

Sisters in Arms.
**Reinventing the bond between philosophy and theology
after the “empirical turn”**

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**Key note session 1 Powerlessness, Enhancement, Resilience. Interdisciplinary
Approaches and Critique**

Chair: Prof. dr. Cornelia Richter (University of Bonn, Bonn Institute of Hermeneutics, Systematic Theology and Hermeneutics)

Powerlessness, enhancement and resilience have become key notions of research in academic disciplines so diverse as philosophy, theology, psychology, palliative care, theories of education, sociology, cultural studies, political sciences, economics or technology. They mark core features of human experiences at the interplay of individual and existential needs, intra- and interpersonal resonances and interactions and they display huge impact on the political needs of social groups and social cohesion in a more general sense. All three notions are tied to experiences of crisis and various modes of coping, be it successful or not, be it active, medio-passive or passive, be it expressive and self-reflective or rather implicit or even unconscious. Last but not least, all of them are driven by implicit or explicit narratives of self and other, self and telos or destiny, self and transcendence. Hence, any thorough inquiry of powerlessness, enhancement and resilience will have to combine perspective of anthropology, analytic and phenomenological philosophy, psychology of religion and philosophy of religion. In our panel we will refer to these traditions and present results of our ongoing interdisciplinary research projects “Resilience in Religion and Powerlessness” and “Ethics of Powerlessness”.

- Dr. David Batho (University of Essex, research group "Ethics of Powerlessness"):

The Phenomenology of Powerlessness and Virtue Theory

Experiences of powerlessness are common in contexts of end of life care. What is the nature of these experiences and might it mean to live well in light of them? In this paper I draw together recent research on the phenomenology of powerless to articulate the central features of these experiences. I argue that experiences of powerlessness consist in an experience of the inability to be yourself. I argue that traditional virtue ethics faces serious problems in accounting for the possibility of living well in light of these experiences.

- Prof. dr. Thiemo Breyer (University of Cologne, research group "Resilience in Religion and Spirituality")

Vulnerability and Resilience: Perspectives from Analytic and Phenomenological Philosophy

This talk addresses the various contributions of philosophers from the analytic and phenomenological tradition to our understanding of vulnerability and resilience. Whereas analytic approaches are commonly interested in the epistemic attitudes individuals and groups adopt in the face of crises, as well as in the normativity of both basic concepts, phenomenological accounts focus on the structures of subjective and intersubjective experience, trying to elucidate how the responsiveness to the physical and social environment is shaped by adverse events. I look at this discourse from an anthropological angle, thereby concentrating on fundamental human issues such as corporeality, finitude, and transcendence, to discuss the hermeneutical benefit of connecting the abovementioned theoretical options with a theological outlook.

- Prof. em. dr. Susanne Heine (University of Vienna, psychology of religion)

Philosophical Implications of Psychological Concepts on Powerlessness and Enhancement

Psychology is understood to be an empirical science, yet it employs philosophical presuppositions about human nature. This is something the discipline shares in common with the study of religion. This paper concentrates on Sigmund Freud and C. G. Jung as founding figures of two different main psychological schools, with a side glance at humanistic psychology. Freud's psychology, which is based on the tension between drives and intellect and derives morality out of this tension, refers inter alia to Immanuel Kant's history of humankind and will be interpreted in this paper with reference to the concept of "powerlessness." In contrast, Jung's psychology shows traces of substance-metaphysics, excludes ethical notions altogether, and will be interpreted in this paper with reference to the concept of "enhancement." The latter also applies to aspects of Humanistic psychology and early modern notions of holism. In no case does a relation to a personal God come into play which will invoke interesting discussions with philosophy of religion.

Key note session 2 Living Religion

Chair: *dr. Anastaia Scrutton (University of Leeds, Philosophy and Religion)*

- Prof. dr. Beverley Clack, (Oxford Brookes University, Philosophy of Religion)

"Truth isn't truth": Shaping a Practical Feminist Philosophy of Religion for the Age of Trump'

The rise of populist forms of politics has been accompanied by a querying of the importance of facts and truth. At the same time, 'gender fluidity' and 'trans activism' are challenging the very notion of 'Woman' upon which a feminist politics appears to depend. This paper considers what a feminist philosophy of religion might look like against this background of uncertainty, and suggests prioritising practical responses to the challenges (and sometimes distortions) of the new politics. Rather than turn to critical theory as a means of framing feminist discourse in philosophy of religion, this paper draws upon insights from liberation and black feminist/womanist perspectives. From this reframing emerges a renewed emphasis on the everyday, making possible a philosophy of religion grounded in the kind of personal and social transformation that has been of such importance to the various shapes taken by the historical women's movement.

- Dr. Rhiannon Grant (University of Birmingham, Theology and Religion, Modern Quaker Thought)

'What Is Religion? Finding Something Fading'

In this paper, I will briefly summarise the conclusions of my article "Using Multiple Religious Belonging to Test Analogies for Religion", then focus on new developments in this field and the ways in which my thinking has changed. There are three key points I want to pick up on. The first is about why the analogies we use for religion are important: they matter because they shape our understanding of what religion is and can be. The existence of multiple religious belonging challenges some traditional versions of that picture and prompts us to create a more complex and nuanced analysis. The second is about the specific analogies, and how digging deeper into them complicates the question. In particular, I have become less satisfied over time with my initial analysis of the relationship between religion and race and I want to consider this in the light of recent publications on white privilege. Finally, the third point is about whether these issues are worth thinking about at all in an age when, as Steve Bruce argued strongly in a 2017 article, however much a few people are tinkering around with changing religion, the overall trend is towards complete secularisation.

- Dr. Simon Hewitt (University of Leeds, Leverhulme Fellow, Philosophy of Religion),

Divine Personhood and Living Christianity : Some Wittgensteinian Lessons

Is God, if indeed she exists, a person? For much contemporary philosophy of religion the answer is an obvious 'yes'. To the extent that the question is even debated, for example when personhood is challenged by apophatic accounts of theism, an appeal is made to religious practice. Only a God who is a person can be coherently prayed to or worshipped; only a God who is a person could lie behind scriptural accounts of God as feeling and acting, given the significance with which these are imbued by religious believers, and it is clearly such a God who is the subject of Jewish and Christian biblical narrative. This paper challenges the dominant perspective by careful attention to Christian religious practice under the methodological influence of the later Wittgenstein. After a presentation of Wittgenstein's approach as careful attention to questions of meaning as necessarily situated within particular forms of life, and within this of drawing apart differences in usage behind assumed uniformity, the paper looks at four aspects of Christian practice which are supposed to support divine personhood (in the sense that, if the God towards whom this practice is

directed exists, then that God is a person). I argue that in none of these cases does the practice require a metaphysics of divine personhood to make sense of it. I consider in turn prayer, worship, the attribution of emotional states to God, and biblical narrative. A converging picture develops: the case for personhood is compelling only on the basis of an attention to an 'insufficient diet of examples', ignoring the diversity of Christian practice, of setting aside crucial differences between religious activities and everyday human interactions, and of ignoring the wide variety of types of linguistic usage present in scriptures (as well as traditional understandings of analogy and metaphor). Attending to practice in detail suggests that whatever is meant by 'God' defies straightforward categorisation as a person.

Key note session 3 Discussing fiction as a Way of Introducing Lived Suffering and Lived Religion into Theodicy

Chair: Prof. dr. Marcel Sarot (Tilburg School of Catholic Theology, Systematic Theology and Philosophy)

One possible way of introducing 'real life problems' into theological reflection is by engaging with literary works (fiction, and sometimes poetry) that help to make the topic under discussion concrete. This is often done, for example, in philosophical and theological discussions of evil and suffering. Dostoyewski's *The Brothers Karamazow* has become a classic in contemporary philosophical and theological discussions of suffering, so much so that selections from it are to be found in many student textbooks. The same goes, to a lesser extent, for Camus' *La peste* and Endo's *Silence*. One of the advantages, so it seems, of discussing evil by making use of fiction is that it enables one to remain very close to the kind of experiences people have without usurping specific experiences for purposes that the people who had these experiences would object to (e.g., using the stories of Jews in concentration camps in Christian apologetics). Often, philosophers and theologians use fiction, without focusing on the practice of using fiction in the discussion of evil. Here, this practice will be the focus of our attention.

- Dr. Marc De Kesel (Titus Brandsma Institute, Radboud University Nijmegen)
'Christianity and Its Ideal of Selflessness. On a Novel by Shusaku Endo & an Essay by Michel de Certeau'
- Prof. dr. David Jasper (University of Glasgow, Literature and Theology)
'The Nineteenth century Novel and the Rhetoric of Fiction'
- Dr. Bettine Siertsema (VU University Amsterdam)
'Fiction, fact and the search for truth in Holocaust literature'

Key note session 4 Approaches to the 'empirical' and to 'ontology'. Remarks on the current enthusiasm for anthropology in theology and for theology in anthropology.

Chair: Dr. Petruschka Schaafsma (Protestant Theological University Amsterdam, Ethics)

- Prof. dr. Sarah Coakley (University of Cambridge, Emeritus Norris-Hulse Professor)
- Dr. Timothy Jenkins (University of Cambridge, Anthropology and Religion)
- Prof. dr. Nicholas Adams (University of Birmingham, Philosophical Theology)

This panel offers critical reflection on the recent 'empirical' turn in theology and the 'ontological' turn in anthropology, suggesting that a focus on cases will allow us to go beyond the mobilizing slogans. The speakers will use Robert Orsi's study of *The Madonna of 115th Street* (2010³), which speaks of the 'lived religion' of Catholic Italian Harlem. We will trace a shifting focus of self-understanding through the introductions to the three editions of the book, which culminates in a reflection on the letters sent by Orsi's subjects and their descendants ('you described my life'). As it evolves, this study offers an account of religion importantly different from that proposed by Geertz (and the allure of 'culture' as a controlling category). We imagine writing a fourth introduction which would be focused less on describing religious lives and more on taking account of change in those lives and the ways in which the category of 'religion' describes various forces at work in that change. This view will be related to the projects of theologians Frei and Lindbeck by asking how they might have

developed their methodological proposals had they pursued the line established by Orsi rather than that laid out by Geertz. In short, the enthusiasm shown by theologians for anthropology may be more productive and generative if accompanied by sharper differentiations between tendencies in anthropology and, reciprocally, may offer a theology that serves anthropologists' interests better.