

European Academy of Religion 2025 in Vienna



Eighth Annual Conference

Religion and Socio-Cultural Transformation: European Perspectives and Beyond.

8th-12th July 2025

Vienna

Panel Title: A Culture of Certainty: Islam, Knowledge, and the Search for Truth in Unstable and Uncertain Times

Proponent: Claire Gallien, cg858@cam.ac.uk

Date : 11/07/2025

Location : Lecture Hall 21

Panel Presentation:

سَنُرِيهِمْ ءَايَاتِنَا فِي الْكَافَاقِ وَفِي أَنْفُسِهِمْ حَتَّىٰ يَتَبَيَّنَ لَهُمْ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ

We shall show them Our signs in the farthest horizons and in themselves, until it becomes clear to them that this is the Truth...
Quran, sura Fuṣṣilat, 41:53

Since after World War 2, Europe has embraced what critical theory and philosophy described as a postmodern condition, marked by relativism in identities and values, fluidity, ambiguity, irony, disenchantment, and anti-foundational thinking. Postmodernism was also intended to function as a rebuttal to the myth of the universal truth of a single Eurocentric historical narrative, and as such joining ranks, at least on this particular aspect, with postcolonial theory. However (and quite ironically given its anti-foundationalism, hermeneutic pluralism, and anti-universalism), the military, economic, and epistemic hegemony of the Global North meant that postmodernism as an ontological and epistemic condition imposed itself as the new global narrative.

To any believers, Jean-François Lyotard's definition of postmodernity as 'incredulity towards metanarratives' in his seminal philosophical work *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979) is counterintuitive and problematic. Indeed, theology as 'God-talk' (Chittick) constitutes precisely this meta- (i.e. transcendent) narrative. In addition, from the perspective of believers, postmodernity's anti-foundationalism, relativism, and disenchantment constitute

untenable stances. Faith in God and the cosmovision as well as the episteme that ensues from this belief, necessitates the exact opposite, namely the support of scriptural foundations, clear demarcations between the ugly and the beautiful, between the harmful and the beneficial, and a perception of the world as God's creation, to be preserved as His gift and re-enchanted as His signs.

Building on recent works in Islamic studies which have demonstrated how Islam proposes a conception of the secular that is not anti-religious (Sherman Jackson), of religion that is not anti-modern (Irfan Ahmad), and of ambiguity that is not nihilistic or sceptic in its ambitions (Thomas Bauer), this panel is interested to explore Islam as 'a culture of certainty'.

As a rejoinder to Bauer's insightful investigation of Islam as 'a culture of ambiguity', panellists pursue various venues of enquiries, including the definition of knowledge in Islam, its limits, foundations, tools, and claims; the concepts of certainty and 'anti-vagueness' (Zamboni) in Islamic theology and philosophy; the removal of uncertainty in language, perception, and rational enquiries; the interplay between questions of certainty and truth and questions of genres and disciplines, namely what does 'certainty' mean across the fields of *kalām*, *fiqh*, *uṣūl al-fiqh*, *uṣūl al-hadith*; the relation between certainty and mysticism, between clear speech and poetry...

Islamic scholars, luminaries and mystics from the past (and present!), their works and the theological projects they contributed to, shall not be examined as 'objects' of historical study. Rather, we are interested in them as points of reference and as interlocutors for further developments in contemporary Islamic theology. What does it mean to posit, reclaim, problematise Islam as a 'culture of wise certainty' and how does this culture may repair and positively transform inner-selves and contemporary societies?

Each speaker presents for 20/25 min + 10/15 min Q&A

WELCOME 9.00

SESSION 1

Chair: Lejla Demiri (Tübingen University, lejla.demiri@uni-tuebingen.de)

9.15-10.30

Full name: Yunus Hentschel

Institutional Affiliation: ERC Research Project VISIONIS - Vision and Visuality in the Qur'ān and Early Islam at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Email: yunus.hentschel@gmail.com

Title: Muqātil b. Sulaymān's Vision of the Prophets' Endeavor for Certainty.

Full name: Hiroaki Kawanishi

Institutional Affiliation: Tübingen University

Email: alihiroaki1993@gmail.com

Title: Certainty in Islamic Theology. *A Reflection on Early Modern Islamic Apocalypticism*

BREAK 10.30-10.45

10.45-12.00

Full name: Natalie Kraneiß

Institutional Affiliation: Münster University

Email: n.kraneiss@uni-muenster.de

Title: Verification (*tahqīq*) as Religious and Epistemic Practice: Establishing Certain Knowledge about Prophetic Descent in the Islamic West

Full name: Besnik Sinani

Institutional Affiliation: Tübingen University

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Title: Scripturalist Certainty in Modern Muslim Thought: Nasir al-Din al-Albani's Epistemology of Prophetic Teaching

LUNCH BREAK 12.00-13.30

SESSION 2

13.30-15.15

Chair: ???

Full name: Easa Saad

Institutional Affiliation: Wolfson College, University of Oxford

Email: easa.saad@wolfson.ox.ac.uk

Title: Rūmī's Paradoxical Certainty: The Path of Knowledge And Love

Full name: Mohammed Tayssir Safi

Institutional Affiliation: Northwestern University

Email: mohammed.safi@northwestern.edu

Title: The Epistemic Status of Scripture Between Spinoza and the Falāsifa

Full name: Muhammad Sami

Institutional Affiliation: Oxford University

Email: muhammad.sami@theology.ox.ac.uk

Title: Al-Ghazālī's certitude-giving light: What is it?

BREAK 15.15 – 15.45

SESSION 3 – 15.45-17.00

Chair: Christian Schlenker (Geneva University, christian.schlenker@unige.ch)

Full name: Christoph Rogers

Institutional Affiliation: Goethe University Frankfurt

Email: rogers04c@gmail.com

Title: The Surplus Of (Un-)Certainty: A Deleuzian Reading Of The 'isnād Paradigm

Full name: Claire Gallien

Institutional Affiliation: Cambridge Muslim College & Divinity Faculty, Cambridge University

Email: cg858@cam.ac.uk

Title: The Truth Hidden from the Eye – Postmodern Nihilism, Darwinist Cognitive Science and What Islamic Theology Has to Say