

How religions talk and talk to each other in the public sphere

November 2, 2016

A conference in Trento in 2017 co-financed by the Universities of Berlin and Friburg and organized by FBK's Center for Religious Studies. The Humboldt-Universität of Berlin and the Albert-Ludwigs-Universität of Friburg will co-finance FBK's Center for Religious Studies project entitled "Arguing religion", and in particular an international conference to be held in Trento in June of next year.

In cooperation with the research project entitled "Tiefe Meinungsverschiedenheiten/Deep Disagreements", coordinated by Berlin and Friburg, the Center for Religious Studies (FBK-ISR) is organizing the international conference "Arguing Religion: Disagreement, Recognition, and the Reach of Argumentative Debate". The meeting is part of the research activities of the project, that was launched this year, entitled "Arguing religion" (the scientific coordinators are FBK-ISR researchers Boris Rähme and Paolo Costa) and will be hosted in Trento, at FBK's location on via S. Croce 77, June 6 through 8, 2017.

The participation of renown researchers in the fields of philosophy of religion, of religious studies and of philosophy of law, coming from Finland, Sweden, England, Germany, United States, Canada, Austria and Italy has been confirmed.

The "Arguing Religion" (How religions talk and talk to each in the public sphere) project

(By FBK-ISR)

Description Drawing on past and ongoing research conducted by the Center, this project, initiated in 2016, aims to improve our understanding of the prospects and scope of argumentative responses to religious disagreement. While there are numerous studies on the means societies have to deal with religious disagreements in ways that are ethically, politically and legally legitimate, the question of the room that such disagreement leaves to argument in the proper sense has received much less attention. We are convinced, though, that the study of this dimension is crucial, including for the purposes of adequate public policies on religious diversity. The "Arguing Religion" project meets precisely this need. In line with our vision of a religious three-faceted diversity, we will consider religious disagreements from three different points of view: (a) as

disagreement between believers of the same faith (intrareligious disagreement); (b) as disagreement between believers of different faiths (interfaith disagree) and (c) as disagreement between believers and nonbelievers (atheists and agnostics). One can anticipate that the role, purpose and scope of the argument will differ depending on the different scenarios, and based on the religious beliefs involved. Often, a convergent judgment or even consent are considered as the intrinsic purpose of the argument. But is this convergence or this concept of consensual purpose of public argument applicable in an useful manner to the case of religious argument? And if not, are there promising alternative concepts? The project will address the above issues, and those below, from the perspectives of different disciplines (philosophy of religion, epistemology, argumentation theory, theology, religious studies):

- “Arguing Religion” is part of an international scientific network of excellence. The activities conducted during the first semester have enabled us to start a partnership with the “Deep Disagreements” German research project, coordinated by Prof. Geert Keil (Department of Philosophy, Humboldt Universität zu Berlin) and by Prof. Ralf Poscher (Department of Law, Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg). The scientific committee of “Arguing Religion” also includes international experts, such as Prof. Sami Pihlström (University of Helsinki, Academy of Finland Centre of Excellence “Reason and Religious Recognition”) and former Prof. Charles Taylor (McGill University, Montreal).
- What is a religious disagreement and what types of religious disagreements exist?
- What is a religious argument and what distinguishes it from non-religious arguments?
- To what extent can, and must, religious disagreements be conceived as disagreements in which at least one of the disagreeing parties commits an epistemic error (i.e., has a false belief)?
- What are the theoretical alternatives to the cognitivist interpretation of religious disagreement, and what reflections do they have on the role that argument and reasoning could and should play in responding to religious disagreements?
- Does it make sense to conceive (some) religious disagreements as faultless disagreements, i.e. as cases where, for propositional content p, A believes that p (or something that implies p), B believes that not-p (or something that implies not-p), and neither A nor B are in error?
- What is the epistemological significance of peer disagreement in the case of religious arguments?
- What is the best way to understand the purposes of religious arguments? Is the purpose to convince others, persuade them, be able to convert them or an other one altogether?

The “Arguing Religion” project involves the “Conflicts”, “Values, science and technologies” and “Spirituality and life styles” research lines. It is linked to the Center’s mission in that it explores the argumentative discussion among different religions, as well as between religion and non-religion, as a possible source for innovative changes inside a plural society.

Partner – Outcome

An important stage of the project will be the organization, in June of 2017, of the “Arguing Religion: Religious Disagreement and the Reach of Argumentative Debate” international conference, which is already in an advanced stage. Speakers who have confirmed their participation include former: Prof. Charles Taylor (McGill University, Montreal, Canada), Prof. Sami Pihlström (University of Helsinki), Prof. Richard Feldman (University of Rochester, USA), Prof. John Pittard (Yale University, New Haven CT, USA), Prof. Geert Keil (Humboldt University, Berlin, Germany), Prof. Christoph Jäger (University of Innsbruck, Austria) and Prof. Fiona Ellis (Heythrop College, London University).

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