

Religio Academici

PARTICIPATIO

*General Editors*

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# Religio Academici

*Essays On Scepticism,  
Religion and the Pursuit of Knowledge*



Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest

Edited by Péter Losonczi, András Szigeti, and Miklós Vassányi.

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## PREFACE

This anthology is a collection of essays on forms of scepticism and knowledge in academic scholarship, religion and everyday life from classical Antiquity to our times. Contributors—philosophers, historians, theologians—were invited to reflect on Karl Kerényi’s thoughts on this subject which he set out so eloquently in his essay *Religio Academici* placed at the head of this volume.

Our joint objective was to explore Kerényi’s inspiring suggestion that *mutatis mutandis* religion and academic scholarship share much common ground as they are both in the business of pursuing knowledge and of keeping sceptics at bay. But to what extent have religion and scholarship shared the same ideal of knowledge? Exactly which forms of scepticism are compatible with a religious and which with a scholarly stance? Is religion essentially dogmatic? Is scholarship essentially sceptical? At what point do doubt and criticism give way to all-encompassing scepticism and become destructive?

Needless to say, ideas about what is to know, what is worth knowing and what sort of doubt is the most threatening have changed over the ages. And so have the complex relationship of religion and scholarship, and more specifically, of theology and philosophy. Indeed, most of the essays of this volume take Kerényi’s thought as their point of departure for investigating the above questions from a historical perspective. But perhaps, despite all historical change, some forms of doubt and some ideals of knowledge have been with us forever. It is therefore fitting that some of the contributions also focus on what may be timeless aspects of sceptical and anti-sceptical strategies.

Following an English translation of KÁROLY KERÉNYI’s essay, the contributions are arranged in the chronological order of their subject-matter (with a few unavoidable overlaps). It is worth mentioning that Kerényi’s work was originally published in the journal *Pannonia*,

founded by himself, in 1938 (volume IV, issues 8-10, pp. 320-9). Kerényi draws on an analysis of Cicero's utterances on religion in *De natura deorum* to discuss the question how modern scholars of religion should approach religious phenomena and to develop his ideas on the more general themes described above.

In the next chapter, GYÖRGY GERÉBY investigates cognitive attitudes typically ascribed to historians of religions and theologians. His essay explores what we mean by the concept of "traditions of the forefathers" and studies the relationship between religion and the past, elaborating on the idea of religious memory.

GÁBOR KENDEFFY's contribution compares pagan and Christian ideas of learning, taking up the debate concerning the idea that the choice of one's philosophical master is an irrational act. Kendeffy then goes on to describe how Christian authors exploited this idea for the purposes of apologetics.

GÁBOR BORBÉLY's essay focuses on Nicholas of Autrecourt's theory of the principle of contradiction. Autrecourt was an interesting figure in the fourteenth-century revival of scepticism. In the context of the present volume, he is especially noteworthy for his novel approach to scepticism, especially as regards the attainability of infallible truths in philosophy.

A fascinating sample of Byzantine philosophy is presented in the paper by JOZEF MATULA. His discussion of leading Byzantine philosophers serves to show how deep religious commitment remained compatible with a continued interest in the tradition of ancient scepticism.

MIKLÓS VASSÁNYI investigates the philosophical interpretation of the Holy Trinity (especially of the Christ and the Holy Spirit) in several of Bruno's metaphysical works, both published and in manuscript. Reflecting on the difficult relationship between religion and philosophy, the essay concludes with an analysis of Bruno's concept of the Absolute.

DOMINIK PERLER is concerned to show that a theological debate could engender new philosophical ideas. Perler argues that Cartesian scepticism is not a natural philosophical problem that inevitably arises in every context. Rather, it is the outcome of a certain epistemological theory that opens up a radical gap between an inner and an outer world. This gap is not just the invention of Descartes, but surfaced as a result of a number of transformations in late medieval philosophy and theology.



The following essay also discusses the work of Descartes. PÉTER LOSONCZI advances the view that making a case against atheism—or at least against a certain form of atheism as reconstructed by Descartes—is an important component of the Cartesian programme. Coming to grips with this issue, Losonczi claims, can make an important contribution to a better understanding of the Cartesian *oeuvre*.

The essay by HERMAN DE DIJN places Spinoza's naturalism in the context of an early modern paradigm shift. De Dijn stresses that, paradoxical as this may seem at first sight, the Spinozistic rationalist philosophical system is tied up with a religious outlook which is not without mystical overtones. This "scientific mysticism" places the problem of the religion-science dialogue in a new light, especially as it resurfaces in scientific thought of later eras as well, shaping, among other things, Einstein's world view.

WILLEM LEMMENS offers an analysis of Hume's ethics, his naturalistic approach to morality and his development of a non-theistic ethics. He shows how Samuel Clarke and Francis Hutcheson defended an intrinsic link between religion and morality, while Hume's sceptical attack on the natural religion paradigm and rational theology led to the radical dissolution of theistic-providential metaphysics.

WALTER VAN HERCK discusses the nature and epistemic status of religious faith against the backdrop of Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* and the development of twentieth century analytical epistemology and philosophy of religion. Van Herck maintains that this issue cannot be treated outside the framework of religion as a form of life and practice. The question concerning the certainty of religious faith must also be addressed within this framework.

The paper by ANDRÁS SZIGETI reconstructs a non-standard form of scepticism which he refers to as practical scepticism. The "practical sceptic's challenge" posits that even if we can secure theoretical truth—for example the putative truth that moral responsibility is impossible—we may not be able to (and perhaps should not) live by this truth and that therefore theoretical and practical rationality can be irremediably locked in conflict. Szigeti discusses various answers to the practical sceptic (compatibilism, libertarianism, hard determinism, Strawsonian compatibilism, inclusivism) and proposes his own tentative solution as well.

Closing the circle, ÁDÁM MESTYÁN harks back to Kerényi's *Religio Academici*. Mestyán demonstrates that for an adequate understanding

of Kerényi's work one must take into account not only the disciplinary considerations of classical philology, but also pay heed to the historical, intellectual and political climate in which Kerényi wrote. This can throw light not only on the complexity of Kerényi's *oeuvre*, but also reveals why *religio* and *religio academici* were live problems at the time and may still very well be such today.

This anthology grew out of a workshop on Kerényi's *Religio Academici* organized jointly by Central European University (CEU) and the Philosophical Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. The workshop, which took place in November 2005, was hosted and co-sponsored by CEU and was also generously supported by the Local Societies Initiative Programme of the Metanexus Foundation.

The editors wish to thank those who helped organize and financially supported that event. We also gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the Local Societies Initiative Programme of the Metanexus Foundation, and of the József Irinyi Programme of the National Office for Research and Technology, which made the publication of this volume possible. For their invaluable professional advice we would especially like to thank Professor Gábor Borbély, coordinator of the József Irinyi Programme, and Professor György Geréby, chief academic series editor.

*Péter Losonczi, András Szigeti, Miklós Vassányi*

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**Herman De Dijn** received his PhD in philosophy from the Institute of Philosophy at the Catholic University Leuven (Louvain) in 1971. His area of research is modern philosophy, especially Spinoza and Hume. He held a number of guest professorships including the Belgian Francqui Chair of Philosophy in Louvain-la-Neuve (2001), the Spinoza Chair at the University of Amsterdam (2007), and the Erasmus Lectureship at Harvard University (2009). He is a member of the Royal Academy of Belgium and was Vice-Rector for the Humanities of his university from 1995 till 2000. He is the author of *Modernité et tradition* (Peeters-Vrin in Louvain-Paris, 2004). He writes (mainly in Dutch) on modernity and post-modernity, tradition and progress, toleration and democracy, religion and politics.

**György Geréby** CSc/PhD (1996, Hungarian Academy of Sciences) teaches late antique and medieval philosophy and philosophical theology at the Mediaeval Studies Department of the Central European University in Budapest. His latest publications include “Theistic fallacies,” in *Reflecting Diversity*, ed. Péter Losonczi and Géza Xeravits

(Wien–Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2007), 166–190; “Political Theology versus Theological Politics: Erik Peterson and Carl Schmitt,” *New German Critique* 105 (2008): 7–33; “Reasons and Arguments in the Clementina,” in *Nouvelles intrigues pseudo-clementines. Plots in the Pseudo-Clementine Romance. Actes du deuxième Colloque international sur la littérature apocryphe chrétienne, 30 VIII–2 IX 2006, Lausanne–Genève*, ed. Frédéric Amsler, Albert Frey, Charlotte Touati, Renée Girardet (Lausanne: Éditions du Zèbre, 2008), 211–222.

**Walter Van Herck** received his PhD in philosophy from the Institute of Philosophy of the Catholic University Leuven in 1996. He is associate professor of philosophy of religion at the University of Antwerp. His research interests include religious epistemology, religious language, and more broadly, the interaction between culture and religion. He wrote among others on Master Eckhart, David Hume, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and Michael Polanyi. Among his most recent publications is an article on the meaning of piety in a collection of essays dedicated to the late Dewi Z. Phillips (Ashgate, 2007).

**Gábor Kendeffy** is Associate Professor at the Károli Gáspár University of the Hungarian Reformed Church and at the University of Pécs. His main field of research is the philosophy and theology of the Church Fathers. He is author of two books: *Az egyházatyák és a szkepticizmus* (The Church Fathers and Scepticism, Budapest: 1999); *Mire jó a rossz? Lactantius teológiája* (What is evil good for? Lactantius’ Theology, Budapest: 2006).

**Károly (Carl, Karl) Kerényi** (January 19, 1897–April 14, 1973) born in Temesvár, Hungary (now Timișoara, Romania). Kerényi grew up to be one of the founders of modern studies in *Greek mythology*. He earned his doctorate from the University of Budapest with a dissertation on Plato and Longinus. He worked as a secondary school teacher in Hungary, travelled widely in Greece and Italy and attended courses at German universities. His academic appointments included a professorship of classical philology and ancient history at Pécs, and a visiting professorship in classical antiquity at the University of Budapest. In 1943, he moved to Switzerland. Unable to find work in Hungary during the Stalinist regime, Kerényi was forced to emigrate once again, for the rest of his life. He became a citizen of Switzerland in the late 1940s.

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