

The Historiography of Science and Religion in Europe

with Jaume Navarro and Kostas Tampakis, “Science and Religion in Nineteenth-Century Europe: Non-Anglo-American Perspectives”; M. Alper Yalçinkaya, “‘Science,’ ‘Religion,’ and ‘Science-and-Religion’ in the Late Ottoman Empire”; Kostas Tampakis, “High Science and Natural Science: Greek Theologians and the Science and Religion Interactions (1832–1910)”; Agustín Ceba Herrero and Joan March Noguera, “Serving God, Fatherland, and Language: Alcover, Catalan, and Science”; Jaume Navarro, “Draper in Spain: The Conflicting Circulation of the Conflict Thesis”; and Neil Tarrant, “Science, Religion, and Italy’s Seventeenth Century Decline: From Francesco de Sanctis to Benedetto Croce.”

SCIENCE AND RELIGION IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY EUROPE: NON-ANGLO-AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES

by Jaume Navarro  and Kostas Tampakis

Abstract. This is an introduction to the thematic section on “The Historiography of Science and Religion in Europe,” which resulted from a symposium held at the eighth Conference of the European Society for the History of Science, University College London, UK, from September 14–17, 2018. The introduction provides a brief argument for the decentering of science and religion from the Anglo-American discourse. It concludes by previewing the contributions of the section’s essays.

Keywords: Catholic; European periphery; Islam; nation building; orthodox; science and religion

When trying to understand the relationships between science and religion, “there are deep reasons why a historical approach is not a luxury but a necessity” (Brooke and Numbers 2011, 3). Ever since the so-called complexity thesis came into the picture (Brooke 1991), historians of science have helped philosophers, sociologists, and theologians decenter the question of the supposed static relationships between science and religion. In the last decade, the analysis has moved beyond the diversity

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of relationships as such, as the complexity thesis did, and moved toward stressing the temporal and geographical contingency of both “science” and of “religion.” As is by now well known, Peter Harrison’s (2015) *The Territories of Science and Religion* has historicized the very notions of “science” and of “religion,” arguing that the relationship between both is a product of such evolution in modern times. His analysis is a much-needed step in de-essentializing “science” and “religion,” and one that has influenced the work of the authors in this thematic section. But we feel Harrison’s book still has a center: the Anglo-American, mainly Protestant, geography, institutions, and intellectual traditions.

Among the ground-breaking attempts to decenter the picture from a geographical point of view, we could mention the collective volume *Science and Religion around the World* (Brooke and Numbers 2011). In it, a number of scholars paid attention to other religious traditions such as Judaism and Islam, discriminating between “early” and “modern,” as well as Buddhism, “Indic,” “African,” and “Chinese” religions. As the editors acknowledge in their introduction, the very structure of the book, mixing geographical with “faith” categories, reveals the uneasiness of clearly demarcating the meaning of the term religion. As a matter of fact, it too often happens that science-and-religion studies “around the world” are heir to the very specific Anglo-American tradition of natural theology. Thus, for instance, there are plenty of studies of the reception of Darwin in X, assuming that since Darwin created a huge splash in Victorian society, he must have done so elsewhere, and in a similar manner. And yet, for many other contexts, it was Ernst Haeckel and Ludwig Büchner who carried the flag of Darwinian evolution. The same applies, to give a more contemporary example, to creationism in modern America. Since that is indeed a big science-and-religion issue in some states in the United States, some assume that it must be so in other geographical, cultural, and religious settings. It certainly is not, at least not to the same extent.

The essays in this thematic section suggest a decentering of the big picture of science and religion studies in, at least, a twofold way. Following a tradition started by Frank Turner (1978) a long time ago, a significant proportion of the conflicts between science and religion have very little to do with the contents of either science or religion and are much about the tensions between institutions in search for social legitimacy and cultural hegemony. If that is the case, and we think it is, the local and national contexts in which “science” and “religion” shape their identities, and thus, their relationships are very relevant. Moreover, since there have been hardly any global institutions of “science” and of “religion” before the internationalist movements and institutions post-World War II, it is highly misleading to address essentialist institutional histories of science-and-religion. As a result, the collection of essays in this section tries to shy away from histories about “Christianity and science” in general. The political, social, and

institutional role of the Christian churches in, say, Ireland, Spain, or Greece are very different, as well as the development of their national scientific institutions and traditions. Moreover, when addressing Islam in a profoundly changing state, such as that of modern Turkey, similarities emerge with “Christian nations” that point to the importance of discussing social, cultural, and national notions of modernity above and beyond religious dogmas.

Thus, we try to pay attention to the relationships between science and religion from the point of view of the roles played by the politics of nation building in several European countries, old and new, in the era of nationalisms. Significantly for our purposes, many of the stories refer to non-Protestant Christian religious traditions, namely, Catholic and Greek Orthodox, as well as Islam, and the geographical scope is the so-called European scientific periphery. Specifically, the essays are located at the time of the creation of modern Greece and modern Italy, one the result of the decline of the old Ottoman Empire and the other the outcome of the political unification of a cultural unity; as well as the political changes in Turkey and Spain. In all cases, we see that the role played by religion and religious institutions does not easily fit in the common narratives of the relationship between science and religion.

M. Alper Yalçinkaya addresses the tensions between an old and a new generation of writers and politicians in placing Islam, or a version of it, in the context of modern Turkey. Modernity, Islam, and science were terms in constant negotiation and the outcome was the creation of “Islam as Religion,” rather than a set of traditions, cultures, and practices. In other words, as Yalçinkaya convincingly shows, modern Turkish Islam evolved into a parallel of British Christianity insofar as the critical analysis of the texts of the Qur’an took center stage, in an effort to prove the lineage of modern science with *true* Islam.

Kostas Tampakis looks at the other side of the disciplinary fence and focuses on nineteenth-century Greek Orthodox theologians and their use of science within their own disciplinary narrative. In the traditional drama of science-and-religion narratives, theologians have been deuteragonists, reacting to science and scientists, rather than acting in their own right as historical actors. Tampakis shows that Greek Orthodox theologians, as the first experts of their kind to appear in Europe, used science to establish and delineate their own disciplinary narrative, in a way that goes above and beyond “addition, overlap, fusion, confusion, separation, complementarity or conflict,” to use another poignant phrase from Brooke and Numbers (2011, 2).

Agustín Ceba Herrero and Joan March Noguera introduce a very novel element in science-and-religion studies: linguistics. Following the career of Mallorcan priest, linguist, and polymath Antoni Maria Alcover, the authors trace the very complex networks between nationalism, language, and

religion in the Catalan-speaking territories in the late nineteenth century. The study and preservation of the Catalan language in its different forms was linked to the idea of nationhood or fatherland as well as that of tradition, Catholic religious tradition included. Alcover became the driving force of the first modern dictionary of the language, a scientific project in itself, with an eye to preserve and promote a language also capable of modern culture and science. This ground-breaking analysis of Alcover shows the neglect of many sciences, in this case linguistics, in the usual narratives of science and religion.

Jaume Navarro sets the reception of John W. Draper's famous *History of the Conflict between Religion and Science* in the context of Spanish nationalism in the last third of the nineteenth century. At a time of severe controversies between liberals and traditionalists stemming from their desire to shape the political landscape in Spain, Draper's book came in handy for the political purposes of the many camps in this dispute. A 70-page long prologue to the book by the politician Nicolás Salmerón sets the context in which the book became a weapon against Catholic Spanish traditionalism, not against "religion." It should be noted that the liberal tradition in Spain was highly distinctive inasmuch as it had drawn from the philosophy of Karl Christian Friedrich Krause and his emphasis on educational reforms, which had a strong religious, pantheistic tone.

Finally, Neil Tarrant takes us to the first decades of unified Italy and the attempts to create a new mythology of the modern country in opposition to the cultures of previous decades. Thus, as Tarrant shows, a number of liberal historians, drawing largely from the ethos of Hegel, felt the need to shape a number of myths so as to explain why Italy, in essence the seat of culture, science, and arts, had been prevented from fully embracing modernity. Not surprisingly, the Catholic Church became the central element in a historiography that presented the Church as an element alien to the essence of Italian culture and one preventing Italy from being what it truly was. Tarrant's very well-documented analysis, together with his previous work, helps us trace the origins of many so-called conflicts between science and religion to the political agendas of much later historians.

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