



bulletin

British Association for the Study of Religions



133: November 2018

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WWW.BASR.AC.UK

ABOUT THE BASR

The British Association for the Study of Religions (BASR) was founded in 1954. It is a member association of the International Association for the History of Religions (founded 1950) and of the European Association for the Study of Religions (founded 2001). The object of BASR is to promote the academic study of religion/s, understood as the historical, social, theoretical, critical and comparative study of religion/s through the interdisciplinary collaboration of all scholars whose research is defined in this way. BASR is not a forum for confessional, apologetic, or similar concerns. BASR pursues its aims principally through an annual conference and general meeting, a regular Bulletin, and a Journal of the British Association for the Study of Religions. Membership of BASR is open to all scholars normally resident in the United Kingdom.

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editorial



It seems fitting to be welcoming Bettina Schmidt as the new President of the BASR just as the Brexit deal is being approved. Bettina has been a supportive colleague to me personally (and many others) for years, and to the field in the UK in general through her considerable service in the REF and other less-visible but no-less-important roles. To find that her status in the UK is any way in question brings Brexit into stark focus for me. But if we can set up our own “soft border” at the joint ISASR/BASR conference, then we can follow our own path on other European issues too.

How Brexit will affect the university sector in the UK is not yet clear, but we have plenty of home-grown issues to be dealing with. With the REF coming up, precarious employment is one of the

most serious. Jonathan Tuckett’s Op Ed lays out the issues, and I have no doubt that many readers will be identifying as fellows of the Un-
seen University at

next year’s conference in Leeds.

On an unrelated note, I was saddened by the death of Stan Lee last week, at the age of 95. Not because of his tireless promotion of a much-maligned medium that I happen to love, nor because he was the central figure in the creation of an entire twentieth century mythology. Rather, because he wrote the best Editorials the galaxy has ever known! Excelsior!

Your pal,

“Deconstructin’ Davie” Robertson



www.facebook.com/groups/490163257661189/



twitter.com/TheBASR

news, etc

JBASR #20 (2018) PUBLISHED

The British Association for the Study of Religions (JBASR) issue 20, 'Narratives of Religion', has now been published and is fully accessible here with nine articles (based on papers presented at the conference in Chester) and three book reviews: <http://www.jbasr.com/ojs/index.php/jbasr>

We are planning for the next issue to be a special joint issue with the Journal of the Irish Society for the Academic Study of Religions (JISASR), produced from the proceedings of our joint conference. We invite article proposals in the form of a title and 300 word abstract to be submitted via email to both journals, JISASR: jisasr.journal@gmail.com and JBASR: jbasruk@gmail.com by Friday 30th November 2018.

Papers submitted will go through peer-review, and the decision on article selection as well as which journal – JBASR or JISASR – will be made by the editorial team of the joint issue. Selected articles must be submitted by 1st March 2019.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES AND PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

Those who attended the BASR AGM at the joint Report to the British Association for the Study of Religions Annual Conference in Belfast will recall our decision to set up an Ethics Working Party to draft a Code of Practice to be considered at our 2019 meeting. The purpose of formulating a code is not merely to commit ourselves to professional standards which no doubt already exist in our subject area; university ethics and research committees, as well as grant-awarding bodies, often require researchers to affirm their compliance with a relevant professional code.

A “Framework of Professional Practice” was formulated in 2005 by AUDTRS (Association of University Departments in Theology and Religious Studies), for which I convened the Ethics Working Party. The statement can be found at <https://basr.ac.uk/ethics>. The impetus for revising – or probably replacing – the existing Framework arises from the way in which the Internet has presented new issues for researchers. Those who undertake online anthropology face problematic decisions about whether, for example, it is acceptable to quote material from online discussions, how anonymity of subjects can be maintained, and how data should be stored.

There are other issues, of course. Another concern is the way in which ethics committees operate – often using a biomedical model, requiring consent from all human subjects, typically in written form. Perhaps a code of practice should acknowledge that this is not always appropriate in our fieldwork, for example when one attends events that are open to the public.

Some statement may be desirable about the scope of ethics, which ethics committees often conflate with methodology and risk assessment.

We are at a preliminary stage of our discussions, and would like to have as wide a consultation as possible with those who face ethical decisions in the research, or have to face ethics committees. It is important not to impose a code of practice on practitioners, but to enable those who are subject to it to feel a sense of ownership of its contents.

The working party consists of Bettina Schmidt (BASR President, University of Wales Trinity Saint David), George Chryssides (York St John University and

University of Birmingham), Vivian Asimos (Durham University), Lidia Guzy (University College Cork), James Kapalo (University College Cork), Jeremy Kidwell (University of Birmingham), Suzanne Owen (Leeds Trinity University), Giorgio Scalici (Durham University), Beth Singler (University of Cambridge), Paul-Francois Tremlett (Open University), Jonathan Tuckett (University of Stirling), Theo Wildcroft (Open University).

If there are any questions, or comments you would like to make, either about content that should be included, or about the process of devising a Code of Practice, you are invited to get in touch with me (GDChryssides@religion21.com), or any member of the Working Party.

COMMISSION ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PODCAST

A report published in September 2018 by the Commission on Religious Education entitled *Religion and Worldviews: the Way Forward: A National Plan for Religious Education* proposed a change in the law to ensure that all school pupils in England receive their 'National Entitlement' to education about religion and worldviews. The report, authored by fourteen Commissioners from a range of sectors (including academics, teachers, headteachers and consultants, a broadcaster and a Human Rights lawyer), was the culmination of two years of intensive consultation with a range of stakeholders, and an ambitious attempt to bring the whole 'RE

Community' together to push for statutory change.

At a recent RE research and policy conference #2020RE, Dr Wendy Dossett (the BASR's Teaching Fellow 2018) recorded a podcast for the Religious Studies Project with two of the Commissioners and authors of the Religion and Worldviews report, Dr Joyce Miller and Prof Eleanor Nesbitt, along with Religious Education sociologist (and convener of SOCREL), Céline Benoit. Their conversation ranged over some of the following issues: the rationale for the move from calling the subject 'Religious Education' to 'Religion and Worldviews'; the inadequacy for the classroom of a world religions approach; the degree to which faith communities are entitled to influence what gets taught in schools; and the anomaly of the so-called withdrawal clause.

Listen to the discussion now at <https://www.religiousstudiesproject.com/podcast/re-commission-report-a-way-forward/>

MEMBER'S NEWS

Christopher Cotter is now co-editor of the journal, *Secularism and Nonreligion*: <https://www.secularism-andnonreligion.org/>

Rosalind Hackett has been appointed Gerardus van der Leeuw Fellow at the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Groningen, the Netherlands, from August-December 2018.

GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

News Items	Up to 150 words
Conference Reports	500-1500 words
Conference Announcements	Not more than a single page
Book Reviews	700-1000 words
Features	Around 1000 words
Members' Recent Publications	Maximum 5 items

PLEASE SEND MATERIAL FOR INCLUSION TO david.robertson@open.ac.uk
DEADLINE FOR THE MAY 2017 ISSUE IS **31 APRIL 2019**

Study of Religion/s: Making the Positive Case

I'm grateful to the Bulletin editor, Dr David Robertson, for inviting me to contribute a brief piece as I stand down from my position as Honorary President of BASR 2015-2018. I'm tempted to add that I now join the illustrious ranks of the 'Ex-Presidents', but some of the hipper (read: older) readers will recognise this as the moniker of the surfer-dude bank robbing gang in Kathryn Bigelow's *Point Break* (1991) – don't on any account watch the 2015 re-make – and I can assure you that life after BASR is no way as glamorous.

I wish the new BASR committee every success; we are lucky to have such a strong group to take our association forward, and I would urge you to support them over the next three years by keeping in touch, giving input, sending in material for the website and the Bulletin and of course attending the BASR annual conference. Don't forget to support the EASR conference (in Tartu next year) and also the IAHR Quinquennial Congress in Dunedin/Otago in 2020 where our BASR officers will also be flying our flag.

I'm really pleased to have been part of a collective team on the BASR executive over the last three years and would like to extend warm thanks to Stephen, Chris, David, Suzanne, Dominic, Clare and Vivian for their collegiality during this period. I'm pleased that we managed to introduce a new logo and website for BASR, to rebrand Diskus as JBASR (special thanks to Suzanne), to rationalise membership dues and banking arrangements (step up, Chris), and to continue a strong vein of prudent conference stewardship (thanks to Stephen in particular). We've seen the Bulletin go from strength to strength under David's bold editorship into a leading international publication. Thanks to Dominic's leadership, we've inaugurated an annual Teaching Fellowship, and were delighted to award this to Dr Stefanie Sinclair in Chester in 2017 and to Dr Wendy Dossett in Belfast in 2018. It was also in Belfast, at Queen's University, that BASR held its first ever conference in Northern Ireland and its first ever joint conference with a fellow national organisation – in this case, the Irish Society for the Academic Study of Religions (ISASR) – to follow on from two conferences we've organised with the European Association for the Study of Religions (in Cambridge in 2001 and in Liverpool in 2013). Special thanks for organising the Belfast conference to Chris Cotter for BASR, and to Jenny Butler for ISASR. Finally, I am delighted that BASR has begun a history project with the threefold aim of producing a commemorative booklet, a peer-reviewed scholarly article, and most importantly a new sense of ownership of our scholarly history.

This brings me to my main observation about the Study of Religion/s, a term I increasingly prefer to Religious Studies, by the way. We need collectively, publicly and on a UK-wide stage to articulate the positive case for the Study of Religion/s as an inter/disciplinary field that most of us are already doing by default in our teaching and research. For understandable reasons, much of the energy of Religious Studies over the last fifty years has gone into demarcating ourselves from the theological and confessional interests informing many traditional university studies in 'religion/s' in order to find a



Dr Steven Sutcliffe
Ex-President BASR, 2015-2018

different footing, whether through a neo-modernist scientific paradigm in earlier years, or increasingly under the influence of poststructuralism and deconstruction. There are good reasons to continue to reflect on working models of Religious Studies/Study of Religion/s as an academic field, as well as to understand the historical and sociological conditions under which we have developed our narratives of disciplinary identity, since these raise important questions of epistemological coherence on the one hand and of religion-state relationships on the other. However, in the process perhaps too much of our rationalisation of what we do as scholars of religion/s has taken the form of what we don't do and what we are not. The key task of the future, I think, is to articulate what we do do, what we are, and the difference that we are capable of making to intellectual and public life. With REF 2021 approaching we have fresh opportunities to raise our profile by proactively engaging in conversation with colleagues in TRS UK, in SOCREL and in other social science and humanities contexts, as well as (more prosaically) with research managers in our HEIs. Given recent sector reviews, we have a new chance to re-engage curriculum development in secondary school education in religion/s, from where we continue to receive a good portion of our students – and could potentially receive more, better equipped in the future for the kind of positive intellectual agenda that the Study of Religion/s can help to set. Pioneers of RS in the UK, such as Ninian Smart, Eric Sharpe and John Hinnells, understood RS in the university to go hand in hand with RE in schools. We should re-embrace that twin-track approach and in the process link up once again with our colleagues in continental Europe and the Nordic countries who have been doing important work in this area for over a decade: for example the EASR working group: <http://www.easr.info/easr-working-groups/public-education/>.

Finally, there is much talk these days of interdisciplinarity, not least as a kind of added value factor in REF 2021. On this point we can be unequivocally proud of our history, for Religious Studies and the Study of Religion/s is, and always has been, an inherently interdisciplinary field. Our members are sociologists, phenomenologists, ethnographers, social historians, psychologists, economists, textual analysts and more – even biologists and cognitivists ;-). Not only this, we have unparalleled – unparalleled – expertise in the history and use of the category religion and its various cognates (faith, spirituality, etc) and a strong and vital comparative drive: that is, we tend to look at multiple examples, across traditions and formations, either in our own studies or in collaboration with colleagues. In other words, we deal with specifics and particularities, as good interpretivists should, but we also seek to generate the kind of comparative and generalised knowledge befitting explanatory approaches.

It follows that the Study of Religion/s is inherently interdisciplinary and is based in a strong theoretical and comparative framework. The latter qualities are intellectual strengths that can stand up in any company and supply a tough but flexible backbone to our field which exerts, dare I say it, a disciplining force of the best kind. What's not to like?

Wishing all members success for their projects over the coming years.

Steve
20 November 2018

BASR Annual General Meeting

13.30-15.00 - 04/09/18 - Queen's University, Belfast

British Association for the Study of Religions
Registered Charity Number 801567
(Affiliated to the IAHR and EASR)

1. Welcome. Steven Sutcliffe welcomed all, especially Carole Cusack from Sydney and Rosalind Hackett from Tennessee.
2. Apologies: Peggy Morgan, Molly Kady, Graham Harvey and Ursula King.
3. Minutes of the previous AGM. Jim Cox & George Chyrissides approved.
4. Matters arising. Points 16 & 17 from last year's AGM had matters arising. It was reported that both are being addressed; the action arising from 2017 point 16 is completed in point 15 of these minutes and 2017 point 17 was addressed through point 17 of these minutes.
5. Presidential Address (Steven Sutcliffe). SS noted how pleasing the collectivist approach to tasks taken by the committee was, and thanked the Executive Committee for great teamworking over the past three years. He was pleased that committee members were standing again and that BS is taking over as President. SS noted it had been a busy three years – BASR has achieved a lot of things – the website and logo revamped (thanks to Claire Wanless and David Robertson); JBASR relaunched and rebranded and re-hosted (thanks to Suzanne Owen) and DISKUS archive now accessible; Bulletin transformed (thanks to DR); rationalisation of banking, payments and membership list, easier process to join and better tabs kept on dues (thanks to Chris Cotter and Stephen Gregg); prudent conference financial management (thanked SG, Wendy Dossett & CC); healthy bursary awards for both PGR and ECR; and History Project up and running). SS noted it was good to bow out with a joint conference, taking forward collegiality and partnership (at this point SS invited James Kapalo who spoke about the symbolism of contemporary society being addressed well by this conference, and the importance of working between associations). SS then proceed to give an update on the History project update. SS finished by outlining the BASR's consultative work with REF 2021, where we had made robust recommendations for panel members, with some success, and noted that our own BS was vice-Chair. SS noted BASR had excellent relationship with Gordon Lynch (Chair) who will speak on REF at this conference, and encouraged the membership to engage with GL and use this opportunity to learn and enquire.
6. Secretary's Report (Stephen Gregg). SS noted that, on membership, CC and he had culled the members list and removed dormant members, chased non-paying members and updated lists. A very positive picture has emerged, as noted in CC's report. Bursaries: Another very high number and standard of applications again this year; we have continued to support as many people as possible, and this year was the first year that we have applied the rules agreed during last years' Exec discussions regarding awarding bursaries only once at PGR and ECR status for individuals. Although it is always a tough decision, we think this is working as it is sharing out funding opportunities amongst our growing membership. Activities - Religion and Media Centre: Attended pre-launch event in London, after BASR-member pointed them in SG's direction. SG Canvassed members to join and asked if any had been approached, but none had. British Academy event – SG attended BA event with deputy head

of administration for REF. The major issue, after REF updates already shared with institutions, was the proposal of the KEF; Jo Johnson's new project. SG noted that, with the subsequent change of minister, he would update members on any new developments to the proposed KEF. TRS-UK – SG has been voted onto the committee of TRS-UK. Met in London twice although Marion Bowman deputised on one occasion. Challenging environment for TRS, and there is a clear need to work more strategically with RE and feeder students. SG referred to CRE Report, outlined below. GDPR update: SG is confident BASR has complied, and a message went out to all members on the mailing list. REF nominations – 8 put forward; radically different to last time, as far more bodies nominated people. 1 BASR nomination chosen, but others on panel, including Chair, are sympathetic to the aims of RS within TRS, and SG argued that BASR had done well in the current context to maintain a relevant and useful voice in the consultation. Meeting Attendees: SG noted that the Exec have discussed the problem of spreading ourselves too thinly during our work for BASR, and the need for a London-based/near London member to volunteer to attend one or two meetings a year and to report back to the Exec on behalf of the membership. SG noted that fair expenses would be paid in full, and asked volunteers to contact the Exec. Finally, SG thanked all the committee members for their hard work, noting how they worked well as a team. SG gave special thanks to SS for his support.

7. Treasurer's Report (Chris Cotter). Full accounts and notes are provided attached to these minutes. No questions were raised and the membership unanimously accepted the accounts.

8. Teaching and Learning (Stephen Gregg). SG noted that there is a vacancy for a T&L rep, and asked membership to volunteer. SG noted that committee would also approach a suitable candidate if necessary. SG updated the membership on the report of the Commission on RE, co-chaired by Denise Cush, BASR member, and encouraged members to read the report. SS noted that our founders had strong links to RE, and that we retained this through collaborative conference work with EASR and IAHR initiatives, particularly in partnership with Wanda Alberts and Tim Jensen.

9. BASR Teaching Fellowship (Stephen Gregg). This year's award was given to Wendy Dossett of Chester University. SS addressed the membership on WD's track record of excellent work in T&L, and commended her for the award. WD was unable to attend, due to fieldwork commitments, and a video acceptance-speech was played to the AGM. Video will be placed on website.

10. JBASR Co-ordinating Editor's Report (Suzanne Owen). SO noted that there were 9 articles from the Chester conference in the latest edition, which should go live by next week. This year BASR will pool with JISASR and need to do that on a technological platform that makes sense; papers will be nominated and self-nominated; SO wants senior academics as well as PGRs and ECRs. JBASR is Open Access, so keeps REF requirements happy. SO asked members to please use JBASR articles in teaching.

11. Bulletin Editor's Report (David Robertson). DR noted that everything going fine under new style and systems – content and material is now focus – particular need for more 'Correspondent' pieces from diverse countries, especially interested in Africa and South America, Japan, India. (Re)Thinking series is going very well. Bursary holder conference reports now work to pro-forma, so should help bursary-holders produce an interesting and effective report more easily. RH asked about content and length of these reports; DR said no set but about 1200. BS said it looked really good in the new format. DR asked membership to please keep content coming, including articles, book reviews and conference reports.

12. Website and Social Media (Vivian Asimos). VA noted it was her first report, and she was

learning the ropes but DR had been very supportive. The website has been rearranged and social media is the new focus. New updates now appear on website front page. #ThingsToThinkWith is being used on Facebook, Twitter and Website as a social media campaign. Members can fill in a form to share this with VA and then the membership – please do so.

13. Religious Studies Project (David Robertson & Chris Cotter). DR noted they had a brand new website from a professional web designer. RSP is now a Scottish-Registered charity. Eternally grateful to BASR for support and funding. RH asked about non-English submissions; response was it needs to be English for peer review and RSP has no budget for translation costs. RH suggested getting bilingual editors onboard. DR welcomed this and asked to be put in contact with any suitable candidates.

14. BASR Conference 2019 (Suzanne Owen) – SO confirmed Leeds Trinity University as our next conference site. Should be accessible to all members, as it is the centre of the country - accommodation is on site. 2-4th September 2019.

15. Election of Executive Committee Members (Secretary – Stephen Gregg, Treasurer – Chris Cotter, Ordinary Member #1 – David Robertson, Ordinary Member # 2 – Suzanne Owen). All candidates were nominated and seconded to the Hon. Secretary (SG: Graham Harvey & George Chryssides, CC: Aine Warren & Sammy Bishop, DR: Jonathan Tuckett & Liam Sutherland, SO: Theo Wildcroft & Marion Bowman) and each position was uncontested. The membership passed unanimously all candidates, who were duly elected to serve new terms of office.

16. Hand-over to President Elect. SS noted he was delighted to hand over to BS. BS briefly noted her thanks to SS and all the committee, for continuing to work together so well, and thanked members for electing a German in the context of Brexit -the first non-British President. BS noted this showed the inclusiveness of BASR and thanked members.

17. Any Other Business. A discussion was raised on the issue of an Ethics statement, as noted from last years' AGM point 17. George Chryssides noted the roundtable at the Belfast conference was highly productive, with much conversation centred upon digital ethics. GC noted he would like to arrange a working party. Jonathan Tuckett volunteered to help organise and arrange something prior to next AGM. SS asked that GC to lead and JT & Theo Wildcroft to help coordinate. BS noted Irish association was also keen to be involved. SS asked members to assent to working party, and show of hands was unanimous.

18. Date, time and location of next AGM - Tuesday 3rd September 2019, Leeds Trinity University.

**BRITISH ASSOCIATION FOR
THE STUDY OF RELIGIONS
ACCOUNTS as at 15 AUGUST 2018**

Notes 2017-18 2016-17

Notes 2017-18 2016-17

Balance at 16 August 2017 26956

RECEIPTS

Subscriptions	<i>i</i>	5280	3362
Bank Interest		10	17
2018 Conference Receipts		450	0
2017 Conference Receipts	<i>ix</i>	123	0
2016 Conference Receipts		0	2225
Total		5864	5604

PAYMENTS

Printing & Postage Bulletin		-65	-23
RSP		-500	-500
Committee Expenses	<i>ii</i>	-2830	-1846
Society Subs	<i>iii</i>	-729	-477
Merchandise	<i>iv</i>	-125	0
Insurance	<i>v</i>	0	-796
Journal		-212	-231
History Project	<i>vi</i>	-1348	-1813
Teaching Fellowship	<i>vii</i>	-341	-245
Website	<i>viii</i>	-554	-84
2018 Conference Expenses		-68	0
2017 Conference Expenses		-678	-980
2016 Conference Expenses		0	-2000
Total		-7450	-8995

Balance at 15 August 2018 22144 23565

BALANCE SHEET as at 15 August 2018**Cash Funds: Bank Accounts**

Lloyds Current	1509	1619
CAF Gold	19922	21912
PayPal	522	9
Petty Cash	25	25
Total	21979	23565

FINANCIAL SUMMARY UP TO 15 AUGUST 2018

Balance as at 16th August 2017	23565	Conference 2017	
Total Receipts	5864	Total Receipts	123
Total Payments	-7450	Total Payments	-1658
Net Receipts/Payments	<i>x</i> -1586		
Balance as at 15th August 2018	21979	Deficit/Surplus	<i>xi</i> -1535

NOTES TO ACCOUNTS

- i* Effort resulted in over 30 members 'renewing'/paying arrears. Increase in annual subs of £615+, and 1-off bonus of £660.
- ii* 2 EASR conferences in this financial period. BA and TRS-UK meetings.
- iii* Increased paying membership means increased subs.
- iv* Badges... did you get one? Should we get more/similar?
- v* Last year included 2 years payments. 2018/19 has been paid after this accounting period.
- vi* All of the empirical work has been done. Final payment of £1500 on completion. Should be approx. £300 under £5000 budget.
- vii* Total for 2017 Teaching Fellowship = £586. Conference bursary, travel, and £300 prize.
- viii* Includes £420 for the complete design overhaul on the logo etc. (dating back to before Wolverhampton 2016)
- ix* We are still due £1658.28 from University of Chester. Invoiced in December 2017, followed up April and August 2018.
- x* With Chester money, accounts will be up £72.
- xi* Chester 2017 actually turned £123 profit.

*Affiliated to the
International Association for the History of Religions and
the European Association for the Study of Religions*

features

I am a Fellow of The Unseen University (and my department is growing)

Jonathan Tuckett, The Unseen University

At the last BASR conference I listed my affiliation as the Unseen University. It was meant somewhat as a joke, born out of my frustration at the current job market and how I was, at best, only employed on a temporary contract—not sure whether I would continue to be employed one semester to the next. At the time I felt that I was contracted by Edinburgh University, but that I was not part of Edinburgh University—at least, not enough to think of myself as an institutional academic. A lesson in itself, perhaps, on Marxian alienation.

While some of the attendees appreciated the joke at the time because there are a growing number in the same situation, it was clear that others were rankled by my little “commentary”. Perhaps not least, other members of Edinburgh University who might have expected me to list my affiliation as such. But to those, and any academic, who may take issue with my listing myself as part of the Unseen University, I have very simple response: you should not be offended, you should be concerned—very concerned.

In truth, I never intended the joke to go very far. It was originally a moment of catharsis, a release for a bitterness that had been brewing over that summer. At the same time, however, I had listed my affiliation as the Unseen University in the Introduction to a volume that I was editing. Whether I forgot or didn't care enough to change it to a “real” institution, the manuscript was sent with that affiliation. The series editor, however, noticed the affiliation and responded: “If this [is] intended as a joke, I don't much care for it. In any case, it needs to be fixed.” A friend, commented on the matter and I realised that behind my initial joke is a much more serious point—a point that needs to be made regardless of whether my fellow

academics—all of you—like or care for it.

In my response to the publisher, I justified my affiliation as a means to “to highlight the plight of academics who are employed by universities but do not enjoy the formal recognition or benefits of being an institutional academic”. As it happened, this also tied into my contribution to that very volume where I discussed who does, or does not, get to call themselves “social scientists”. This built off a piece that was published a few issues ago in the *BASR Bulletin* where I highlighted the difficult position some academics are placed in by the current publishing climate. So I fed my defence of the Unseen University into my main argument.

In summary: the current climate among academic publishers is to only accept material from institutionally affiliated academics. And in the so-called era of “multidisciplinarity”, they are sceptical of anything that comes from a contributor outside the “discipline”. In the case of journals it is often required that articles must be submitted along with information indicating institutional affiliation, or writing a covering letter (a statement of relevance) to justify why the article should be considered before it is reviewed by another academic. Fail to convince an editor and no matter how academically valid your point might be, it will not be published. In the case of monographs, publishers have begun to show reservations about publishing books by scholars who do not already have an established position. This, of course, is coupled with the double-edged sword that many institutions are now showing reservations about hiring a young academic without a published monograph. After all, a young academic with no publications has no REF profile—a point I will return

to momentarily.

But first, the response from the publisher to my defence. In full:

We understand that the author, Jonathan Tuckett, wishes to list his affiliation as “the Unseen University” so as “to highlight the plight of academics who are employed by universities but do not enjoy the formal recognition or benefits of being an “institutional academic”. As an academic publisher we take affiliations and institutions seriously. The institution “Unseen university” does not exist, is not established privately or publically to carry out teaching and research functions, and is not included in a recognized or accredited catalogue of higher education intuitions globally. The so-named affiliation is not even a virtual teaching portal; hence its identification for professional purposes is wanting. Besides, there is an ideological statement here that is not appropriate in this context as the publication in question is not an advocacy medium. We are therefore unwilling to use the latter part of the statement that identifies the supposed affiliation. If Dr Tuckett is employed in a university then he should simply name the university or college concerned. Alternatively he can mention that he is “an independent scholar”, and a phenomenologist specializing in philosophical anthropology, intersubjectivity and religion.

Let me reiterate this point: the Unseen university does not exist, is not established privately or publically to carry out teaching and research functions, and is not included in a recognized or accredited catalogue of higher education intuitions globally. By corollary, only research conducted within a privately or publically established teaching or research institution is valid research. This is the publisher’s view, not that of a fellow academic. And if you wished to be published as an academic, you must conform to this view. You may well respond that the publisher is willing to accept work from an independent scholar. But consider the very phrasing of the point: the publisher is willing. Not your fellows, but the publisher is the ultimate arbiter of not only what is published, but who publishes.

In that response I was reminded that a highly eminent historian once came up to me after a conference paper I gave in order to, in his words, “Shake the hand of an angry young academic.” And while I may not be so young any more, I can still do anger very, very well.

And being angry is far more preferable, far more productive to being bitter.

For reasons of expediency I listed myself as an independent scholar. But let me clear: in today’s world there is absolutely no reason for me not to list my affiliation as the Unseen University instead of Edinburgh. In fact, there is even more reason to do so.

For far too long I listed Edinburgh as my affiliation out of force of habit. I did so because it is easier to get into the review process by connecting myself to a university than it is by referring to myself as an “independent researcher”. But this is now nothing short of exploitation. Nothing in my wonderfully titled “non-standard contract” provided a provision for me to write. I was not paid to do the research I do which gets published. I was not provided a mentor, I was not provided assistance or a support network. I was a contract worker, an employee of the university for only those 1-3 tutorials that I was employed to take. I gave up a full day of time for less than a full-day’s pay. Tutorials are rarely organised for the ease of the tutor so that I could teach in the morning and go work elsewhere in the afternoon. I had hours-long gaps between tutorials which, for practicality’s sake, tied me to the university. But do not think I could use that time to fulfil the rest of my obligations, these obligations—preparation for my teaching—necessarily had to have happened before.

This digression into the nature of such teaching contracts is necessary to highlight just what it means to be affiliated to the Unseen University. And I do not single out Edinburgh because it was necessarily bad. I single it out because I was there. I now teach at Stirling and a similar situation pertained until they had the decency to put me on the rather pitifully small 0.2fte—my teaching load is actually roughly equivalent to full-time staff members. That is how the university intends us to manage our time, what it considers our teaching is worth condensed down into a meagre monetary value which is then outweighed by the same monetary value which they place on “research”. And yet, for those who belong to the Unseen University, they are the main point of student-conduct in many instances. The responsibilities of teaching fall to us; teaching the very same people who are—in age where a single academic year costs £9,000—funding that “research”.

But as a contract tutor or as a lecturer on 0.2fte, not

a single penny of that monetary value I am adjudged to be worth is on the basis of the research that I do. I teach so that others can research. Which as a state of affairs would not be so deplorable if, in order to advance to their lofty level, I didn't have to do research as well! For the established academic, "research" is a reward for teaching that they barely do anymore. For the Unseen University, "research" is an expectation. An expectation we are not paid for, an expectation we are not supported in.

And yet, as the publishers indicate, this research that we do should bear the name of that institution. Well, to that I say this: outside of those contracted six hours a week where I worked for the University, I was my own free man doing my own research at my own expense on my own initiative. The ironic twist of writing a thesis which argued that "social science", properly understood, is nothing more than a hobby; I find myself doing all of my research in my spare time.

And to all this comes the crucial question: what right do Edinburgh or Stirling, or any university, have to take credit for my work, whether claimed for themselves, or "claimed" on their behalf by publishers or conference organisers? Why should they get "credit" for my attendance at a conference that I paid for with my own hands? A full-time lecturer is afforded a budget, admittedly paltry for some, to attend these occasions. Are those of us on part-time or temporary contracts? Of course not.

We are in the catatonically deplorable state of affairs in which we are not paid to work, we pay to work. And for that we have to endure the "privilege" of crediting some university institution for our presence. We are forced, by publishers and by conference organisers, to give them credit where no credit is due. I could just as easily work anywhere else, in any other sector, if I am to do research on my spare time.

And that should concern you very greatly. We live in the age of REF—the Research Excellence Framework. TEF has yet to materialise, TEF which may ironically remedy some of the state of affairs I have just described—lecturers paid on the basis of lecturing. And why is REF so dangerous? Consider this: A while ago I produced an article in a reputable journal which was awarded an honorary diploma for my contribution to the field. Out of necessity, I listed my academic affiliation as Edinburgh University. Under the guidelines of REF 2014, the university could have

claimed my work as part of their submission for the next REF and thereby increased their funding without having to pay me a penny. Consider the parallel, I file a patent for a product. Then someone else starts making and selling that product. Under the law I could sue that thieving grot senseless for stealing my product—he's making money off my work, profit which I myself would not see. In any other sector, the idea that someone can claim credit and reward for someone else's work, without that originator receiving anything in return, is deplorable and unacceptable! Why do we think we go into such an uproar every time we hear about executive's bonuses?

Now, the REF 2021 document has mollified the situation somewhat. An academic needs to be employed on a contract with a substantive "research" component in order to be included in a university's submission. Something which is never a feature of non-standard contracts. But this gives me even less reason to associate my work with a university who has not contributed to that work! What, in such a situation, do I actually gain from such an affiliation? Those who tell me that it is a privilege to have my name associated to a university fail to appreciate the sort of situation that REF has created. Thanks to the REF, getting to publish my work in the name of a university, any university, for gratis is no longer a privilege. The world of privilege and prestige no longer exists. The REF does not apportion funding on the basis of heritage and history. The REF determines funding on the sweat and toil of academics in the here and now. Universities are measured on their performance, on their products. Whether you like it or not—whether you will admit it to yourselves or not—REF has created a mercenary environment and so I see no reason not to be mercenary.

I will not allow a university to claim credit and reward for my work if I am not in some way compensated for that very work. No young academic should have to credit a university, any university, with their work when that university has done nothing to assist in that work. So if I list my affiliation as the Unseen University it is because a fictional university in a fictional city has contributed just as much to my research as the very real universities in which I might set foot.

[Editor's note: This article has been edited to correct some inaccuracies included in the original version.]

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT ... IN BRAZIL

Flavio Senra, PUC Minas, Belo Horizonte

The current report is based on data supplied by the Postgraduate Department of Religion Studies and Theology in the National Postgraduate System (SN-PG). The entity in charge of monitoring the Brazilian postgraduate program is the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES), a Foundation linked to the Ministry of Education of Brazil (MEC). In the Brazilian SN-PG, the postgraduate program is organized in 49 evaluation areas.

ANPTECRE - National Association of Postgraduate and Research in Theology and Religion Studies - is the association that brings graduate programs together in the country. Researchers in the area are individually organized in other scientific societies, the largest being SOTER - Society of Theology and Religion Studies and ABHR - Brazilian Association of Religion History.

The area of Assessment in Religion Studies and Theology emerged with the CAPES 174/2016 Ordinance, officially published on October 13, 2016, reassigned by Resolution nº 01 from April 04, 2017, published in the CAPES Service Bulletin - Special Edition nº 1 - April 2017.

Forty-six years have passed since the creation of the first Program in the Area. Until late 2016, existing programs in the current area of Religion Studies and

Table 1. Tree of Knowledge

SUBAREA	RELATED TOPICS
APPLIED RELIGION STUDIES	Religion and public space, politics, ethics, health, ecology, cultures; themes associated with diversity, respect and tolerance; interreligious dialogue; education and religion.
RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE STUDIES	Methods and sources for the study of religions, spiritualities or wisdom traditions, of their natural languages, their vocabulary and grammar; relations between religious language, artistic-literary language, and language in general.
EMPIRICAL RELIGION STUDIES	Religious phenomena, spiritualities, wisdom traditions or life philosophies in the "area"; "on religion" courses, in dialogue with theories and methods of other constituted sciences: Sociology ..., Anthropology ..., Psychology ..., History ..., Geography ..., Phenomenology - in a descriptive sense.
EPISTEMOLOGY OF RELIGION STUDIES	Theoretical-methodological or metatheoretical reflections; philosophical approaches to the concept/ definition of religion or its negation; religion psychology and phenomenology - in a systematic sense.
HISTORY OF THEOLOGIES AND RELIGIONS	Historical studies of ideas and religious doctrines/spiritualities/ wisdom tradition (intellectual history), of their expression(s) or socio-cultural rooting.
FUNDAMENTAL-SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY	Rationale of theology and its coherent (systematic) development; dogma exposition (kerygmatic aspect); defence or up-to-date clarification of religious doctrines/spiritualities/wisdom traditions specific to tradition (apologetic aspect); political theology, philosophical theology; religion philosophy.
PRACTICAL THEOLOGY	Pastoral psychology; ecotheology, faith and politics, homiletics and education in the respective tradition.
SACRED TRADITIONS AND SCRIPTURES	Sacred scriptures and oral tradition accounts from various religious traditions/spiritualities/wisdom traditions.

Source: CAPES – Document of the Religion Studies and Theology area

Theology comprised the extinct area known as Philosophy/Theology: Theology subcommittee.

The Area conducts investigations oriented by multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary or trans-disciplinary approaches and encompasses courses such as Academic Masters, PhD, and Professional Masters.

The Area of Religion Studies and Theology combines two knowledge areas: Theology and Religion Studies. The tree, however, is subdivided into eight subareas that consider the possibility of research at the interface between both knowledge areas.

In Table 1, it is possible to identify the corresponding themes related to each of the mentioned sub-areas.

Table 2. List of programs in the area of Religion Studies and Theology in Brazil

HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION ²	PROGRAM TITLE	COURSES
UEPA	Religion Studies	Masters
UFPB/J.P.	Religion Studies	Masters/PhD
UNICAP	Religion Studies	Masters/ PhD
UNICAP	Theology	Masters
FUFSE	Religion Studies	Masters
FUV	Religion Studies	Professional Masters
PUC-RIO	Theology	Masters/ PhD
UFJF	Religion Studies	Masters/ PhD
PUC/MG	Religion Studies	Masters/ PhD
FAJE	Theology	Masters/ PhD
PUC/SP	Religion Studies	Masters/ PhD
PUC/SP	Theology	Masters/ PhD
PUCCAMP	Religion Studies	Masters
UMESP	Religion Studies	Masters/ PhD
UPM	Religion Studies	Masters
PUC/PR	Theology	Masters/ PhD
FTBP	Theology	Professional Masters
PUC/RS	Theology	Masters/ PhD
EST	Theology	Masters/ PhD
EST	Theology	Professional Masters
PUC-GOÍÁS	Religion Studies	Masters/ PhD

Source: CAPES

In the 2013-2016 quadriennial, the Area of Religion Studies and Theology comprised 21 postgraduate programs, distributed among 8 Religion Studies programs, 2 Religion Studies programs, 2 Religion Studies programs and 9 Theology programs. Among them, there are 3 professional and 18 academic course programs, as shown on Table 2.

The Area is represented nationwide, although some asymmetry may be observed in the North and Midwest regions. Each of these regions holds only one program. The Northeast region holds 4 programs. The highest concentration of programs is observed in the Southeast and South regions, with 10 and 5 programs, respectively.

The intellectual production of CAPES assessment areas takes into account, among

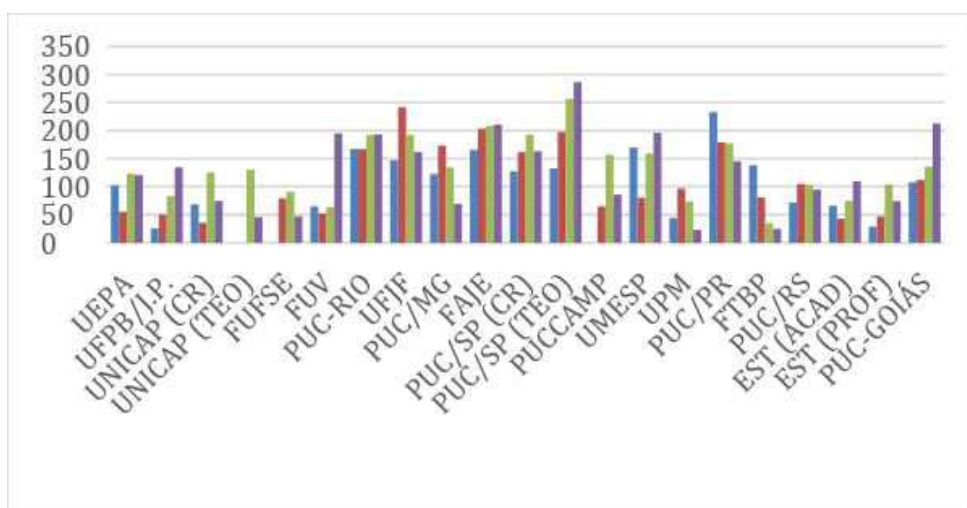


Chart 1: Evolution of qualified intellectual production by permanent teachers. Source: CAPES

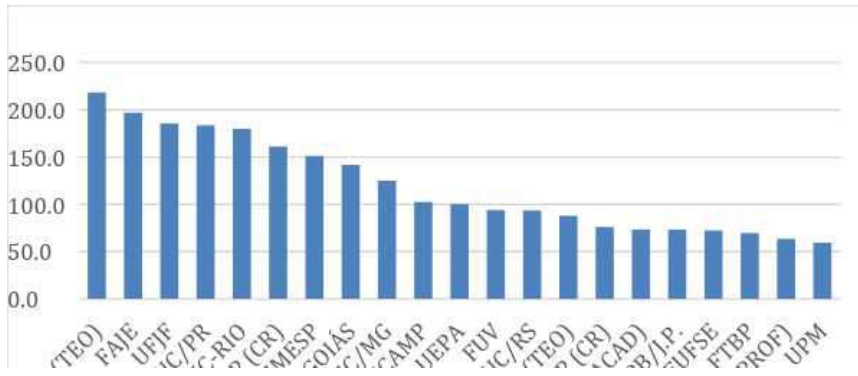


Chart 2: Score of qualified intellectual production of permanent teachers. Source: CAPES, prepared by the area based on data from the Sucupira Platform

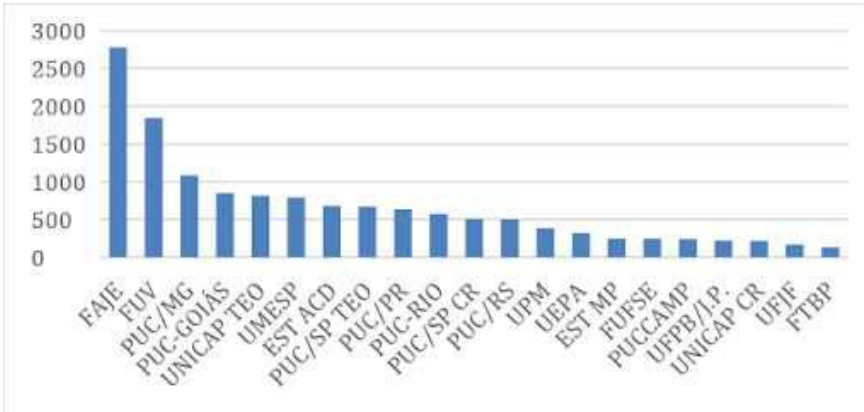


Chart 3: Technical production items. Source: CAPES

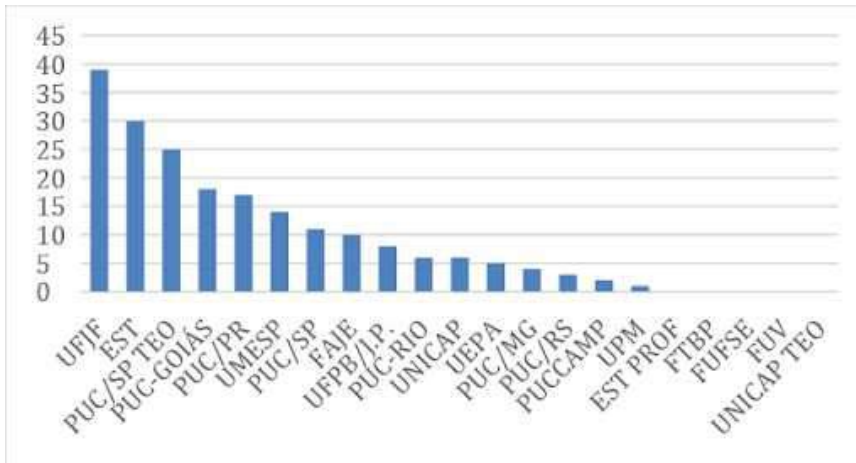


Chart 4: Qualified student production items. Source: CAPES

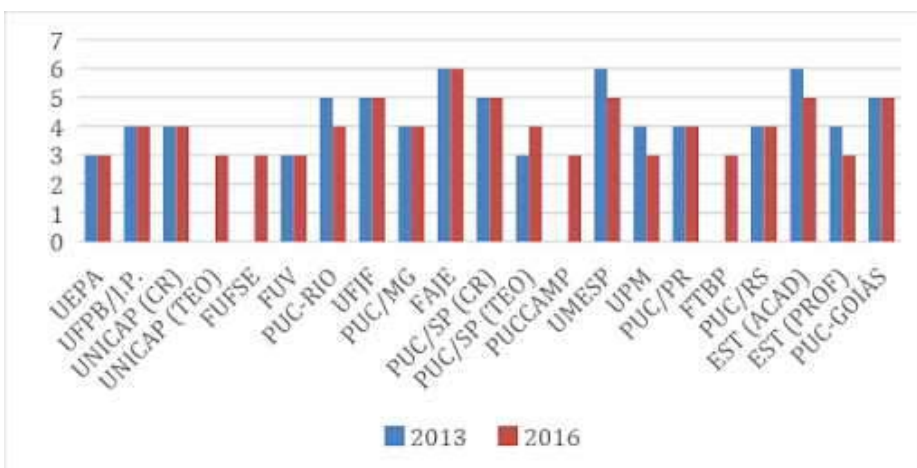


Chart 5 - Score evolution in the 2013-2016 quadriennial. Source: CAPES

other aspects, academic production concerning bibliographic products in books and scientific journals. On the one hand, bibliographic production expressed in books is distributed in four strata, from lowest to highest score (L1 to L4). Strata L3 and L4 refer to qualified production in books. On the other hand, bibliographic production in periodicals is distributed in three tiers (B1-A2-A1, B5-B4-B3-B2, and C). The first tier is related to superior quality products (B1 to A1). The second tier concerns lower quality products (B5 to B2). The third tier (C) refers to production that may not be qualified as a scientific article.

Production is assessed in four-year time frames. The last one was held in 2017, concerning the 2013-2016 quadrennial. Chart 1 displays the evolution of qualified intellectual production, i.e., that of the highest strata in the assessment of books and articles in periodicals, as explained above.

Qualified intellectual production, as measured by the highest levels of evaluation in books and journals, presents the flow that each of the graduate programs experienced over the years 2013-2016.

The strata of bibliographic production ascribe each of the programs a score. Considering the upper strata, being L3 and L4 for books and B1, A2 and A1 for periodicals, Chart 3 explains the ranking between programs.

Technical production is not organized by strata and cannot be scored in the current assessment system of the Religion Studies and Theology area. Considering the technical production of the programs, the volume of what has been produced in terms of technical services is observed, mainly concerning short courses, paper presentations, publishing, didactic material development, event organization, research reports, among others.

Similarly to the production by teachers, bibliographic production by students is also evaluated. Chart 4 presents the volume of items produced by students from the Religion Studies and Theology area.

Religion Studies and Theology area grew by 22% in the 2013-2016 time frame, with four new programs, two with courses in Theology and two in Religion Studies. Among them, one is professional and three are academic course programs (FTBP - Professional

Masters in Theology, PUCCAMP - Academic Masters in Religion Studies, FUSE - Academic Masters in Religion Studies, UNICAP - Academic Masters in Theology).

Regarding the program scores after the periodic assessment every four years, the following parameters are observed: 1 and 2 (not approved), 3 (regular), 4 (good), 5 (very good). Notes 6 and 7 refer to excellence standard.

Postgraduate studies in Religion Studies and Theology are ranked according to the above distribution. Such data describe the current status of Religion Studies and Theology postgraduate research in Brazil.

RE:THINKING MAX MÜLLER

'Introduction to the Science of Religion' as model for twentieth century theological 'science'

Max Müller's four lectures on the science of religion, delivered to the Royal Institution in 1870, pioneered a self-proclaimed 'impartial and truly scientific comparison of the most important religions of mankind' (Müller 1893, 26). I want to highlight the fact that, contrary to its claim to be science, the work was a confession of faith. The scientific elements are subordinated to a theological scheme that is evolutionary, Christian supremacist, and, overarching the whole, Platonist. Although the work may not be a key text for students today, its significance lies in the fact that this original Platonist confession, masquerading as science, is the model of many influential works over the past 150 years—Bellah (2011) and Berger (2014), to name just two of the most recent. This façade of science, girded by the subtleties of Platonism, is apt to be misleading. For instance, Donald Weibe, a determined opponent of theological influence in sociology, considered that Müller's science of religion rested "wholly upon a scientific rather than a religio-theological foundation" (Weibe 2000,11). Weibe used this position to argue the theological regression of '60's Religious Studies. But the science of religion/Religious Studies was a theological project from its inception. I want to suggest that, so long as Müller's work is not recognised as a confession of faith, then we have not yet achieved clear sight on the theological 'science' that dominated, and confounded, the sociology of religion in the twentieth century. There is some seismic re-thinking to be done.

The Content of the Lectures

To begin with, let's recap the content of the book. Lecture one stakes the claim for scientific immunity

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from ecclesiastical outrage at any non-privileged comparison of religions (8). Müller, as an authority on Sanskrit, came from immersion in the science of language which had produced fine results in the face of “dangerous dogmatic scepticism” (97). He gave examples of some likely results of freedom from religious orthodoxy. The typical development of scriptural canons could be illustrated by reference to Buddhism (22). He counters the wishful prejudice that Christianity should have an Aryan, not a Semitic origin (27). He dismisses the prejudice that Zulus have no religion (43). He warns against literal readings of the bible and uses the example of Woman created from the rib of Adam (34). Rib, we learn, is a Hebrew reference to “bone”, that metaphorically signifies “the same essence”.

Lecture two sets out Müller’s cultural classification of religions. “The only scientific and truly genetic classification of religions is the same as the classification of languages” (82), that is; Aryan, Semitic and Turanian. Müller therefore dismisses classification by polytheistic, dualistic and monotheistic characteristics (80), the cherished distinction between revealed and natural religion (74), and the degeneration theory of a primeval revelation of religion (30).

Lecture three expounds Müller’s synthetic principle—that all religions, despite appearances, have an underlying monotheistic impetus. They are attempting to conceptualise the unity of God, one “Heaven-Father” (107). This “One” may take the incipient form of Sky, Light, being, Nature, El, Strong, Peerless, Exalted. As example, even the peculiar Chinese “mean ...the same God whom we mean, however helpless their utterance” (125). Even African religions display the same impetus, once we get past the “theory of primitive fetishism [which] has done most mischief in blinding the eyes even of accurate observers” (99).

Lecture four continues this theme of an underlying unity. Müller goes on a tour of religions to trace, in all of them, the moral grains of Christianity. The “quintessence of all religion”, quoting Rabi Hillel, is “Be Good, my boy” (154). Thus, “As in Buddhism and Brahmanism, so again in the writings of Confucius, we find what we value most in our own religion” (176). This cosy synthesis concludes the *Introduction to the Science of Religion*.

Science or Theology?

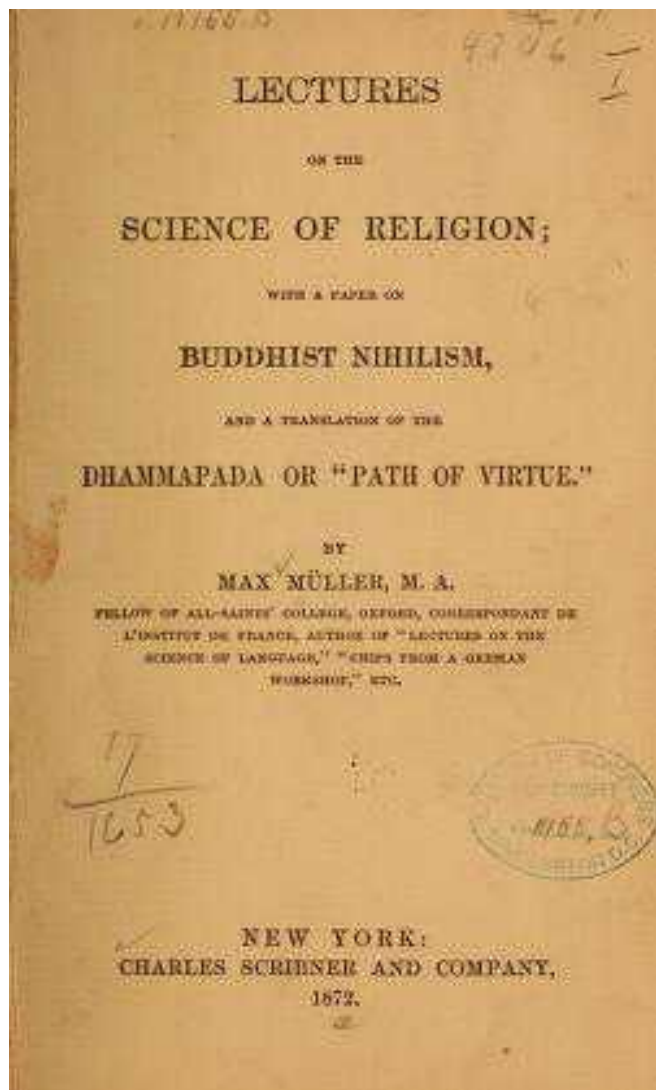
As I have selected the material here, these lectures might pass as an enterprise independent of theology. The ‘higher criticism’ of the Bible stands out as boldly independent for its time. The credence accorded to other religions also broke free of Victorian ecclesiastical shackles. But the whole work is imbued with theological parameters: it holds a certainty of moral truth and it assumes Christian supremacy as the pinnacle of an evolutionary ascendance of religions. The whole is licenced by Müller’s Platonism, in which this higher understanding of the Christian myths, espoused by liberal intellectuals, is enlisted to excuse all childish myths, and to serve as the ‘scientific’ higher understanding of all religions.

As illustration of the moral certainty, Müller provides this mission statement: “As students of the Science of Religion... We study error, as the physiologist studies disease... where we see that superstition saps the roots of faith... we must take sides” (7). “No religion has been drawn so far away from the truth as in the religion of Buddha” (171).

Darwin’s theory of evolution is applied to the history of religions. “An honest and independent study of the religions of the world will teach us... the Divine education of the human race” (151, *Italics original*). “If we must not read in the history of the whole human race the daily lessons of a Divine teacher and guide, if there is no increasing purpose in the succession of the religions of the world, then we might as well shut up the godless book of history altogether” (151).

This evolution of religions is crowned by Christian supremacy. “The language of antiquity” (polytheism and mythology) is “a parler enfantin of religion... as we put the most charitable interpretation on the utterances of children, we ought to put the same charitable interpretation on the apparent absurdities, the follies, the errors, nay even the horrors of ancient religions” (204-5).

How is Müller able to discount “these inevitable excrescences of all religions”, and “find much of true religion where we only expected degrading superstition or an absurd worship of idols” (191)? It is because Müller is a confirmed Platonist. He operates a bifurcation that I have identified as the Platonist



“Gospel of Essence and Form” (Rock 2017). Religion, for Müller, is defined exclusively by nature-mystical, personal revelation, which is independent of all cultural forms. As he explains the case, just as there is a “faculty of speech, independent of all historical forms of language, there is a faculty of faith in man, independent of all historical religions” (13). This revelation comes through the “faculty of the Infinite” (14). This is a “third faculty of man” (14), which is independent of reason or sense. Müller was a Platonist mystic.

This bifurcation of Essence and Form derives from the paradox that this inexpressible mystical experience must find expression. It does so in cultural forms; thus “so-called creeds or confessions of faith... give us always the shadow only, and never the substance of a religion” (53). The forms of ancient religions are like an old precious metal, whose purity is revealed beneath the rust (50). Thus, all forms of religion are culturally imperfect attempts

to attain expression of the numinous. They engage in an endless “dialectic [of] growth and decay” (201, *Italics in original*), displaying a tension between a high and low dialect.

Re-thinking Max Müller

Müller’s Platonism has had a devastating effect on the sociology of religion. While it professes to be comparative, it is determinedly anti-comparative. All religions are reduced to the same thing. The different types of religion, such as apocalyptic and karmic, nature mystical or collective representation, polytheistic, dualistic and monotheistic, have no significance in their own right. The ‘scientist’ knows, in advance, that the multifarious cultural expressions are versions of the same thing. Platonism offers the politically and theologically seductive proposition that all religions are, at bottom, reconcilable; and not inherently factious cultural confections.

Müller’s work has lasting significance because his Platonism represents the model which the major twentieth century works in the sociology of religion repeated. Figures such as Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Mircea Eliade, Peter Berger and Robert Bellah are apostles of this religion of Ultimate Reality. Their approach is identical to the liberal theologian synthesisers of religion, such as Paul Tillich, John Hick and Robert Neville. That Platonism is still in full spate today, and so long as we might imagine that Müller’s work was scientific, and not a confession of faith, we have not yet reached clear sight on the past 150 years as the theological *parler enfantin* of religious studies.

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conferences



BASR/ISASR JOINT CONFERENCE 2018, QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY, BELFAST, SEPT 4-6

The 2018 annual conference of the British Association for the Study of Religions was organised together with the Irish counterpart, the Irish Society for the Academic Study of Religions, at the Queen's University of Belfast. The event, the first joined event, was inaugurated by Professor Tony Gallagher, Dean of Research at Queen's. He delivered a moving speech that recalled the turbulent past of Belfast and the achievement obtained through the dialogue between communities that brought to the peaceful present. On this note, Gallagher wished for more joined debates such as the BASR-ISASR conference would take place in the future. In a university amphitheatre crowded with enthusiast participants, the meeting opened in the afternoon of the 3rd of September with a vibrant and exciting programme of presentations and panellists.

The joint nature of the conference, and its location in Belfast, meant that the diversity of religiosity within Britain and Ireland was frequently brought into clear focus. It is often easy to assume that the religious and political situations across the two countries are similar and yet many of the presentations demon-

strated the important and continuing influence of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland. The ongoing impact of Ireland's cultural heritage should not have been a surprise but the reminder of how much our histories shape us was particularly important in the present political context, with Brexit and its potential impact on the peace process hovering in the background. Gladys Ganiel's keynote address explored some of these issues, first building on her previous work studying 'Post-Catholic Ireland' and then moving on to explore how extra-institutional religion continues to play an important role in contributing to religious, social and political change. Her keynote drew on a case study that examined the important role that extra-institutional religious actors played in ecumenical peacebuilding efforts by allowing individuals to simultaneously draw upon and move beyond the influential religious authorities that had such influence in the Troubles. In addition to highlighting the role that extra-institutional religion plays in Ireland, even in a context of diminishing institutional authority, Ganiel's work also suggested that we should examine the role of religious influence beyond the boundaries of religious institutions in other contexts.

The BASR AGM was held on the 4th of September.

After a necessary review and approval of the budget, the committee presented some projects related to the future of the organisation. First of all, the new president of the BASR was introduced to the audience. Steven Sutcliffe, the former president, passed on the baton to Bettina Schmidt who was warmly welcomed by the audience. Everyone wished her to successfully cover this role for the next three years, bringing to the BASR new ideas and energies, while leading the association in these times of change. After that, the Commission on Religious Education was introduced, with a discussion on the importance of religious education and the role that we, as religious scholars, must fulfil to improve the quality of religious education in Britain, to create a more tolerant community.

Moreover, the members of the BASR committee invited the audience to collaborate with the journal of the association, JBASR, illustrating the opportunity to be published in future issues. More initiatives came from Chris Cotter and David Robertson, founders of the Religious Studies Project, who presented their podcast project dedicated to the study of religion. During the presentation, the duo asked for support from national and international scholars who are keen on producing podcasts that explore the religions in Britain and in the World.

This international vocation of the Religious Studies Project, BASR and ISARS were clearly expressed by the presence of many panellists from all around the world (Italy, Colombia, U.S.A. Japan and many other countries). The significant participation of such a diverse audience may have been determined by the conference topic dedicated to Borders and Boundaries: 'Religion' on the Periphery. The panelists who attended offered exciting and different approaches and points of views. Besides, many panels actively engaged with the minority communities and activism; essential themes of discussion in these time characterised by a new wave of intolerance and ethnocentrism. During the AGM, an Ethic Working Team has been instituted to produce much-needed ethics guidelines, to help all the scholars with their research. We hope to see this document at the next BASR conference to be discussed with all the members.

The second keynote, delivered by Naomi Goldenberg of the University of Ottawa, delved further into the theme of borders and boundaries by exploring the role of religion as a tool of statecraft. Informed by the emerging field of "critical religion", which critically interrogates the construction of the category religion, Goldenberg addressed how religion has been created as a tool to contain dissidents of a former



The recipients of the 2018 BASR Bursary - and the authors of this report.



"Religion" - Naomi Goldenberg

governance structure, which she calls a “vestigial state”. In her view, religion was devised as a solution to compensate for the illegality and the violence of the governing state. She thus questions the oft-assumed conceptual boundaries between religion and politics and attempts to bring to light the place of religions within the power structure of the ruling entity. Her rather provocative argument prompted a lively discussion during the following Q-and-A session, revealing how scholars of religions themselves may have fundamentally different understandings of the category religion.

The closing event was a plenary session on the incoming Research Excellence Framework (REF). The talk, delivered by Gordon Lynch via Skype focused on the draft of the new document and on its assessment criteria. Lynch went through the technicalities of the REF process pointing at the continuity with the 2014 text, especially for what concerns the mentioned assessment criteria. Lynch also sugges-

ted the presence of a BASR member on the subcommittee for religious studies, hoping the association would appoint someone to be part of the 2012 REF. He carried on adding that he would have kept the association in the loop, feeding back to the BASR key members and the new president Bettina Schmidt about the further development of REF document. Some concerns and questions regarding the potential precariat the REF2021 could reinforce rather than decrease inside academia were also raised during the Q&A, concerns that Lynch tried to address suggesting that there is still work, especially regarding similar issues.

The conference closed with a brief discourse delivered by Bettina Schmidt wishing all the best for the study of religions and encouraging all participants to come back to BASR 2019 in Leeds.

Masato Kato, James Murphy,
Giorgio Scalici, and Ilaria Vecchi

Sammy Bishop and
Manon Hedenborg White
in the Podcasting Studio
at #EASR2018



EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF RELIGIONS CONFERENCE 2018, BERN, 17-21 JUNE.

From Sunday 17th to Thursday 21st June, Bern University hosted the 16th Annual Conference of the European Association for the Study of Religion (EASR). The city itself enjoying a hot June and the UNESCO-listed cobbled streets were lined with Swiss flags and flat-screen televisions; the FIFA World Cup had just begun.

The conference was titled 'Multiple Religious Identities', an inclusive theme into which the conference attendees channelled their own multiplicity, hiving off into different disciplinary and subject-area groups. In general, the papers involved either historians showcasing research on ancient, middle-age and early-modern religious multiplicities, such as Professor Jorg Rupke's polished keynote 'Urbanity and multiple religious institutions in Antiquity'. Or sociologists and like-interested scholars exploring contemporary religious diversity under pressures of institutional, social and political integration. For example, Dr. Milda Alisauskiene, the first Baltic states academic to deliver an EASR Conference keynote, pulled this conversation eastwards with a presentation on post-Soviet religious diversification in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. From a personal perspective, many of Alisauskiene's statistics were new to me, and as such, particularly interesting. The papers, however, were not limited to the European

experience, and presentations drew on international case studies and topics were as varied as healing, motherhood, the sea, popular culture, mountains and Highgate cemetery. The EASR 2018 programme crammed in a total of 501 papers over four days, spread across 16 concurrent panels and presented by 454 speakers. The EASR 2017 Annual conference in Leuven registered 441 speakers, so Bern just edged last year's event on numbers.

The conference aimed not just to explore the histories and politics of religious diversity, but also the methodological problems multiplicity presents. The call for papers queried: 'Do we let go our theoretical endeavour in favour of the multitude of individual cases or do we blur the manifold individual and social realities of religions through our generalising concepts?' It's a familiar problem, and when used to undermine 'religion' itself, some professors mutter, a rather trying one. On Sunday evening, in the opening panel to the conference, the current state of religious studies was described as being '30 years after the cultural turn'. The understanding was that the study of religion-as-cultural production, diverse and hetero-form, had displaced the old emphasis on phenomenology, and opened up the subject to feminist, post-colonial and critical-theoretical engagements. This shift then, whilst introducing its own abstract, overarching signifiers, has arguably moved 'religion' from the numinous and universal, to the tangible and particular.

One of the first papers I heard the following Monday morning gave an early indication of where next, within this tension, religious studies may find new purchase. Sebastian Schuler's tidy overview of the evolutionary study of religion was a conference treat: a stimulating paper outside one's field, accessibly delivered for a non-expert audience. The resurgence in an evolutionary approach to religion, long after the demise of Frazer and Tylor, has generated a variety of original theories: supernatural belief as a by-product of human cognition, rituals as cost-signalling adaptations, and religion as a fitness-enhancer, involving moralising big gods and pro-sociality. Schuler identified the key obstacles to this sub-discipline as being its emphasis on universality over plurality, and on biological determinates over cultural symbols. As a bold 'theoretical endeavour' the evolutionary study of religion aims for nothing less than a unified system of knowledge, and following the 'cultural turn', is swimming against the current. Little wonder, then, its preference for heavy empiricism, with teams of anthropologists using large data-sets drawn from systematic ethnographies.

In the early afternoon of the same day, Grace Davie's engaging and Brexit-lamenting keynote, juxtaposed public religion in 'democratic' France versus 'tolerant' Britain, and spoke more broadly regarding religious identity in the European context. In summary, Anglicans are more likely to be Brexiters, Muslims voted Remain, and if France and Britain are to rise to the challenge of multicultural governance, they had best look to their own traditions rather than across the Channel. The conference had started off in good form.

The next few days the weather remained glorious, and though the canteen food was standard fare, the sunlit courtyard made for fine al fresco lunches. The between-panels canapes also provided for superior snacking. For me, with a few exceptions, including an excellent panel on Tuesday morning on Muslim Secularities, the conference took a turn towards religion and education, and specifically to Switzerland's most well-known public religion controversy, the Therwil Affair of 2016.

I had attended the Wednesday double-panel on the Therwil Affair to recruit potential interviewees for the Religious Studies Project (the RSP had secured a podcast recording room upstairs). In a podcast re-

ording with Marion Maddox that morning, we discussed the history of religion and education in Australia. In Bern, and looking to continue the education theme, the furore over two Swiss Muslim schoolboys refusing to shake hands with their female schoolteacher seemed an ideal topic.

The double-panel effectively deployed a multidisciplinary approach to unpack the Therwil Affair, including systems theory, media analysis, political science and law. It reminded me why the study of religion is so much richer for its multiplicity of methods, and how such engagements typically provide a research-sum greater than its researcher-parts. The discussion was too rich to distil adequately here, but one memorable take-home point by Philipp Hetmanczyk is worth mentioning. If, for purposes of integration in multicultural societies, schools are utilised merely as sites for the inculcation of standardised norms and values, conflict over the actual substance of these norms and values will be inevitable. A better objective for schools, therefore is not to work towards a cultural uniformity, but instead to provide spaces and experiences for learning about cultural difference. The RSP podcast I recorded with Philipp, along with Martin Bürgin, will be broadcast on December 17th.

In the conference spirit of multiplicity, I chased up a couple of alternative perspectives on the conference from two fellow attendees. Edinburgh's Sammy Bishop found the panels on 'Spiritualities' and 'New Age' a particular highlight: 'not only because that's my preferred area of study, but it was also great to see a range of inter-connecting papers first address the categories 'New Age' and 'Spirituality', etc..., then move on to ethnographic explorations. It seemed as though the organisers had really thought about how these panels could be best arranged to be of benefit to the attendees'. Whereas my fellow New Zealand delegate Geoff Troughton of Victoria University of Wellington (soon to be renamed 'Wellington University'), 'particularly appreciated an engaging series of panels on the religious 'nones', and on secularisation and contemporary sacralisation of nature'. Geoff added 'the conference was well-organised, conducted in pleasant surroundings, and retained the sense of friendliness and collegiality one hopes for in such an occasion - despite the substantial size of the gathering.'

To round-up, the EASR 2018 performed the rich mul-

The Guiguzi statue,
now unveiled



tiplicity of its own theme, offering up an intellectual feast that was gladly washed down with an evening stein. Oh, and did I mention the disco...?

Thomas A. J. White,
University of Otago

CESNUR 2018 TRADITION AND INNOVATION IN RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS: EAST ASIA, THE WEST, AND BEYOND. WEIXIN COLLEGE, NANTOU COUNTY, TAIWAN, 17-23 JUNE 2018.

Scholars of New Religious Movements who like to combine academic presentations with fieldwork might profitably consider attending CESNUR events. This year's annual conference was held in Taiwan, and was timed to coincide with the unveiling of the world's largest statue of Guiguzi, and which was attended by 5,000 people, and to which conference attendees were invited. Guiguzi, whose name means "the sage of ghost valley", was a somewhat enigmatic figure – or maybe a composite character – who authored the fifth/sixth century book that bears his name. He is believed to have become an immortal,

and is frequently identified with the bodhisattva Wang Chan Lao Zu. The Grand Master Hun Yuan is the founder-leader of Weixin Shengjiao – a sizeable Taiwanese religious movement founded in 1984 – and the Dean of Weixin College, where the conference was held. After suffering a serious illness in 1982, Hun Yuan attributed his recovery to supernatural powers, and subsequently devoted his life to spiritual affairs, claiming a mystical oneness with Guiguzi. Hun Yuan proved to be a jovial and extremely hospitable host throughout the conference and on the subsequent three-day field visits.

Most CESNUR conference themes are broad, since the organisers do not wish to exclude interesting innovative research. However, the Far-Eastern venue attracted scholars from Korea and Vietnam, as well as Taiwan, which serve to put new religions from these countries on the map, in line with the theme. One panel was devoted to the Vietnamese Cao Dai movement, founded in 1924, and two panels addressed the theme of Feng Shui. Inevitably Sun Myung Moon's Unification Movement received coverage, although a growing interest is now emerging on Daesoon Jinrihoe, which is Korea's largest, but less well-known, new religion, and which provided the subject matter for one dedicated panel as well as a number of other presentations. Western NRMs found a niche too, and included one panel on Scientology. The conference ended with a roundtable on the theme of charisma, in honour of Eileen Barker's eightieth birthday, and chaired by J. Gordon Melton. A forthcoming edition of *Nova Religio* is planned to develop the theme, which arguable has relied on undue deference to Max Weber until now.

The full conference programme can be viewed at www.cesnur.org/2018/taiwan-program.htm and further discussion of Daesoon Jinrihoe features in the current edition of *The Journal of CESNUR* (Volume 2, Issue 5 September–October 2018 – and open access journal, located at https://cesnur.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/tjoc_2_5_full_issue.pdf).

The 2019 conference is already publicised on the CESNUR home page. It will be held in Torino, and there should be just enough time to attend the annual BASR Conference and to travel to Italy.

George Chryssides,
University of Wolverhampton

35TH ANNUAL SANSKRIT TRADITION IN THE MODERN WORLD SEMINAR, 2018, UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

We were delighted to welcome 22 participants to the 35th meeting of STIMW on Fri 25 May 2018. STIMW was first convened by Dr Dermot Killingley of Newcastle University in 1984. In 2006 it moved to Manchester. From the outset, STIMW has received precirculated papers, encouraged postgraduate contributions, been open to members of the public and been non-profit-making. Over the years it has welcomed papers from international scholars and early doctoral students alike, with dancers and storytellers also contributing. The entire time allocated to a paper is devoted to a brief introduction to the paper by a discussant followed by open supportive discussion with the author which makes this an ideal forum for gaining feedback for initial ideas through to chapters of books.

This year, Peter Connolly led discussion on Jacqueline Suthren Hirst's exploratory paper on 'The problem of social memory in Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta' (Manchester). Drawing on Tulving's well-accepted distinction between episodic memory, which draws on a person's own past, and semantic memory of content independent of particular memorisers, Suthren Hirst then examined the claim that in the contemporary 'memory boom' social memory has been conceptualised primarily in terms of episodic rather than semantic memory. Noting the relative lack of attention given to the critical analysis of *sā pradhāyas* as a vital form of social memory transmitting the content and interpretation of the fundamental texts in Indian schools and Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta in particular, Suthren Hirst asked whether contemporary questions about collective memory, including Ingold's development of the notion of the externalisation of memory, might illuminate a critical discussion of the Sanskrit material. A lively debate ensued on whether such an approach was requiring an inappropriate 'fit' to one particular set of categories in the multi-theorised, burgeoning and ever-developing 'field' of memory studies or whether detailed study of the 'ecology' (Ram-Prasad) of Śaṅkara's understanding of memory might not only challenge a rather 'western-centric' set of discussions but thereby provide new questions to engage with.

Jackie Hirst then chaired discussion of the first of

two postgraduate papers, Rosie Edgley's 'Exploring śakti in Śrīdhara's Subodhinī' (Manchester). This paper was part of Edgley's doctoral investigation into the different ways in which Krishna in the Bhagavadgītā is understood in three Advaita Vedāntin thinkers, of whom the fourteenth century Śrīdhara is the second (the others being Śaṅkara and Madhusūdana). Śrīdhara, who also wrote a commentary on the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, is often interpreted through the lens of later Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava theology which emphasises the multiple powers (śaktis) of the Lord. Edgley interestingly proposed that the understanding of Śrīdhara's Advaitin predecessor Citsukha of svaśakti as the inherent power through which words function, and in this case indicate brahman, might provide an alternative way of conceptualising Krishna's sattvic body which thus gives the follower a way of talking about brahman. A theory of performativity, rather than, or as well as, one of language, was suggested as a possible fruitful avenue of thought.

The third paper by Karen O'Brien-Kop (SOAS) continued an investigation of language with an insightful exploration of the 'cloud of dharma' (dharmamegha) in terms of conceptual metaphor theory. She argued that there is a distinct shift from the full abundant nurturing raincloud of the final stage of the bodhisattva path in various early Mahāyāna texts compared with the contemporary Pātañjaliyogaśāstra's understanding of the highest 'cloud of dharma' state as one of cessation and examined four possible explanations for this shift, thereby highlighting the contribution conceptual metaphor theory has to make to the study of Indian texts. Matthew Clark led the discussion drawing on his own understanding of a wide range of yoga material. Readers should watch this space for Karen's dissertation which will shortly be submitted.

Lynn Thomas (formerly Roehampton), herself an important Mahābhārata scholar, was then discussant for Brian Black's (Lancaster) paper on 'Narrative Plurality in the Mahābhārata: three versions of a dialogue between Duryodhana and Dhṛtarāṣṭra'. This was a particular treat for STIMW participants, as it forms part of a chapter of a book Brian is writing on Dialogue in the Mahābhārata, a book which has sprung from an earlier paper given at STIMW. Brian explored the three very different dialogues about the run-up to the famous Dicing Game and proposed that the richest reading is not to try to remove inconsisten-

cies but to appreciate the different perspectives from which they explore key questions about how things come to be. 'Fate', responsibility, freedom, temporality, playing with time through framing, and irony and manipulation were topics of lively debate.

For the final session, we were delighted to welcome Alice Collett from Nālandā University, north India, whose intriguing paper reminded us of the dangers of reading inscriptions through the lens of normative brahminical Sanskrit texts. Her focus was a Prakrit inscription in the largest cave at the top of the Nāneghāṭ mountain pass which, though badly damaged, has been attributed to the Sātavāhana queen Nāgaṇikā, first century BCE. Her paper carefully laid out the views of key previous scholars, whose interpretations all differed considerably but shared the desire to interpret the inscription through particular brahminical texts of their choice and thereby to undermine Nāgaṇikā's own agency in a variety of ways. Alice's bold contention was that if we read the inscription carefully and without such a lens we see a feisty female leader acting in her own right. Reminding us of the importance of acknowledging custom and practice even in dharma texts themselves, she then proposed that perhaps Nāgaṇikā could be seen as a trend-setter who even influenced textual formulations. Simon Brodbeck, the discussant (Cardiff), asked whether we could find evidence of such a direct influence and initiated a conversation about what we know of the importance of Vedic rituals and who would be responsible for their continuation in the case of a regency. Slides of the location and the inscription formed a stunning backdrop to a fascinating day and the organisers would like to thank all those who have contributed papers, acted as discussants and attended the symposia over the last 35 years.

The likely date for the next STIMW will be Fri 24 May 2019 with the location in Oxford. A link will be put up on the website (www.alc.manchester.ac.uk/stimw) when this is confirmed.

Jacqueline Suthren Hirst,
University of Manchester

reviews

JOSEPHSON-STORM, JASON ĀNĀNDA. *THE MYTH OF DISENCHANTMENT: MAGIC, MODERNITY, AND THE BIRTH OF THE HUMAN SCIENCES*. CHICAGO: UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS, 2017.

This book is the first monograph, to my knowledge, to begin in a Japanese Tantric Buddhist tattoo parlor amid a natural disaster. While sitting in such a facility in 2011, Jason Ā. Josephson-Storm found himself debating American superstition and spirituality with the customers, against the televised backdrop of the Fukushima disaster (xi). Galvanized by this conversation, Josephson-Storm relocated to Germany, where he set aside his long-standing research into the transformation of Japanese religion in the Meiji period. He now resolved to study the relationship of esoteric knowledge to nineteenth-century European modernization (xii). The results of this study comprise *The Myth Of Disenchantment*, an engrossing intellectual history of “magic, modernity, and the birth of the human sciences.”

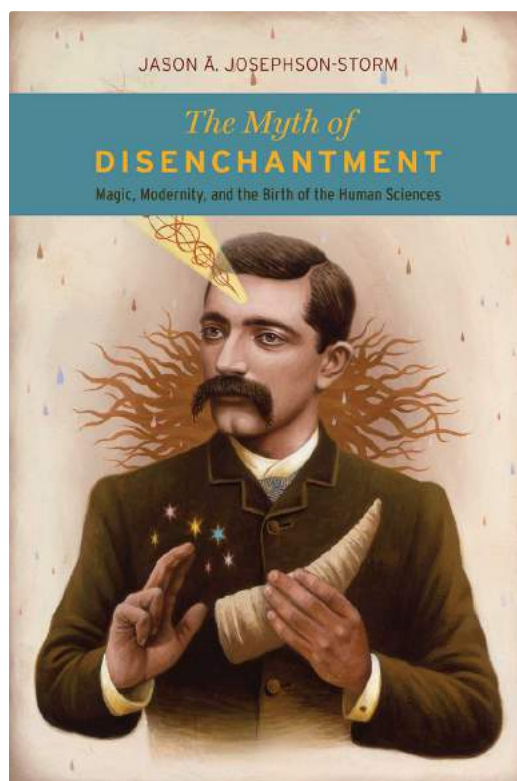
The introduction opens with the unusual anecdote of

Marie Curie attending one of Eusapia Palladino’s Parisian séances in 1907 — the first example of Josephson-Storm’s argument that modern scientists regularly engaged with the occult (1). Visits to Eusapia’s parlor were, for many French researchers,

legitimate scientific observations (2). Josephson-Storm is concerned not with the truth of Spiritualism, but rather the faith of past scholars in Spiritualism and related esoterica. His thesis is that magic has not left modern society because of modernization. Rather, magic rather remains intertwined with science and other precepts of society. Josephson-Storm will document how Westerners came to think, erroneously, that the world was disenchanting (3).

Unlike some scholars of religious thought, who want to restore a lost, ancient sense of the en-

chanted, Josephson-Storm thinks the enchanted worldview never went away. Westerners never stopped believing in esoteric religious ideas, even as they professed modernity, secularity, and the scientific method (5). The rise of social science in the nineteenth century, thanks to the work of Max Müller [Although see this issue’s Re:Thinking - Ed], Max



Weber, and other German scholars, did not preclude the exploration of Spiritualism. Nonetheless, a consensus arose in Western higher education that science had dispelled religion (6). To Josephson-Storm, this is a faulty reading of intellectual history. Instead of arguing that natural philosophers began to free themselves from religion during the Enlightenment, we should recognize the magical underpinnings of Enlightenment thought (58–59). In regard to the study of U.S. religious history, Josephson-Storm agrees with Catherine Albanese and Courtney Bender—not to mention historians such as John Brooke, Susan Juster, and Jon Butler—that metaphysical or occult religions are widespread in America (23).

Why did scholars come to regard disenchantment as the default state of Western society? Josephson-Storm proposes several reasons. Modernity was often equated with industrialized, European, and Christian cities, in contrast to colonial lands (8). Some nineteenth-century thinkers claimed that myth was defeated because they wanted to counteract social scientists' fascination with the occult (7). Thinkers found magic dangerous because it might unite religion and science (13). Harry Houdini and other theatrical magicians who disproved Spiritualist hoaxes helped to promote the idea of a disenchanted world (306). Scholars' attempts to write off all occultism as evil in the wake of Nazism's appropriation of occult imagery promoted a false understanding of the esoteric (311–12).

Furthermore, the Frankfurt School of twentieth-century social criticism (Adorno and Horkheimer, Habermas, etc.) built on Weber's work and depicted modernity as a cage, shorn of myth (9). While Josephson-Storm admires critical theory and shares the Frankfurt writers' rejection of a Christian-centric Western civilization, he dissents with the Frankfurt School. Myth was never fully shorn from society. We get a hilariously convoluted statement that equally evokes the theoretical works of Hayden White and the comic book movie *Dick Tracy*: "The recognition of the opposition to myth as myth is itself myth" (10). As best as I can decipher it, Josephson-Storm wants his reader to grasp that the scholars who claim disenchantment for the modern West, as well as the scholars who point out the flaws in that argument, are inventing new stories for interpreting the world (10). Here is the Hayden White connection: Historical and philosophical narratives are continually recreated.

By showing how esoteric religion continues to affect the sciences, Josephson-Storm undermines the concept of a progressively stronger secularism in the West, as well as clear divisions between modernist and postmodern philosophy. The reader can see the abstract and the empirical intertwined almost inextricably in this book's intellectual history. There is no simple answer to the creation of truth or the disintegration of truth in an age of tumultuous technological development. Josephson-Storm says that he wants to "'queer,' or render strange," the historical narrative of modernity and science (7). He also wants to reflect on religious studies and its flaws (12). Josephson-Storm succeeds in both efforts, although he is not the first scholar to write in this fashion. If interrogating the tangled Christian-versus-occult origins of religious studies counts as queering history, then Jonathan Z. Smith, Catherine Albanese, Wayne Proudfoot, Courtney Bender, Charles Long, John Brooke, D. Michael Quinn, and David Sloan Wilson, among others, have queered history in their work.

The Myth of Disenchantment as a whole suggests five historical attitudes toward Western disenchantment: (a) Belief in a Western, Christian-centric definition of modernity, with a disenchanted worldview (never mind the contradiction between Christendom and supposed disenchantment); (b) the pursuit of occultism; (c) the scientific attempt to debunk Spiritualism and occultism; (d) criticism of Christian and capitalist modernity, mixed with confidence that the world is indeed disenchanted; and (e) Josephson-Storm's viewpoint, that myth never left the world during the so-called modern age. In advancing this fifth viewpoint, Josephson-Storm shows how numerous scientists and nominally empirical scholars integrated esoteric and religious principles into their work:

Spiritualism and theosophy have appealed to biologists like Alfred Russel Wallace and inventors like Thomas Edison. Nobel Prize-winning physicists from Marie Curie to Jean Baptiste Perrin to Brian Josephson have often been interested in parapsychology. Even computer scientists like Alan Turing believed in psychical powers. Moreover, despite the laments of the new materialists, panpsychism has been a persistent countercurrent in philosophical circles as well-known thinkers—including Spinoza, Leibniz, Goethe, Schopenhauer, Margaret Cavendish, Julien La Mettrie, Gustav Fechner, Ernst Mach, Henry David

Thoreau, C.S. Peirce, William James, Josiah Royce, John Dewey, Henri Bergson, Samuel Alexander, Charles Strong, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Alfred North Whitehead, Charles Hartshorne, Albert Schweitzer, Arthur Koestler, and Gregory Bateson—all argued that the material universe should be thought of as thoroughly animated or possessed of mind and awareness. Mechanism has long had establishment enemies (305).

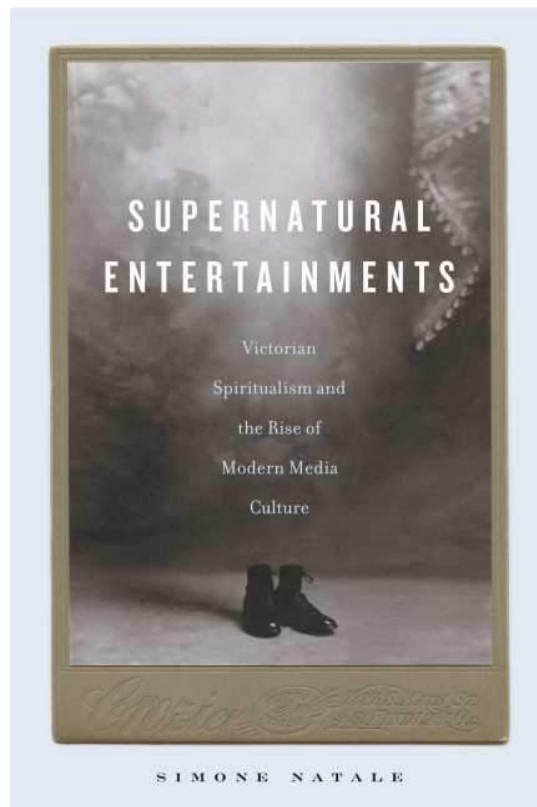
While reading this volume, I repeatedly thought of Michel Foucault, who viewed society as a prison, to match Weber’s vision of society as a cage. Foucault’s purpose with poststructuralism, or intellectual genealogy, as he called it, was to break open the prison and free humans from inherited restrictions on their behavior. One could read Foucault’s philosophy as an attempt to restore myth and imagination, in a sense, to a disenchanted world. To use Josephson-Storm’s framework, the prison and Foucault’s pursuit of freedom were both myths.

The epilogue features a stirring portrayal of Felicitas Goodman, Josephson-Storm’s anthropologist grandmother who believed in spirit communion and alternate realities (302–03). Reflecting on Goodman, Josephson-Storm notes that those who fight for a spiritualized understanding of the world often reinforce the idea that myth really did go away in the modern age (303). Josephson-Storm, of course, dissents. He contends that both modernity and postmodernity are myths that fail to truly explain our messy, pluralistic world (306–09). The occult is not alien, or weird, or something to be (or that can be) suppressed. The nature of the world and its philosophies defies easy categorization. Forget about the modern–postmodern framework, the author suggests; we should ac-

cept a complex world where we continually make new narratives and metanarratives (316).

Extraordinary in its scope, albeit extraordinarily dense in some chapters, *The Myth of Disenchantment* will yield new layers with repeat readings. I imagine that it will prompt Christian theologians, atheists, and ardent defenders of disenchanted religious studies to fire off salvos in the major journals. I also expect it to confound, excite, and challenge graduate students in religion seminars. With its theoretical rigor and command of global religious literature, *The Myth of Disenchantment* is a valuable contribution to the theories of religion, surpassing Josephson-Storm’s first, and impressive, monograph, *The Invention of Religion in Japan*.

Daniel Gorman Jr.,
University of Rochester



SIMONE NATALE, 2015. SUPERNATURAL ENTERTAINMENTS: VICTORIAN SPIRITUALISM AND THE RISE OF MODERN MEDIA CULTURE. PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY PRESS.

The first thing to say about Simone Natale’s book is that it’s one of the best produced and presented academic books I’ve ever seen, with high-quality paper and binding, a consistent at-

tention to detail in the layout, striking use of typography and many, many illustrations throughout. These are essential to the text, as the book looks at the media industry around Spiritualism and other forms of supernatural spectacles during the nineteenth century, which of course means predominantly print material - handbills, posters, newspapers and so on.

As a work of history, the book is well researched with

a great deal of detail. The focus is on both the UK and the US, though the US material is somewhat predominant. The first section includes a chapter on the theatricality of the spirit science looking at how it was framed as a performance which used the languages of the theatre to create its effect, and how the ambiguity surrounding the truth-claims was central to the commercial success of Spiritualist performances. This is followed by a chapter on how this spilled out into the parlours of wealthy and middle-class Spiritualists, and the relationship between the séance to games and other home entertainments.

The second section focuses more on the media's involvement with spiritualism, first looking at the role of the newspapers in creating controversial sensations, and in particular selling the ambiguity of the events, creating debate and encouraging skeptics to attend. Secondly, Natale considers the rise of celebrity culture at the time, and how mediums deliberately but ambiguously straddled the role of the celebrity and the religious icon. The third part, chapter 5 and 6, focuses on aspects of material culture in this world, firstly on publications produced by automatic writing (or composed by spirits, if you prefer), focusing on James Burns and the Progressive Library and Spiritual Institution. Secondly, he discusses the market in spirit photography, and the use of techniques such as double exposure and superimposition. In one of the most intriguing parts of his argument, Natale suggests that the market for these photographs and their stage applications directly contributed to the development of "special-effect"-heavy entertainments in the latter twentieth century.

The historical material in *Supernatural Entertainments* will be of interest to scholars researching any aspect of Spiritualism, the supernatural or other forms of popular religion in the Victorian period—especially the chapters on the press and material culture, which is perhaps the most unfamiliar material presented here. However the book is relevant to scholars more widely, due to the thesis it presents about how supernatural and popular religious claims are not something which is used by the media or that uses the media, but rather are intricately entangled together to create forms of spectacle which involve the audience in different ways playing on notions of belief, credulity, passivity, authenticity and other aspects of theatricality. Spiritualism was not only coin-

cidental to the development of a new commodity culture of the spectacle, but helped to define it. Natale reminds us that all forms of religion—popular and mainstream—use aspects of the spectacle and have evolved along with other media forms; that religion is not something which exists in some separate realm which then is corrupted and uses media, but rather we see a "complex relationship of religious discourses and praxis with commerce and money" (14). It also reminds us that belief may often be something which functions in the subjunctive mode, in which audiences take part in spectacles where propositions are not accepted uncritically, but rather the audience and the producer are mutually engaged in an exploration of the possibility of such phenomena being true. We are still taken by surprise when the public engage with the Ouija board or Slenderman, and there is something familiar to the presentation of self-help gurus in the present day such as Russell Brand or Tony Robbins. Therefore I urge any of my colleagues working in popular religion, religion in the media or on popular belief to take a look at Natale's spectacular book.

David G. Robertson
The Open University

Image credits: Cover (The Guiguizi statue is unveiled) and 26, by George Chrüssides. Pages 2, 5, 21 and 22 - David G. Robertson. Page 17, Wikimedia, Creative Commons. Page 19 - Internet Archive. 22 and 23 - Christopher Cotter.

Members' Recent Publications

Erica Baffelli

- 2018 (co-authored with Ian Reader) *Dynamism and the Ageing of a Japanese 'New' Religion: Transformations and the Founder*. Bloomsbury. <https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/dynamism-and-the-ageing-of-a-japanese-new-religion-9781350086517/>
- 2016 *Media and New Religions in Japan*. Routledge. OPEN ACCESS: <https://www.routledge.com/Media-and-New-Religions-in-Japan/Baffelli/p/book/9780415659123>

George D. Chryssides

- 2019 (with Dan Cohn-Sherbok and Usama Hasan) *People of the Book: An Interfaith Dialogue about How Jews, Christians and Muslims Understand Their Sacred Scriptures*. Jessica King Publishing. ISBN 978-1-78592-104-9.
- 2019 (ed.) *Minority Religions in Europe and the Middle East: Mapping and Monitoring*. Routledge.
- 2019 'Jehovah's Witnesses and the Middle East'; in Chryssides, George D. (ed.) *Minority Religions in Europe and the Middle East: Mapping and Monitoring* (Routledge), 78-96.
- 2019 'Key data on religions by country'; in Chryssides, George D. (ed.) *Minority Religions in Europe and the Middle East: Mapping and Monitoring* (Routledge), 227-250.
- 2018 "'Be Not Conformed' – A Historical Survey of the Watch Tower Society's Relationship with Society". *Religion – Staat – Gesellschaft* 18.Jahrgang (2017) Heft 1–2: 223-240.

Carole Cusack

- 2018 "Prehistoric Monuments in Britain as Numinous Sites of Spiritual Tourism: The Rollright Stones", *Fieldwork in Religion*, Vol. 13, No. 1, pp. 61-80.
- 2018 (with Jason Prior and Anthony Capon) "The role of pliability and transversality within trans/disciplinarity: Opening university research and learning to planetary health," in Dena Fam, Linda Neuhauser and Paul Gibbs (eds), *Transdisciplinary Theory, Practice and Education: The Art of Collaborative Research and Collective Learning* (Springer), 57-72.
- 2018 "Celebrating with the Church of the SubGenius: X-Day Rituals of Bad Taste, Burning 'Bob', and the End of the World (Not)", in Frans Jespers, Karin van Nieuwkerk and Paul van der Velde (eds), *Enjoying Religion: Pleasure and Fun in Established and New Religious Movements* (Rowman and Littlefield), 47-63.
- 2018 "Mock Religions," in Henri Gooren (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Latin American Religions* (Springer). At: https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007%2F978-3-319-08956-0_559-1.pdf
- 2018 "The Cult of St Triduana in Scotland," *Sydney Society for Scottish History Journal*, Vol. 17, 31-45. At: <https://openjournals.library.sydney.edu.au/index.php/JSSH/article/view/12551/11537>

Breann Fallon

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"The particular difficulty of sociology comes from the fact it teaches things that everybody knows in a way, but which they didn't want to know or cannot know because the law of the system is to hide those things from them."

(Pierre Bourdieu, Kunst und Kultur, 2015, 583.)

