



BASR

British Association for
the Study of Religions

Bulletin

No. 123, Nov 2013

ABOUT THE BASR

The British Association for the Study of Religions, formerly the British Association for the History of Religions (founded in 1954), is affiliated to the European Association for the Study of Religions (EASR) and to the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR) Its object is the promotion of the academic study of religions through international interdisciplinary collaboration. The BASR pursues these aims within the United Kingdom through the arrangement of conferences and symposia, the publication of a Bulletin and an Annual General Meeting. Membership of the BASR is open to scholars whose work has a bearing on the academic study of religions. Membership of the BASR confers membership of the IAHR and the EASR.

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Editorial

Welcome to the November 2014 edition of the BASR *Bulletin*, number 123.

This year's BASR/EASR Conference is only a few weeks behind us, even if we have all been busy since then. For those who might have forgotten how much everyone seemed to enjoy it, and how successful it was, the Bursary holders have provided us with an entertaining report to act as an enduring record. Thanks are due once again to Stephen Gregg and Elizabeth Harris for all their hard work.

This edition of the Bulletin begins with the minutes of the BASR AGM held at the conference. One change of relevance to the Bulletin itself is that Dominic Corrywright has chosen to step down as co-editor, although he will retain responsibility for contributions on teaching matters, which thankfully means that his regular column appears once again in this issue. Thanks are due to Dominic for all his work with the Bulletin, and for enabling us to continue with the present economical arrangement for printing at Oxford Brookes University.

Succeeding Dominic as co-editor is David Robertson, of the University of Edinburgh and the Religious Studies Project (RSP). Although he has not (quite) completed his PhD, David's presence as co-editor will consolidate links between the BASR and RSP to mutual benefit. The first sign of this development is a new page in the Bulletin giving information about the RSP, together with details of available podcasts and other resources that go to make the RSP a valuable teaching resource.

As well as our regular book review and conference report sections, we have a feature George Chryssides offering reflections on what goes to make for a good conference paper. Conference papers can be a challenge for scholars who know their field well, simply because we often know too much to be satisfied with what can be said in twenty minutes. Taking on the challenge of public speaking is to be reminded that presentation is what enables content to be conveyed from the mind of the speaker to that of the listener so as to make some kind of imprint on the latter. In a world where we no longer teach rhetoric and other forms of advocacy as a distinct subject, things that might once have seemed to 'go without saying' are now often, because unsaid, simply forgotten. George's contribution is welcome.

Whatever stage in our careers we are at, we are all busy, but we hope you will take the chance to enjoy this issue of the Bulletin. We do not intend to be especially critical or dogmatic editors, so if there are items you would like to see included, do send them in.

David Wilson and
David Robertson

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting

held at 2 p.m. onwards on Friday 6 September 2013 at Liverpool Hope University

1. Welcome. The BASR President opened the meeting by welcoming all members (24 members attending).

2. Apologies received from Chris Cotter, Beth Singler, David Wilson, John Sawyer and Naomi Appleton

3. Minutes of the AGM, 6 September 2012 (published in the BASR Bulletin 121, November 2012). Accepted and signed.

4. Matters Arising

None that are not covered by any other item on the Agenda

5. Presidential address (Graham Harvey):

He started with expressing his thanks to Stephen Gregg, Sara Frethem and Elizabeth Harris in particular but also to other committee members for the successful conference.

GH then reported about some developments in the last twelve months:

- The successful establishment of Teaching and Learning group under the leadership of Dominic Corrywright and Stephen Gregg. Its increased visibility has enlarged the profile of the BASR. One item here has been the special issue of DISKUS, and GH thanked Suzanne Owen, Dominic Corrywright and Stephen Gregg for their work.
- The social media and in particular the Religious Studies Project has also increased the profile of the BASR, thanks to Chris Cotter and David Robertson and the other member of the team. The increasing national and international reputation of the RS Project reflects extremely well on the BASR. The internet presence of the BASR and the EASR conference has reached well beyond the UK.
- GH also noted that it was good to see so many publications of BASR members in the book exhibition downstairs. The strong presence of national and international publishers shows their interest in the study of religions and BASR members.
- GH then reported that he represented the BASR at several meetings about Open Access, research finding schemes and other items (e.g. by the British Academy). The BASR is in a good position, in particular with DISKUS being an international respected good open access journal.

6. Secretary's Report (Bettina Schmidt)

- The current membership list (including Honorary Life Members) lists two hundred and thirty-nine (239) members which is an increase of twenty-two. An ongoing problem is that several members have not paid despite of several reminders by email and in writing (distributed via the Bulletin). However, due to the extra duties the treasurer had to take on in April, after the withdrawal of the conference organiser, it has been impossible to chase the non-paying members. The executive committee will make a new effort to check the list of members and to delete non-paying members later this year.
- The committee has met two times since the last AGM: in February and at the first day of the conference at Liverpool Hope. The discussion about the bursaries was conducted on-line in order to save costs for the BASR.
- The BASR received seven applications for a bursary and decided to hand out four. In addition two other members of the BASR received a conference bursary of the EASR for this conference.

•In addition of looking after the membership records the main work in the last twelve months has been the mailing list and other correspondences, including responding to consultations (e.g. RE consultation). Unfortunately none of the BASR nominees as REF research user has been invited to the panel. However, as the BASR was very successful in the initial nomination of REF panel members the BASR is very well represented.

· The BASR received some emails about Self-Archival Policy and other aspects connected to Open Access which shows the increasing significance of DISKUS.

· In conclusion BS reported that at the AGM of TRS UK (former AUTRS) she was elected Vice-President. Replying to a question BS highlighted that TRS UK has a different agenda to the BASR, stressing the importance of BASR involvement in TRS UK but also the ongoing independence of the BASR.

7. Treasurer's Report and Account (Stephen Gregg)

(a table with accounts follows these minutes)

The treasurer began with confirming that the conference will not be a financial burden to the BASR, despite initial fear in the Spring. The balance of the accounts (seen on screen during the meeting) are sound and the BASR is financially in a good position.

8. Bulletin Editors' Report (Dominic Corrywright)

Dominic Corrywright reported that he is stepping down as Bulletin co-editor after six years. David Wilson will take over his work though printing will remain at Oxford Brookes which is currently the cheapest option.

He reported that the last issue of the Bulletin was thinner than previous issues and requested members to contribute to the Bulletin.

GH thanked him for his work for the Bulletin and expressed hope for ongoing contributions to the BASR.

GH then asked the AGM to approve the co-opting of David Robertson as the new co-editor of the Bulletin which will strengthen the link between the social media side of the BASR and the Bulletin. The AGM agreed unanimously.

9. Diskus Co-ordinating Editor Report (Suzanne Owen)

Suzanne Owen reported that DISKUS will have two issues this year. The first one, a special issue on Teaching and Learning has been published and the second one with papers from last year's conference will follow soon. She was waiting for some late papers but it was decided not to wait longer than the end of September.

She then reminded members to nominate papers of this year's conference. SO also reported that proposal of other special issues are welcome. She concluded with thanking GH for his support and mentioned that DISKUS is hosted by the Open University.

10. Teaching & Learning group (Dominic Corrywright and Denise Cush)

Dominic Corrywright reported that there was no specific panel on T & L at this year's conference but that there had been panels on many issues related to T & L throughout the conference.

Papers from last year's panel (and others) were published in DISKUS. An ongoing issue to consider is that the group of active contributors to T&L issues is often the same and more contributors are needed.

Denise Cush reported on the RE consultation on a new National curriculum led by the RE Council. She mentioned that the final draft will be circulated soon for further consultation and that members should submit their comments, either via the BASR, the HEI or individually. The BASR is represented at the RE Council by Dominic Corrywright and alternates Stephen Gregg and Lynne Scholefield. In the discussion it was mentioned that a report in the Bulletin would be welcomed.

It was agreed that T&L is an increasingly important issue for the BASR. Graham Harvey asked the AGM to approve to co-opt Dominic Corrywright to the executive committee in his role as T&L representative. The AGM agreed unanimously.

11. Social Media (David Robertson)

David Robertson reported that the Religious Studies Project has now a team of national and international editors (mainly US, Europe and Australia). The response to the podcasts is very encouraging. He mentioned in particular the increasing usage of the podcasts in teaching worldwide. In future the Religious Studies Project will work further together with the Bulletin where, for instance, book review and conference reports submitted to the RS Project will be published.

12. Election of Treasurer

The BASR received one nomination: Bettina Schmidt and Dominic Corrywright nominated to re-elect Stephen Gregg as treasurer. Approved by the AGM.

13. Benchmark Statement for Master degrees (George Chryssides)

George Chryssides reported that the text was handed over to the QAA which will conduct a public consultation. In the discussion it was highlighted that Scotland has a MSc programme in study of religions than needs to be included in the text.

14. BASR conferences 2014 and 2015

The BASR conference in 2014 will be held at the Open University in Milton Keynes. The (unconfirmed) dates are: 3-5 September 2014. The topic will be Religion, Art and Representation (to be confirmed).

The BASR conference in 2015 will be held probably at the University of Kent, Canterbury. However, the local conference organiser has to be confirmed by the department at Kent.

15. Report of EASR and IAHR

- The secretary reported that the outgoing **EASR** president, Maya Burger, expressed her thanks to Stephen and Sara for the organisation of the conference. The next EASR conference will take place in Groningen, the Netherlands, from May 11-15 2014 and the BASR president encouraged members to attend. The deadline for panel proposals is 10 October and for paper proposals 1 December. The secretary reported that at the AGM of the EASR Marion Bowman was elected Vice-President of the EASR and expressed her congratulations to Marion Bowman. She reminded members to subscribe to DOLMEN, the English language mailing list of the EASR and the other mailing lists to be found on the EASR website. The EASR AGM conveyed Honorary Membership to Ursula King in recognition of her work for study of religions and in particular gender and religion.

- The secretary reported that the executive committee of the **IAHR** has increased membership fees significantly from \$1 per member to \$3 per member, despite some protest, in particular from the BASR and the German association. The next world congress of the IAHR will take place at Erfurt, Germany, from 23-29 August 2015. The BASR president encouraged members to attend the congress. The secretary reported that at the AGM at the World Congress in 2015 proposal to change the name of the IAHR will be discussed. She also mentioned that the IAHR has launched a new book series "The Study of Religions in a Global Context" with Morny Joy as the General Editor and Katja Triplett as the Managing Editor. Stephen Sutcliffe is a member of the editorial board. And the secretary reminded female members of the BASR to join the Women Scholar's Network of the IAHR.

16. Any Other Business

None

17. Date and Venue of the next meeting

The next AGM will be held during the 2014 conference at the Open University in Milton Keynes. Further details will be announced in the Bulletin and website.

Graham Harvey closed the AGM at 3.50 p.m.

BASR TREASURER'S REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDING 15th AUGUST 2013

By Stephen E. Gregg BASR Honorary Treasurer
at Liverpool Hope University Friday 6th of September 2013

Treasurer's Report concerning Summary Accounts Statement for YE 15/08/13:

1. General income for the year was £5,062 (down on last year, which was artificially high due to one-off T&L grant). This year's figure is sound and representative of our standard turnover.
2. Bank Interest: Negligible as per recent years due to historically low base rates.
3. General expenditure for the year was £5,753.
4. Printing and postage is largely unchanged at £474. The Bulletin is now available as a digital-only publication for those who wish to receive it in this format, which would of course save us further. It will remain in print also, for those who prefer that format.
5. Committee expenses are lower than last year – virtual meetings have been held where possible.
6. EASR/IAHR Membership is steady at £372.
7. Bank charges – bank transfer fees for paying our subscriptions to AESR and IAHR (and converting Sterling/Euros/Dollars) remain high and increase this year to £82.
8. Insurance has been paid twice this year as last year's premium request arrived after the cut-off for the last accounts – this year's figure of £703 thus represents , 2011-2012 & 2012-2013.
9. £788 further of the T&L grant has been spent – finishing the re-working of the BASR website to incorporate HEA materials, and supporting the creation of teaching and learning materials on the Religious Studies Project website.
10. Winchester Conference – a very pleasing success in the current challenging climate for conference costing. A residue of £1,262 off-set the payments for students bursaries, meaning the event was very close to cost-neutral.
11. General Fund: £18,014, almost unchanged from last year.
12. Conference Fund: £1607. Slight dip due to some EASR Liverpool costs paid out, but these will be claimed back in due course. The 2013 EASR at Liverpool appears to be on course not to lose money.
13. Bank Accounts: As of August 15th Bank Accounts totalled £19,621.
14. Summary of Financial Position: Overall, the finances of the BASR are sound with adequate reserves to ensure our successful continuation. The conference fund has reduced in recent years, but this is to be expected with increased costs as universities maximise their corporate services departments, and thus increasing costs to conference organisers.

**BRITISH ASSOCIATION FOR
THE STUDY OF RELIGIONS
ACCOUNTS as at 15 AUGUST 2013**

RECEIPTS**PAYMENTS**

General Fund	<i>Notes</i>	2012-13	2011-12		<i>Notes</i>	2012-13	2011-12
		<i>TY i</i>	<i>LY</i>				
Balance at 16 August 2012		18187	12592	Audit Fee		0	0
Inland Revenue		0	551	Printing & Postage Bulletin		-474	-489
Subscriptions		3780	3033	T&L Grant		-788	-968
Bulletin insert fees		0	0	Committee Expenses		-1555	-1762
T&L Grant		0	4768	EASR/IAHR Membership		-372	-376
Bank Interest		20	31	Bank Charges		-82	-66
		<u>21987</u>	<u>21875</u>	Insurance	<i>ii</i>	-703	0
				Balance in hand 15 August 2013		<u>18014</u>	
						21987	
Conference Fund		<i>TY</i>	<i>LY</i>			<i>TY</i>	<i>LY</i>
Balance at 16 August 2012		2125		2012 Conference Expenses		-1455	
2012 Conference Receipts		1262		2013 Conference Expenses		-325	
2013 Conference Receipts		0		Balance in hand 15 August 2013		<u>1607</u>	
		<u>3387</u>				3387	

BALANCE SHEET as at 15 August 2013

Cash Funds: Bank Accounts				Represented by:		
Lloyds Current	2046	2797		General Fund	18014	
CAF Cash	3459	3447		Conference Fund	1607	
CAF Gold	13768	13752				
PayPal Holding	323	313				
Petty Cash	25	25				
Cheques not yet presented	0	5				
Total	19621	20339			19621	

FINANCIAL SUMMARY UP TO 15 AUGUST 2013

Balance as at 16th August 2012	20312	Winchester Conference 2012	
Total Receipts	5082	Total Receipts	1262
Total Payments	-5753	Total Payments	-1455
Net Receipts/Payments	-891		
Balance as at 15th August 2013	19621	Deficit/Surplus	-193

NOTES TO ACCOUNTS

- i* Adjusted for £28 error in 2011/12 accounts
ii Two annual premiums in one accounting period

Teaching and Learning Matters:

The Pedagogic Pleasures of Eternal Return

In teaching, at all levels, balancing the mundane with the exciting, thrilling and downright life-changing can be quite a challenge. For those of us who have on occasion felt the thrill of presenting a scintillating lecture or seminar series the positive student feedback is gratifying to the point where we might lose humility. It is important to remember the balance where 'deep learning' is accomplished. Exciting teaching sessions do indeed burn memory scars, but they are like comet trails in the sky without slower processes which join up old learning with new and integrate each in a more complex network of seeing and reading the wider universe. For thorough understanding is partially achieved by ponderous methods; by systematic and repeated reflection and application. As layers of understanding accumulate the learner recognises and makes connections between abstract elements and concretises ephemeral data into firmer clarity. Intelligence, it might be suggested from such a perspective, is simply the ability to make connections.

Such too is the learning process of the pedagogue. As we re state and re frame content, theory and method in multiple teaching contexts we bolster old connections and make new links. This process is one of the intrinsic pleasures of the 'eternal return' of teaching new students as they begin their programmes and re-teaching 'old' students to apply a previously learnt concept or model in a new situation. A very simple structure for this method of teaching is the tripartite, learn - practice - re-learn. It works as a model for an individual teaching event in a standard lecture-seminar situation and as a model for structuring a 3 year undergraduate curriculum. In pedagogical theory it is sometimes described as a spiral model for learning.

The twentieth century psychologist Jerome Brunner (1915-) developed a constructivist understanding of learning, well illustrated by the many versions of the spiral model of learning, which explicitly encouraged a pedagogy of return to core concepts and categories thereby enhancing developmental accumulative learning.

It is a powerful pedagogy. But it rests on somewhat positivist assumptions. The implicit symbolism of Brunner's constructivism is of buildings and growth. Positivist approaches to knowledge are all about accumulation and expansion. Scholars of religion, and theologians especially, are perhaps more sensitive to contrary models and symbolisms, to apophatic traditions, and to 'clouds' of unknowing. And this too provides a powerful pedagogy. Any survey of the history of the study of religions involves a certain amount of 'unlearning'. In my classes I engage students in a Foucauldian process of 'unmasking' presumptions on, for example, what constitutes a religion. And I teach hermeneutics of suspicion which challenge authorial overviews on their historical specificity, gender and authority. To this type of teaching I refer in part to another psychologist, Carl Rogers (1902-1987), who described two modes of learning: cognitive (meaningless) and experiential (significant). A merely constructivist model for teaching and learning is a cognitive/meaningless procedure. What one aims for is experiential/significant learning. The disconcerting experience of deconstructing standard presumptions and the empowering experience of undermining authorities on the basis of the historical and cultural specificity are important elements in significant learning.

To return to the opening theme of balancing the mundane with the exciting. The quality of the experience in a teaching situation is crucial to the success of the learning experience. Recognition and re application of previously learnt ideas can be a catalyst to deep processes of integration. Positivist, constructivist comet-like teaching and learning experiences seem to provide the channels for deep learning. However, the products of mundane and ponderous teaching may not always be immediate. One example of a teaching experience that has sometimes become a dire version of eternal return is the library session. Students aver they have done it all before, librarians comment on low student turnout and engagement. Yet these 'library' skills and knowledge underpin academia and the core of undergraduate study in

projects and dissertations. A solution offered by both students and librarians is to re-label the event as 'multi media resource discovery'. But my view is aspects of the learning experience are necessarily mundane. Just as part of learning for my students is discovering how little they know; or more unsettling still that what they thought they knew may oftentimes be wrong. My cheery aphorism of the moment to convey this pedagogy to my students is 'Be comfortable with the uncomfortable!'

Dominic Corrywright
Principal Lecturer for Student Experience
Subject lead Religion and Theology
Oxford Brookes University
23 October 2013



<i>Recent podcasts and features:</i>
<p>John Wolffe and Ronald Hutton on Historical Approaches</p> <p>Bruno Latour, Talking "Religiously"</p> <p>Religion and the News panel</p> <p>Martin Stringer on Situational Belief</p> <p>Carole Cusack on Cultural Production</p> <p>Ann Taves on Religious Experience</p> <p>Paul Williamson on Serpent Handling</p> <p>After the 'World Religions Paradigm...?'</p> <p>IAPR Psychology of Religion panel</p>
<i>Forthcoming:</i>
<p>Russell McCutcheon on Sui Generis Religion</p> <p>Robert Segal on Jung</p> <p>Tim Jensen on Religious Education</p> <p>RS and the Paranormal</p> <p>... and our Christmas Special, Pointless Nul Point!</p>

The Religious Studies Project: From the Editors

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Project

On Twitter: @projectRS

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Welcome to a new regular feature where the editors of the Religious Studies Project report back to the members of the BASR. In case you don't already know, the RSP is an **international collaborative resource funded by the BASR**.

Since January 2012, we have produced weekly podcasts with leading scholars on social science and humanities research into religion, to help disseminate contemporary issues in RS and provide a resource for undergraduate students of RS, their teachers, and interested members of the public. In addition to the podcasts, the website also features weekly essays, resources, conference reports, plus our weekly digest of opportunities (jobs, journals, conferences, etc).

We'll be telling you about exciting developments, suggesting ways of using the site and podcasts, and asking for your help (more about that later). Although the RSP and the Bulletin will be sharing more material now that David Robertson is co-editor, every issue we'll be including a list of recent and forthcoming podcasts which may be useful or interesting (*see previous page*), so you don't need to worry about checking in every week. You can also keep up by subscribing via email, or through one of our social media pages.

We are looking for assistant editors. We've built up a good team covering Europe and North America, but we're keen to improve

our representation in **Africa, South America and Asia**. We need trustworthy people who would be able to record a couple of interviews and help organise reportage from conferences. It's not many hours on top of what they'd be doing anyway, and it's good networking and good fun. If you are interested, or know of someone else who might be, then please do get in touch with us by contacting **editors@religiousstudiesproject.com**.

We are always grateful for your comments and suggestions for subjects, interviews and team-members. However, you can help to financially support the RSP simply by shopping on Amazon – and at no additional cost to you! If you click through from

www.religiousstudiesproject.com/amazon

and buy ANY product during your visit (not just books featured on the site), the RSP will earn referral fees at no additional cost to you. Why not add a shortcut to your bookmarks bar and use these links every time you shop?

Next issue, we'll be talking about some of the ways the RSP is being used in teaching. Please get in touch if you have used the podcasts in teaching, or what's stopping you from doing so!

Your pals, Christopher R. Cotter and David G. Robertson (Editors-in-Chief)

Conference Reports

BASR/EASR, Liverpool 2013

For many of the inhabitants of Earth, 3-6 September 2013 probably passed by without much comment, the routines and rituals of day-to-day life repeating themselves in their reassuring-yet-relativizing rhythm. Others, for better or for worse, were not granted such reassurance. Over these days, those who regularly traverse the city of Liverpool were witness to an unusual migration of intellectual vagabonds from across the globe who, for these four days, would call this city (or, rather, Liverpool Hope University's Hope Park Campus) 'home' and, for the briefest of periods, mutate the aggregated discourses of this cosmopolitan city with discussions of 'reification', 'phenomenology' and 'reptilian overlords'. The reason for this unusual occurrence was the 12th Annual Conference of the *European Association for the Study of Religions* (EASR) and a Special Conference of the *International Association for the History of Religions* (IAHR), hosted by the *British Association for the Study of Religions* (BASR), on the theme 'Religion, Migration, Mutation'.

Tempting as it would be for the authors of this report – some of us new faces at these acronym-tastic events, others fast becoming grizzled veterans – to write some sort of insightful autoethnographic account or a titillating exposé of this academic ritual, what follows is our account of some of the key themes of the conference – conceptual, methodological, and contextual – with, perhaps, a dash of the aforementioned literary styles thrown in for good measure. Of necessity, we have taken a thematic approach, for even if it were physically possible for four people to attend all seventy panel sessions, the resulting tome would likely have been longer than the Ramayana, and taken about as long to write and collate. We highly recommend taking a look at the full book of abstracts in order to fully digest the breadth of scholarship that was on display.

At the conceptual level, we were primarily struck by the way in which many papers mutated the category and prevalent models of 'religion'. Graham Harvey's keynote address, 'Migration and Mutation of a European understanding of "Religion"' called for renewed attention to the diverse ways in which religion can be understood: in everyday practices, vernacular language and ways of interacting with the world, as much as in specific rituals and prescribed internal beliefs. Similarly, Maya Burger's keynote suggested, through a focus upon the migration of stories about Rama and the spread of the Ramayana(s), that approaching 'religion' comparatively through narratives can be a means of avoiding the World Religions Paradigm; an "antidote" for Religious Studies. Turning to some other presentations, Bindi Shah's paper on gender differentiation amongst second generation Jain youth in the UK and US attested to changes in modern Jainism towards a model of 'religion' conceived as a set of abstract moral principles and guidelines. Jan Motal guided his listeners through a series of diverse examples to consider transhumanism as a form of 'secularist faith' involving the 'secularization' of traditional Christian apocalyptic tropes. Hanna Lehtinen's paper on the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster raised important questions concerning how academics should approach this movement – is it a 'counter religion'? A 'parody religion'? Or, if it sounds, smells, looks, and feels like a 'religion', should it simply be treated as such? And finally, Jonathan Tuckett applied Ninian Smart's dimensions of religion to the primary religion in the videogame series *Elder Scrolls* to provocatively ask his audience 'Does a believer have to have meat-world presence to be considered real?' All of these papers and more attested to the value of turning scholarly attention to boundary-pushing phenomena, or re-turning that attention to more 'traditional' arenas, in order to refine (and, indeed, mutate) out-dated and hegemonic conceptualizations of 'religion'.

This wasn't the only mutation that characterized the conference, by any means. For those of us being introduced to the BASR/EASR/IAHR for the first time, our expectations underwent a pleasant mutation. Rather than being stuffy and serious, the atmosphere was, in general, relaxed and informal. We were relieved to see that not everybody was dressed in business attire, and pleased to discover that the discussions in the panels were collegial rather than aggressive – something which we would all identify as a key and commendable feature of the BASR in general. We were also surprised to see such an emphasis on studies of contemporary 'religion', particularly given the focus upon migration and mutation. Although we feel somewhat ambiguous about this, it would have been good to see more presentations taking a historical approach. On a more superficial but, arguably, no less important level, although the authors did not enter the conference with much of an opinion on Carling 'beer', this has since mutated into a revulsion which might well last a lifetime. Also, the less said about the various 'mutations' that seemed to be occurring on the dance floor when 'The Shakers' were playing after the gala dinner, the better...

Returning to more scholastic matters, at what could be called the 'methodological level', the main message which we took from this conference concerned the usefulness of spatial approaches and metaphors for the contemporary study of 'religion', as eruditely delineated in Kim Knott's keynote address. In an ambitious panel on 'Religion, the City and Spatial Analysis', which explored the making and practicing of ritual spaces, presentations expertly covered different centuries, continents, and disciplines. John Eade traced the various claims, negotiations and civic controversies surrounding the use of religious buildings, such as the conversion of cinemas into Churches, and industrial sites into mosques. Archaeologist Katy Soar demonstrated the connections between public ritual and appeals to legitimation from an imagined past in Bronze Age Crete, and Paul-François Tremlett surveyed resistance to the privatization of public space in Occupy protest camps, suggesting that the camps, criticised for not proposing demands or an agenda, were an attempt at living, rather than discussing, an

alternative. Common themes across such diverse subject matter and methodologies were deftly elaborated in another appearance from Kim Knott, who invited consideration of the need for groups to establish spaces that persist, often bounded by tradition, as well as by exclusion. In another panel, Nick Hanks provocatively developed a flexible model of how liturgical buildings/sites distribute space and configure their accessibility, drawing upon a diverse array of examples to invite his audience to think about how religions produce a visual and spatial discourse along with textual or disciplinary ones. Finally, another panel on 'Social Identities Between the Sacred and the Secular' brought together editors and contributors to a recent edited volume to consider the theoretical and methodological challenges for approaching the 'sacred' and 'secular' and demonstrate how, in practice, the boundaries between these two contested poles collapse and mutate.

We have often heard it said that perhaps the most important thing that happens at conferences is the networking and socializing that occurs outside the presentations themselves. (Did you notice the spatial metaphor?) From the informative sight-seeing visit to Liverpool's UNESCO World Heritage Site, to the gala dinner and uncomfortably early breakfasts, via the strangely hilarious version of the BBC game show 'Pointless' hosted by *The Religious Studies Project*, we think we can safely say that the majority of delegates had a first rate time, and that many future projects and partnerships would be poorer or non-existent had it not been for these important, yet so easily botched, elements of the conference programme.

The final rhetorically convenient level that we are going to focus upon is context, with the vast majority of conference papers emphasizing its importance for the data which is made to populate our field and facilitate our theoretical deliberations. First of all, a number of papers which engaged explicitly with the concept of 'migration' were particularly memorable. Wendy Dossett's paper focused upon 'the hiding and claiming of Buddhism' in mindfulness-based therapies, proposing that the 'Western' adoption of mindfulness had removed the soteriological content from this practice and made

in proliferating information and counter-views to young Sikhs, it did not play a significant role in transmitting 'Sikhism', and Jaspreet Kaur's presentation which analyzed how the 'Happy, Healthy, Holy Organization' (3HO) uses the Internet to broaden the discursive boundaries around Sikh identity and to assert its own orthodoxy.

Turning to another context, two entire panels – 'God Listens (to Slayer): Religion and Heavy Metal and Punk Music Cultures' and 'Religion and Music: Practice and Theory' – were devoted, to the relationship between religion and music. Papers contained therein introduced listeners (sometimes literally) to the de/territorialisation of 'international songs' from a recent songbook by Swiss Sai Baba devotees (Vanessa Maier), the symbolism, sacrality, and unrepeatability of black metal concerts (Niall Scott), the terminological difficulties associated with studying experimental music in Ireland (Marian Caulfield) and the referencing, citation and performance of mystical sounds, images, symbols and language by drone metal bands (Owen Coggins). Finally, a panel on 'Religion and Conspiracy Theories' was introduced by Stef Aupers who highlighted the changing dynamics of conspiracies, from accusations of paranoia to a tentative but growing acceptance of such beliefs as beliefs. David G. Robertson used David Icke's changing position on extraterrestrials to trace the developing relations between apocalyptic and millennial tendencies in conspiracy thinking. Jaron Harambam contrasted currents of technological and Romantic soteriology in asking what might be achieved by comparing religion and conspiracy theories, while Beth Singler examined controversies surrounding vaccines, ADHD and genetic modification, in which medical definitions, diagnoses and prescriptions are employed or contested according to differing views of 'Big Bad Pharma.' Ethan Gjerset Quillen closed the panel, speaking about differing definitions of atheism, with reference to a Rumsfeldian conspiratorial logic. Each paper in this panel attested to strategies of legitimation that emerge as conspiracy theorists and their defenders position themselves in relation to scientific discourses. Although many more papers could have been highlighted here, this swift survey should be

sufficient to illustrate the importance and impact of deep, contextual studies upon the boundaries surrounding the containers 'religion' and 'Religious Studies'.

In closing this whirlwind summary, we would like to express our gratitude to the BASR Committee for awarding us bursaries and making this clearly beneficial experience possible for all of us. Our thanks also go to Stephen Gregg, Sara Fretheim and Elizabeth Harris who performed above and beyond in carrying this conference successfully to completion, and to all the countless other people who helped to organise the conference, who presented papers, who offered advice, who bought us a drink, or who otherwise contributed to this important and memorable event. Until next time – be that in Groningen, Milton Keynes, Erfurt, or further into the future – 'you stay classy, BASR!'

Owen Coggins, Christopher Cotter, Jaspreet Kaur, and Urmilla Mohan

Bursary Holders 2013

CESNUR 25th Anniversary Conference 2013

Falun, Sweden, 21-24 June

Not long after I arrived home following the 2013 CESNUR conference, having spent some forty-odd hours door-to-door flying from Sweden to Australia, I tweeted "Great conference, beautiful country, lovely people". The lengthy transit (dare I say 'pilgrimage') usually involved in making one's way to CESNUR from the Antipodes is never too much to bear, for despite being small the conference is always one filled with enthusiastic colleagues keen to share their research and listen to that of others. It is a pleasing atmosphere, especially given that, as research foci, even now NRMs are sometimes regarded as topics of occasional frivolous scholarly fancy.

This concern for research area validity is a common theme for CESNUR conferences, especially the plenary sessions, perhaps speaking more of the type of resistance faced by the professorial leaders of the field in their formative

years than that of early-career types like myself and many other attendees. The resistance currently is less methodological and more economic; 'cults' are somehow less dangerous, and with this decline in public interest there is less money. A recurrent problem for the field, to be sure, but one for which we should feel proud, for in part it comes from the confounding of the 'cult' paradigm so prominent in the 1980s and 1990s. This year in Falun, Sweden, thanks to the organisation and leadership of Liselotte Frisk, of Darlana University, and CESNUR managing director Massimo Introvigne, the social, political, and cultural importance of NRMs studies was evidenced by scholars ostensibly gathered to discuss change and religious movements. This theme was set by Eileen Barker's opening plenary in which she noted the inevitable lifecycle changes that NRMs undergo: the deaths of founders, children and ageing converts, and new ideas within still putatively New Religious Movements. This was fittingly followed by J. Gordon Melton's plenary on the very definition of NRMs, using Texas Pentecostalism as a test case. Melton argued that Pentecostalism, worldwide, can variously be categorised as a NRM, an establishing group, or an established and normalised group. Critically, Melton reminded conference attendees that 'NRM' signifies anything that is in competition with dominant religious milieu in any given setting. Conceived along a spectrum with dominance at one end and alienation/minority status at the other, NRMs are those groups we may observe occupying the later, often at the explicit behest of the established/dominant religious stakeholders.

This framework laid down some interesting questions that many other conference presenters picked up. Knut Melvaer and Margrethe Løøv (University of Bergen) presented some intriguing field data from Norway regarding self-designations by individuals at New Age fairs which gave some statistical data to long-held assumptions about what sort of beliefs people who describe themselves as 'spiritual' hold. Papers by David Webster (University of Gloucestershire) and Cimminnee Holt (Concordia University) were also notable for their concentration on the challenge to the scholar. Webster in particular noted that the

NRMs scholars should not simply be concerned to observe and relay 'objective' information with which people may make their own decisions; scholars should also offer critical ethical judgements based on substantiated fact. This was serendipitously followed by Holt's paper in which it was noted that such judgments tend to operate in the realm of the soundbite; and scholars shy away from anything less than a well referenced few thousand words. How to deal with these parallel problems in an increasingly mediatised, connected, and data saturated world is a core question for all subfields of Religious Studies.

For many attendees not from Sweden, this very problem was highlighted in the plenary session on the Knutby Philadelphia Pentacostal Church, which included a presentation from one of the groups pastors. This was both a fascinating and enlightening insight to Swedish religions and one of the voices in the present new religious fugue in Sweden. It also reinforced Melton's comment that the newness of NRMs is to be found in their social location in situ. The Knutby Philadelphia group were portrayed as clearly both 'culturally and socially alienated', largely through media representation, including suspect TV doco-dramas and news stories.

Concluding the conference, incoming ISSNR President Milda Alisauskiene's plenary paper, 'Pyramid of Merkine: New Age or Popular Catholicism?' was a personal highlight. It combined a religious tourism location and fieldwork thereof which complicated any attempt to institutionally categorise the pyramid. I am looking forward to reading more from Milda about this site as it demonstrates well the dimension of syncretic 'newness', and therefore tension with the dominant, in much religiosity. Finally, Massimo Introvigne's concluding plenary on Lithuanian Occulture was a tour not just of his venerable knowledge of the occult, but his fondness for works of art also.

I look forward to attending 2014's CESNUR conference in the infamous and important Waco, Texas. I hope there we can see a continuation of the theme highlighted at Falun; that the change that is to come for NRM scholars is one of communication effectiveness and ensuring

that our scholarly voices are not lost amid the din of hegemonic scholarship and funding. The theme for the Waco conference bodes well in this regard, 'The Vitality of New Religions'. And vital too is the study of them. See you in Texas.

Alex Norman
University of Sydney

Enchanted Modernities: Theosophy and the Arts in the Modern World

Amsterdam, Netherlands 25-27 September 2013

The "Enchanted Modernities: Theosophy and the Arts in the Modern World" conference was organised in collaboration with the Centre for the History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents of the University of Amsterdam. It was the first conference of a newly established research network, Enchanted Modernities: Theosophy, Modernism and the Arts c.1875-1960, funded by the Leverhulme Trust. Conference organisers were Associate Professor Marco Pasi (University of Amsterdam), Dr Sarah Victoria Turner (University of York), and Assistant Professor Christopher Scheer (Utah State University), and administration was handled by Dr Katie Tyreman (University of York).

The conference centred on the complex, multifaceted relationships between Theosophy, modernity and artistic culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. There were 133 registered participants, including 55 speakers, and the conference was in such demand that all talks were ultimately live streamed, with around 2000 viewers. The calibre of papers was excellent due to a rigorous selection process. Papers were given on a wide range of topics, with sessions devoted to early abstraction, music, the performing arts, Rudolf Steiner, and the influence of Theosophy and the arts in Australia, Canada, Mexico, India, Japan, the Baltic region, and eastern and southern Europe. Among the strongest papers were "Back to Barr: MOMA's 2013 Origins of

Abstraction" by Professor Rose-Carol Washton-Long (City University of New York) and "Leonora Carrington and the Occult" by Professor Wouter J. Hanegraaff (University of Amsterdam).

Keynote presentations were given by Professor Raphael Rosenberg (University of Vienna), Professor Linda Dalrymple Henderson (University of Texas), and Assistant Professor Anna Gawboy (Ohio State University). In Rosenberg's paper "Mapping the Aura in the Spirit of Art and Art Theory: Blavatsky, Leadbeater, Besant, and Steiner," he demonstrated that theosophical explanations about auratic colours and lines ultimately derive from art and aesthetic theories popular among late nineteenth and early twentieth century artists. Henderson explored parallels between theosophical doctrine and contemporary science in her paper "Rethinking Theosophy in its Early 20th Century Context." She highlighted the ways in which discoveries in modern science, such as the X-ray and radioactivity, and the hypothesis of a space-filling ether, complemented interest in higher unseen dimensions of space. Anna Gawboy spoke on "Synesthesia Imagined, Synesthesia Revealed," examining the ways theosophists and occultists viewed synaesthesia as a means of accessing esoteric knowledge, and how composers and artists such as Alexander Scriabin, Wassily Kandinsky and Arnold Schoenberg premised their work on multisensory correspondence.

The conference was highly successful for a number of reasons. The entire event was meticulously organised, with an informative, up-to-date website and useful Facebook page. The main venue for the conference was charming; the Singelkerk, a large Mennonite church between the Singel and Henregracht canals. Parallel talks were conveniently given in the Doe-lenzaal Library across the street. In the Singelkerk sumptuous buffet lunches were revered by participants. Finally, there were three well-planned activities held outside the main conference venues, offering participants the opportunity to mingle, experience Amsterdam, and delve further into the topics of the conference.

Inform's Anniversary Conference
Minority Religions: Contemplating the Past and Anticipating the Future

Celebrating over a quarter of a century of providing information that is as reliable and up-to-date as possible about minority religions

**London School of Economics, WC2A 2AE.
31 January – 2 February**

Registration will open on 1st November 2013. See www.Inform.ac for further details.

Draft Programme Outline (21/9/13)

Friday 31 January

15.00: **Registration** opens (tea and coffee will be available)

15.30: Introductory talk about the London School of Economics and tour of the campus

17.30: Welcome and Plenary Panel A: “Stakeholders”

when representatives of some of the sections of society that have used Inform will briefly describe what they have gained from their association with Inform and what they would like Inform and students of minority religions to focus on in the future:

The Established Church: The Right Reverend Graham Jones, Lord Bishop of Norwich

The Media: Dr Damian Thompson, Director of the Catholic Herald and columnist for the Daily Telegraph

Politics: Stuart Hoggan, Deputy Director, Integration Division, Department for Communities and Local Government

The Police: Ron Gilbertson, former police officer

The Law: Philip Katz QC, Barrister

Academia: Professor Conor Gearty, Professor of Human Rights Law, LSE

19.30: Reception and Launch of the *Ashgate/Inform Series on Minority Religions and Spiritual Movements*

Saturday 1 February

09.30–11.00: Plenary Panel B: Members or former members of new religious movements

Representatives of **NRM**s with high visibility in the 1980s (the Unification Church; the Church of Scientology; ISKCON; the Children of God/Family International) will talk about how their respective movements have changed over the past 25 years and how they envision their future.

11.00–11.30: *tea/coffee*

11.30–13.00: Parallel Sessions I

13.00–14.00: *lunch*

14.00–15.30: Parallel Sessions II

15.30–16.00: *tea/coffee*

16.00–17.30: Parallel Sessions III

19.00: Anniversary Dinner (the cost of this will not be included in the registration fee)

Sunday 2 February

09.30–11.00: Parallel Sessions IV

11.00:11.30 *coffee/tea*

11.30–13.00: Parallel Sessions V

13.00–14.00: *lunch*

14.00–15.30: Plenary Panel C: “Cult Watchers”

15.30: Conference ends

ADVICE ON CONFERENCE PAPERS

George D. Chryssides

The recent EASR conference at Liverpool Hope University afforded an impressive range of papers. In its wake the BASR Bulletin editors have suggested that I write a short piece – particularly aimed at postgraduates and less experienced presenters – offering a few observations about putting together a conference paper.

Most of us agree that giving a conference paper is much more demanding than lecturing to students. Knowing that the country's – sometimes the world's – leading authorities are listening can be a daunting prospect. However, one important purpose of a conference presentation is to receive feedback, and a prestigious audience can ensure quality comments on one's work. It is worth remembering that established scholars recognise the strengths of a presentation, and not just any weaknesses. Constructive criticism helps to take our work forward, so I prefer to introduce work in progress rather than completed research. Some years ago I heard a prestigious academic being asked if he would address a conference on the theme of his latest book. He declined, saying that the book was the culmination of his thinking, leaving little more to be said! This may have sounded somewhat arrogant, but he did have a point.

Conferences generally have themes, although organisers usually interpret them in a fairly liberal way. Sometimes an apparently inimical theme can prompt us to explore a new dimension of our specialism. If in doubt about whether a potential paper is quite on target, it can be a good idea to enquire before sending a proper outline – better to do that than to receive a rejection. The outline should conform to the given criteria (usually 150-200 words with a brief CV), and it is helpful to indicate how it impinges on the theme. By the time the conference comes round, one's thinking may have moved on, but I think conference planners accept this, and even welcome it.

Getting a panel together on a common theme is worth considering. A ready-made collection of proposals helps the organisers, and ensures papers are grouped appropriately. It can be disappointing to find one's presentation in a seemingly inappropriate slot in the programme, attracting a reduced and possibly less specialised audience. It is not good protocol to ask for the programme to be adjusted if this happens: conferences take an unbelievable

amount of organising, and it is important to fit in with arrangements.

The standard length of presentation of conferences these days is 20 minutes with a further 10 for questions. I reckon that 1000 words equals 10 minutes, and that I therefore need to be concise and realistic about the scope of my presentation. There is no room for ad-libbing or departing from one's script. Chairpersons have to be ruthless, in fairness to other presenters. Although 2000 words is not much, it should allow enough time for some analytical depth, rather than just a news update about the religious community that is being researched.

Use of technology is important. Only a few presenters these days turn up without PowerPoint backup, and an audience expects to be bored if the presentation is merely talk. But avoid simply using PowerPoint to replicate your text: one of my pet hates is the presenter who puts all his or her text on screen, and promptly reads it: the audience will read ahead rather than listen. DVD and You-Tube clips may be useful – but of course they take time away from one's discussion.

Some presenters report having problems with introductions and conclusions. I rely on the technique of the old gospel hall preacher who said, "I tell them what I'm going to say, then I say it, then I tell them I've said it." Stating one's aims is always a good opening, or else contextualising one's research: Is it part of a wider project? Why is the topic important? What are the research questions? A quick recap that summarises one's main points and the conclusions that one has reached is quite an acceptable ending.

I've learned never to worry about the questions at the end. The ones I cannot answer are the most interesting: they are the ones that provide the cues for further research, and need not cause embarrassment. Elementary questions can be a bit unsatisfying, but it is also useful to be alerted to points that seem obvious to the specialist, but which are less clear to those who are less acquainted with the topic.

If you haven't given a conference paper before, it is certainly worth having a go. You can expect encouraging and constructive feedback, and presenters are more likely to get support from their institution if they have an active role.

Book Reviews

Mental Culture: Classical Social Theory and the Cognitive Science of Religion

Dimitris Xygalatas and William M. McCorkle Jr. (Eds.)

Acumen Publishing Ltd., 2013

The true marks of an established and progressing cognitive scientific approach to religion abound when it can not only tout achievements, but also recognize current limitations and issue calls for new directions. In this sense Xygalatas and McCorkle, the editors of *Mental Culture: Classical Social Theory and the Cognitive Science of Religion*, (borrowing language from philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn's *The structure of scientific revolutions*) say they now take the paradigm "for granted" (p.9) - albeit they also admit that it has not yet acquired the paradigmatic status of "normal science" (p.10). While Thomas Kuhn would most likely see these two admissions to be slightly at odds with one another, inasmuch as one cannot truly take "for granted" a paradigm unless they are indeed doing "normal science", Xygalatas and McCorkle's statements seem to be an indication that the cognitive science of religion (CSR) is headed in a direction that will one day enable many other scholars to take the paradigm "for granted" and find themselves in the midst of the CSR as "normal science". The editors have truly put together, to use their words, a "who's who of the field" (p.4) for *Mental Culture* with an interdisciplinary team of scholars contributing to the fourteen chapters of their book. *Mental Culture* brings 20th century thought into the 21st century. As the subtitle of the book implies, it not only situates, but also connects classical social theorists with the CSR. This brief review will consist of some chapters that stand out as particularly interesting.

The second chapter, as the editors admit, is slightly out of place in that Robert McCauley

does not aim to reconnect a past social theorist with the present. Instead, this chapter addresses criticisms present by many in Religious Studies that CSR is "reductionary" in nature with McCauley arguing for "explanatory pluralism" (p.11), construing the CSR as simply another level of analysis that can be applied in the academic study of religion. In chapter three Stewart Guthrie goes back through 400 years of "cognitivist thought" (p.33) and presents us with an argument that in many respects, puts both science and religion on an equal explanatory level. In one of the most interesting chapters (chapter four), Jason Slone "Darwinizes Karl Marx" as he writes a "lows status individual might not be using religion as an opium for escape, but rather as an aphrodisiac for attraction" (p.65). In other words, religiosity may function as an ornate display attracting mates for reproductive purposes with religion working "even if it is false, just as Marx suggested" (p.61).

In chapter eight Joseph Bulbulia, in his own words, "salvages Freud" (p.112) for the CSR and provides an interesting argument for why, as he claims, Freud thought religion was civilization's "most precious possession" (p.114). While he notes that many scholars attempt to write Freud right out of the history books, Bulbulia puts him center stage arguing that although no one should want to be a "Freudian evolutionary psychologist of religion" (p.125), Bulbulia thinks Freud has important contributions to the CSR and should not be ignored. Tanya Luhrmann builds on William James in chapter ten and attempts to shift the focus from "religious experience" as something spontaneous, to the learning processes involved in the production of such experiences and thus providing another area for the CSR to focus on and such new directions are crucial if the field is to progress. Armin Geertz conceptualizes the work of Clifford Geertz in chapter twelve in an attempt to recapture an overall Geertzian theory that includes the mind (i.e. puts cognition back into C. Geertz's work).

A. Geertz argues that the interpretation by Tooby and Cosmides has created theoretically conceptual mistakes, thus wholly misrepresenting C. Geertz, in which the structure of the original C. Geertzian theory is now lost on readers. Armin Geertz emphasizes the role of culture in cognition and outlines Clifford Geertz's contribution to the CSR.

Overall, editors Xygalatas and McCorkle of *Mental Culture*, and their interdisciplinary team of authors, bring together prior scientific thought with the current CSR in a manner that exudes their dedication to progress in the CSR field and the erudition of all scholars involved. Although the book consists of many different directions currently present in the CSR field, it is a necessary call to arms for the field to battle out a more coherent and solid research programme with greater theoretical and methodological agreement. With that in mind, the CSR will likely become what these scholars so desire – Thomas Kuhn's "normal science". This book will excite and encourage young scholars to contribute to the field of the CSR while providing new and interesting insights for more established scholars. It is a significant contribution to the field and a must read for all interested in the study of religion.

Thomas J. Coleman III

University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

Defining Magic: A Reader

Berndt-Christian Otto and Michael Stausberg
(Eds.)

Equinox Publishing (Acumen), 2013

The 'Critical Categories in the Study of Religion' series has by now established itself as an excellent source of key readings in a variety of topics. *Defining Magic* continues this praiseworthy tradition, broaching a topic which is not only highly contested within the field of religious studies, but which some might argue has no place in religious studies at all.

This work is not about the history of magic, or the theory or practice of magic; it's about an issue which has for far too long been neglected or glossed over in academic discourse—how shall we *define* 'magic' as an object of scholarly study and discussion? Berndt-Christian Otto approaches this task as a specialist in the conceptual history of magic; Michael Stausberg's expertise is in the history of religions, with a particular interest in theories of religion and ritual. Together they have assembled an interesting and useful collection of writings, and have also provided some challenging insights in their editorial material.

In their general introduction, the editors open up the whole issue of 'defining magic' by remarking that 'there is no unanimously agreed academic definition of "magic" [used by the editors throughout in quotes, to indicate the contested nature of the term], nor any shared theory or theoretical language—and apparently not even any agreement on the range or type of actions, events, thoughts or objects covered by the category' (1). A considerable semantic fuzziness exists around 'magic': different words (for example 'witchcraft' and 'sorcery') have been attached to the term throughout its history, but there is no clear usage of any of these terms. The editors argue that the problem of the 'magic-religion-science triangle' is a product of modern Western history (6), and that the Western practice of projecting the term 'magic' onto other cultures (even onto the pre-modern West), and then claiming that it explains a great deal of what goes on in these cultures, 'may, in fact, be nothing but the projection of deeply entrenched Western "modes of thought" and colonialist fantasies.' (6) This projection is evidence of 'a sometimes dramatic unawareness (or even deliberate ignorance) of the ethnocentricity of the concept of "magic" in scholarly discourse... a more thorough, interdisciplinary reflection on this topic would probably contest or entirely dismantle a major part of these "findings".' (6) This is an excellent point which deserves to be given careful attention.

The Introduction is followed by four parts. In every case the editors have selected their sources with an explicit focus on *defining* 'magic'—i.e., what it is, what its boundaries are,

what its most salient features are, how it works. They have also focused on seminal texts that have, in their view, significantly shaped the debate on the topic.

Part I, *Historical Sources*, presents selections from Plato (4th century BCE) through to Helena Blavatsky (19th century CE). Although each excerpt is brief, the ensemble provides an interesting glimpse into the evolution of the idea of ‘magic’, and the various vocabularies and semantic patterns that developed with it. It is a pity that no Islamic or Jewish texts are included; the editors say their absence was for unidentified ‘practical reasons’.

Parts II-IV follow the evolution of the scholarly debate from the late 19th century to the present. Part II provides excerpts from foundational works in the academic debate in the UK and France. The former, represented by E. B. Tylor and Sir James Frazer, had an evolutionary view of the place of ‘magic’ in society, identifying it as rather low on the scale of cultural achievement—a primitive mindset to be superseded by ‘religion’ which in turn would be discarded in favour of ‘science’ (I use quotes on these words for the same reason the editors use them for ‘magic’—they are also contested terms whose meaning is not settled in academic discourse). The latter, as illustrated by works of Marcel Mauss and Henri Hubert, and Émile Durkheim, were more interested in studying the social functions of ‘magic’. In their view, the distinction between ‘magic’ and ‘religion’ was not evolutionary but social: ‘religion’ is a communal activity binding people together, ‘magic’ is an individual pursuit (and perhaps inimical to social cohesion).

Part III follows the academic debate into the mid-20th century. The editors suggest that the inconclusive and indeed contradictory approaches to ‘magic’ in the foundational academic literature led subsequent investigators to engage in a number of coping mechanisms, which often sought to relate ‘magic’ to ‘science’ although not in an evolutionary (and therefore sequential) sense. The focus in this section is on the ‘rationality debates’ of the 1960s and 1970s, as epitomised in the work of E. E. Evans-Pritchard; the excerpts from Horton and Tambiah illustrate two different reinterpretations of

the ‘magic-science’ dyad. Edward Leach distinguished ‘magic’ from both ‘science’ and ‘religion’, and eventually concluded that the word ‘magic’ has no meaning at all. Malinowski’s work, which is chronologically earlier, sets out his more functionalist reworking of the ‘magic-science-religion’ triangle. An excerpt by Gerardus van der Leeuw introduces the phenomenological viewpoint to the discussion.

The final section, *Part IV : Contemporary Voices*, is an exciting departure from the usual format of the Critical Categories readers. The five essays in this section are not excerpted from previously-published works, but were specially commissioned for this volume from scholars currently working in the field.

Three of the authors are historians. Kimberly B. Stratton discusses the use of ‘magic’ as a form of social discourse in the Ancient (Mediterranean) World; and argues that literary depictions of magic from that era are ideological portraits bearing little resemblance to what was actually a surprisingly consistent practice throughout the Greco-Roman period. Christopher Lehrich proposes that ‘magic’ is a generalizable but not universal category distinct from both ‘science’ and ‘religion’. He suggests that any definition of ‘magic’ must be able to serve simultaneously as a jumping-off point for critical reflection and as a basis for debating particular data; and offers a definition modelled on Clifford Geertz’s famous definition of ‘religion’. Randall Styers’ focus is the whole modern academic discussion of ‘magic’. He argues that the contemporary scholarly configuration of ‘magic’ produces a highly idealized normative vision of ‘religion’ (as pious and ethereal) and of ‘science’ (as humble and cautious); and thus the attempt to define ‘magic’ appears also as an attempt (hidden or not) to constitute a particular vision of modernity.

Susan Greenwood is the only author in Parts II-IV who writes as both scholar and practitioner of ‘magic’. Drawing on her anthropological fieldwork and personal experience, she suggests that there is a ‘magical consciousness’ which can be a legitimate source of knowledge. This ‘magical consciousness’, which is intrinsic to us as humans, is a type of

‘imaginative associative thinking different from more abstract, analytical modes of thought’ (198); it can engage with both materialistic and non-materialistic ‘realities’. She does not claim that this form of consciousness is *the only* valid way of knowing, only that it is *a* valid way of knowing which should not be overlooked or disparaged.

Jesper Sørensen writes from the perspective of cognitive theory, and proposes moving towards a ‘scientifically valid’ concept of ‘magic’. It would appear that he regards the use of the term ‘magic’ to be limited to issues of ritual efficacy, and at times he seems to use the words ‘magic’ and ‘ritual’ interchangeably. Sørensen’s argument is for a definition of ‘magic’ that will establish it as a universal aspect of human behaviour, part of the ‘hard-wiring’ of the human brain. It would perhaps be an interesting exercise to read Sørensen’s and Greenwood’s chapters together.

Defining Magic is a useful addition to the scholarly literature on magic—with or without quotes—and will be helpful to undergraduate and graduate students as a starting point for inquiry. It is also sufficiently straightforward to appeal to the informed general reader. An added value is the quality—and quantity—of the editorial material. In addition to the general introduction, there is an editorial introduction to each part, and also to each of the individual readings (25 in all). In the secondary and even tertiary-level introductions, the editors have expanded their discussion of the material to reference other works which relate to the topic at hand but which, for whatever reason, they were unable to include in their collection. Readers should not just study the extracts but should also pay careful attention to this editorial material, which signals the existence of more points of view and elements in the debate over the meaning of the word ‘magic’ than could be provided by excerpts alone. The addition of an extensive bibliography supports further exploration of the many issues which could only briefly be touched upon in a general selection.

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Naturalism and Our Knowledge of Reality: Test- ing Religious Truth Claims

R. Scott Smith

Ashgate New Critical Thinking in Religion,
Theology and Biblical Studies Series, 2012.
Ashgate.

Reviewing Scott Smith’s new book is really a case of reviewing two separate books, one titled *Naturalism and Our Knowledge of Reality* and the other *Testing Religious Truth-claims*, which is no good way to start a review. Nevertheless the book exhibits a clear and highly uneven split between these two titles in which topics of the second title do not appear in any shape or form in topics of the first.

Beginning with *Naturalism and Our Knowledge of Reality* Scott Smith’s book is a look at certain naturalistic philosophies that have come to underpin much of our current approaches to the social sciences, particularly cognitive sciences. In the introduction we are told of naturalism’s dominance of the fact-value dichotomy, a phrase that occurs infrequently throughout the rest of the book, and worse naturalism despite being one of the key concepts of the book is defined in a footnote: ‘I take philosophical naturalism to be a thesis that reality consists solely of the physical, spatiotemporal world; thus there are no supernatural or non-natural entities or beings’ (pg.1). Scott Smith’s concern is to show how various naturalistic philosophies cannot give us knowledge of reality. And there are a hefty number of names with which Scott Smith contends: D.M. Armstrong, Fred Dretkse, Michael Tye, William Lycan, John Searle, David Papineau, Daniel Dennett, Paul and Patricia

Churchland, John Pollock, and Jaegwon Kim. Each, it is argued, presents a naturalistic philosophy meant to give us knowledge of reality which in fact fails to do so.

If this seems like an overwhelming list of names for a two hundred fifty page book (less if you discount the pages dedicated to *Testing Religious Truth-claims*) then you'd be correct. I will admit to only a certain degree of familiarity with some of these figures but it is clear that Scott Smith gives little time to fleshing out their ideas. Many of these naturalistic philosophies are complicated endeavours and require an understanding of the findings of cognitive studies in the past few years to grasp how some of these arguments work. Yet for some reason Dretske, Tye, and Lycan are all treated in a single chapter at blistering speed. While the other philosophers under scrutiny get a chapter to themselves this one chapter makes it apparent that Scott Smith is rushing through these ideas such that when he comes to criticise them his own arguments have more of a feel of assertions.

Perhaps the greatest flaw of *Naturalism and Our Knowledge of Reality* is that it isn't written by Errin D. Clark. Principally it is a good idea to let a Phd student write a chapter for a book but in this case it does Scott Smith no favours. Clark's chapter on the Churchlands is not only better reasoned, he gives them a much more detailed and fairer hearing, it is also better written. Clark's chapter is well laid out and it is easy to follow the progression of point to point as he explicates the Churchlands' philosophy before finally giving his own critique. The overall impression is one of more coherency and a fairer analysis than anything Scott Smith provides. I hazard that had the whole book been written by Clark it would be significantly better.

This brings me to why I have reviewed two books. From the title and the introduction it is suggested that Scott Smith's book is a look at the way in which these naturalistic philosophies might be applied to religious truth-claims. Yet no such effort is made throughout the nine chapters in which he deals with naturalism. In fact I struggled to even find mention of religion anywhere in this part of the text. It reads more as an introduction to and critique of

naturalism, and a poor one at that. The only serviceable chapter is Clark's which is hardly reason enough to buy the book. For those who want an introduction to naturalism or the philosophy behind cognitive science there are better introductions out there. Religion does, however, make a return in the final chapter for *Testing Religious Truth-claims*.

Scott Smith having assumed that he has categorically disproven the worth of naturalism for knowing reality in the previous chapters then asks the logical question of how do we know reality. We are informed that because there are nonphysical entities that match up with physical ones, my thought about a red car matches up to the red car out there, we require 'an order of being that has explanatory power, but is different from all other things which we naturally expect an explanation' (pg.204). We are informed that because humans not only survive but *thrive* also, this is a clear indicator that we were designed by a being that is different from us. Clearly it is religion that can justify our knowledge of reality but this poses another question, which religion? Again Scott Smith provides the answer by presenting three criteria for figuring out which *monotheistic* religion does this: the historical accuracy of its claims, that the God of this religion is shown to care for us, and the coherence of their moral claims.

The whole chapter is a thinly veiled Christian apologetic dressed in a philosophical discussion about naturalism. This is not how we might test religious truth-claims' knowledge of reality but how Christianity confirms our knowledge of reality. As a Religious Studies text Scott Smith's book has no place; this is not a book about religion, it is a religious book. It is a mistake to read this book as anything other than a Christian philosophical response to the outside challenge of Naturalism. Thus for anyone studying how Christians respond to certain external pressures then this book is probably a good primary source from which to draw from. As an academic text within Religious Studies however this book has no value.

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