

A working conference on "Meaning in Religion, Cognition and Culture" will take place May 28-29, 2009 at the University of Aarhus, Denmark, hosted by the main research area Religion, Cognition and Culture (RCC) at the Department of the Study of Religion in collaboration with the International Association for the Cognitive Science of Religion (www.iacsr.com)

The cognitive science of religion has made heady progress over the last few decades, and it continues to create new insights. There is now a growing awareness that human cognition is more than in the individual and 'in the head'. Human cognition is distributed as well as situated. It is also externalized and exploits the capacities of extended minds in language, symbols, practices and objects.

Thus, as a program statement of the RCC emphasizes:

We analyze religion by studying the functional organization of the human brain, its interaction with the social and cultural worlds that it inhabits and modifies, and its developmental constraints and flexibility. Humans are mental creatures as well as embodied agents, who interact with the world. Core features of cognition – for example our moral intuitions and epistemic hunger – are powered by interpersonal dynamics. Cognition happens not only inside heads, but between heads, among heads and without heads (i.e. in cultural artifacts and systems).

It is our firm conviction that such interactions and interpersonal dynamics take place in modes of communication that include and depend on 'meaning' – here broadly conceived as the contents of communication. Meaning is one of the most taxing terms in the English language as any dictionary will reveal. This conference concentrates on problems concerning the relations between individual and collective linguistic and non-linguistic meaning and cognition in religion and religious practices, be that in mind, body, text, ritual, institutions, and/or objects. The issues of meaning and cognition converge on questions of individual and collective intentionality as well as on normative cognition, i.e. the capacity of human cognition to conform to socio-cultural expectations and pressures. Such unique human abilities depend on the exchange of meaning. As meaning is inter-subjective and most of the cognitive science methodologies are inherently individualistic and mentalistic, we expect creative and critical presentations and discussions. This being a working conference we welcome work in progress. Selected proceedings will be published with an acclaimed international publisher.

A presentation can be either short, i.e. 10 + 5 minutes or long, i.e. 30 + 15 minutes. Final date for submission of preliminary proposals including a 200 word abstract is March 2, 2009. Further inquiries are to be addressed to: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Phil. Jeppe Sinding Jensen (organizer) or Professor Dr. Phil. Armin W. Geertz (co-organizer), e-mail: jsj@teo.au.dk and awg@teo.au.dk

Further info on the RCC: www.teo.au.dk/en/research/current/cognition