

HALL: Seminar Room 08

RELIGION, HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Abstracts

Hans-Ferdinand Angel (University of Graz/Austria)

Health as Matter for Credition: Christian Components for a Conceptual Belief

Recent evidence from cognitive neuroscience shows that believing is a fundamental brain function called credition. It integrates information which comes from the environment with the personal perspective taking of individuals. The believing process results in a subliminal stage in three types of beliefs which can be categorized as empirical, relational, and conceptual beliefs. They can also encompass so-called superordinate concepts which may become accessible to conscious awareness and can be part of the oral and ritual traditions of societies. For example, pain as well as health can be understood as such kind of superordinate concepts. The Christian faith aims in its core at salvation and redemption. In this presentation some aspects the Christian understanding of health will be presented. They include recorded examples from the Bible as well as examples of the work of art.

Lluís Oviedo (Antonianum University Rome/Italy)

Exploring the interaction between theology and studies on religion, health and wellbeing

Although research on religion, health and well-being has flourished in the last 10 years, it has received very little attention in theological circles, and the general impression is that such research and its interesting results may not be of interest to theologians concerned with the proper hermeneutics of Christian revealed texts. Two questions could motivate a greater engagement between the two fields. The first relates to the question above: what can theology learn from this body of research and its indications regarding the positive effects of religion? The second goes in the opposite direction: to what extent can theology contribute to refining and better understanding or applying such research? For

example, greater theological involvement could help to answer several open questions in this research, such as those concerning the different types of religion and their effects; or how to better understand and avoid misconceptions about the healing effects of religion; and how to avoid a complete instrumentalisation of religion as a result of this encouraging data.

Piotr Roszak (University of Tórun/Poland)

Saša Horvat (Medical University of Rijeka/Croatia)

Cognitive Resilience and Religion

This presentation examines the role of religion, particularly Christianity, in shaping cognitive resilience and its potential to enhance individuals' capacity to navigate challenges in a complex and often disorienting world. Far from being a vehicle for gullibility, religion is presented as a dynamic epistemological framework that critiques dominant narratives, supports emotional regulation, and facilitates effective coping strategies. Religion emerges as a source of various forms of resilience—moral, cognitive, cultural, existential, and spiritual—capable of reducing cognitive overload, fostering critical thinking, and transmitting intergenerational wisdom to help individuals and communities endure prolonged challenges. Mechanisms such as religious rituals, community support, and the construction of religious narratives are shown to play a key role in stabilizing individuals' lives, enabling them to reinterpret adversity, maintain ethical integrity, and strengthen group identity. The article argues that these resilience mechanisms naturally flow from the act of faith, illustrating the synergy between grace and human nature in fostering adaptive cognitive and emotional capacities.

Rüdiger J. Seitz (University Clinic [LVR-Klinikum] Düsseldorf/Germany)

Religion and Religiosity - a Cognitive Neuroscience Approach

Religion, health and well-being are linked by religiosity. Religiosity or spirituality as preferentially used in the Anglosaxon context denote the human capability and willingness to believe in transcendent forces. In my presentation I will show that believing is a central brain function that underpins the formation of beliefs and faith. In fact, the processes of believing integrate sensory information with a subject's emotional state. As the processes of believing evolve fast and outside conscious awareness they afford a subject's intuitive actions. In contrast, that what people believe can be articulated as beliefs and, thus, can become object of

reflective appraisal. Notably, the recently coined term *credition* encompasses a neuroscience model of belief formation and updating as well as the cognitive psychology of believing. It will be discussed that cognitive neuroscience of believing opens a new avenue for the understanding of how humans approach (any) religion when developing their individual religiosity.

Berenika Seryczyńska (Medical University of Rijeka/Croatia)

The Restorative Role of Pilgrimage: A Journey Toward the Source of Values

As evidenced by a number of studies in various scientific fields pilgrimage, a practice deeply rooted in the traditions of many cultures and religions, holds a profound restorative potential, offering therapeutic benefits on both individual and societal levels. This analysis explores how pilgrimage reconnecting participants with core values that cleanse, revitalize, and provide direction in life. Drawing on Alexis de Tocqueville's metaphor of "murky waters" in everyday culture, the concept emphasizes the need to reach the "pure waters" of fundamental truths—life-giving values that, like a clear spring, bring clarity and flourishing. As water requires purification to sustain life, pilgrimage allows individuals to reconnect with values that renew their inner clarity and vitality. By stepping out of daily routines and participating in a communal journey, pilgrims undergo a transformative process that imbues their lives with deeper meaning. These purified values nurture personal growth and sustain flourishing communities, ensuring they become a source of vitality rather than harm. Equally important is the social dimension of pilgrimage. It fosters dialogue across cultures and generations, strengthens social bonds, and builds resilience in communities. By addressing challenges such as societal fragmentation and the erosion of shared values, pilgrimage serves as a restorative practice for the broader social fabric. The analysis will draw on qualitative research conducted in 2024, examining the impact of pilgrimage on Polish culture. The study involved 20 expert interviews with academics, experienced organizers, members of St. James' brotherhoods, and seasoned pilgrims. Findings highlight pilgrimage as a force for spiritual renewal and social cohesion, reconnecting participants and communities with the "pure waters of values."

Jolana Wagner Skacel (Medical University of Graz /Austria: Department for Medical Psychology, Psychosomatics and Psychotherapy)

Credition, Communication and Resilience

Belief processes and perception processes are the basis of life for human beings. It enables us to thrive in contingent and changeable environments. In this respect, it stands for ability, resilience, potential and empowerment, as well as limitation and finiteness. Since belief processes, understood psychodynamically, are responsive to varying degrees - reacting meaningfully (adaptively and creatively) to internal and external circumstances - they can be understood as interaction and as a basic form of communication. With greater clarity and linguistic explicitness, a transmission from nature into culture and vice versa takes place. People become (self-)critical and political actors primarily as perceivers, as sensually capable. What is learned, practiced, practiced or neglected in a positive sense as abilities in certain forms and remains undeveloped concerns, for example, attention, empathy, interaction understanding, understanding of affectivity and emotional expression, responsibility and ethos. Among the countless resilience factors, social support stands out as one of the most empirically validated protective factors. Communication is the primary mechanism through which people connect with each other, establish and maintain relationships. At its core, communication is a process of "coming into relationship" with another person. It's not just about exchanging information, but also about shaping the way relationships are perceived and experienced. This is of particular importance in the clinical context. In this lecture, communication is viewed as a multifaceted construct consisting of belief processes and resilience.