polyphonic concert of voices so differentiated over more than fifty years was fruitful. Undoubtedly, together with the Spanish philosopher Eugenio Trías, we can refer to Eranos as "the collective responsible for the general renewal, in the twentieth century, of studies on religion." We could even talk about a real revolution. According to his own words, "religion will be conceived differently from the meetings of this group and its Yearbooks."[10]

8. Although hermeneutics is an adequate aspect of thought for the study of religions (as I have tried to show), we do not think however that it should be imposed on the IAHR as a manifest (talking stock or corporative identity). On the contrary, I think of the IAHR as an open forum of analysis in which, regardless of the researcher's beliefs, what matters is the seriousness and the tried and true information with which he has delved into the great variety of religious behaviors and spiritual searches in our postcolonial, post-secular, or postmodern times.

The starting point is how to study what cannot be learned objectively. In other words, given the peculiar character of our object of study, we need a new way of doing science beyond the separation of mythos-logos, physical-metaphysical, body-spirit, rational-irrational. The task of the IAHR would then be, first of all, to be able to offer a suggestive panorama of all the current trends in the historical,

10. Trías Eugenio, "Proemio. Los signos y los símbolos," in *Hermenéutica de Eranos*, 6.

critical, and hermeneutic study of religions in all their expressions, often aberrant.[11] Each scholar can follow the same method that has inspired his specialty. Trying as much as possible to agree that religion is a dimension of being as a whole (body and psyche), which has as its object of study the interpretation and the understanding of the intangible, the mystery of the ultimate meaning of a life full of singularities, magic, beauty, and mystery as well as of destruction, violence, and extermination.

To conclude, in this way, from a perspective that in itself demands an interdisciplinary, phenomenological, and hermeneutic perspective, it seems to us that the IAHR can promote the academic study of religion worldwide, striving to reconstruct the history of religions, in their understanding and interpretation, both retrospectively and prospectively, in the evolution of their multiple forms. It would have to account for the dangers of understanding religion as something "overcome," to make it be seen, rather, as a phenomenon of utmost importance for the understanding of man and woman and his cultural creations, today threatened by an imminent ecological catastrophe on a planetary level, largely the result of the process of the desacralization of nature. It would thus seek to promote the analysis of religious phenomena in their ties to science, art, economics, and ecological politics; to promote the study of religion as an expression of its historical moment and, at the same time, as a phenomenon that alludes to the multifaceted character of man (and woman) and his essential determinants: body and psyche or soul, in developed countries and in the rest of the world, from marginal worldviews to the global interconnected world.

Chetty: In the 10 minutes allocated, I want to position a perspective on these critical discussions from the Global South. I frame my points within the theme "Mapping the Global Nexus: Examining the Intersection of the Study of Religion, Knowledge, Inequality, and its Situational Dynamics in an Unequal Academic Landscape." My main contention is that when we start problematizing the study of religion, we cannot do this outside of the complex issues that challenge the discipline and, more especially, the context we derive from.

Let me begin with the "Context." While we argue about how we should approach the study of religion on a global stage, we cannot do this without engaging critical factors that distinguish the positioning of the academic study of religion from the Global South and North. Even though the Global South and

11. In Mexico some new religious expressions are, for example, the cult of the "Holy Death," to "Maximon," "Malverde," or "the new Mexicanidad." See Yolotl Gonzalez Torres, "Las nuevas religiones en México como forma de identidad colectiva." https://equiponaya.com.ar/articulos/religion01.htm.

North are contested concepts, I think it is important to understand the distinctions between them.

While we have been engaging with religious studies, I have heard the humanities being mentioned in one or two points of the earlier discussions. First, more than a decade later, Nussbaum's[12] initial thesis on the demise of the humanities as an area of scholarship within what we call a progressive and market-driven higher education landscape still finds a fitting place in discourses on whether the humanities will survive the onslaught of a neoliberal agenda. I think this is critical because we cannot have this discussion outside of that context.

Second, on a critique of the relevance of the humanities supporting Nussbaum's thesis, Belfiore[13] argues that the humanities find itself in a "silent crisis" with an image problem of relevancy, which we have seen throughout the discussion. The historical legacy of theology (more specifically in Africa) as an ideological apparatus in many higher education institutions places the study of religion as its counterpart under much scrutiny. The center of the debate is why such subjects should enjoy the privilege of being in state-funded universities. Therefore, while we have these critical discussions on how we should approach the study of religion, we can't do it outside of these contexts that define how the study of religion is perceived within the academic domain of many higher education institutions in Africa and the Global South.

Third, in many universities in the Global South (specifically Africa), disciplines such as the study of religion are the first to be reduced with academic staff and eventually close as they are nonprofitable—that is, they do not attract high student enrolments, cannot secure grants, and cost the universities in terms of human resources. This often leads to compromising the integrity of the discipline to attract students through marketable themes—that is, religion and human rights, religion and citizenship, and so on, which are directly intertwined with some form of activism and social transformation. While I have nothing against pursuing an activist approach, my contention is as evident in South Africa as we saw in the apartheid era, a focus on liberation and in the post-apartheid era, and a shift to reconciliation and social cohesion. Now, these time-based, historically sensitive nuances pose challenges for the types of competencies we want to develop as part of the study of religion. This leads to the points raised on the challenges of objectivity in social activist research (by Nancy Cartwright) and whether "objectivity" is neutral and void of any contextual

12. M. C. Nussbaum, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

13. E. Belfiore, "The 'Rhetoric of Gloom' v. the Discourse of Impact," in *Humanities in the Twenty-First Century: Beyond Utility and Market*, E. Belfiore and A. Upchurch, eds., 17–43 (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013).

influence. Instead, we find ourselves in a state of constant defining based on sociohistorical trends. Assuming the activist approach in the study of religion means that we will continuously seek a cause to shape our study of religion. And this, for me, is problematic.

Let me now move on to the contentious position in the desire to reinvigorate the humanities in Africa. The 2015–2016 student uprising in South Africa under the banner "fees must fall," which called for economic emancipation, also gave birth to a quest for the epistemic decolonization of the university. In essence, it called for the rethinking of a relevant curriculum for our students and the relevancy of curriculum as an epistemic decolonization of the university. For the study of religion, this created new spaces to engage with issues of decolonization, Africanization, indigenous knowledge systems, the global knowledge economy, and epistemic restoration. Now, these are concepts that I am using in terms of how we see the study of religion reshaping itself and its response to a context-driven mandate. The challenge requires a framework and approach representing the African discourse to address the imbalance in knowledge production.

Let me move on to rethinking the study of religion in Africa—knowledge inequality and power disparities. We cannot talk about a scientific approach to the study of religion without addressing the biases historically situated in the dominant narratives. The discipline formation of the study of religion is a product of empire; we cannot ignore this reality. Hence, I want to position four significant points that advance a critique of epistemology.

First, a brief comment on terminology. David Chidester's *Savage Systems*[14] problematizes the emergence of comparative religion within European colonial outreach, in which the contested concept of religion was defined under unequal power relations: "Before coming under colonial subjugation, Africans had no religion. After local control was established, they were found to have had a religious system after all." For Chidester, understanding how terms were employed in studying religion in the colonial era is an important advancement in assessing the repercussions of knowledge production and the "power disparities" in constructing knowledge.

Second, thinking black. Another important contribution by Chidester is *Empire of Religion, Imperialism, and Comparative Religion*,[15] where he captures the idea of thinking black. Chidester articulates the concept of triple mediation. And here, he sees imperial theorists derive colonial data through indigenous

14. David Chidester, *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996).

15. David Chidester, *Empire of Religion: Imperialism and Comparative Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

middlemen. However, Chidester explores the reverse flow of knowledge, that is, how African middlemen turned imperial theorists into informants to advance their intellectual agenda of studying religion. These developments (although not classified as decolonial) demonstrate some of the polemics in the study of religion in Africa.

Third, a critique of black reason. In his *Critique of Black Reason*,[16] Achille Mbembe, a prominent philosopher, speaks about how blackness functioned to justify the West's political imperialism and as the fundamental ground of the continental philosophy tradition of "pure reason." Mbembe used the idea of blackness as a point of contrast and contradiction. An important note here is that throughout the discussions so far, the study of religion was always positioned or came across as a contrast to what it is not—that is, it's not confessionalism, it's not political, as opposed to a definition of its merit. And this is something we maybe need to talk about. Are we defining the study of religion based on its contrast, or are we seeing it as a completely autonomous discipline that can justify its existence?

Fourth, on knowledge inequality. Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, in "The Emergence and Trajectories of Struggles for an 'African University': The Case of Unfinished Business of African Epistemic Decolonisation,"[17] writes about the decolonizing knowledge and trajectories in African studies. He argues that decolonization challenges the present globalization and its intentions of universalism. Ndlovu-Gatsheni postulates that decolonization is an epistemic movement to regain balance in the knowledge-power discourse. As opposed to being value-driven, this is contextually responsive to systematically addressing knowledge deficits and imbalance.

Nevertheless, university mission statements employ this term to speak about a value-driven ideological proposition. Our disciplines operate within these structures and ideological terrains that already define how we see our curriculum and how our research is undertaken. But what does this mean for us regarding how we shape our disciplines—such as Religious Studies—and function?

As I conclude, I want to address the IAHR within the Global South discourse. In considering the scientific study of religion, I would like to question the legitimacy of knowledge: Whose knowledge, by whose definitions, and within whose parameters? A parting question for the Global South: Have we contributed enough research to the knowledge corpus in Religious Studies to address the

16. A. Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

17. S. J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "The Emergence and Trajectories of Struggles for an 'African University': The Case of Unfinished Business of African Epistemic Decolonisation." *Kronos*, vol. 43 (2017): 51–77.

knowledge imbalance? As evident in the IAHR publications and conference presentations, the gap between the Global South and North is clear. This is a major challenge for the IAHR. With these inequalities, can we truly pursue a scientific study of religion without considering "context"? Therefore, a single approach to the "scientific" study of religion is problematic as it does not consider the inherent situational dynamics. A single scientific approach for the African context will immediately disempower the current strides made to position the critical discourse of knowledge production and address the challenges of epistemic injustice. On the other hand, a shared platform that is cognizant of diversity creates a climate for an engagement with the Global South and North—this is critical for the IAHR.

Finally, turning to the Ukraine-Russia statement issued by the IAHR Executive. The IAHR is a collective engagement space with member associations from different countries with their political climate. A centralized statement on political matters sets the precedent that it speaks for all member associations, which can be problematic. As seen in the case of South Africa in the Ukraine-Russia crisis, the government has taken a specific stance. Collective statements on behalf of member associations create the impression of silencing those that differ, which is problematic. This can lead to regional schisms in the IAHR.

Jahan: Today's roundtable discussion on the scientific study of religion is very significant. To begin with, let me state my subject position as I am an archeologist and art historian by profession, a Muslim by birth, and a citizen of Bangladesh. I was brought up in a postcolonial environment with the shared values of South Asia. I studied ancient South Asian literature from childhood, which includes Vedic literature, later Vedas, epics such as the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, Buddhist and Jain literature, and Islamic literature, as well as stories of thousands of local beliefs and traditions which have traveled through generation to generation right from the remote past. I am also aware of the ancient South Asian critics, like Atharvaveda. Ancient and medieval South Asian literature show us how the history of religious philosophy has evolved here in South Asia from the various utilitarian and intellectual practices of the inhabitants due to its distinct geography and environment.

As we know, religion is more complicated in the intellectual sphere than in ordinary daily life, yet by the same token a society ordered by the demands of various ethnic groups also had its complexities. It is difficult therefore to create a clear picture of the religious rituals and practices of South Asian people without interdisciplinary research with a holistic approach. Nevertheless, there is a very long history of the relations between the devotion, beliefs, and rituals of various ethnic communities of South Asia. In addition, certain communal beliefs and rituals did not always remain confined to their particular groups

but the thoughts and practices of one group in varying degrees were adopted by another, and so different rituals developed. Religious philosophy in ancient and medieval South Asia evolved from various trends. Aborigines of South Asia, like those of other countries, ascribed divinity to certain trees, stones, hills, fruits, flowers, beasts, birds, and places, and offered worship to them. This practice as in the ancient and medieval periods is still very popular among the various communities of South Asia. We have also learned to respect cultures and religions around us, as well as learning to ask questions and understand each subject critically, scientifically, and academically. This is why I am interested in the IAHR. I think the IAHR is the right platform to conduct a multifaceted scientific study of religion. We must allow questions for critical analysis and study people, their beliefs, behaviors, and institutions critically. We admit that there is no room for confession or theology in the scientific academic study of religion.

Religious studies includes both the scientific study of religion and theology, but the scientific study of religion never includes the latter. So, all of us understand clearly from the constitution of the IAHR what it says. As we know, religion or religious philosophies developed in the world through various political and geographical contexts. We may not bring everything as our one truth philosophy. This is also one kind of blindness. As we all know, there are more parallel truths in and around it. So let us try to understand religious philosophy with logic without avoiding the local contexts. Politicians of the world are using religion for their distinct political identity right from the remote past and discourage the scientific study of religion. As I am an archaeologist, I study world religions based on material culture. I must admit that various threats to the scientific study of religion are recorded throughout the world and regardless of time. I often find problems in approaching the sense of philosophical things to analyze local beliefs and traditions against classical religious philosophy in the global geopolitical context.

I, on behalf of the members of the South and Southeast Association for the Study of Culture and Religion (SSEASR) as well as the Bangladesh Society for the Study of Culture and Religion (BSSCR), expect the IAHR to encourage the scientific study of religion by organizing open discussion sessions, seminars, symposiums, workshops, conferences and so on for creating a healthy academic environment throughout the world in hybrid mode to disseminate the finding of academic research to a wider community through the national and regional associations of the IAHR.

Regarding the idea of changing the name of the IAHR to IASR and a part of its constitution, which was announced in 2019, is fine with me and my colleagues of SSEASR and BSSCR, but for me, it really does not matter much whether we change the name of IAHR to IASR or not if the constitution clearly enumerates it. So I think we should clearly say at least in one place, and then we make our stand

very clear to our colleagues. I too agree with Kevin that objectivity and subjectivity should both be considered, because values are very important. These must be studied against their local context. We admit without any hesitation that knowledge production depends on many aspects of an individual research scholar as vouchsafed by today's keynote speaker. Let us acknowledge and respect all kinds of knowledge production and provide a healthy academic platform to share holistic multidisciplinary scientific study and engage in academic discourse.

Robertson: Disciplines, as William Newell and William Green write, "are not natural species amenable to systematic characterization through a taxonomy. But rather, a discipline is perhaps best characterized as a sociopolitical organization which concentrates on a historically linked set of problems."[18] Or, as Richard Carp puts it, "disciplines are knowledge formations which represent a historically specific network that includes institutional structures, economic forces, social interactions, political considerations, historical influences, personal motivations, and so forth."[19] The historically specific context in which *Religionswissenschaft* developed was the colonial projects. And it encoded within itself many of the assumptions of the political context, as well as Christian norms and the scientific paradigm of the nineteenth century. This much is relatively uncontroversial. The Marburg statement, however, was in the context of the growth of the social sciences in the postwar period. On both sides of the Atlantic, undergraduate degrees in the social sciences grew steadily, buoyed by the influx of formerly excluded groups. As a result, our models of identity and society shifted from being predominantly understood as transmitted genetically to being understood as transmitted culturally. Western academics increasingly turned away from finding the primitive in colonies outside Europe to finding the primitive in internal colonies among the poor and otherwise dispossessed in Western societies. So from a racial hierarchy to an economic hierarchy, the work of anthropologists like Emile Durkheim and Pierre Bourdieu on social stratification and the transmission of tradition in contemporary European societies became increasingly central as the discipline tilted toward a focus on religious change in the West.

But the Marburg statement was also part of a longer conversation about the nature of religion, as several have pointed out, and indeed the nature and purpose of the study of religion. The tension between those who saw religion on the one hand as something to be studied scientifically, and on the other hand,

18. Newell, W., and W. J. Green, "Defining and Teaching Interdisciplinary Studies," *Improving College and University Teaching* 30 (1982) (23–30), 24.

19. Carp, Richard M. "Integrative Praxes: Learning from Multiple Knowledge Formations," *Issues in Integrative Studies* 19 (2001) (71–121), 75.

theologically, here defined as the realization of transcendent truth, was already in full flow in the first issue of *NVMEN* in 1950. It was, at the same time, a conversation about the discipline, the discipline and its object being mutually constitutive. For those who saw religion as a distinct and unique phenomenon, they sought a distinct and unique method. But no such agreed definition, method, or theoretical model has, to date, been found. This was the problem that was solved by the critical turn. Religion is a social, not a natural category. And therefore, the issue at hand is not science, but religion. And I'm not talking here about postmodernism, in which knowledge claims are all regarded as relative and equally true, nor am I talking about the naïve lionization of indigenous knowledge. Rather, I'm talking about the basic constructivist position that Richard King has recently described as "a truism of sorts within the academy," that religion is a category constructed through human activity rather than merely discovered in nature. Like "race," the taken-for-granted category "religion" does not refer to a distinct and unique natural phenomenon. This realization amounts, King writes, to "a Copernican turn in the study of religion," even if this has yet to significantly filter through to public and political discourse. J. Z. Smith's famous comment that "we have no data for religion" should be born in mind here. Religion is not a natural category and so cannot itself be measured empirically. Rather, religion is a category which collects a number of different discrete phenomena under a single conceptual umbrella. We can test for extraordinary experiences, we can test for belief in transcendent reality or spiritual beings, we can test for particular ritual practices, but this is not in itself a test of religion. It's a test of one possible aspect of religion. We must first always ask, how has this become considered religion, and who is making the particular definition? This is nothing more than a simple acknowledgment of the history of our category and the work that's been going on in religious studies since at least the 1990s as well as every other discipline in which the critical turn has caused us to acknowledge that not all categories are natural. We can only begin to decolonize knowledge by acknowledging that many of the categories in academia, including but not limited to religion, were established in the context of Europe (and particularly Protestant Europe) and then exported to the rest of the world. The simple assumption that global organizations must continue to be centered upon the terminology ordained by Europe shows this epistemic imbalance. Yet religion itself remains a political term. It is a category through which states control their own populations and justify violence upon others. And therefore the question of *Religionswissenschaft*, of decolonization and of the political role of the IAHR are essentially one and the same. In order to decolonize, we have to be able to acknowledge the role of religion in a category which imposes a particular frame of reference on the rest of the world. If we wish to be buoyed by an influx of previously excluded groups such as the Global South, we will need to

be open to other frameworks. And part of that is to accept the deconstruction of religion itself as our central category. The IAHR might instead communicate that mystification, and unpack the central category of religion as one of the categories through which modernity is built. We should look to organizations and disciplines dealing with race, with gender, and with other categories which until comparatively recently seemed like they were indeed simply natural aspects of the world when they were in fact part of the mechanism through which power flows. It is this reason that causes me to suggest that social science, which in its broad sense can include history, anthropology, sociology, and many of the disciplinary perspectives through which we study religion, but importantly not theological approaches, should be central to how we reword the IAHR's mission for the twenty-first century, and we should work toward communicating the insight that religion is made by and of people. It also suggests how we may be engaged without being political. Where religion is being used to justify violence, or indeed to stamp down resistance to it, we should engage. Otherwise we should remain silent. We need not abandon religion nor science, but acknowledging that there are other knowledge formations will allow us to remain relevant in the emerging global postcolonial paradigm.

Yamane: I'm afraid to say that my presentation will not match today's theme because I can't mention the Kyoto school today and can't offer a viewpoint as one Japanese. I am a researcher of the philosophy of religion of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with a particular focus on philosophers such as William James, Charles Renouvier, and Henri Bergson. Today I would like to talk about what I think about the objectivity of religious studies from the perspective of William James' pragmatism.

I understand that William James's theory of religion has been criticized so far. For example, it is sometimes said that his claims and arguments in his book, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, are too psychological or subjective and lack objectivity. We might say his view is engaged and confessional. It can also be criticized that James's criterion for his value judgments about religion is based on a Protestant bias. I think those criticisms are valid, and I am not going to defend James's position from them. What I would like to discuss is the theory of truth in his pragmatism, which I will use as a basis for considering the objectivity of religious studies.

The following quotes are from James, which state the pragmatic theory of truth in a nutshell:

> The ultimate test for us of what a truth means is indeed the conduct it dictates or inspires. But it inspires that conduct because it first foretells some particular turn to our experience which shall call for just that conduct from us. And

> I should prefer for our purposes this evening to express Peirce's principle by saying that the effective meaning of any philosophic proposition can always be brought down to some particular consequence, in our future practical experience, whether active or passive.[20]
>
> There can be no difference in abstract truth that doesn't express itself in a difference in concrete fact and in conduct consequent upon that fact, imposed on somebody, somehow, somewhere and somewhen.[21]

In the pragmatic theory of truth, what is important is not what the origin or cause of an idea is, but whether or not it actually works on a person and causes any difference in that person (whether in thought, action, or emotion). In James's pragmatism, there is no distinction between so-called natural scientific truths and religious truths, at least, no difference in quality is recognized there. In James's pragmatic theory of truth, whether an idea is true or false is revealed when it is tested or verified in experience. "Test" also includes consistency with other ideas already held to be truths. This applies even in the discourses or words of supposed mystics.

> To come from thence [subliminal or transmarginal region] is no infallible credential. What comes must be sifted and tested, and run the gauntlet of confrontation with the total context of experience, just like what comes from the outer world of sense. Its value must be ascertained by empirical methods, so long as we are not mystics ourselves.[22]

James treats the testimonies of mystics as something worth listening to, but he repeatedly admonishes against the attitude of people who blindly believe them to be true. What mystics said is no more than an idea that must be respected unless tested or verified, but is, "just like" a nonreligious idea, waiting to be tested by experience and its conformity with other truths. Mystical experiences, even if only directly available to some privileged people (mystics), are not guaranteed of their objective truthfulness from the outset, but must be confirmed and judged true by others in and through their experiences. James says, "the true is what works well, even though the qualification 'on the whole' may always have to be added."[23]

Of course, I don't claim that this is the answer to the problem of the objectivity of religious discourses and ideas. James's view that I have talked about is problematic in many ways, and indeed it includes some points to be criticized. However, if an idea or discourse actually has some influence on people's thinking

20. Frederick Burkhardt, ed., *The Works of William James: Pragmatism and The Meaning of Truth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978, 259).

21. Burkhardt, 30.

22. Burkhardt, 38.

23. Burkhardt, 361.

and conduct, it should not be ignored, no matter how ambiguous and lacking in objectivity it may seem from the perspective of natural science or rigorous social science. Nor should we disregard them in comparison to supposedly scientific discourses, ideas, and notions. It seems important to first treat all discourses and ideas, whether considered scientific or not, with the same qualifications in considering the sensitive issue of objectivity in religious studies. If this is so, then the truth theory of classical pragmatism, as represented by James, may also have some significance. I hope that my short talk today will deepen the discussion on this issue.

Questions and Answers

Anonymous speaker: Thank you very much for your presentations. You were talking about other knowledge formations and I was wondering what this is. Because we are talking in English here. I'm very sorry that some of us do not speak English. So I mean that the native English speakers speak so fast and everything, but still I think it's a good way of communication. But anyway, we are in Japan. Japan in the past 150 years, that was a gigantic translation process. And they did everything. I mean, they, sorry, Japanese people, I think you copied so much from the West, from the so-called West and made it better. So why should we do anything else in the case of religion? Shouldn't we start with what European and Western and Japanese and many others, I mean, Japanese religious studies is so old. Isn't it a good idea to start with that and make it better? I don't understand where the need for other knowledge formations comes from. And then one other question and then you were talking about postcolonialism and all that stuff. But recently, there are so many books which are talking about the good things of colonialism. And I'm wondering why there are six people sitting, Tim (President Jensen), who are all somehow on the postcolonial criticism side and nobody else. So this is surprising to me because I think this is somehow ideologically biased. Thank you.

Andrea Rota: Thank you all for the presentations. I would like to react to them all, but time is short. So I would like to react just to one point that David made, if I may. I found very interesting, as a part of decolonizing the study of religion, the importance of calling attention to the origin of the concept [of religion] and to the huge amount of work that went into deconstructing its origin and its inherent power relations. My only concern with this plan is that we would be limited to a study of religion focused on the concept of religion and its implications, and we would lose a grasp on the possibility of studying humans and what they do, alone or collectively. So I was wondering if there is a possibility of a decolonial

study of religion, if this is our aim, that is not solely a discursive one, but still has the possibility of grasping the world somehow beyond the concept.

Robertson: I do hope there'll be questions for someone else at some point. Okay, what was the first one? The other frameworks. I'm not suggesting that we create other frameworks. Japan, for instance, the example that you give did not start with the concept of religion. It adopted it. And what I'm suggesting is that there are other frameworks which already exist. Instead of forcing everything into the category of religion, which is essentially what happened during the colonial period, we could not do that. We could look at, for instance, the way that dharma, for instance, overlaps with the category of religion but is not the same. Or in my own work, I've looked at the same argument from conspiracy theories, for instance. There are different ways of organizing all of these discrete human things, which kind of relates to what you were saying. I think in the study of religion, we're in a bit of a bind because we do have this one central category. So, I mean, truly decolonizing it would mean abandoning the category. And I'm not willing to argue that far, especially not within the context of an organization set up to do that. But I think there's a middle ground where we accept the historicization and the fact that it's somewhat artificial, at least in certain contexts, without abandoning it completely. I do think we need to maybe pay more attention to the specific phenomena that we're looking at in any given argument. I could give examples of where there's been failures of that, but we're short of time, so I won't. But maybe we can talk about that later. Is that a reasonable answer? There was one other thing about the decolonialization. Yeah, if it's ideological, I think we've already established that there is no neutral study today.

Chetty: Let me respond by saying that one of the problems facing the IAHR is the lack of participation from Africa (and marginalized countries in the Global South). This is not a new phenomenon; it's a historic issue. This is precisely because of the point you raised. Much African research is done by people outside of Africa—that is, engaging in Africa. The reality is that much research on Africa is published outside Africa. Now, your question is, why do we need to talk about decolonization? Can't we accept the knowledge produced by colonization? In essence, it is the very nature of the subjective voice in the production of knowledge that must be addressed. The voice inside Africa has been historically suppressed—for example, simple things like how you see indigenous traditions in colonial terms—that is, terminology. African religion has been historically demonized. Selective African religion rituals are seen as an embodiment of witchcraft (anti-Christian)—a colonial term which served to distort and disempower indigenous rituals and belief systems. In the African context, we see a complete deviation in the classification of these so-called witchcraft rituals to

owning the concept through an African renaissance and repositioning of indigenous knowledge. So, we cannot talk about the "good of colonialism," as you refer to, without addressing the suppression and distortion of knowledge. Unless we engage in ways that see people inside of Africa as equal contributors toward the production of knowledge, the decolonization debate will be the primary contribution from Africa, bringing critique from the Global South. By saying that we already have "colonized knowledge" and why the need to "decolonize," we already create disparities and accept the power imbalance historically produced.

Rota: Thank you very much for this last comment. I have a question about the comment. If voices from the Global South should be included and heard in a global organization like the IAHR, assuming that the framework of this expression is not the one of the scientific study of religion, as it is framed by the Marburg Statement or something like that, should the IAHR, in your opinion, change its framework in the name of such an inclusion? Or should the voices from the Global South reframe their idea in terms that align with the current IAHR framework, maybe with a Habermasian collective effort of translation?

Chetty: I think that is precisely why we have these discussions. First, I cannot speak for the Global South; my points are responsive to the African context. I am only "one" voice sitting here today. Second, creating spaces of engagement implies we cannot discuss the decolonial discourse in isolation from the colonial discourse. Decolonialism is a response to the colonial impact. We must create spaces to bring the Global South voices to the table. We will continue with the historical suppressive trajectory if we do not create these spaces for the Global South. Third, we must consider complexities across the Global South, which will challenge some of the earlier decisions in the approach to the study of religion.

Jahan: I think the IAHR is a wonderful platform where we can have these discussions and open symposiums. We should not be bound with any kind of existing knowledge, or we should not discourage us from any knowledge. The academic discourses on deconstruction of religious philosophy, the scientific study of religion, and the interpretation of religion in the postcolonial era is very necessary. So we engage ourselves in the academic debates and discourses as much as possible but not by necessarily dividing us into Global South, Global West, Global East, and/or Global North. I fully disagree with this; rather, I would suggest scholars from all corners of the world may join this IAHR platform and discuss relevant issues openly to arrive at an understandable solution. We must not be afraid of any traditional understanding or belief system where blindness is too much and we should also not be frightened by more scientific research, where our positions are vulnerable. We should have a free and open

discussion. And I am sure, as many more discussions will take place, all kinds of problems will be solved. And if we really wish to solve problems globally rather than dividing ourselves, we must respect that all the philosophies, traditions, and beliefs which have a certain agenda/interest with a certain identity are discussed critically. Why not? And this is why we are in IAHR. Thank you.

Chair: Before closing the session, I would suggest taking a moment of reflection. Have you seen diversities here in this room today? Or have you seen a divide, a simple divide between A and B, A versus B? I think that's a big point to describe what the IAHR is facing today. So we'll continue this discussion tomorrow. Thank you very much for attending this conference.

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Individual Paper Session (Abstracts)

Abstracts

Vibha Agnihotri, "The Scientific Study of Religions: Exploring Methodologies, Perspectives, and Implications"
The scientific study of religions represents a multidisciplinary approach aimed at understanding the diverse religious traditions that shape human culture and society. This paper explores the methodologies, perspectives, and implications of scientific research on religions. By examining key theories, comparative approaches, and contemporary advancements, it aims to shed light on the complex and evolving field of religious studies.

Gritt Klinkhammer, "The Study of Religion: Objective Inquiry and Politics"
I will approach my presentation with the following general question: "If religion is part of politics in society, how can the study of religion be not?" By elaborating, I will also reflect on the limits of the "scientific" study of religion. Second, I outline the conditions and challenges for a scientific, objective analysis of religion, especially in regard to Max Weber's distinction between the necessary aim of value-free research, and—at the same time—the (in principle) value-bounded science. Finally, I will discuss what this means in research practice with an example from my research field about Islam in Europe and what this means in general for the role of social and cultural science.

Mokhlesur Rahman, "Study on Religious Thoughts and Cultural Diversity through Tourism"
Theology and the cultural school of religions build truth, the science of faith, and doctrines, as well as the dynamics of the social influences, politics, and

international events affecting religions. In a heterogeneous society, theology and mutual doctrines administer the belief system of people and enrich religious diversity. This study uses tourism as an intersection at the sacred motivations for pilgrimage as a tool to explore the religious cultural school of thought. The amount of respect among tourists and local communities creates religious tolerance and a belief system. Cultural diversity indicates the existence of religious thinking and dynamics inside human thought. Ethnic and cultural belongings of religion express social and economic utilities though tourism. Religious cultural diversity is a highly intense and an immensely powerful reality with sacred and ethical values. It builds a tendency to reconstruct religious thought with cultural diversity to further develop mankind. This study is an effort to understand the practices of religious thought and cultural diversity in the context of the contemporary period.

Sławomir Sztajer, "Charting the Course: Advancements and Challenges in the Scientific Study of Religion"

Academic discussions on the scientific study of religion begin with the fundamental question of whether it is possible to study religion scientifically. Scholars who aim to conduct scientific research on religion often express valid doubts about the possibility of facing intellectual, ideological, and institutional challenges in their endeavors. It is not uncommon to notice a tendency to give up on achieving a fully scientific character of the study of religion. However, in recent decades, there have been attempts to reframe the scientific study of religion. These include multidisciplinary approaches that cross boundaries between the social and natural sciences, as well as the humanities. The approach that has played a key role in building a new scientific study of religion is the cognitive science of religion. In my presentation, I refer to both the achievements of the cognitive science of religion and the challenges it faces. I argue that broad multidisciplinary approaches to the study of religion may provide an impetus for developing the scientific strength of the discipline.

Fylypovych Liudmyla Oleksandrivna and Trylis Serhii Ivanovych, "Change of Paradigms of Methodological Thinking in Modern Religious Studies: The Experience of Ukrainian Scientists"

The tragic changes in Ukrainian people's lives—linguistic, cultural, informational, religious, and so on—necessarily correct scientific neutrality, objectivity, and noninvolvement. In our opinion, the war situation frees us from impartial, out-of-contextual analysis. The acceptability of such a methodological approach is discussed in this article.

In Ukrainian religious studies, the understanding that "the texture of reality can be grasped only by personal experience (which is called contextuality of

knowledge of religious reality), and the dimensionality—by the depth of familiarity with the subject and its specificity" (MAIDAN and CHURCH 2014, 8).

In the conditions of war (reality in its event-extreme state), contextuality appears as an extremely important methodological basis, and it becomes the dominant principle of understanding, ahead of other possible competing methodological approaches. The contextual study of religion involves a study of the ways in which religion is influenced by its social, political, and other contexts.

Comprehending the *force majeure* of war as a phenomenon in general, and the extreme violence of Russian aggression against Ukraine in particular, which destroys not only the external, but also the internal worlds of Ukrainians and all of humanity (YERMOLENKO 2022), leads us to the conclusion that it is permissible to refuse the principle of legal normativity instead of the creative use of the principle of contextuality: life should not be adapted to the law, but the law should meet the requirements of life.

Andrea Rota, "Neutral. All Too Neutral? Contemporary (?) Challenges in the Study of Religion"

This paper discusses the contested status of a "neutral" study of religion from both a systematic and an historical point of view. The paper proposes a working definition of "neutrality" as the interrelation of axiological neutrality, methodological naturalism, and the suspension of truth statements. Against this backdrop, it analyzes current debates on the neutrality and universality of a "Western" study of religion and compares it with the debates held at the 1960 IAHR conference in Marburg. The paper argues that contemporary challenges to a "neutral" study of religion are not dissimilar from those of the past, but they take place against a different social, cultural, and academic background. In the conclusion, it evaluates potential "gains" and "losses" related to different understandings of the epistemic bases of the study of religion.

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Andrea Rota

Neutral. All Too Neutral?
Contemporary (?) Challenges in the Study of Religion

Preliminary Remarks

This paper was presented at the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR) Special Conference held in Tokyo on 16–17 December 2023. As it is intended to serve as a record of the debates that occurred on that occasion, I have kept the editing to a necessary minimum to convey in written form what was originally intended for oral presentation. I have also opted not to add a complete bibliography, including only those references that were already mentioned in the PowerPoint slides. In addition, with his consent, I have included the question posed by David Thurfjell at the end of my talk, along with my brief response.

This talk constitutes only a first step in my exploration of epistemic matters that I consider crucial to the academic study of religion. While due to its original form the tone here is closer to an essay, it is my intention to provide a deeper, clearer, and more comprehensive discussion in future publications, to which the following paper is but a tentative prelude.

Introduction

In this paper, I will propose a systematic and historical account of several controversial issues within the global history of religions in terms of a series of emancipatory and counter-emancipatory narratives. My goal is to highlight the dynamic reconfiguration of profound fault lines within our discipline. To this end, my argument will be organized into four parts. First, I will introduce three

Andrea Rota is a Professor in the Department of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages at the University of Oslo.

ideas that I regard as foundational for the academic study of religion: axiological neutrality, methodological naturalism, and the suspension of truth statements. However, I will not provide a philosophical defense of these ideas. Instead, in the second section, I will argue that these ideas reflect a development in the history of our discipline that finds its crystallizing moment at the famous 1960 Marburg Congress. A brief reconstruction of some key exchanges during that event will provide the backbone of the first emancipation narrative, which emphasizes how, over the following decades, scholars of religion mobilized different resources to preserve and reinforce a new disciplinary paradigm.

In the third section, I will argue that a number of contemporary challenges to that paradigm are also rooted in emancipatory discourses. These discourses have originated outside of the study of religion but find increasingly vocal supporters within our discipline. Drawing on selected examples, I will provide a concise account of these discourses and call attention to some criticisms leveled against them. The aim of my conclusion will be to review what may be gained—but mostly to emphasize what will be lost—if our discipline moves away from its current foundations.

First Section

The IAHR Constitution states that "the IAHR is not a forum for confessional, apologetical, or other similar concerns."[1] Personally, I share this premise, but I often feel that it may be worth spelling out the meaning of this framework in methodological rather than in religious or political terms. A minimal stipulative framework based on the three concepts mentioned in my introduction—axiological neutrality, methodological naturalism, and the suspension of truth statements—may fit this goal. I see these three ideas as mutually dependent, meaning that if one falls, the others will rapidly follow suit. As criteria, I feel, they do not merely regulate the contemporary study of religion but constitute it as an academic discipline.

Allow me to briefly introduce each concept. First, embracing a principle of axiological neutrality means excluding evaluative judgments regarding the intrinsic value, virtues, or inadequacies of religious or anti-religious (pro-)positions as part of the validity criteria of our scientific results (see WEBER 1904; 1919). Second, adopting a methodological naturalism means excluding from our work explanations, theories, and data that rest on the existence or authority of supernatural entities or principles (see BERGER 1967). Third, suspending truth statements means excluding evaluative judgments regarding the ultimate truth or referentiality of religious doctrines, experiences, beliefs, and so on (see van

1. Article 1, available at: https://www.iahrweb.org/constitution.php.

Baaren 1973). For the sake of argument, we can call this a framework of "neutrality," although I am not particularly concerned with providing or defending a particular label.

When I talk of these ideas as a stipulative fundamental framework, it is to emphasize that they are historically situated and have emerged from lengthy scholarly debates. Within the IAHR, these debates were epitomized by the exchanges that took place at the 1960 Congress in Marburg, Germany, with protagonists including the then IAHR Secretary General, C. Jouco Bleeker (1898–1983), and the Israeli scholar of religion Raphael J. Zwi Werblowsky (1924–2015). At the heart of the contention, we find nothing less than the ontological status of religion and the epistemic conditions of its study.

Second Section

In Marburg, Bleeker defended an understanding of religion as a *sui generis* reality to which scholars of religion have privileged access, stating, "The science of religion takes religious facts as part of the culture of humanity […]. But the value of the religious phenomena can be understood only if we keep in mind that religion is ultimately a realization of a transcendent truth" (Bleeker 1960, 227). Against this backdrop, Bleeker maintained that, in virtue of their knowledge, scholars of religion had a social role to play in reviving cultural and religious life: "The question arises whether it is not part of his duty [of the scholar of religion] to spread the light of his knowledge and of his insight because he is constantly occupied with the study of one of the highest human goods, namely religion" (Bleeker 1960, 227).

Werblowsky's response to Bleeker's outline of the study of religion and its tasks fundamentally challenged the IAHR Secretary General's perspective. In a five-point rebuttal later known as the Marburg Statement (see Schimmel 1960, 236–37), he countered Bleeker's ontological, epistemic, and political views with an alternative framework not dissimilar from the three-pronged framework of "neutrality" I sketched at the beginning of my presentation.

However, this is not the whole story. In fact, this debate was entangled with institutional questions about the increasingly global scope of the IAHR. Two years before Marburg, the IAHR had held its first Congress outside of Europe, in Tokyo, and the debates in Germany were shaped by the presence of an important delegation of scholars from Asia. Addressing their growing role in the study of religion, Bleeker emphasized that "oriental scholars are equally capable of strictly scientific research as western students of the history of religions" (Bleeker 1960, 225). However, he added, "[T]he westerner arrives at his conclusion by means of the logic of Aristotle, whereas the easterner approaches

the truth by intuition, after which he arranges his knowledge, however without using reason" (Bleeker 1960, 225).

Bleeker's essentializing observation was, in fact, a move to position his own phenomenological approach as the perfect bridge between cultures. He continued,

> In the East scholars primarily seek for the essence of religion. The phenomenology of religion is on the same track, though moving forward in a slow and cautious way. […] [Phenomenology] is a remarkable combination of disinterestedness […] and personal interest in the value of the religious phenomena […]. One could say: an ideal combination of the western and the eastern approach to the study of the history of religions. (Bleeker 1960, 230)

In short, Bleeker's phenomenological method would temper the intuitive approach of the East while simultaneously expanding on the strictly historical approach of the West.

For Werblowsky, however, distinctions of geography, culture, or style of thought were beside the point when discussing the validity of a given approach.

> The truth of the distinction between the Eastern and the Western approaches does not […] bear upon *Religionswissenschaft* as such, but merely on the relative interest in it. Modern chemistry may have been introduced to the East from the West; but once it was taken up it was neither "eastern" nor "western" but simply chemistry, since it is one and the same chemistry that it is studied everywhere. (Werblowsky 1960, 219)

In short, "*Religionswissenschaft*, like physics or archeology is the same in the East and in the West: religion is studied scientifically or is not" (Werblowsky 1960, 219). As Annemarie Schimmel (1960, 237) reports, most of the scholars who participated in the subsequent discussion agreed with Werblowsky's position, and retrospectively, the Marburg Congress served as the foundational reference for the study of religion emancipated from a theological agenda.

This emancipatory dimension is also revealed by the repeated efforts to fend off institutional and ideological forces poised to reintroduce confessional concerns—either with a capital or lower-cased "c" (see Wiebe 1984)—in the study of religion. For example, scholars have called attention to the political dimension of the *sui generis* discourse on religion as a means of maintaining, from within the discipline, a number of academic privileges (see, for example, McCutcheon 1997). The academic landscape is dynamic, however, and scholars have to deal with moving targets.

To simplify, in the 1980s and 1990s most emancipatory efforts were geared toward exposing "conservative" tendencies within the study of religion. More recently, however, doubts and objections have also been raised about some

"progressive" perspectives. For example, critical approaches to the study of religion, which were once prized as the most effective instruments for exposing religionist agendas, have become suspect. Some authors regard their radicalized use as a means of deconstructing the whole package of modernity and ushering in a post-truth age (see Ambasciano 2019). In parallel, the globalization of the study of religion is seen as a source of new challenges (Wiebe 2021). In particular, new perspectives from the Global South seek to provincialize the scientific study of religion, which is seen anew as a local Western product. On the basis of decolonial theory—to be distinguished here from postcolonial theory—these perspectives present a counter-emancipation narrative, which I will try to summarize in the next section, drawing on selected authors.

Third Section

An important premise of these works is the observation that the end of the colonial era is not synonymous with the end of colonialism. For the Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano, the coloniality of power is preserved in the coloniality of knowledge. As he puts it, the relationship between the European and the former colonies still consists, "in the first place, in a colonization of the imagination of the dominated" (Quijano 2007, 169). In short, this means that the Global South can participate in the global Western world only in terms of the categories imposed by the former colonizers. However, Quijano goes a step further and argues that the process of colonization was in fact crucial for the development of the Western conceptual framework insofar as it is within the power relations of the colonial project that the West could construct the equivalence of rationality and modernity and differentiate between a Western culture containing a "subject" as the bearer of "reason" and other cultures that can only be "objects" of knowledge (Quijano 2007, 173). In light of this critique, Quijano underscores that "What is to be done is […] to liberate the production of knowledge, reflection, and communication from the pitfalls of European rationality/modernity" (Quijano 2007, 177). Such a program does not simply amount to throwing rationality overboard, however. To understand it better, I would like to introduce another decolonial thinker, the Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos.

Among Santos's most influential ideas is the invitation to move beyond "abyssal thinking." Abyssal thinking, which in his view characterizes the modern West, consists of "a system of visible and invisible distinctions, the invisible ones being the foundation of the visible ones" (Santos 2007a, 45). The distinction between invisible and visible is foundational in the sense that what lies to "'the other side of the line' vanishes as reality, becomes nonexistent, and is indeed produced as nonexistent. […] Whatever is produced as nonexistent is radically

excluded because it lies beyond the realm of what the accepted conception of inclusion considers to be its other" (Santos 2007a, 45). To unpack this idea, we can start by looking at one of the visible distinctions characterizing modern Western thought, namely, the distinction between science as the dominant mode of knowledge and theology and philosophy as alternative ways of knowing. This distinction grounds all modern epistemological disputes between scientific and nonscientific forms of truth.

Santos argues that the "visibility" of what may appear to be a self-evident distinction is "premised upon the invisibility of forms of knowledge that cannot be fitted into any of these ways of knowing" (Santos 2007a, 47). On the other side of the abyss, we find "lay, plebeian, peasant or indigenous knowledges" that are regarded as beyond truth and falsehood (Santos 2007a, 47). As such, they are not real knowledge but "beliefs, opinions or subjective understandings which, at most, may become objects or raw material for scientific inquiry" (Santos 2007a, 47). Santos suggests that, historically, the construction of this legitimizing radical difference coincided with a specific social territory, namely, the colonial zone. "Whatever could not be thought as either true or false," he writes, was "most distinctly occurring in the colonial zone" (Santos 2007a, 48). Thus, in his view, any form of decolonial justice requires post-abyssal thinking.

To illuminate what post-abyssal thinking may look like, Santos speaks of an ecology of knowledges "premised upon […] the recognition of the existence of a plurality of knowledges beyond scientific knowledge" (Santos 2007a, 67). Such a recognition implies renouncing any general epistemology but does not amount to a disparaging of science. Instead, it aims at "promoting the interaction and interdependence between scientific and nonscientific knowledges" (Santos 2007b, 14). Such interdependence would require a fundamental rethinking of the way in which knowledge is validated. For an ecology of knowledges, "Knowledge-as-intervention-in-reality is the measure of realism, not knowledge-as-a-representation-of-reality" (Santos 2007a, 70). This means that ethical-political deliberations become part of a new epistemology.

At this point, it should be clear how the emancipatory program of an ecology of knowledges challenges the emancipatory program of the post-Marburg study of religion. Indeed, the construction of bridges between the visible and invisible sides of the abyss also implies the construction of bridges between the two sides of the visible divide—science and theology-*cum*-philosophy—in a joint pursuit of concrete political goals.

Within the study of religion, decolonial perspectives are gaining increasing attention, sometimes in a fairly simplistic manner, and in other cases in more reflective and sophisticated ways, such as in the recent work of An Younatae (2020). Drawing in part on the aforementioned authors, An discusses the role of "secularity" as a key category, alongside race and gender, through which the

West constructed the coloniality/modernity nexus in Latin America. Secularity served to maintain and reproduce old theological views through the scientific language of objective reason while depoliticizing and de-rationalizing religion in a way that did not conform with local orders of knowledge (see An 2020, 959). In light of these historical processes, An argues for the necessity of overcoming the subject–object distinction in the study of religion as a way of truly engaging with theory produced by indigenous intellectual communities (see An 2020, 967).

Decolonial approaches are already part of the disciplinary discourse of the study of religion, and it seems to me that to brush them aside simply in the name of preserving the "purity" of a post-Marburg study of religion would be intellectually dishonest. It would be equally problematic, however, to accept their conclusions on moral rather than epistemic grounds. In this respect, a few scholars of religion have already raised critical questions regarding contemporary approaches that present a family resemblance to the decolonial perspective. As a bridge to my conclusion, I would like to summarize some considerations put forward by the German scholar of religion Inken Prohl and the Danish scholar of religion Jørn Borup.

Among other things, these authors note that a shift from a "knowledge-as-a-representation-of-reality" to a "knowledge-as-intervention-in-reality" would impact the analytical potential of our discipline when it comes, for example, to the discussion of forms of "self-Orientalism, strategic essentialism, or religious nationalism" (Prohl 2022, 122–23, my translation). Indeed, one of the most important intellectual contributions of scholars of religion in recent decades has been a relentless effort to de-essentialize identities, practices, and concepts—most prominently the very concept of religion. However, it seems that a certain strategic essentialism is intrinsic to promoting awareness of a general emancipatory-*cum*-identity agenda, which, as Borup (2022, 172) puts it, makes "a territory fit a map." Most worryingly, however, we may be confronted with the end of comparative approaches. Indeed, as Jonathan Z. Smith noted, it is impossible to compare two things "each 'considered' and 'defined' in their own terms" (Smith 1982, 34), since the *tertium comparationis* will inevitably lie outside of the *comparanda*. The alternative to such a comparative distance appears to be a radical cultural particularism that "leaves no room for religious historical research outside 'the West' or global modernity" (Kleine and Wohlrab Sahr 2020, 5, quoted in Borup 2022, 172).

Conclusion

To conclude, let me return to my stipulative framework of "neutrality" and ask what we may gain and what we will lose by replacing it with alternative foundational premises. Abandoning our axiological neutrality in favor of a pragmatic

evaluation of political relevance may increase our social visibility since our actions would be geared toward changing the world, hopefully for the better. However, this would cost us our critical distance and require us to gain new competences, in political philosophy, for example, to evaluate the results of the actions we might concert with various social and religious actors. By the same token, opening our discipline beyond methodological naturalism may contribute to the world's epistemic diversity, but the price seems to be the loss of any possible common ground upon which to build theories and methods. Finally, the integration of truth statements about super-empirical realities may provide us with an ultimate horizon for grounding our actions—or with a number of potentially conflicting ultimate horizons—but at the cost of our capacity to analyze such realities as contingent productions of human individual and collective ingenuity. I would say that, in the end, we would lose our very *raison d'ĕtre*.

Questions and Answers

During the Q&A, Professor David Thurfjell asked the following question: "Does your conclusion mean that you debunk the position that you have just presented?"—referring to the position of a decolonial approach to the study of religion—to which I replied, "I would not say [that I am] 'debunking' [it], but that embracing a decolonial approach on moral grounds has epistemic consequences that radically change what it means to be a scholar of religion."

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Fylypovych Liudmyla Oleksandrivna and Trylis Serhii Ivanovych

Change of Paradigms of Methodological Thinking in Modern Religious Studies

The Experience of Ukrainian Scientists

In view of the crisis that has arisen in the ranks of religious researchers in connection with the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine since 24 February 2022, which is formulated in the title of the conference, there is a need to clarify the position of Ukrainian religious scholars. Yes, we face complex challenges: ideological, political, ethical, and ultimately scientific and methodological.

We will omit an explanation on differentiation in methodological approaches in modern religious studies in Ukraine and Russia. Just suffice it to say that religious studies in Russia, as well as official scientific circles and the main religious establishments, have almost completely moved to the position of supporting Russia's military aggression against Ukraine. Let us now mention the background.

Was science *politicized* in the ussr? Yes, especially in humanitarian studies. Did it become *confessionalized* with the revival of religion in the former ussr countries? Partly, yes. This is especially clear in Russia, where religious studies exist mainly as Orthodox theology. Is Russia declaring itself the direct successor of the ussr? Again, yes. Are the current efforts to occupy other countries' land and annex their territories, the heritage of brutality and manipulation of the truth, the open efforts to renew the Soviet Union system and Russian imperialism and colonialism—is that all we see today? Again, yes.

In the independent Ukraine, the situation with religious studies is far different. Together with the background of a multiparty system (over one hundred political parties registered), frequent changes of political power make it difficult for

Fylypovych Liudmyla Oleksandrivna is based at the Institute of Philosophy named after H. Skovoroda at the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, and is President of the Ukrainian Association of Researchers of Religion. Trylis Serhii Ivanovych is based at Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture, Japan, and is Head of the Whole-Ukraine Buddhist Center.

religious scholars to enter the political mainstream. Therefore, Ukrainian religious studies distanced itself from narrow party interests, but always defended liberal values and democratic processes in society. So, we avoided the disease of politicization.

The same applies to the non-confessionalization of Ukrainian religious studies. Due to the multi-confessional nature of Ukraine (more than 120 religious movements) and the absence of a dominant church, on the religious field, Orthodox (3 branches), Catholics (2 denominations), Protestants (of different denominations), Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, and others are represented equally due to the clear definition of the object of research and delineation of the subject fields of the science of religion and the *science of God*, Ukrainian religious scholars have managed to avoid the disease of *confessionalization*.

Since Ukraine's independence in 1991, we have begun to actively develop direct initiatives and research because previously this was only done through Russia. We broadened our contacts and relations with European scientific centers and universities and international professional associations. We have been a member of the IAHR since 1996, and a member of the EASR since 2016.

Were there political and religious challenges? There were and there are. There were attempts to win us over by various political and religious communities. But we survived thanks to the *scientific methodology of studying religious phenomena*. Back in 1996, when writing the *Religious Dictionary*, and in 2000, with the publication of the *Academic Religious Studies* textbook, edited by Professor A. Kolodnyi, and then in all our writings we noted the principles on which science should stand. For many of you, these are obvious things, but for science, which was just emerging from Soviet scientific atheism, these issues became fateful.

However, this is not the time to discuss this complicated process here. Something else is more important. During the current war, we realized that it was time to deepen and expand the classical methodological principles formulated by Ukrainian academic religious studies in the prewar period.

For a long time, we went over what should form the basis of our research, and we substantiated the *principle of contextualization* as one of the main methodological approaches in the study of modern religious processes. It is not only the universality and effectiveness of some research methods in the new circumstances of the Russian-Ukrainian war that need rethinking. In the hierarchy of religious research principles, the *contextual approach* is especially in demand due to the real events of the war. We understand the contextual dangers for the living world (Ger: *lebenswelt*) of Ukraine that exist in its religious segment and highlight external and internal factors that cannot be ignored when analyzing the contemporary religious situation in Ukraine and the world.

The tragic minefield of the context of life for Ukrainians—linguistic, cultural, informational, religious, and so on, necessarily corrects expert neutrality,

objectivity, and noninvolvement. In our opinion, the war situation liberates us from impartial, out-of-contextual analysis. The admissibility of such a methodological approach is currently being actively discussed in Ukrainian religious studies.

This concerns the understanding and interpretation of the situation that has developed around the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC). The government's initiatives to limit the activities of this church in Ukraine may seem illegal from the point of view of constitutional guarantees for freedom of religion. In peacetime, all experts would have commented on the recent law 8371, which restricts or prohibits the activities of religious organizations whose management centers are not located in Ukraine but in other countries. We would also recognize this law as discriminatory because it would infringe on the rights of many religious communities: Catholics and Greek-Catholics, because their center is in the Vatican; Buddhists and Hindus, because their centers are located in India and other Asian countries; many Protestants whose centers are in different European countries and the USA; and other religious traditions. But it is the context—Russia's aggression against Ukraine, the anti-state cooperation of seventy priests and the hierarchy of the UOC with the occupation authorities—that dictates prohibitive requirements for certain religious structures: the activities of those religious organizations whose administrative centers are in a country recognized as the aggressor—Russia—are prohibited. The threat of being banned hung not only over the UOC, but also over other organizations such as the Russian Old Believer Church and Allatra. Therefore, using the principle of legal normativism, we could, which is what the overwhelming majority of foreign "fighters" for freedom of conscience do, condemn Ukraine, which resorts to restrictions on human rights in the sphere of freedom of conscience. But understanding the threat looming over the country and considering this security context, we support the state's measures to protect its national and state interest. Moreover, this law does not limit the rights of believers, no one persecutes them for their faith, no one is imprisoned for praying and participating in religious services, no one kills, no one closes any communities, no one takes away and destroys temples, and no one burns religious literature. Such discriminatory actions are carried out by the Russian authorities in the temporarily occupied territories, condemning people for their faith for decades: Muslims in Crimea, Jehovah's Witnesses in so-called people's republics (DNR and LNR respectively), banning the existence of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, and so on. In Ukraine, people are brought to criminal liability, including both believers and priests, but are liable as citizens of Ukraine and not as parishioners of a particular church for crimes committed, in particular for treason as an anti-state activity.

Unlike our foreign colleagues, our interest in methodological research is not so much driven by the general theoretical needs of the science of religion as by a practical need for a critical rethinking of the classical methodologies of

the prewar period, and the need for their correction and clarification in *force majeure* situations, which were manifested by the full-scale multilevel aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine.

Trying to avoid the pragmatically oriented results of the scientific understanding of religion is not only difficult, but also dangerous, because both religion and religious studies, as a systematic knowledge of religion in its various manifestations, is a purely human, humanistic, anthropocentric phenomenon or cognition that has a specific practical task: the salvation of humans (for religion), and providing a person with adequate knowledge of what religion is (for religious studies). A. Bronk noted that "absolute objectivity in religious studies is impossible, and the role of methodological studies as a meeting place of competing points of view becomes important" (Bronk 2011, 98).

Ukrainian religious studies crystallize the understanding that "the *texture* of reality can be captured only by personal experience (contextuality of knowledge of religious reality), and the *volume* of reality—can be realized by the depth of familiarity with the subject and its specifics" (Maidan and Church 2014, 8).

Moreover, in the conditions of war (reality in its extreme event state), contextuality becomes an extremely important methodological basis, and in fact becomes the dominant principle of understanding, ahead of other possible competing methodological approaches.

The contextual study of religion involves the study of the ways in which religion is influenced by its social, political, and other contexts.

Aware of the *force majeure* of war as a phenomenon in general, and the danger of Russian aggression against Ukraine in particular, destroying not only the external but also the internal worlds of Ukrainians and all humanity (Yermolenko 2022), it is necessary to focus on a critical analysis of the religious situation in consideration of those risks that affect this situation on a global and local scale, not only in the immediate, but also from a long-term perspective.

We have already written about changes in the religious landscape of Ukraine during the war (Kolodnyi and Fylypovych 2022), and about the role of Ukraine in the geopolitical reformation of the world, which occurred because of the Russian-Ukrainian war (Fylypovych and Vladychenko 2022). But the dynamics of religious life itself precedes our awareness of its changes. During 2023, events took place, perhaps unexpected for the church, the state, and society. We refer to the loss of the monopoly of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in the religious life of Ukraine, the aggressive influence of the Russian Orthodox Church on all Orthodoxy, a change in the vector of relations between Moscow and Rome, the growing role of chaplaincy in the armed forces, the provision of spiritual care for Ukrainian refugees abroad, and so on. But it is the context of the war that determines the speed of all these changes, their dynamics, and scale.

Conclusion

So, *contextuality as a methodological approach in religious studies* consists in the fact that the researcher must take into account:

(1) The context (in particular, Russia's military aggression against Ukraine) as a condition for the manifestation of religion, which determines its functional and meaningful features. Therefore, the context of reality is the meeting place of a religious scholar with a living religion, and contextuality is the understanding of transformational processes both in religion itself (the historicity of religion) and in its functioning as a human phenomenon in the conditions of war, on the one hand, and on the other hand, the simultaneous immersion of the researcher in this context.

(2) Features, depth, and intensity of one's (research) contextual inclusion or exclusion. Contextuality requires the researcher to constantly correct his position, check the assumptions formulated by him with reality, weigh the appropriateness of using certain methods and definitions, critically rethink what he said when the context changes, and by colleagues using the entire methodological apparatus of Ukrainian academic religious studies.

The methodological approaches used in academic religious studies in prewar times have not lost their functional significance even now during the Russian-Ukrainian war. But now the contextual approach is especially relevant, which proves the change of the paradigm of modern methodological thinking in the study of religion.

Therefore, the conceptual and methodological problems of religious research, analysis, and forecasting in conditions deformed by Russia's military aggression against Ukraine need to be strengthened by the principle of contextualization, correlation/correction, reconciliation of formulated assumptions with reality, weighing the appropriateness of using certain methods and definitions, and critical rethinking of the chosen methodological apparatus. The modern contextuality of religious studies dictates the need to understand not only the problems of metatheory, but also metapractice.

Finally, if someone asumes that the war situation involves only Ukraine they are mistaken. This war is the biggest in scale and significance since World War II, the challenges the whole world is facing are the same as during World War II, and we are all in fact on the brink of World War III, and Russia is leading us in this direction. So, our collective human and civilization answers to these challenges should be appropriate and should consider the dangers with a full sense of responsibility. We can no longer play objectivity or neutrality. We can no longer play with a full-scale emerging monster, otherwise that cancer will eat all of humanity.

Here are our few practical suggestions:

(1) Adopt the principle of contextuality as one of the most important scientific approaches in modern religious studies, and the contextual approach should be higher than the position of neutrality and noninvolvement.

(2) Clearly condemn the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, following the ethical and moral responsibility as scientists, as humans, and as members of the global family. Consider this as not being political but as following moral and ethical principles.

(3) Do not allow Russian scientists to be full, active, and equal members of the religious studies community until they take a clear stand against the war crimes their country is committing.

(4) Continue to elaborate relevant concepts of modern religious studies, adopted so that they may respond to the challenges the world and religions are facing.

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Shusuke Yamane

The Theory of Truth in William James's Pragmatism and Objectivity of Religious Studies

This study aims to examine William James's theory of truth in his pragmatism as *Wissenshcaft*,[1] and thereby reconsider the objectivity of religious studies and thus the "objectivity" of religious discourses. However, some skepticism is bound to occur in referring to James for such purposes. Although it is true that the theory of religious experiences developed by James in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (hereafter *Varieties*), based on a series of Gifford Lectures delivered at Edinburgh University, had a profound impact on the religious studies and philosophy of his time and of later generations, it is also true that it has received much criticism. Moreover, it is possible to indicate that the difficulties found in James's theory are fatal to religious studies and their objectivity. Let us begin by reviewing this point from James's own text.

According to James, the religious field can be divided into two branches; one is religion as "an institutional, corporate, or tribal product," and the other is religion as an individual personal function (James [1902] 1985, 268). The essentials of the former are "worship and sacrifice, procedures for working on the dispositions of the deity, theology and ceremony and ecclesiastical organization," whereas the latter branch comprises "the inner dispositions of man himself which form the centre of interest, his conscience, his desert, his helplessness, his incompleteness," and James proposes "to ignore the institutional branch entirely" (James [1902] 1985, 32). This dichotomy and the limitation of the discussion to the latter do not merely stem from his methodology of exam-

1. The term "Wissenschaft" as used in this study has a broader meaning than science.

Shusuke Yamane is Associate Professor at the National Institute of Technology, Maizuru College, Japan.

ining religion psychologically. The two branches that constitute this opposition are not equal in value; rather, personal religion is assumed to be superior to institutional religion. James believes that the fundamental element that forms the core of religion is the intense emotional upheaval that an individual undergoes through religious experience, and it is in this that the reality of the world emerges.[2] In contrast, religion of an ordinary believer, whether Christianity, Buddhism, or Islam, "has been made for him by others, communicated to him by tradition, determined to fixed forms by imitation, and retained by habit," or "second-hand" religion. James considers it inferior to "the original experience" (James [1902] 1985, 15) or "direct personal communion with the divine" (James [1902] 1985, 33), from which the former was derived.

This dichotomy and the superiority of personal religion are justified in the arguments of mysticism in *Varieties*. It is an important and difficult problem to elucidate the relationship between religious and mystical experiences (also expressed as "mystical states of consciousness"); however, let us temporarily assume that mystical experience is a more direct encounter with the divine than with any other religious experience.[3] James lists four characteristics of this mystical experience: ineffability, noetic quality, transiency, and passivity (James [1902] 1985, 302). Here we focus on the "ineffability."[4] He believes that someone who has experienced a mystic state "says that it defies expression, that no adequate report of its contents can be given in words" (James [1902] 1985, 302). Therefore, it is impossible for those who have experienced a mystical state to convey it to those who have not experienced it, and therefore, it can only be understood by actually experiencing it. The vast number of writings of mystics quoted in *Varieties* have inspired many people, but they are only inadequate copies of the original experiences. Institutional religion is a derivative of these experiences and can only occupy a subordinate position to personal religion. This is his firm position that runs throughout *Varieties*.

Some Criticisms of James's Theory of Religion

Some criticisms of James's view of religion have been addressed. According to these criticisms, it is not appropriate to use James's theory of religion to examine the objectivity of religious studies, for his theory of religious experience presupposes the universal concept or essence of religion that has been criticized by

2. "The recesses of feeling, the darker, blinder strata of character, are the only places in the world in which we catch real fact in the making, and directly perceive how events happen, and how work is actually done" (James [1902] 1985, 395).

3. "Personal religious experience has its root and centre in mystical states of consciousness" (James [1902] 1985, 301).

4. "This incommunicableness of the transport is the keynote of all mysticism. Mystical truth exists for the individual who has the transport, but for no one else" (James [1902] 1985, 321).

religious studies since the late twentieth century. Such criticisms stem from the attitude shared by many scholars of religion, such as Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Talal Asad, Russell McCutcheon, and others, who take a stand against the presupposition of the concept of "religion" as self-evidently universal and consider it as simply a local concept that has been historically constructed from a Protestant perspective. In *Varieties*, James criticizes Catholicism and other religions that emphasize doctrine, ritual, and church organization, and praises Protestantism, which he belonged to, and he believes that Christianity has gradually changed and developed from a Catholic form to one that emphasizes communion with the inner God.[5] It is difficult to deny that there is a bias in his theory of religious experience that places a high value on individuality or interiority and an underestimation of the value of collective religious practice. Moreover, there appears to be minimal self-reflection as to whether this tendency stems from the Protestant tradition to which he belongs, that is, whether the position he adopts is influenced by the religious background in which he was born and raised.[6]

Further, James's theory of religion is criticized as inappropriate for religious studies as a discipline because of its bias toward an overemphasis on the personal, internal, and emotional elements, and particularly because it pushes the authenticity of religious experience into the psychological and subjective. John E. Smith, in the introduction to *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, noted that "by identifying the social dimension with ecclesiastical structures, James was unable to appreciate the spiritual togetherness of many individuals sharing a common faith in a continuing community" (James [1902] 1985, xix). Thus, it criticizes James's theory as not beyond the subjective and emotional experience that an individual has, and cannot have any further validity or be connected to objectivity that any discipline must have. This is a point that overlaps with criticisms of his pragmatism.

This study does not defend James against these criticisms. They are certainly valid, especially considering the abovementioned theory of religious experience

5. "One may say that the whole development of Christianity in inwardness has consisted in little more than the greater and greater emphasis attached to this crisis of self-surrender. From Catholicism to Lutheranism, and then to Calvinism; from that to Wesleyanism; and from this, outside of technical Christianity altogether, to pure 'liberalism' or transcendental idealism, whether or not of the mind-cure type, taking in the mediaeval mystics, the quietists, the pietists, and Quakers by the way, we can trace the stages of progress toward the idea of an immediate spiritual help, experienced by the individual in his forlornness and standing in no essential need of doctrinal apparatus or propitiatory machinery" (James [1902] 1985, 173).

6. However, James also condemns the essentialist understanding of religion as follows: "The very fact that they [definitions of religion] are so many and so different from one another is enough to prove that the word 'religion' cannot stand for any single principle or essence, but is rather a collective name" (James [1902] 1985, 30); "There is no ground for assuming a simple abstract 'religious emotion' to exist as a distinct elementary mental affection by itself, present in every religious experience without exception" (James [1902] 1985, 31).

in *Varieties*, and it would be futile and unproductive to refute them. Nevertheless, it is significant that this study dares to use James's ideas to discuss the objectivity of religious studies.

It is true that James left significant works as a psychologist and assumed an empiricist and anti-intellectual position, and, therefore, it is not surprising that he tends to emphasize personal and internal feelings. However, it is noteworthy that the essential and inevitable element of James's pragmatism is the search for objective truth while simultaneously emphasizing personal feelings and subjectivity, although this is done differently from one adopted by "foundationalism" whereby one judges the truth based on the success or failure of the actions that certain propositions and ideas lead to, and on their consistency with each other. By considering the pragmatist perspective, it may be possible to develop the theory of religion in *Varieties* in a different direction, and thus contribute to the objectivity of religious studies.

James's pragmatism is unique and significant in that it provides a means of examining the truth or falsehood of a proposition or idea, independent of whether it is naturally scientific or accurate in the naturally scientific sense. Thus, James's pragmatism is able to treat ideas, discourses, and propositions uniformly in determining their truth or falsehood, regardless of their type, and it inherits this property from Peirce's pragmatism. For James's pragmatism, whether a discourse is scientific is a secondary and derivative issue; what matters is whether it "works well" in actual experience. It has the possibility to open up a new way of thinking about the objectivity of *Wissenschaft*, different from the old way, which held that scientific discourses can be objectively judged true or false, whereas religious discourses cannot be judged, and therefore should not be considered by *Wissenschaft*.

The Pragmatic Method

"Pragmatism" was proposed by Charles Sanders Peirce. As its origin can be traced back to the "metaphysical club" to which Peirce and James belonged when they were young, it is unclear who coined the term itself; however, James attributes it to Peirce. He defined pragmatism as a way of clarifying the semantic content of a concept from the perspective of its practical effects. For example, when we say that something is "hard," we mean that it will not be scratched by other objects when rubbed by them, and this is the entire concept of "hardness." In determining the meaning of a concept, Peirce bases his criteria on the effects that the concept produces when tested in actual experiences.[7] He removes the

7. "Consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object" (Peirce 1955, 31).

ambiguity and imprecision of a concept, proposition, and judgment and makes it clear and understandable. This is what Peirce attempted through pragmatism.

James's pragmatism is similar in that it emphasizes practical results and conduct; however, its substance is distinctly different from that of Peirce. Peirce considers pragmatism as a methodology that overturns and replaces the Cartesian view of science and cognition, whereas James applies pragmatism to philosophical concepts such as existence and truth, religious concepts such as God and faith, and moral concepts such as good and evil. He believed that the pragmatist methodology is not limited to scientific problems alone, but includes affairs related to human activities in general. Consequently, his pragmatism concerns specific and particular human actions and experiences. Furthermore, James does not appear to be as concerned with the rigor and clarity of concepts as Peirce. Rather, he argues that what is important for a concept is the way it leads one to any individual conduct. The following quotation is from James's lecture "Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results," in which he discusses pragmatism for the first time:

> The ultimate test for us of what a truth means is indeed the conduct it dictates or inspires. But it inspires that conduct because it first foretells some particular turn to our experience which shall call for just that conduct from us. And I should prefer for our purposes this evening to express Peirce's principle by saying that the effective meaning of any philosophic proposition can always be brought down to some particular consequence, in our future practical experience, whether active or passive. (James [1907] 1975, 259)

Thus, James's pragmatism denotes that the meaning of a concept depends on the particular conduct it will provoke in the future, and the concrete experiences that people will undergo. James admired Peirce's pragmatism, but he incorporated his interpretation of it into his own philosophical system. In *Pragmatism,* he states, "there can *be* no difference anywhere that doesn't *make* a difference elsewhere—no difference in abstract truth that doesn't express itself in a difference in concrete fact and in conduct consequent upon that fact, imposed on somebody, somehow, somewhere and somewhen" (James [1907] 1975, 30). Such statements can be found in various other works. James's emphasis on the concreteness of lived, personal experience is always to be found in these nonmethodological discussions. His theories of truth and reality, discussed in the next section, are examples of this.

What is Truth for James's Pragmatism?

What is truth? James considers this question in depth in the sixth lecture of *Pragmatism*, "Pragmatism's Concept of Truth." He states that the most common definition of truth is the "agreement of ideas with reality" (James [1907] 1975, 96).

However, the question to ask is what is meant by "reality" or "agreement." James defines the concept of truth as follows:

> *True ideas are those that we can assimilate, validate, corroborate and verify. False ideas are those that we cannot*. That is the practical difference it makes to us to have true ideas; that, therefore, is the meaning of truth, for it is all that truth is known-as. This thesis is what I have to defend. The truth of an idea is not a stagnant property inherent in it. Truth *happens* to an idea. It *becomes* true, is *made* true by events. Its verity is in fact an event, a process: the process namely of its verifying itself, its veri-*fication*. Its validity is the process of its valid-*ation*. (James [1907] 1975, 97)

In James's pragmatism, truth is something that can only be true when we "verify" an idea, and this truth is seen as a dynamic "process" that gradually acquires its truthfulness, as opposed to the subjectivist way of thinking, which considers truth as something that has been true from the beginning. Intellectualism considers the view of discovering a hidden and static truth from outside of it, whereas in pragmatism, one creates truth. Truth is a "discovery" for other theories but an "invention" for pragmatism, as Bergson rightly expresses (Bergson [1934] 2009, 247). We assume an active role in making an idea true through a process called "verification," rather than confirming that the idea is true. Therefore, what is this process of verification? Consider the following quote:

> What do the words verification and validation themselves pragmatically mean? They again signify certain practical consequences of the verified and validated idea. It is hard to find any one phrase that characterizes these consequences better than the ordinary agreement-formula—just such consequences being what we have in mind whenever we say that our ideas "agree" with reality. They lead us, namely, through the acts and other ideas which they instigate, into or up to, or toward, other parts of experience with which all the while—such feeling being among our potentialities—that the original ideas remain in agreement. The connexions and transitions come to us from point to point as being progressive, harmonious, satisfactory. This function of agreeable leading is what we mean by an idea's verification. (James [1907] 1975, 97)

This is where "agreement" is treated. As suggested by the previous quote, in James's theory of truth, the agreement of idea and reality is not something predetermined.[8] Thus, James does not believe that the agreement of an idea with a certain reality occurs independent of us, and that we possess truth only by finding that idea. Rather, we are led in a certain direction through the conduct

8. "Our grasp of the notion of truth must not be represented as simply a mystery mental act by which we relate ourselves to a relation called 'correspondence' totally independent of the practices by which we *decide* what is and is not true" (Putnam 1995, 11).

caused by an idea, and if we can find the reality corresponding to it in the various events experienced along the way, or at the end of the path to which we have been led, then this is the "agreement" and only then does the idea become true.

Let us assume, for example, that you want to borrow a book and have an idea of the library. You imagine the path to the library and follow it as you walk or open the doors. All the while, you feel that your changing experience is continuing to match your initial idea. Therefore, if you successfully arrive at the library and are able to borrow the book, you will fulfill your original purpose and feel satisfied. At that point, the "idea of the library" matches the real "library," and therefore, this idea has been made true, satisfactory, and useful.[9] The satisfaction of steadily approaching the reality to which an idea indicates and the usefulness enjoyed by doing so are merely the signs that accompany this agreement or the derivatives that it leads to, and do not constitute the agreement itself. Satisfactions are "insufficient unless reality be also incidentally led to" (James [1909] 1975, 106). When you reach the destination to which the idea leads, then the agreement occurs. However, if you arrive at a place that is not a library, and are not able to borrow the book, then there is no agreement, satisfaction, or usefulness.

It is noteworthy that this sequence of processes can only occur in actual and concrete experiences. All the terms involved in the processes of verification are embedded in "the matrix of experiential circumstance, psychological as well as physical" (James [1909] 1975, 91), and therefore, the details of these processes of mediating between ideas and the reality to which they refer can be traced one by one by our physical activities within the experienceable world, with no need to go outside of it. It is not the incomprehensible leap that establishes the agreement of ideas with the reality. Through "particular workings, physical or intellectual, actual or possible, which they [ideas] may set up from next to next inside of concrete experience" (James [1909] 1975, 7), our ideas are directly connected to the reality and become true.

Degrees of Truth

In his various writings, James rejects the theological God or God as Absolute. However, if such a God offers religious comfort to some people, he says, the idea of God is "true in so far forth" (James [1907] 1975, 41). However, we should not distinguish two types of truths in James's pragmatism; one is "truth-in-so-far-forth," with which James opens the way for religious thoughts, and the other is, as discussed earlier, truth through verification, which secures the possibility of scientific inquiry. It is not appropriate to divide truths in this way into two

9. "True is the name for whatever idea starts the verification-process, useful is the name for its completed function in experience" (James [1907] 1975, 98).

completely different types. Here, I would like to introduce the notion of "degrees of truth" to consider this problem.

James mentions this "true in so far forth" in the second lecture titled "The Meaning of Pragmatism" in *Pragmatism*, where he states that it is in the sixth lecture, "The Pragmatist View of Truth," which discusses truths through verification, that he will convince the readers of this type of truth (James [1907] 1975, 42). From this, we must argue that "true in so far forth" can also be understood based on the agreement of idea and reality through verification. It is unnecessary to consider the two types of truths as being entirely different. When an idea is held to be true, its truthfulness has a gradation, and there is not only a choice between true and false. When there are two true ideas, can we assume a case in which one is even more true than the other? James suggests that there can be degrees of truth, using expressions such as "truer," "half-truths," and "only relatively true" (James [1907] 1975, 107). Considering these, it is not surprising that James remarks, "how much more they [theological ideas] are true, will depend entirely on their relations to the other truths that also have to be acknowledged" (James [1907] 1975, 40–41).

James places the least true "truth in so far forth" at one pole and the truest "maximal conceivable truth" (James [1909] 1975, 87) at the other pole, and we can interpret James as thinking that the actual various truths lie somewhere between these two poles. The extreme of "truth in so far forth" is a complete fallacy with no connection to reality, whereas that of "maximal conceivable truth" is the "ideal vanishing-point toward which we imagine that all our temporary truths will some day converge" (James [1907] 1975, 106–7), "an utter mutual confluence and identification of ideas and reality" (James [1909] 1975, 87). Truths cannot be held in the former, and the latter, described as "absolute limit of truth" (James [1909] 1975, 88), is impossible to actually occur. When an idea is true, we may say that it is partially consistent with reality and true to that extent; however, it is not a complete truth because it is not consistent with every other truth. If there should be the absolute truth, it would be "what works best in the way of leading us, what fits every part of life best and combines with the collectivity of experience's demands, nothing being omitted" (James [1907] 1975, 44), but such a truth may be considered an extreme ideal. Therefore, James defines the agreement of an idea with the reality as being "guided either straight up to it [reality] or into its surroundings" or being "put into such working touch with it as to handle either it or something connected with it better than if we disagreed" (James [1907] 1975, 102).

James invented the concept of truths that differ from each other in content and in various degrees of their truthfulness. The degree of truth is measured by how well, useful, and satisfactory it is for someone who needs it. A truth, despite being once accepted as truth, always leaves open the possibility of being superseded by other truths judged to be truer. As the absolute truth is considered only

an ideal, every truth is simply one of hypotheses that are actually working well for now. Thus, truth in James is understood as something that has shades and allows for differences in degree rather than as something absolute.[10]

Previous Truths

An important point for James's pragmatist theory of truth—and for this study's perspective on the theory of *Wissenschaft*—is that truths, as described so far, form a system of various truths called "previous truths" (James [1907] 1975, 118). We already have a multitude of truths that our predecessors have left us or that we have learned on our own, and we can think and act according to these truths. We use them without examining them each time, and we could not possibly live without them. There exist truths that are not directly confirmed as such, truths that actually work despite the individual not making them true. Most of them belong to a group of truths called "common sense," or "discoveries of exceedingly remote ancestors, which have been able to preserve themselves throughout the experience of all subsequent time" (James [1907] 1975, 83).

James says that the possibility of verification is the same as verification (James [1907] 1975, 99; [1909] 1975, 4). Therefore, knowing in advance that an idea is true without actually following the process to which it leads, and actually following that process to complete its verification, ultimately points to the same thing. For "all true processes must lead to the face of directly verifying sensible experiences *somewhere*, which somebody's ideas have copied" (James [1907] 1975, 103). We believe that we can verify an unverified idea by actually testing it in our experience. The "credit system" underlies this. "We trade on each other's truth" (James [1907] 1975, 100), constructing a vast system of infinite truths called common sense. Certainly, it is insufficient to believe everything that others state. If an alleged truth is inconsistent with other truths, we need to question it and actually trace it back ourselves, otherwise we accept the truths that already exist as our legacy, the ideas that others provide as truths, without examining them one by one. "*Indirectly or only potentially verifying processes may thus be true as well as full verification-processes*" (James [1907] 1975, 100).

We use these "previous truths" to create new truths, "resultants of new experiences and of old truths combined and mutually modifying one another" (James

10. To recognize degrees of truth means not to adopt the binary logic of true or false, and also not to consider logical laws such as the law of the excluded middle and the law of noncontradiction as valid for all things. The laws of logic are valid only in the purely abstract realm of mathematics and logic. Although James acknowledges the validity of this realm (James [1907] 1975, 101), he believes that it was originally constructed by the gradual abstraction of concrete sensible experiences where binary logic is not necessarily valid. For James, the logical laws are not a panacea in our actual experiences.

[1907] 1975, 83), and add them to the stock of past truths, "the ancient body of truth" (James [1907] 1975, 36). Being subject to various types of constraints over which we have no control, we act by using several truths created in the past and sometimes create new truths that enable us to have better contact with reality. They are added to the collective body of truths as the heritage of humanity, so that they can be used again by others. James believes that humans have developed through a chain of such processes. It is in this sense that James insists that "the whole history of our thought is the history of our substitution of one of them [realities] for another, and the reduction of the substitute to the status of a conceptual sign" (James [1909] 1975, 31).

Such a theory of truth in James's pragmatism would indeed form a theory of science. The various fields of science share this system of truths, which is composed of several verified truths, and draw useful truths from it and use them or modify the system by adding new truths obtained from them. Ideas that were once considered truths are not unconditionally and permanently accepted as truths as they are. To acquire and maintain their position as truth, they must be consistent with infinite other truths that already exist, and they must be proven valid in the actual world. A truth may be discarded or corrected after confrontation or experimentation with other truths, and conversely, existing truths may be forced to be modified. In any case, the system of truths is expected to change and grow gradually. This is exactly what science has been doing.

This pragmatist theory of truth has been succeeded in the modern philosophy of science. Of the contemporary philosophers of science who assume a pragmatist position, Hasok Chang, mentioned in Cartwright's lecture, is perhaps the one who most closely follows James's pragmatism (and Dewey) in his examination of science. He defines his own concept of truth as "truth-by-operational-coherence" (Chang 2022), inspired by the work of Roberto Toretti, who advocated pragmatic realism.[11] Chang insists that all scientific research is actually based and depends on this type of concept of truth, and that, through it, "William James's controversial notion of truth can be rehabilitated" (Chang 2022, 197). According to this concept, a proposition or statement is true when it has operational coherence, that is, when the act in accordance with that proposition or statement is successful for its original purpose (Chang 2022, 40, 167–68). Chang's philosophy of science shares positions with James's pragmatism in many ways: the rejection of reality and truth as existing independently of our experience, the notion of experience as the ultimate source of all knowledge, and the concept of truth to guide our conduct and life better.

11. "It is pragmatic realism, not the nostalgic kryptotheology of 'scientific realism,' that best expresses the real facts of human knowledge and the working scientist's understanding of reality" (Torretti 2000, 115).

However, considering that James defines reality as anything that influences us in any way, it may be insufficient to apply James's pragmatism to defined scientific theories alone, as Chang does.[12] Rather, James's pragmatism places both scientific and religious reality or truths on the same plane, and the truth or falsehood of both scientific and religious ideas can be judged based on the same criteria. Pragmatism affirms the reality of something by the action or effect it exerts on us, whether in a scientific or religious context. For pragmatic methods, it is sufficient to examine only its "fruit," and there is no need to seek its "origin" or "foundation," and it does not make any difference whether its "nature" or "essence" is physical, psychological, or divine.

James's Pragmatism and Religious Studies

How, then, are religious ideas made true? A nonreligious idea presented as a hypothesis can be tested by the success or failure of conduct led through that idea, or by its conformity with existing truths. Even ideas that have been recognized as true may lose their status as truth owing to competition from new truths. Can the same process be followed for religious ideas? Usually, because words from a mystic's experience, as well as religious doctrines, discourses, and scriptures based on them, are treated as unscientific and lacking objectivity and so excluded from *Wissenschaf*, a mystic's experience cannot be confirmed by everyone and has no reproducibility enabled by experimentation, which almost all disciplines of natural science consider essential. However, as noted above, in the pragmatic theory of truth, the origin or cause of an idea is not important, but whether it actually affects a person and causes any difference in that person. In James's pragmatism, there is no distinction between "natural scientific truths" and "religious truths," or at least, no difference in quality is recognized there. Nevertheless, James does not consider religious ideas to be unconditionally correct or capable of being judged true or false independently of scientific truths. In James's pragmatic theory of truth, whether an idea is true or false is revealed when it is tested or verified in experience. Moreover, "test" includes consistency with other ideas already held to be truths. This applies even to the discourses or words of supposed mystics.

12. However, Chang suggests the possibility of applying his pragmatic conception of truth to the religious realm as well, but his prudence as a philosopher of science appears to prevent him from explicitly stating this. "James's 'radical empiricism' involved paying respectful attention even to religious, mystical and parapsychological experiences. It is an important part of pragmatism to take 'experience' as the full lived experience of human beings, recognizing its full range and all of its aspects" (Chang 2022, 61); "Whether moral or religious truths are in empirical domains is a controversial question, which I will not try to answer here. But I do want to offer a conception of truth that can be usefully applied in whichever domains that one may treat as empirical" (Chang 2022, 167).

> To come from thence [the subliminal or transmarginal region] is no infallible credential. What comes must be sifted and tested, and run the gauntlet of confrontation with the total context of experience, just like what comes from the outer world of sense. Its value must be ascertained by empirical methods, so long as we are not mystics ourselves. (James [1902] 1985, 338)

James treats the testimonies of mystics as something worth listening to. However, he repeatedly admonishes the attitude of people who blindly believe them to be true.[13] Their testimonies are no more than an idea that must be respected unless tested or verified, but are, "just like" a nonreligious idea, waiting to be tested by experience and its conformity with other truths.[14] Mystical experiences, despite being only directly available to some privileged people (mystics), are not guaranteed of their objective truthfulness from the outset, but must be confirmed and judged true by others in and through their experiences. James states that, "the true is what works well, even though the qualification 'on the whole' may always have to be added" (James [1902] 1985, 361).

In his first philosophical work, *The Will to Believe*, James describes faith as a "working hypothesis," which can be tested and verified by living the religious life as if it were true. Similar to a scientific hypothesis, a true religious hypothesis is that which "works best" (James [1897] 1979, 8), and one can empirically confirm its efficiency. It is true that the time taken to judge the truth or falsehood of a hypothesis varies from case to case. Some may be refused in five minutes alone, whereas others may be disqualified as truth after having been considered true for decades or centuries. However, generally speaking, "the longer disappointment [which a hypothesis brings someone] is delayed, the stronger grows his faith in his theory" (James [1897] 1979, 79). In any case, according to James, it is not valid to believe a religious idea after it has proved true. There is no way to confirm the truth of religious ideas in a foundationalist way. Only by actually placing our faith in our experience can we ascertain that it is true, and only then can it become true.

For further consideration of this difficult question of how the truth or falsity of religious ideas can be determined, it is instructive to draw on Bergson's notion of the "lines of facts." In "Consciousness and Life" in his collection titled *The Spiritual Energy*, he discusses the appropriate way of inquiry for philosophy,

13. "No authority emanates from them [the mystical state] which should make it a duty for those who stand outside of them to accept their revelation uncritically" (James [1902] 1985, 335); "Mystics have no right to claim that we ought to accept the deliverance of their peculiar experiences, if we are ourselves outsiders and feel no private call thereto" (James [1902] 1985, 336).

14. It is puzzling that Chang, a faithful and observant reader of James, states the following: "The basic pragmatist intuition is that primary truth is something that we can live by. Unlike religious truth in its ordinary conception, which one also lives by, empirical primary truth is tested by experience" (Chang 2022, 169).

comparing it with that for natural science. Some of the problems that philosophy deals with are such that there can be no definitive facts that lead to a clear solution, such as the problems that mathematics, physics, and so on deal with. Nevertheless, it is possible for the various groups of facts found in experience to form multiple lines, and for them to converge on a single point, which can lead us to a definite conclusion. It is true that each line may not be sufficiently long, and it does not provide us direct acquaintance all at once, but this process would provide some certainty and advance philosophy. This philosophical search for truth by "lines of facts" is a metaphor for the "triangulation" performed by surveyors. As it is said "we will come infinitely closer to the path of certainty through the common efforts of associated good wills" (Bergson [1919] 2009, 3–4), it is important that this process is not conducted by individual philosophers but by a group of philosophers, that it will progress "like positive science," and that each line can be called a "hypothesis."

Bergson, in *Consciousness and Life*, presents the inquiry by "lines of facts" in relation to science and philosophy, but in *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, the same argument is brought up in relation to religion. Bergson notes that, although "mystical experience, left to its own devices, cannot provide philosophy with definitive certainty," when what is found through "sensible experience and reasoning based on it" is in accordance with experiences of mystics, we become considerably close to the truth. Referring to the "lines of facts" discussed in *Consciousness and Life*, he asserts that "this method of cross-referencing is the only one that can definitively advance metaphysics." The statement of mystics is assumed as a group of lines, and the facts acquired in an empirical way as a group of lines, alluding to the same point, despite being separate (Bergson [1932] 2008, 262–64).

Conclusion

This discussion highlighted the theory of *Wissenschaft* considering James's theory of truth in pragmatism, and showed that there is room for religious ideas and discourses in *Wissenschaft*. Finally, I would like to present the chief points of this consideration and once again refer to the theme of the conference from this perspective.

A religious idea has to be tested in two ways. The first is by adopting it as a truth and examining whether it actually works well; the second is to investigate whether it is consistent with other ideas that have already been established as truths and have their own place among previous truths. In the actual verification, one cannot strictly distinguish the two ways. Its working well implies that it is not in conflict with other truths that lead our conduct. If an idea that emerges from mystical experiences is to be tested, it cannot be directly verified by someone who has not had such experiences. However, by believing it, it can be verified

and its truthfulness can be enhanced. Religious ideas are not accepted as truths in and of themselves. They may be true for someone who has mystical experience, but only insofar as they are true. They can only acquire "objectivity" when they are believed to be true by those who share the system of truths into which they have been thrown.

Therefore, it is thought that ordinary believers without direct mystical experience can play an active and important role. Verification of an idea, whether scientific or religious, is a communal activity. There may be cases where a simple idea can be made true by a single person, but only for a limited number of ideas, and such ideas alone are insufficient to act or think properly. Religious ideas, for their inclusion in the system of truths, are repeatedly tested by the practices of those who believe them to determine whether they will remain as truths to be adopted in the future. Every time believers pray in church, hang their head to the gods with oak hands at a shrine, worship facing Mecca, roll beads and chant the *nenbutsu*, religious ideas are tested and gradually solidify their position as truths so that the members of communities can "use" them as the truths. It is not only other religious ideas that are referred to when measuring truthfulness of a religious idea. Sometimes, they will be discarded as "outdated" because of advances in science or changes in secular values. We can see religious ideas that have passed the test of time as continuing in the form of articles of faith, scriptures, and rituals.

> The truest scientific hypothesis is that which, as we say, "works" best; and it can be no otherwise with religious hypotheses. Religious history proves that one hypothesis after another has worked ill, has crumbled at contact with a widening knowledge of the world, and has lapsed from the minds of men. Some articles of faith, however, have maintained themselves through every vicissitude, and possess even more vitality to-day than ever before: it is for the "science of religions" to tell us just which hypotheses these are. (James [1897] 1979, 8)

If this is the case, why is it necessary to exclude "confessional" elements from our definition of "religious studies" as *Wissenschaft*? The attitude of distinguishing in advance between what is to be studied and what is not to be studied is inappropriate, at least for James's pragmatism. Have we not been taught by many excellent religious studies since the late twentieth century that we should place certain reservations on the validity and legitimacy of attempting to separate science and religion altogether? Certainly, I do not claim that this is the answer to the problem of the objectivity of religious discourses and ideas. James's view is problematic in many ways, and includes some points to be criticized. However, if a religious idea or discourse actually has some influence on people's belief and conduct, it should not be ignored, regardless of how ambiguous and lacking in objectivity it may appear from the perspective of natural science or rigorous

social science. Further, it should not be disregarded in comparison with supposedly scientific discourses, ideas, and notions. It appears important to treat all discourses and ideas, regardless of whether scientific, with the same qualifications in considering the sensitive issue of objectivity in religious studies. Considering this the theory of truth of classical pragmatism, as represented by James, may also have some significance.

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Summary of JARS Young Members' Roundtable Session

"Why Study Religion? JARS Young Members' Perspectives"

Organizer:	Satoko Fujiwara
Chair:	Katja Triplett (IAHR Executive, Leipzig University)
Speakers:	Aya Oba, Aki Murakami, Mina Lee, Hiroki Tanaka, Ikuo Tsuboko
Discussants:	Milda Ališauskienė (IAHR Executive, Vytautas Magnus University), David Thurfjell (IAHR Executive, Södertörn University)

Introduction

In this roundtable session, five doctoral and post-doc JARS (Japanese Association for Religious Studies) members, who have thoroughly understood the purpose of this Special Conference and its background, expressed their opinions and suggestions for the IAHR. The panel organizer had given them four questions, any of which they could focus upon:

- In Europe, where the modern scientific study of religion is said to have originated, it is often said nowadays that young scholars of religion are relatively more inclined to socially relevant research. Is the inclination of young scholars toward social relevance the same in Japan?
- What do young JARS members think about the integrity of the academic study of religion?
- What are the objectives of their research? What challenges are they facing?
- What do they expect from an international academic federation like the IAHR?

Aya Oba

Postdoctoral Fellow at the National Museum of Japanese History, holding a PhD in literature from Taisho University, specializing in the sociology of religion with a focus on the transformation of funerals in modern society.

WHY STUDY RELIGION:

Oba's interest lies in exploring how people view and deal with the problem of death, a universal and inevitable aspect of human existence. She inquires how

this perspective has evolved over time, the role of religion and the state in this process, and similarities across different cultures. Her approach includes examining changes in religious culture, particularly in funeral practices, through the analysis of specific practices.

THE STUDY OF RELIGION AS "SCIENCE":

Oba agrees with the IAHR Executive Committee's 2019 proposal to rename "History of Religions" the "Study of Religions" and "the academic study of religions" the "scientific study of religions." She emphasizes the need for regional diversity in the IAHR and suggests that the term "science" in this context should be approached with caution, especially considering its different interpretations in various linguistic and cultural contexts. In Japan, for instance, the academic study of religion includes humanities, social sciences, and theology. At Taisho University—a Buddhist private university founded by four Buddhist schools, from which she earned her PhD—there is a department of religious studies. Here, approximately half of the students and scholars are also monks. However, she observes that they are careful to ensure that their studies do not appear to be confessional or apologetic even though their work is fundamentally motivated by their faith in their schools and their perspectives are sometimes different from hers. Therefore, Oba argues for a broad interpretation that encompasses empirical evidence, speculative religious philosophy, and even the perspectives of monks, priests, religious leaders, and activists.

EXPECTATIONS FROM THE IAHR:

Oba hopes the IAHR will continue to provide an open international platform for diverse scholars to interact, in contrast to solely online communication that often leads to echo chambers or filter bubbles. She values the opportunities for exchanging ideas and perspectives across different fields, highlighting the importance of such interactions for understanding contemporary social issues, including those related to death. Oba emphasizes the significance of this platform, especially for young scholars, in encountering new ideas and broadening perspectives.

CONCLUSION:

Oba studies religion to understand how people confront death and its societal implications. She stresses the importance of ongoing discussions about what constitutes "scientific" in the study of religion, tailoring these definitions to fit contemporary contexts. She envisions the IAHR as a dynamic space for scholars

of varied backgrounds, particularly aiding young academics in discovering new viewpoints and methodologies.

Aki Murakami

A graduate of secular and national Tsukuba University, specializing in the sociology of religion and focusing on contemporary local religious practices in Japan, such as shamanism and rituals for the dead. She is currently a tenured lecturer in the Faculty of Buddhist Studies at Komazawa University, a Buddhist private university.

BACKGROUND OF KOMAZAWA UNIVERSITY:

Komazawa University, one of the oldest private universities in Japan, was founded as a school for Buddhist priests by the Sōtō Zen Order in 1592. It opened to non-priest students in 1925. The university comprises seven faculties and seventeen departments with about fourteen thousand students. About forty Buddhist universities in Japan are run by traditional Buddhist orders, with Komazawa being one of the largest.

FACULTY COMPOSITION AND RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT:

Many faculty members are associated with Buddhist temples, being either Buddhist priests, children of priests, or married to priests. Half of the faculty are Sōtō Zen priests, and most students are sons of priests, destined to follow in their footsteps. This unique composition impacts the faculty's educational focus and Murakami's position as the only faculty member not directly tied to a Buddhist temple or order.

STUDY OF RELIGION IN JAPAN:

Regular Japanese universities typically do not offer specialized courses in the study of religions. Buddhist universities, including Komazawa, have been primary providers of specialized education in this field, heavily influenced by Buddhist orders. Murakami observes no significant tension between Buddhist theology and the study of religions within the faculty, unlike the Western academic distinction between Christian theology and the study of religions.

APPROACH TO RESEARCH:

Murakami conducts field research on folk religious practices influenced by Buddhist teachings, distinguishing her work from the traditional textual and doctrinal focus in Buddhist studies. This difference in approach has led to a new sense

of identity and purpose in bridging the gap between doctrinal study and the lived aspects of Buddhism.

EXPECTATIONS FOR THE IAHR:

Murakami stresses the importance of the IAHR's role in fostering diverse debates on the nature of religious studies and believes that international discussions can offer new perspectives on domestic issues faced by researchers. She advocates keeping discussions open to various viewpoints and not settling for a singular answer regarding the identity of the study of religions.

CONCLUSION:

Murakami highlights her unique position within the Buddhist academic environment of Japan. Her focus on field research in the study of religions contrasts with the traditional doctrinal focus prevalent in Buddhist universities. In other words, the difference between Buddhist studies and herself lies in the difference in research methods rather than the dichotomy of confessional and non-confessional. She envisions a more inclusive and diverse approach to the study of religions, both in Japan and internationally, through platforms like the IAHR.

Mina Lee

A doctoral student in the Department of the Study of Religions at the University of Tokyo, focusing on the early modern history of Judaism.

INTEREST IN THE STUDY OF RELIGIONS:

Being a third-generation Korean living in Japan, Lee's interest in the study of religions, specifically Judaism, was sparked by a comparison between the Jewish ghetto in Venice and the residential area in Tokyo where their grandparents lived. This personal connection to minority experiences in Japan led to a deeper exploration of similar historical contexts and their societal implications.

SOCIAL RELEVANCE OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES:

Lee discusses the challenge of defining "scientific" within the context of the study of religions, emphasizing the importance of distancing the study from benefiting any particular social group. She also highlights the potential practical application of the study of religions, akin to applied sciences, and expresses confusion over the broad definition of science in this field.

PERSONAL ACADEMIC JOURNEY:

Lee shares her academic background in architecture, a field that combines technical and humanistic aspects for societal benefit. This background provided a framework for understanding the social relevance of her current research in Jewish studies, especially in the context of political narratives and controversies in Israel.

ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL IMPACT:

Lee included insights into how Jewish studies can be politically charged, as experienced during her research in Israel. She learned about the importance of conscious academic engagement in social goals, citing the example of an Israeli historian who integrates political and moral considerations into his research. This experience led Lee to question the traditional pursuit of a purely scientific approach in humanities research.

EXPECTATIONS FROM THE IAHR:

Lee expresses a desire for the IAHR to increase the social significance of the study of religions. She emphasizes the need for broader societal recognition and support for this field, especially in Japan, where the study of religions are often undervalued. She also touched upon the financial struggles and social challenges faced due to the perceived lack of societal relevance in her research.

CONCLUSION:

Lee concludes by highlighting the importance of the study of religions not just as an academic discipline but also as a field with real-world applications and societal impact. She advocates for a balance between scientific rigor and social relevance, emphasizing the role of researchers as both scientists and members of society.

Hiroki Tanaka

A PhD student in the Department of Religion at the University of Tokyo. His doctoral thesis explores the modern history of the laicization of French hospitals.

ACADEMIC FOCUS:

Tanaka's research centers on the intersection of politics and religion, particularly in the context of French *laïcité* and Japanese secularism. His interest was sparked by the post-secular debate and the evolving conversation about religion's social relevance in Japan.

COMPARATIVE STUDY:

His work involves comparing secularism in modern France with postwar Japan. By exploring the notions of "modernity" in France and "postwar" in Japan, Tanaka aims to address a broader range of societal and historical issues.

PURE ACADEMIC CURIOSITY:

Tanaka emphasizes that his research is driven by pure academic curiosity without any specific intention to be socially relevant. He acknowledges the potential for social recognition but maintains that it differs from the academic value of his work.

EXPERIENCE WITH SOCIAL CONTROVERSY:

Tanaka recounts his involvement in a discussion about the Unification Church in Japan following the assassination of former Prime Minister Abe Shinzo. He created a YouTube video explaining the history of French anti-cult movements, drawing from his master's thesis. This led to a dispute with a Japanese anti-cult activist about the evaluation of the current French anti-cult policy.

CHALLENGES OF NEUTRALITY:

His experience highlighted the difficulty of remaining socially neutral or objective in research related to politics and religion. Tanaka found that even factual and historical analysis can inadvertently become entangled in current political debates and societal issues.

EXPECTATIONS FOR IAHR:

He expects the IAHR to demonstrate "negative capability" in maintaining its status as an international platform while bearing the internal tension between academic integrity and social relevance. Tanaka believes that this tension adds intellectual dynamism to the field of religious studies.

CONCLUSION:

Tanaka explores the complex relationship between academic research in the study of religions and societal relevance, particularly in the context of secularism in France and Japan. His insights highlight the challenges faced by researchers in navigating social controversies and the ever-present tension between academic integrity and societal demands.

Ikuo Tsuboko

A graduate of the Department of Social Sciences at secular, national Hitotsubashi University. He is currently a part-time researcher at Hitotsubashi University. His doctoral dissertation is on Charles Taylor's theory of religion.

RESEARCH FIELD:

Tsuboko describes his field as a blend of the study of religions and philosophy of religion. He notes a tension between these fields in Japan, exemplified by contrasting traditions at the University of Tokyo and Kyoto University. Tsuboko's affiliation is with neither, prompting questions about the implications of combining these disciplines.

METHODOLOGY AND DISCIPLINE IDENTITY:

Tsuboko observes that the study of religions do not have a distinct methodology or shared research question separating them from other academic disciplines. He notes that the Japanese Association for Religious Studies allows for various approaches, questioning what constitutes the core of the discipline. He emphasizes the importance of a buffer zone within the study of religions to distinguish it from theology, even when normative, political, or confessional elements are present.

PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION VS. SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH:

Tsuboko discusses the tension between the philosophy of religion, which is sometimes speculative, and scientific research on religion. He questions the legitimacy of belonging to both fields and the challenge it poses to academic identity.

HUMAN SCIENCES AND RELIGION:

He argues that the study of religions, as part of the humanities or human sciences, differ from natural sciences in their objectives and methodologies. Tsuboko, influenced by Charles Taylor, advocates for a hermeneutical approach, aiming to understand and articulate the human meaning of religion.

SOCIAL EMBEDDEDNESS OF MEANINGS:

Tsuboko reflects on his academic background at Hitotsubashi University, which is known for sociology and social philosophy. He acknowledges the influence of this background on his study of religion, emphasizing the need to situate philosophical thought in its social context.

CURRENT RESEARCH PROJECT:

His current project explores "the philosophy of religion for disability," aiming to integrate religious thought with disability studies. This project questions the conceptual division between the religious and the secular, particularly in today's sociopolitical conditions.

CONCLUSION:

Tsuboko emphasizes the complexity and interdisciplinary nature of the study of religions. He advocates for a nuanced understanding that bridges the study of religions and philosophy of religion, while also engaging with contemporary social issues such as disability studies.

He hopes the IAHR can encourage diversity and extend the framework of the study of religions, intersecting with sociopolitical interests like disability studies.

Discussion

FIRST DISCUSSANT: DAVID THURFJELL

Historian of religion, specialist in Iranian Shiite Islam and secularization in Scandinavia.

Comments:

- Discussed the recurring themes in the presentations.
- Emphasized the importance of pragmatic questions in the study of religion without the need for strict definitions.
- Addressed the ideals of Enlightenment, particularly truth and social justice.
- Highlighted the similarity in questions asked by scholars of religion and professional theologians.
- Discussed the distinction between different disciplines in universities based on methodologies and themes.
- Suggested that the IAHR should balance methodological focus and epistemological orientation.
- Proposed the analogy of water and fences to describe the approach of the IAHR in keeping the discipline united.

SECOND DISCUSSANT: MILDA ALIŠAUSKIENĖ

Sociologist of religion, specialist in post-socialist society and religious diversity.

Comments:

- Praised the insights from the presentations.
- Highlighted the importance of discussing the social and political context in academia.

- Stressed the need to consider the social relevance and impact of research.
- Discussed the role of researchers in the field, particularly insider and outsider perspectives.
- Addressed social identity formation among scholars and the distinction from theologians.

Panelists' Responses:

- Panelists engaged in a discussion on various aspects raised by the speakers.
- Topics included the relationship between truth and society, moral obligations in research dissemination, and the interplay between religious studies and theology.
- Participants reflected on their experiences and perspectives on these themes.

Concluding Remarks:

- The discussion concluded with an emphasis on the diversity of methodologies and the importance of social relevance in religious studies.

Organizing Committee (in Japanese alphabetical order)

Okuyama Michiaki 奥山倫明
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