

Beyond Foundationalism: New Horizons in Muslim Analytic Theology



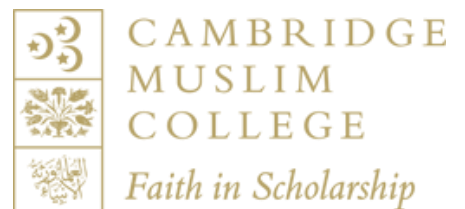
Programme Booklet

Workshop 2:
Theistic Epistemologies in Conversation

Saturday 30th October 2021



AZIZFOUNDATION



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Workshop 2: Theistic Epistemologies in Conversation

The last decades have seen an explosion of activity in analytic theology, which is an approach that applies the concepts and methods of analytic philosophy developed in the twentieth century to theological doctrine with an aim for clarity of expression, precision and rigour of argument. Given the discipline's origins in mainly European and American scholarship, it is unsurprising that it has hitherto been dominated by Christian intellectual activity, though there has recently been deep engagement by Jewish thinkers. The relative maturity of Christian analytic theology situates it as a key conversation partner for Islam, which has undergone a quiet gestation period in its own iteration of analytic theology and is now in an early developmental stage.

Beyond Foundationalism is a three-year research project funded by the John Templeton Foundation in collaboration with the Aziz Foundation and hosted by the Cambridge Muslim College. The project explores meta-epistemology in the *kalām* tradition, in terms of foundationalism and its alternatives, putting it into conversation with contemporary analytic philosophy and theology. The aim is to gauge the adequacy of the dominant Muslim theological approach to epistemology as well as to assist the development of contemporary philosophical theology, or *kalām jadīd*, on this important question.

In light of the above, this workshop, the second of the Beyond Foundationalism project, will focus on a comparative look at Muslim, Christian and Jewish analytic theology within the project's overall remit. The first workshop studied the theme of meta-epistemology in the premodern Islamic tradition through the discipline of intellectual history. This second workshop builds upon this exploration to begin to conceive of how contemporary Muslim analytic theology could revisit the question of epistemic grounding in the light of existing theistic epistemologies. Though it is not a requirement for participants to have expertise within the premodern Islamic theological tradition, there should be dialogue between the different traditions. The focus of the workshop will be primarily theological and epistemological, rather than historical, with interdisciplinary approaches.

Themes of the workshop include:

- Islamic reformed epistemology
- Epistemological methods in Christian and Jewish theology.
- Christian or Jewish articulations of religious epistemologies that can help illuminate Islamic epistemologies.
- Appeals to a shared 'theistic' epistemology applicable to all three monotheistic faiths.
- Philosophical insights from Christian and Jewish epistemologies useful for Muslim constructive theology and vice versa.

The Beyond Foundationalism Team

Ramon Harvey



PROJECT LEADER Ramon is the Aziz Foundation Lecturer in Islamic Studies at Cambridge Muslim College. He received his MA and PhD in Islamic Studies from SOAS, University of London. His research interests are in Qur'anic studies, Islamic theology and ethics, working from both historical and constructive theological angles. He is currently engaged in a long-term project to develop contemporary Muslim philosophical theology, or *kalām jadīd*, drawing especially on the Māturīdī school. Ramon's first book, *The Qur'an and the Just Society* (2018), and his second one, *Transcendent God, Rational World: A Māturīdī Theology* (2021), are published by Edinburgh University Press. He is also the editor of a new series for the press: Edinburgh Studies in Islamic Scripture and Theology.

Safaruk Chowdhury



PROJECT RESEARCHER Saf studied Philosophy at Kings College London completing it with the accompanying Associate of Kings College (AKC) award. He then travelled to Cairo studying the traditional Islamic Studies curricula at al-Azhar University. He returned to the UK to complete His MA at the School of Oriental and African studies with distinction. His doctoral dissertation was on the eminent Sufi hagiographer and theoretician Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami (d. 412/1021) published as *A Sufi Apologist of Nishapur: The Life and Thought of Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami* (Sheffield: Equinox Publishing, 2019). Saf's research interests in

addition to Sufism at the moment are in paraconsistent logic, metaphysics, ethics and epistemology with keen interest in how these subjects were all utilised for clarifying and explicating Islamic theological doctrine – especially within kalam theology. His current book is entitled *Islamic Theology and the Problem of Evil* (New York and Cairo: AUC Press, 2021) which is the first work in Islamic studies to treat the topic within the analytic theology approach.

Shahanaz Begum



PROJECT OFFICER Shahanaz is a doctoral student at the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter, with a focus on Islamic legal theory. Prior to this, Shahanaz completed her MA in Islamic Studies, at the School of Oriental and African Studies. She undertook her postgraduate studies after completing her traditional seminary training at Ebrahim College, London. Shahanaz has also worked in public policy and strategy delivering on agendas such as community cohesion, and gender and faith equality in both a local and a national context. She continues to take an active role in the community through various voluntary activities, as well as teaching in a community context.

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Funded by the John Templeton Foundation in collaboration with the Aziz Foundation and hosted at the Cambridge Muslim College

Workshop 2: Theistic Epistemologies in Conversation

Saturday 30th October 2021
10.00 a.m. – 18.30 p.m. (BST)

10.00 – 10.30 Welcome and Introduction

Ramon Harvey and Safaruk Chowdhury, Cambridge Muslim College (UK)

10.30 – 12.00 Panel 1: Reformed Epistemologies

“Fiṭra-Foundationalism”
Jamie Turner, Ibn Haldun University (Turkey)

"Is There any Doubt about God?" An Islamic Account of Reformed Epistemology
Amir M. Emami, Tehran University (Iran)

Respondent: *Joshua Ralston, University of Edinburgh (UK)*

12.00 – 13.00 LUNCH

13.00 – 14.30 Panel 2: Foundationalist Epistemologies

“An Alternative Exploration of al-Ghazali’s Religious Epistemology through Reid’s Modest Foundationalism”
Ayşenur Ünügür Tabur, University of Augsburg (Germany)

“Firming up the Foundations of Epistemology”
John DePoe, Kingdom Preparatory Academy (USA)

Respondent: *Tyler McNabb, University of Saint Joseph (China)*

14.30 – 15.00 BREAK

15.00 – 16.30 Panel 3: Epistemology and the Divine Nature

“Knowing God Personally: Second-Person Knowledge in Muslim and Christian Analytic Theology”
David Worsley, University of York (UK)

“The Epistemological Necessity of Revelation and Condescension”
Scott Oliphint, Westminster Theological Seminary (USA)

Respondent: *Nader AlSamaani, Qassim University (KSA)*

16.30 - 17.00 **BREAK**

17.00 – 18.00 **Panel 4: Naturalistic Religious Epistemology**

“The Music of the Spheres” (pre-recorded)
Howard Wettstein, University of California, Riverside (USA)

Respondent: *Zeinab Salari (Iran)*

18.00 – 18.30 **Final remarks and next steps**

Ramon Harvey and Safaruk Chowdhury

Presenter Abstracts and Short Biographies

1. John DePoe



Firming Up the Foundations of Religious Epistemology

Where, epistemically speaking, are the proper foundations for religious belief? In the philosophical literature the answers to this question are quite diverse. Many have declared that there are no non-question-begging epistemic foundations and insist on different models altogether, such as Nancey Murphy who ascribes to a type of Quinean coherentism. Many philosophers in religion still believe that the best approach is some form of foundationalism, however no clear consensus about the right kind of foundationalism has emerged among these philosophers. Alvin Plantinga has influentially advocated for a type of foundationalism where one's distinctive religious beliefs can be properly basic when they accord with his epistemic theory of proper functionalism, and he has garnered an influential following from philosophers such as Kelly James Clark, Michael Bergmann, and Tyler McNabb. Still others (Paul Logan Gauge, Richard Swinburne, and others) believe that religious epistemology is founded upon beliefs produced by seeming states. Some, like Keith DeRose, maintain that the epistemic standards for knowledge vary in different contexts, and thereby what counts as properly basic in religious epistemology will shift depending on these contextual factors.

The aim of this presentation is to survey these various approaches to the foundations of religious epistemology and to reject all of them. Instead, I shall argue that the proper starting point for religious epistemology—indeed the proper starting point for any epistemology—is the point of contact between the mind and reality found in consciousness. This approach, a version of classical foundationalism, has been widely rejected by philosophers today, but not for good reason. Historically, it has been championed by diverse thinkers ranging from St. Augustine to John Locke to C. S. Lewis. After sketching my account of classical foundationalism that is based on direct acquaintance, I will respond to the most prominent objections to my position, such as that it is self-refuting or that it cannot provide a satisfactory framework to practice “faith seeking understanding.”

Bio

John DePoe is the Head of the Schools of Logic and Rhetoric at Kingdom Preparatory Academy in Lubbock, Texas. His primary areas of research are epistemology and philosophy of religion. Some of his publications can be found in journals

like *Synthese*, *Philosophical Studies*, *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, *Ratio*, *Philosophia Christi*, among others. His recently co-edited book, *Debating Christian Religious Epistemology: An Introduction to Five Views on the Knowledge of God*, brings different approaches to Christian religious epistemology into dialogue with one another.

2. Amir M. Emami



Is There any Doubt about God? - An Islamic Account of Reformed Epistemology

In Islamic theology and philosophy, the mainstream approach for justifying theism has been arguing for the existence of God based on the metaphysical grounds that were regarded as certain. The same method is also applied to other theological subjects, such as Divine attributes, prophecy and resurrection. The common assumption of the familiar theological debates seems to be strict foundationalism, i.e., beliefs are only justified if they are self-evident in a narrow sense or logically inferred from them. Since most religious beliefs are not self-evident in this sense, the only way of confirming them would be by deductive reasoning. Meanwhile, some Islamic traditions opposed this approach in their theologies, especially on the belief in God. One of the significant ones in the contemporary period is Maktab-i Tafkīk (the school of separation) or Maktab-i Ma'ārif-i Khurāsān (the school of ma'ārif of Khurāsān), founded by Mīrzā Mahdī Iṣfahānī. The adherents of this school justify fundamental religious beliefs by *fiṭra* and consequently consider relevant philosophical and theological arguments unnecessary or even misleading. By adopting terms and drawing insights from Islamic scriptures, they propose a novel view in the epistemology of religion, which differs significantly from that of the mainstream. There are remarkable similarities between this approach and the reformed epistemology, which is a known view influenced by the Reformed tradition in Christianity and contemporary analytic epistemology. Reformed epistemologists like Alvin Plantinga similarly see theistic belief as a properly basic one produced by an inner faculty called *sensus divinitatis*. Nevertheless, there are also some distinctions between the two theories that make each approach unique. Exploring Iṣfahānī's idea and comparing it with the reformed epistemology, as aimed in this research, would be insightful for both analytic and contemporary Islamic theology and would lead to new perspectives in the epistemology of religion and methodology of theology.

Bio

Amir Mohammad Emami is a student of Philosophy of Religion at the University of Tehran, Iran. His philosophical interests include philosophy of religion, epistemology, and ethics. He is particularly concerned with the intersections of contemporary analytic philosophy and traditional Islamic disciplines of *kalam* (Islamic theology) and *usul al-fiqh* (Islamic legal theory). He aims to help develop an Islamic analytic theology by using philosophical concepts and theoretical tools, as well as broadening the scope of the current philosophy of religion by drawing upon the Islamic intellectual sources.

3. Scott Oliphint



The Epistemological Necessity of Revelation and Condescension

Because epistemology has its focus in knowledge, it is incumbent on epistemologists to reckon with the primary source and mode of human knowledge. For Christians, knowledge has its primary source and locus in the character of the Triune God. God's knowledge is intrinsic to His character. It is not added to Him from the outside, nor does He acquire it by virtue of anything outside of Him. In that way, His knowledge is identical with who He is as the *a se*, eternal, infinite and immutable God. When God freely determines to create, He, at the same time, freely determines to condescend to speak into and by that creation. This speech of God, in word and in the world (i.e., the cosmos) is the foundation of epistemology. Whatever God says in and through creation has its origin in God Himself, and in His knowledge. In order for human beings to receive and understand what God says, His speech is accommodated to human capacities. Thus, epistemology has its proper roots and its foundation in God's character. The mode of our knowledge must include God's condescension as He reveals Himself to His human creatures.

Bio

K. Scott Oliphint, Ph.D. is professor of apologetics and systematic theology at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia and the author of numerous articles and books, including "Is There a Reformed Objection to Natural Theology?," "Using Reason by Faith,"

“Bavinck’s Realism, the Logos Principle and Sola Scriptura,” “Covenantal Philosophy,” in *Christianity and Philosophy: Four Views* “Epistemology and Christian Belief,” “Plantinga on Warrant.,” His books include *The Battle Belongs to the Lord*, *Reasons for Faith*, *Know Why You Believe*, *Christianity and the Role of Philosophy*, *Thomas Aquinas*, and *Covenantal Apologetics*. He is also the co-editor of the two-volume *Christian Apologetics Past and Present: A Primary Source Reader* and *Revelation and Reason: New Essays in Reformed Apologetics*.

4. Aysenur Ünügür-Tabur



An Alternative Exploration of al-Ghazali’s Religious Epistemology through Reid’s Modest Foundationalism

According to al-Ghazali’s view of concomitance, the causation between two events is only “the continuous habit of their occurrence repeatedly, one time after another.” However, he explains the occurrence and the constant conjunction of the events by God’s occasional creative intervention. So, we find two notions of causation in al-Ghazali’s theory: constant conjunction of events and God’s creation of the events as their efficient cause. This raises an immediate question concerning al-Ghazali’s cosmological argument: On which notion of causation is his cosmological argument built? While the notion of constant conjunction remains quite weak and inconclusive to ground the core presumption of his cosmological argument, namely “all that is possible must have a cause”, the notion of God’s efficient causation renders the argument question begging. In the proposed paper, I will claim that al-Ghazali’s cosmological argument is grounded on his modest foundationalism that he endorsed after his skeptical period. Al-Ghazali’s epistemological approach has mainly been compared with Descartes’ methodological skepticism in terms of their similarity. However, I will claim that the essence of al-Ghazali’s foundationalism is contrary to that of Descartes since the former presumes the inadmissibility of rational proof as the foundation of knowledge, whereas the latter claims to have overcome the skeptical challenge by reasoning. I will explore al-Ghazali’s modest foundationalism and religious epistemology that ground his cosmological argument with an appeal to Thomas Reid’s modest foundationalism, arguing that Reid’s views—such as inadmissibility of reasoning as the ultimate source of justification for knowledge, fallibility of our knowledge of contingent truths

yet the necessity of trusting them, infallibility of necessary truths including the principle that “all that is possible must have a cause” and the inference of God’s existence by reasoning through the necessary truths—bear striking similarities to those of al-Ghazali.

Bio

Aysenur Ünügür-Tabur studied Islamic theology at Ankara University and wrote her master's thesis in the field of philosophy of religion with a focus on religious epistemology. She received a master's scholarship from the Presidency of the Ataturk Cultural Center. She had her Ph.D. in 2020 at the University of Augsburg, Germany in the department of philosophy with the thesis entitled “God’s Freedom to Choose: The Concept of Divine Free Action in Contrast to Avicenna and Anselm of Canterbury” that critically analyzes the conditions of human and divine freedom in the works of Avicenna and Anselm von Canterbury. During her Ph.D, she was awarded the doctoral scholarship of the German National Academic Foundation for three years. She is currently working as a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Augsburg on her project “Reconsidering the Metaphysics of Modality and the Modal Ontological Argument” which was funded by the office “Chancengleichheit für Frauen in Forschung und Lehre”. She worked as a lecturer in philosophy at the University of Augsburg and Ankara Medipol University. Her research interests lie primarily in philosophy of religion, epistemology, metaphysics, modal logic and philosophy of mind.

5. Jamie B. Turner



Fiṭra-Foundationalism

This paper aims to draw on the ideas of Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328), in elucidating a religious epistemology, that’s predicated on the concept of fiṭra. It seeks to argue how a Taymiyyan epistemology can stand as a critique of classical foundationalist models of justification prevalent in traditional kalām approaches to religious epistemology. In light of those epistemological differences between a kalām and Taymiyyan approach, it outlines how Ibn Taymiyya’s religious epistemology paves the way for a more moderate form of foundationalism, and one which rejects a theistic evidentialist picture, for a reformed epistemological one. Finally, it considers how this fiṭra-based epistemology, might be situated in the context of contemporary forms of virtue epistemology.

Bio

Jamie B. Turner is a post-graduate research fellow in philosophy at Ibn Haldun University, Istanbul; Turkey. His current research primarily involves an exploration of differing trends of religious epistemology within Islamic thought, with particular focus on Damascene theologian, Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328). More generally, his research includes important areas of interest in contemporary philosophy of religion and epistemology. Turner is also a member of the Sapience Institute for Islamic thought and education, a fellow at the Fatima Elizabeth Institute of Islam, Science & Philosophy, and a contributor at the International Foundation for Muslim Theology. He has also acted as a referee for academic journals such as, *Religious Studies*, *Faith and Philosophy* and *Sophia*.

6. David Worsley



Knowing God Personally: Second-Person Knowledge in Muslim and Christian Analytic Theology

Recent work in analytic epistemology has attended to the possibility and scope of second-person knowledge of persons. In this paper, I intend to show how this intersubjective knowledge has been employed in recent Christian analytic theology, in addition to outlining some of the current challenges that such reflection has exposed. I then explore several ways in which a focus on second-person knowledge can constructively aid work in Islamic analytic theology; namely, in providing a framework for (i) reflection on mystical experiential knowledge (ma'rifa) and also (ii) certain philosophical puzzles associated with knowledge (rather than mere sight) of God in the beatific vision (ru'yah Allah).

Bio

David Worsley is a Lecturer in the Department of Philosophy at the University of York. David teaches on the York MA in Analytic Theology, and is currently helping to coordinate a project in Comparative Analytic Theology (funded by The John Templeton Foundation). David completed his PhD at York under the supervision of David Eford in 2017. Prior to this, David and his wife, Laura, spent several years working in China and Ireland.

7. Howard Wettstein



The Music of the Spheres

Philosophers are intoxicated with foundations, with the rational grounding of our beliefs and practices. In this paper, I advance a very different way of thinking about grounding. Our ways are grounded, I suggest, not in reasons but in our human modes of responsiveness. We respond, for example, to the suffering of others. Making sense of this is not a matter of finding reasons. We are moved by an imperative that is categorical, but not derived from a rational principle. We experience the categorically imperative flowing in our lives.

My special interest in this paper is our religious responsiveness, my alternative to rationalist approaches to religion. Faith, including religious faith, is not in the end a matter of reasons but rather an ear for the music of the spheres. I see Martin Buber as a fellow traveler. I explore his approach to intimacy with God and its coherence (or lack of it) with traditional Abrahamic religions.

Bio

Howard Wettstein is a 1965 graduate of Yeshiva University. He has been Professor of Philosophy at University of California Riverside since 1989. At UCR, he served as Chair of the Department of Philosophy and Director of the University Honors Program. He previously taught at the University of Notre Dame and the University of Minnesota, Morris, and held visiting positions at Stanford University and the University of Iowa. Wettstein has published papers in the philosophy of language and the philosophy of religion, and has edited books and collections including *Diasporas and Exiles: Varieties of Jewish Identity* (University of California Press, 2002). He is the author of *The Magic Prism: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Oxford University Press, 2004) and *Has Semantics Rested On A Mistake, and Other Essays* (Stanford University Press, 1991). He is married to a psychologist, which is good for his health, and has two adult children and two grandsons. His website is <https://profiles.ucr.edu/app/home/profile/howie>

Respondents

1. Nader Alsamaani



Bio

Dr Nader Alsamaani is an Assistant professor of analytic philosophy at Qassim University. He completed his Master's and PhD in Philosophy at the University of Birmingham. His research interests include philosophy of religion, epistemology of religion and introducing Islamic views and concepts to analytic philosophy of religion.

2. Tyler McNabb



Bio

Dr. Tyler Dalton McNabb is an Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Saint Joseph, Macau. Dr. McNabb is the author of *Religious Epistemology* (CUP), Co-author of *Plantingian Religious Epistemology and World Religions* (Lexington), and co-editor and contributor of *Debating Christian Religious Epistemology: Five Views on the Knowledge of God*. Dr. McNabb has also authored/co-authored around 20 articles that have been featured in journals such as *Religious Studies*, *European Journal of Philosophy of Religion*, *Open Theology*, *Heythrop Journal*, and *Philosophia Christi*.

3. Joshua Ralston



Bio

Dr Joshua Ralston is Reader in Christian-Muslim Relations at the University of Edinburgh. He is the author of *Law and the Rule of God: A Christian Engagement with Shari'a* (Cambridge, 2020) and the co-editor of two volumes: *Church in an Age of Global Migration--A Moving Body* (Palgrave, 2015) and the *Spirit of Populism--Political Theologies in Polarized Times* (Brill, 2021). He has published widely in systematic, comparative, and political theology with a particular focus on Protestant and Sunni engagement. His current book project is under contract with Westminster John Knox and is entitled "Witness and the Word: An Approach to Christian-Muslim Theological Learning."

4. Zeinab Salari



Bio

Dr Zeinab Salari is currently an independent researcher in Philosophy of Religion. She received her PhD from the Institute of Humanities and Cultural Studies in Tehran, Iran and her MA from Tehran University, both in Philosophy of Religion. Prior to that she undertook a double

BA in Tehran University in Islamic theology and Sociology. During her MA she worked on modern Christian theology and inspired by that, surveyed the works of key Iranian religious innovators. Her doctoral dissertation was in analytic religious epistemology with an emphasis on the epistemic dimension of practical theistic arguments. Zeinab's research interests in addition to analytic Christian and Islamic theology and religious epistemology at the moment are moral epistemology, axiology of theism, analytic atheism and how these issues are at play in illustrating and interpreting Islamic philosophical theology (or Kalam), especially in the Shi'a tradition. She has published several articles and recently a book, *Wagering on God: A Moral Solution to the Epistemic Gap in Practical Theistic Arguments* (2021), in Persian, and cooperates with institutes such as Iranian Association for Philosophy of Religion and the Association of Iranian Philosophers in several research projects.