



How do we see each other? Interdisciplinarity and the potential of interreligious scholarship

Daniel Moulin-Stožek

To cite this article: Daniel Moulin-Stožek (2017) How do we see each other? Interdisciplinarity and the potential of interreligious scholarship, *Journal of Beliefs & Values*, 38:3, 235-237, DOI: [10.1080/13617672.2017.1317516](https://doi.org/10.1080/13617672.2017.1317516)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13617672.2017.1317516>



Published online: 14 Jun 2017.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 399



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Citing articles: 1 View citing articles [↗](#)



How do we see each other? Interdisciplinarity and the potential of interreligious scholarship

The articles presented in this special issue are the fruits of an international conference, ‘*How Do We See Each Other? The Abrahamic Religions and Interreligious Relations in the Past and Present*’ held at the Institute for Culture and Society, University of Navarra, Navarra, Spain, March 10–11, 2016. Using a range of methods to consider interreligious relations between Christians, Jews, and Muslims in diverse contexts, they each explore the metaphor of ‘seeing each other’ in different ways. The result is a rich set of analyses using methods from a range of scholarly disciplines including quantitative social sciences, history, biblical studies, Islamic studies, ethnography, and film studies.

Often when considering interreligious relations, religions are considered through theological lenses. This makes sense because religions make claims about the nature of God, and the Abrahamic religions share similarities in their respective theological traditions (Stroumsa 2015). However, theology is limited in the respect that it cannot investigate and account for the complex relationships between religions, culture and individuals in the ways some other disciplinary approaches can. That is not to say we can escape theology when considering religions with historical and empirical methods. It is no coincidence, for example, the first initiative to bring the ‘world religions’ together, such as the Chicago World Parliament of Religions in 1893, grew out of universalistic theological trends within liberal Christianity that saw all religions as sharing the same common fundamental principles (Moulin 2017). The disciplines of comparative religion and religious studies also express an anthropological universalism that harbour theological biases (Fitzgerald 2004). Interreligious questions are still often considered by scholars and educators within a broadly universalistic framework – either anthropological, theological, or both. It is for this reason the articles in this special issue consider how the religions see each other, are seen, and relate to one another through a range of approaches, rather than attempting to consider them from any one universal ‘God’s-eye’ view – religious or otherwise.

The articles in this special issue, by exploring how religions see each other, invite readers to consider how viewpoints may differ – and for what reasons – without assuming or demanding any total explanation or eventual consensus. As no neutral view is possible, fairness is best ensured by representing multiple viewpoints (Moulin and Robson 2012). Different perspectives are offered in this special issue by examining interreligious relations in different contexts and with different methods. Arkady Kovelman (2017) and Johannes Bork (2017) show how the interpretation of interreligious relations in the past is continually relevant to the present using close textual analyses of ancient and contemporary texts. Anna Katarzyna Dulcka (2017) and Ruchama Johnston-Bloom (2017) explore accounts of how Jews and Muslims have related to each other in different eras. In addition to the different circumstances presented in history, space is also a category of analysis. Emma O’Donnell (2017) and Anna Hager (2017) give insightful case studies of interreligious relations within two defined geographical areas: Lebanon and Jerusalem. These show how spaces and religions may be related in definition and understanding.

Exploring the opportunities for film to create new spaces for interreligious experience, S. Brent Plate examines how films may contribute to greater understanding through the senses.

The last four research articles consider how contemporary empirical research can inform our understanding in different ways. Louise K. Gramstrup (2017) uses ethnography to explore how the practice of interreligious dialogue may rest upon, and result in, particular ways of seeing other religions. While Nathaniel F. Barrett (2017) argues there are important conceptual problems inherent in the way some empirical studies may 'see' religion, Tania ap Siôn (2017), Leslie J Francis and Ursula McKenna (2017), show the power of quantitative methods to examine attitudes towards other religions among selected populations.

Drawing definitive conclusions from these studies about the relationships between the Abrahamic religions is not possible. Indeed, there appear to be no grand narratives that explain the heterogeneity of encounters between those identifying with the Abrahamic religions in the present or across time and place. The articles show collectively how the religions and their relationships to wider culture and societies are diverse and multifaceted. Extensive and deep complexity should be considered as one of the main findings to be drawn from the articles collected here, for anyone wishing to make judgements about the way the Abrahamic religions are in, and have been, and will be, in relationship with each other.

Given this complexity, it is evident that context-specific research is necessary to understand interreligious relationships in any given circumstances. Interdisciplinary scholarship provides the means to do this. Making close and sensitive studies of interreligious relations (and factors that may relate to them and our understanding of them), is one way of approaching the animosity and conflict sometimes found between those of different religions. The scholarly discussion at the conference, along with the articles that resulted from it, demonstrate the opportunities for further rich, edifying conversations in the future.

Thinking about how we see each other also means a deeper reflection upon the values with which we best apprehend the other. It is perhaps appropriate to conclude with a personal comment about the Christian worldview that underpinned the organisation of the conference. The Christian faith may inspire interreligious dialogue in different ways. One possible beginning, however, is the two Great Commandments: Love of God and Love of neighbour (Matthew 22:35–40). These imply Christians should 'see' their neighbours of the other Abrahamic religions with increased love and understanding. Thinking in such a way we see that we do not need to give up on a tradition's way of seeing the other when encountering other religions. Rather, what is needed is a reflexive approach that can bring the relevant aspects of a tradition into scrutiny when apprehending the other. Interdisciplinary scholarship can help to do this. With their visions of ultimate reality that form a way of seeing the world, religions do not need to present challenges to mutual understanding. Religions, and meetings between their scholars and adherents, can also be movements for positive change. An idealist may say that by enabling better understanding of how we see each other, interdisciplinary scholarship is one key that can be used to unlock this potential.

References

- Barrett, N. 2017. "Belief-Centred Religious Constructs, Modern Religious Self-Understanding, and Interreligious Relations: Challenges for Empirical Inquiry." *Journal of Beliefs and Values* 38 (3).
- Bork, J. 2017. "Models of Coexistence: Approaches for Overcoming the Classical Legal Division between the 'Land of Islam' and the 'Land of War' by Contemporary Islamic Scholars." *Journal of Beliefs and Values* 38 (3).
- Brent Rodriguez-Plate, S. (Hamilton College, USA) "Seeing the Other in Cinema: Interreligious Connections through the Senses." *Journal of Beliefs and Values* 38 (3).
- Dulka, A. 2017. "Abrahamic Coexistence in the Twelfth-Century Middle East? Jews among Christians and Muslims in a Travel Account by a Navarrese Jew." *Benjamin of Tudela' Journal of Beliefs and Values* 38 (3).
- Fitzgerald, T. 2004. *The Ideology of Religious Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Francis, L. and McKenna, U. 2017. "Assessing Attitude toward Religious Diversity among Muslim Adolescents in the UK: The Effect of Religious and Theological Factors." *Journal of Beliefs and Values* 38 (3)
- Gramstrup, L. 2017. "Searching for Interreligious Understanding: Complex Engagements with Sameness and Difference in an American Women's Interfaith Book Group." *Journal of Beliefs and Values* 38 (3).
- Hager, A. 2017. "'Lebanon is More than a Nation, More than a Country. It is a Message'. Lebanon as a Model of Christian-Muslim Relations." *Journal of Beliefs and Values* 38 (3).
- Johnston-Bloom, R. 2017. "Analogising Judaism and Islam: Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century German-Jewish Scholarship on Islam." *Journal of Beliefs and Values* 38 (3).
- Kovelman, A. 2017. "Destruction of the Second Temple in Talmudic and Christian Literature: The Rise of the New Morality." *Journal of Beliefs and Values* 38 (3).
- Moulin, D. 2017. "Tolstoy, Universalism and the World Religions." *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 68: 1–18.
- Moulin, D., and J. Robson. 2012. "Doing God in a Liberal Democracy." *Oxford Review of Education* 38 (5): 539–550.
- O' Donnell E. 2017. "Theorizing Sacred Place in Jerusalem: Identity, Yearning, and the Invention of Tradition." *Journal of Beliefs and Values* 38 (3).
- ap Siôn, T. 2017. "Seeing How We See Each Other: Learning from Quantitative Research among Young People in the UK." *Journal of Beliefs and Values* 38 (3).
- Stroumsa, G. G. 2015. "Three Rings or Three Impostors' the Comparative Approach to the Abrahamic Religions and Its Origins." In *The Oxford Handbook of the Abrahamic Religions*, edited by A. J. Silverstein and G. G. Stroumsa. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Daniel Moulin-Stožek

Institute for Culture and Society, University of Navarra, Spain

 dmoulin@unav.es  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9975-2530>