

# **The origins of religion in philosophy, theology and religious studies**

**5th Nordic Conference in Philosophy of Religion, 8th-11th June 2015, University of Helsinki. Organized by Nordic Society for Philosophy of Religion in conjunction with the Centre of Excellence Reason and Religious Recognition (University of Helsinki and Academy of Finland).**

**Keynote speakers: Ingolf U. Dalferth, Jan-Olav Henriksen, Simo Knuuttila and Sigridur Thorgeirsdottir**

The 5<sup>th</sup> Nordic conference in Philosophy of Religion pursues the multifaceted and interdisciplinary theme of the origins of religion. The subject is considered at historical, phenomenological, metaphysical, theological and scientific levels. We aim at bringing together methods of research within religious studies, theology and philosophy of religion. Some central questions of the topic are: Where are the roots of religion as a human form of life? Where and why has the concept of religion originated? What is the relationship between religious beliefs and superstitious views? Have the former evolved from the latter? Why do we have religious and magical beliefs? Can we explain religions and religious phenomena by reference to something else than religious self-understanding itself? How should we approach religious texts, lifestyles, communities, and rituals in order to understand them? Is religious practice primary to detailed and reflected religious beliefs? Does religion as a way of life even need doctrinal theology?

*We invite papers on the following interrelated topics (A-C):*

### **A. Explanations and understandings**

Phenomenology of religion in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century aimed at both understanding religious phenomena as experienced by human individuals and finding universal features across different religions. At present we have witnessed both explanatory and hermeneutic efforts within religious studies and theology. Cognitive science of religion aims at explaining why and how religious behavior is induced and how religious activities connect to other forms of human behavior. On the other hand, hermeneutics, phenomenological philosophy, and critical studies have emphasized the need to understand and describe the lived experience of religious people, including getting their own voices heard, in order to make sense and empower people across cultures. In addition to these approaches, religion is often understood and explained by reference to divine revelation or some other method or source by which religious truths are acquired.

This session invites papers on the methodology of religious studies and theology in the light of the question on the origin of religious phenomena. How can we approach the question on the nature of religious behavior? The origin of religion has been studied with different methodological approaches by evolutionary psychologists, historians, sociologists, philosophers and confessional theologians. What is the relation between different approaches: contrarian, contradictory or complementary?

### **B. Religion, magic and rituals**

Comparative religion separated into its own field of study in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century in the rise of phenomenological, historical, and anthropological studies of different cultures and their religious practices. Figures in this movement were, for example, Edward Burnett Tylor, James Frazer, Émile Durkheim, Bronislaw Malinowski, William James, and Claude Lévi-Strauss. So-called primitive cultures and their religious myths, rituals, and beliefs were the main area of interest and highly present in the source material. While these themes have been prevalent in comparative religion and many early researchers in the field had philosophical undertones, in philosophy of religion rituals, magic, and myths have not had a prominent role.

This session invites papers on the perspective of philosophy of religion to the phenomena and concepts of magic, ritual, and myth, and the philosophical background of studies on these themes in comparative religion, anthropology, and history of religion. What questions arise from the philosophical point of view with regard to magic and religious rituals? What is the difference between religious and magical/animistic beliefs and practices? Are animism, magic, and religion normative concepts? Is religiosity exclusively human phenomenon, or can animals have religious or ritual behavior, too?

### **C. Religion without theology**

Monotheistic traditions in particular have emphasized that one important aspect of religious activity is theology, which can be seen as a systematic attempt to rationally analyze religious concepts and realities. When described in this way, religion comes before theology and religious metaphysical systems: there needs to be a religion first so that there can be theology about it. However, many modern and post-modern philosophers have argued that detailed theological doctrines and metaphysical constructions are irrelevant and misleading aspects of religious phenomena. Should religion and especially religious practice then be seen as the only meaningful feature in religion? Is theological reflection needed for religion? In addition, some, especially atheist or naturalist, thinkers prefer to talk about spirituality instead of religion.

This session invites papers concentrating on the manifold relationships between religion, spirituality and theology. If religion does not need theology or metaphysics, then religion must be capable of maintaining itself without them. But is this obvious? Can religion function without theology? What could this mean? What are the differences and similarities between spirituality and religion?

### **D. A special symposium organized by the Centre of Excellence Reason and Religious Recognition (University of Helsinki and Academy of Finland): 'Recognition and Religion'**

**Invited keynote speakers: Wayne Proudfoot, Thomas Schmidt, Heikki Ikäheimo**

The Centre of Excellence Reason and Religious Recognition (University of Helsinki and Academy of Finland) organizes in conjunction with the 5th Nordic Conference in Philosophy of Religion a one-day symposium titled 'Recognition and Religion'. This special symposium, to be held on the 11th of June 2015, only features invited presentations.

The notion of recognition has been widely discussed by scholars working on Hegel, critical theory, and the French tradition, as well as those working on contemporary social and political philosophy. Recognition may be seen as an intermediary concept between the less demanding concept of toleration and that of full agreement. Toleration is a prerequisite for the flourishing of multicultural societies. Moreover, mutual recognition between various religious and other groups is necessary for the development of positive group identities as well as for social cohesion. But what are the conditions for the possibility of recognition? Do for example religious identities promote individual and social flourishing, or does religion simply foster attitudes of intolerance? In what ways does recognition contribute to the constitution of individual and group identities? These and other themes will be discussed in this symposium.

**Practical information**

We invite max 300 words abstracts of papers on topics A, B and C. The due date of the abstracts is 16<sup>th</sup> February 2015. The abstracts should be sent to *hanna.ronikonmaki@helsinki.fi* and must include applicant's name, professional affiliation and the title of the paper.

For further information please contact *timo.koistinen@helsinki.fi*.

The conference is arranged by Nordic Society for Philosophy of Religion, the Centre of Excellence Reason and Religious Recognition, the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, the Faculty of Theology in University of Helsinki and the project Philosophy of religion and the method of philosophy in the Department of Systematic Theology in University of Helsinki.

The conference planners are Timo Koistinen, Simo Knuuttila, Sami Pihlström, Hanne Appelqvist, Heikki J. Koskinen, Hanna Ronikonmäki and Dan-Johan Eklund.