

STUDYING THE “OTHER,” UNDERSTANDING THE “SELF”: SCRIPTURE, REASON, AND THE CONTEMPORARY ISLAM-WEST ENCOUNTER

Participant Bios

Session I: Studying the Western “Other” *Understanding the Islamic “Self”*

Presenter:

Basit Koshul

Assistant Professor, Religion Department, Concordia College

Education: PhD (2003) Drew University in Sociology of Religion, PhD (ABD) University of Virginia, Religious Studies

Area of Specialty and Interests: Sociology of religion, philosophy of religion and science, Islam and the modern world.

Publications and Related Activity: Koshul has published a number of articles in scholarly journals in the area of Islamic Studies, the most recent being “Ghazzali, Ibn Rushd and Islam’s Sojourn into Modernity: A Comparative Study” in *Islamic Studies* (43/2). Palgrave Macmillan has recently published his revised dissertation for his first PhD titled *The Postmodern Significance of Max Weber’s Legacy*. He is currently working on two projects: a) a comparative study of Weber’s methodology of scientific inquiry and CS Peirce’s philosophy of science and b) a comparative study of Muhammad Iqbal’s and CS Peirce’s philosophy of religion (in collaboration with Richard Gilmore of the Philosophy Department at Concordia College.)

Respondents:

Vincent Cornell

Professor of History and Director of the King Fahd Center for Middle East and Islamic Studies, University of Arkansas

Education: PhD (1989) UCLA in Islamic Studies

Specialties and Interests: Islamic history, theology, law

Publications and Related Activity: A partial list of Cornell's publications includes a number of articles in scholarly journals and groundbreaking studies in two different areas: a) a study of Moroccan Sufism titled *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* and b) an original study of a leading figure in Maghribi Sufism titled *The Way of Abu Madyan: Doctrinal and Poetic Works of Abu Madyan Shu'ayb ibn al-Husayn al-Ansari*. His most recent publications are on Islamic theology and philosophy ("Religion and Philosophy" chapter for *World Eras Volume 2: The Rise and Spread of Islam 622-1500*, Susan L. Douglass, ed.), and the challenges of the terrorist attacks of 9/11 to the Muslim world ("A Muslim to Muslims: Reflections After September 11," *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 101:2, Spring 2002). He has also authored *The Book of the Glory of the Black Race: al-Jabiz's Kitab Fakhr as-Sudan 'ala al-Bidan*.

Yamine Mermer

Education: PhD, Durham University in Theoretical Physics, PhD (Candidate) Religious Studies, Indiana University

Area of Specialty and Interests: Philosophy of science, hermeneutics, theory of meaning, and ethics especially with respect to the thought of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi

Publications and Related Activity: Mermer has authored one book, *Bilimin Marifetullah Boyutları* (Transcendental Dimensions of Science, co-authored two, *Risale-i Nur'dan Bir Toplumsal Barış Onerisi* (Towards Peace: A

Proposal from the Risale-i Nur) and *Bilimin Oteki Yuzu* (Beyond Science) and translated two others from Turkish into French; *Nature: Cause ou Effet* by Said Nursi, *Les Deux Voies pour L'Homme* by Said Nursi. She 2 of 3 has also presented papers at international symposia, a number of which have been published as chapters in the symposia proceedings.

Muhammad Suheyl Umar

Director, Iqbal Academy Pakistan

Education: MA (1979) English, M Phil (1994) Iqbal studies, AIOU, PhD (ABD), Punjab University Lahore in Philosophy, Training in traditional Islamic Sciences (Arabic, Persian, Tajwid and Hifz)

Area of Specialty and Interests: Sufism as well as in the thought of Muhammad Iqbal and in the intellectual history of the Indian subcontinent from Shah Waliullah to Iqbal.

Publications and Related Activity: Umar is the Founder-Editor of *Riwayat*, a scholarly Urdu journal; Editor, *Iqbal Review*, a quarterly journal, published alternately in Urdu and English, focusing on Iqbal studies in addition to Islamic Studies, Comparative Religion, Philosophy, Literature, History, Arts and Sociology. He also planned and inaugurated the Persian, Arabic and Turkish versions of *Iqbal Review*. He also edited *Studies in Tradition*, a quarterly journal devoted to traditional studies on Metaphysics, Philosophy, Literature, Art and Science. Well versed in Urdu, English, Arabic, and Persian, he has contributed a number of articles on Islamic and literary themes to reputed academic journals apart from publishing works in English, Urdu and Persian on Iqbal, Islamic Studies, literature and Sufism.

Session II: Studying the Islamic “Other” *Understanding the Western “Self”*

Presenter:

Steve Kepnes

**Murray W. and Mildred K. Finard Professor in Jewish Studies,
Colgate University**

Education: MA (1976), PhD (1983) University of Chicago

Area of Specialty and Interests: Judaism, holocaust and genocide studies, contemporary Israel, Ethics in Judaism and relations between Jewish ethics and contemporary ethical theory ***Publications and Related Activity:*** *Reasoning After Revelation: Dialogues in Postmodern Jewish Philosophy*, with Peter Ochs and Robert Gibbs (Westview Press, 1997); Editor, *Interpreting Judaism in a Postmodern Age* (New York University Press, 1996); *The Text as Thou* (Indiana University Press, 1992); *The Challenge of Psychology to Faith*, co-editor (NY: Seabury, 1982); articles in *The Harvard Theological Review*, *Judaism*, *Journal of Jewish Studies*, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. Fellow, Hebrew University and Hartman Institute, Jerusalem, Israel 1993-95; editor, Judaism section, *Religious Studies Review*; co-editor, *Journal of Textual Reasoning*.

Respondents:

Nick Adams

**Lecturer, Christian Systematic Theology and Philosophical
Theology, University of Edinburgh**

Education: PhD University of Cambridge in Theology

Area of Specialty and Interests: German Idealism (Kant to Hegel) and its critics: its influence on Christian theology in the twentieth century and beyond.

Publications: Nick has written on figures in the Christian theological tradition that have been influenced by German Idealism, e.g. Schleiermacher, Rahner, Pannenberg, Moltmann. He has recently completed a monograph on theological themes in the work of the German social theorist Jürgen Habermas, and is currently working on an introductory book for theologians on the meanings of 'God' in German Idealism. This is intended to persuade theological students to study the debates begun in this often-misunderstood

period and continued in the present. He has also written on the relationship between tradition and rationality.

Martin Kavka

Assistant Professor of Religion, Florida State University

Education: PhD (2000) Rice University

Specialties and Interest: Modern European and American Jewish thought, post-Holocaust thought, and postmodern philosophy of religion.

Publications and Related Activity: His first book, *Jewish Messianism and the History of Philosophy*, was recently published with Cambridge University Press. In addition to publishing a number of articles in scholarly journals Kavka is currently working on preparing *The Cambridge History of Jewish Philosophy: The Modern Era* (co-edited with David Novak, planned publication 2008). He is also working on two long-term projects that reflect his interests in post-Holocaust thought and the post-modern philosophy of religion. The first, tentatively titled *Redemption Now! The Metaphysics of Presence in Halakha*, analyzes a group of Jewish philosophical and theological texts that claim that the world-to-come can be accessed in the present moment through performing divinely commanded acts. The second, tentatively titled *The Perils of Covenant*, will argue that the recent trend in liberal Jewish theology to conflate the secular and sacred realms leads to a comprehensive liberalism (to use John Rawls' phrase) that risks being both politically obsolete and religiously fanatical; the conclusion of this book will begin the work of grounding a political liberalism out of traditional Jewish sources.

Ian Markham

Professor of Theology and Ethics, Dean of Hartford Seminary

Education: M Litt, University of Cambridge,

PhD University of Exeter

Area of Specialty and Interests: Philosophical Theology, Christian Ethics, Christianity and Other Religions

Publications and Related Activity: Markham's current writing project is titled, 'An Open Orthodoxy'. It will be a substantial study of the ways in which the Christian tradition has been shaped by non-Christian sources and traditions. A partial list of his publications includes three books, *Plurality and Christian Ethics*, *Truth and the Reality of God* and *A Theology of Engagement*, three co-authored books on practical theology, two textbooks and a number of articles in scholarly and popular periodicals. Speaking of the approach shaping his scholarship, Markham notes: "We live in an odd world: conservative Christians largely use the term orthodox. Yet the truth about the religious tradition we have inherited is that it is dynamic, open, and interactive. True fidelity to our tradition requires an openness and willingness to learn from others. My commitment to interfaith dialogue is not a betrayal or compromise of my tradition.

Sessions Moderated By Kelton Cobb

Professor of Theology and Ethics, Hartford Seminary

Education: MDiv, Princeton Theological Seminary

PhD, University of Iowa

Area of Specialty and Interests: Systematic Theology, Theology of Culture, Theological Ethics

Publications and Related Activity: Cobb joined the faculty of Hartford Seminary in 1995, and teaches courses in theology and ethics. He has a keen interest in the overlap of these two disciplines, understanding that a theology gives rise to moral actions, and that moral actions assume a theology. He has authored the *Blackwell Guide to Theology and Popular Culture*, two papers published as chapters in books and a number of articles in scholarly journals. His current interest is in reading theologians who lived and wrote during periods of history that

we now recognize, retrospectively, as "hinge" periods for western civilization -- theologians like Augustine, Dante, Calvin, Bartolome de las Casas, Pope Leo XIII and Abraham Kuyper. Each of them made a serious attempt to reflect on the changes going on around them in light of their theological convictions. The influence of their writings on the unfolding social theory of the west has been largely neglected, but with many recognizing that we are again in a hinge period of our history, there is a small renaissance of attention to these theologians.