Abstract: Speculative Realism and Public Theology

“Things have to be gathered again” “Latour.

Revd Dr John Reader

The paper will offer an overview of how and why ideas emerging from Speculative Realism and related thinkers may provide a necessary and rigorous philosophical grounding for a Christian Realist approach to Public Theology. Brief references to the work of Brassier, Meillassoux and Graham Harman suggest areas for further exploration and development in this respect. Attention then turns to Bruno Latour, who, according to Harman, is an “object-oriented hero” and provides a new form of realist philosophy. His work on matters of concern rather than matters of fact, his questioning of the fact-value distinction, and his contribution towards new models and change and action offer new directions for a realist public theology.

"What's Missing? Gender, Reason and the Post-Secular"

Elaine Graham

This paper will consider whether contemporary debate about the 'post-secular' has overlooked the extent to which as a concept or epoch, the post-secular may be 'gendered'. There is certainly evidence of ambivalence: whilst the resurgence of 'religion' and things of the spirit may be interpreted as posing a challenge to modernity's emphasis on rationality, contemporary discourses founded on the continuing triumph of reason, science and secularism endure, potent as ever. Taking some recent discussions of the post-secular from writers such as Judith Butler and Jurgen Habermas, I will attempt to map some of the gendered contours of the post-secular and consider what future directions the debate might take.

'The work of purification and the turn towards practice in the study of religion'.
Anna Strhan

This paper draws on Latour's analysis of the work of purification in order to consider how the relation between words and things has been framed within the study of religion. Following anthropologist Webb Keane's use of Latour to investigate the relationship between Protestantism and the moral narrative of modernity, I trace the reasons for the recent turn towards materiality and practice in the sociology and anthropology of Christianity, and consider the ethical and epistemological implications of refocusing scholarly attention through the cultivation of a 'stubbornly realist attitude' (Latour 2004).

“Practising atheism: inhuman thoughts”
Steven Shakespeare

This paper will relate Derrida's deconstruction of the idea of sovereignty as a paradigm of decision to ideas of nihilism and necessity in Brassier and Meillassoux. My paper will explore whether speculative philosophies of the 'real' engender a new kind of methodological atheism, and what implications this might have for religious-political practice. Does the refusal of divine necessity open new possibilities for religious thinking which contest the division between practice and theory?

“Phenomenology and the Politics of Theistic Practice”
Pamela Sue Anderson

I propose to take the standpoint of a ‘phenomenological philosopher’ (cf. Glenndinning 2007, 27), in order to elucidate the epistemic disagreements which plague the method – the ‘how’ and not the ‘what’ – of philosophy of religion today. In particular, disagreements plague what I will construe broadly as ‘theistic practices’ of contemporary philosophers of religion, including the range of methods of post-secular ‘philosophers’ (i.e., ‘radical orthodox theologians’ or, ‘rot’ for short), of postcolonial theorists, but also of the most recent speculative philosophers whose epistemic practice seeks to de-contaminate the politics of theists and non-theists alike; this is a
politics of practices which have dominated philosophy of religion since the middle of the last century. My aim will be to support the new direction being taken by the younger generation of speculative philosophers who are working to break the stranglehold of Christian theology over twenty-first century philosophy of religion.

"Messianic Islam and Living as if Immortal: On the Fractured One of Shi‘ism"

Anthony Paul Smith

In this paper I will consider the contemporary forms of messianism at work in Islamic thought. My point of departure will be the work of Christian Jambet (French philosopher and expert in Islamic thought) who has done the most for showing the philosophical importance of the Ismaili Islamic tradition. At the heart of the paper will be a secular retrieval of the much maligned strategy of taqiyya and a discussion of the future of political Islam after the post-secular event.

“‘You turn if you want to’: The questions a Pragmatic Political Theology might ask of Speculative Realism”

Graeme Smith

The paper begins by examining some of the problems to be found in radical orthodox political theology in particular by considering the work of John Milbank. Three distinct problems emerge: the undermining of democracy; the utopian political programme; and the inconsistent relativism. Richard Rorty’s pragmatism is then suggested as a basis for a political theology which defends liberal democracy, seeks to reform capitalism whilst being both ethical and relativist. In particular the importance of rhetoric and empathy are explored. Finally the question is posed whether speculative realism can help in the project of defending democracy and reforming capitalism.
“Retrospective Speculative Philosophy: Looking for Traces of Žižek's Communist Collective in Emerging Christian Praxis”
Katharine Moody

In the closing chapter of *Living in the End Times*, Slavoj Žižek endeavours to ‘look for traces of the new communist collective in already existing social or even artistic movements’ (p.363). This paper explores what Žižek might see if he were to turn his cultural-critical gaze towards emerging Christianity. Increasingly used by ‘emerging church’ practitioner Peter Rollins to ‘retrospectively’ explain his own thought and practice, this paper examines the ways in which Žižek’s speculative materialism is already impacting contemporary Christian praxis. It interrogates the relationship between theory and practice, and questions the extent to which the speculative turn in philosophy of religion can inspire radically new forms of Christian sociality.

“Philosophy of Religion in an Age of Austerity”
Beverley Clack

This paper seeks to address the issues facing philosophy of religion as a subject in the academy in the light of the squeeze on funding for the arts, humanities and social sciences in the wake of the financial crisis and the Browne Review of university funding. My aim is to consider how philosophers of religion might respond to this changing context. Can the subject be reconfigured in order to contribute to a broader, richer agenda of how we might live in the 21st century? And can philosophers of religion, at the same time, challenge a changing context where the value of everything is increasingly being judged in terms of its potential to create wealth?