Narratives of Disenchantment and Secularization:
Origins, Contexts, Transformations

International Conference

October 28-29, 2017

Organized by Robert A. Yelle and Lorenz Trein

Interfaculty Program for the Study of Religion

LMU Munich

Venue:

LMU Munich, Historisches Seminar

Schellingstr. 12, K 001
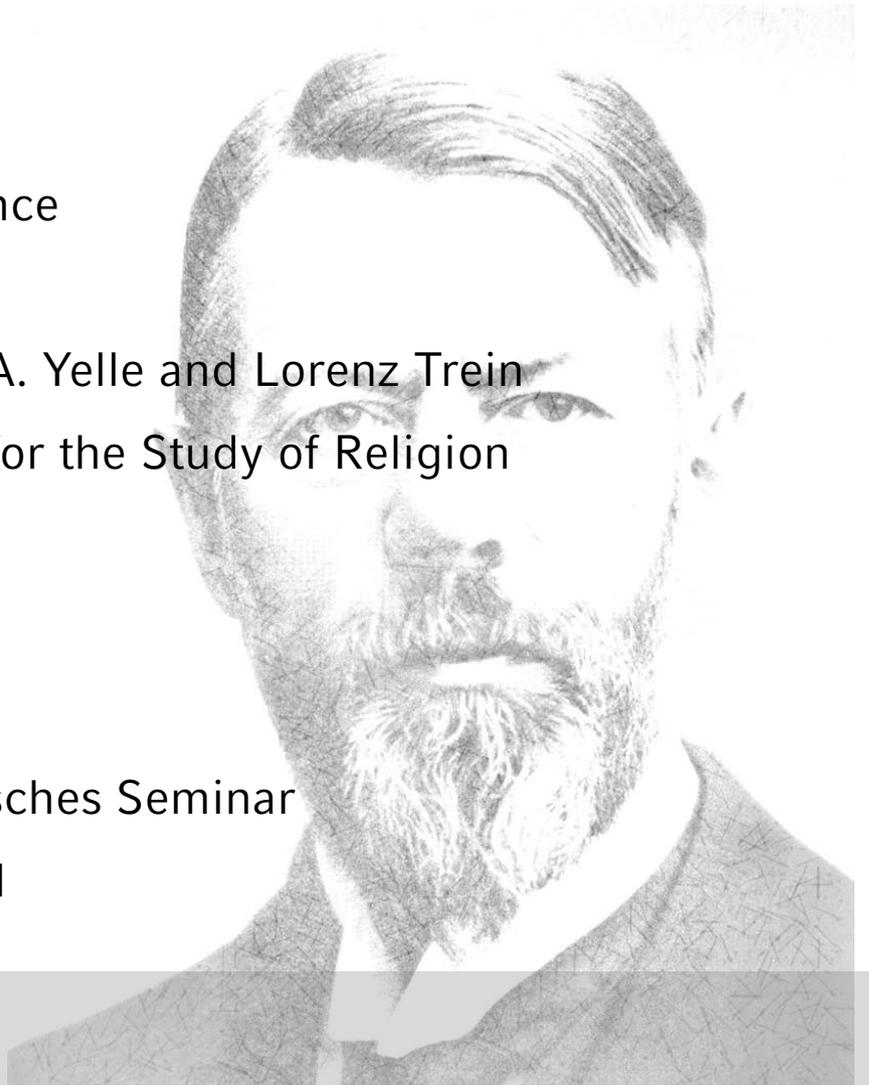
Conference Theme

The year 2017 marks the centenary of Max Weber's famous lecture "Science As a Vocation," given at Munich, in which he announced the "disenchantment" (Entzauberung) of the modern world. On the occasion of this event, this conference will explore narratives of secularization in historical and historiographical discourses on religion, beginning with the question of origins. This question concerns not only the historical derivation of the idea of disenchantment as understood by Weber and others, but also, and more broadly, notions of genealogical continuity as well as of "new beginnings," by which religion has been assigned a temporal position (often as part of an outmoded past) within competing narratives of modernization.

Although the question of which historical sources may have shaped Weber's understanding of disenchantment remains unresolved, some recent arguments suggest that his sociology of religion echoed themes in Protestant theology that were significantly older than such immediate and well-known influences as Rudolph Sohm and Adolf Harnack. Revisiting the influence of Protestantism, not only on Weber, but also on historical narratives of modernization and periodization more broadly, seems especially appropriate at this time, since 2017 will also be the "Luther-Jahr" or 500th anniversary of the beginning of the Reformation in Germany.

If disenchantment describes a moment of rupture with a primitive past, this is a trope that can be found, in various forms, not only in the idea of a "radical Enlightenment" that broke with a religious (and superstitious) past, nor only in the idea of a "dis-godded world" (entgötterte Welt) shared by numerous Romantics, but also in early Christianity, where the decline of oracles and cessation of miracles were regarded as positive events and attributed to Christ's Incarnation or Passion. These early Christian tropes drew upon even older pagan narratives, such as Plutarch's account of the Greek oracles' decline and the idea of the cessation of prophecy in ancient Judaism. The early Christian versions were taken up at the beginning of the Reformation, a movement, the name of which itself implies not a radical rupture, but instead a continuity and a return to origins.

It is not only the historical event of disenchantment (if this ever happened) but also the very idea, or narrative, of such an event that appears to have a theological genealogy. While reinforcing Weber's central insight regarding the influence of the Reformation on modernity, this recognition also heightens the crisis over the "legitimacy" of modernity to which Hans Blumenberg responded by criticizing Weber's (and Karl Löwith's and Carl Schmitt's) idea of secularization as a continuity between modernity and its religious past, and by characterizing modernity conversely as an overcoming of inherited problems.

Moving beyond the narrow question of Weber's influences, the conference aims to contribute to a sharpening of his diagnosis of what modernity represents, particularly vis-à-vis religion, through an investigation of the origins, dissemination, nature, and function of narratives of secularization. The conference will examine tropes of continuity and discontinuity, and of disenchantment and Enlightenment, in historical and historiographical discourses on religion in order to evaluate the function that such narratives play in an overall philosophy of history.

Keynote Speaker

Jonathan Israel, Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton

Speakers

Egil Asprem, Stockholm University

Joydeep Bagchee, LMU Munich

Gustavo Benavides, Villanova University

Wolfgang Eßbach, Freiburg University

Ernst van den Hemel, Meertens Institute, Amsterdam

Jason Josephson-Storm, Williams College

Hans G. Kippenberg, Jacobs University Bremen

Michael Saler, University of California at Davis

Lorenz Trein, LMU Munich

Monika Wohlrab-Sahr, Leipzig University

Robert A. Yelle, LMU Munich

Conference Programme

Saturday, 28 October 2017

9.15　　　　**Welcome and Introduction**

9.30　　　　**Hans G. Kippenberg**: *Dialectics of Disenchantment. Devaluation of the Objective World — Revaluation of Subjective Religiosity*

10.30　　　　**Coffee Break**

11.00　　　　**Egil Asprem**: *Science as a Commodity: Disenchantment and Conspicuous Consumption*

12.00　　　　**Robert A. Yelle**: *Disenchantment as a Secularized Theological Narrative*

13.00　　　　**Lunch**

14.30　　　　**Gustavo Benavides**: *The Production of Enchantment*

15.30　　　　**Wolfgang Eßbach**: *Probleme einer religionssoziologischen Typologie europäischer Religionen*

16.30　　　　**Coffee Break**

17.00　　　　**Jonathan Israel** (keynote): *Radical Enlightenment and the Secularization of the Western World (1650-1850)*
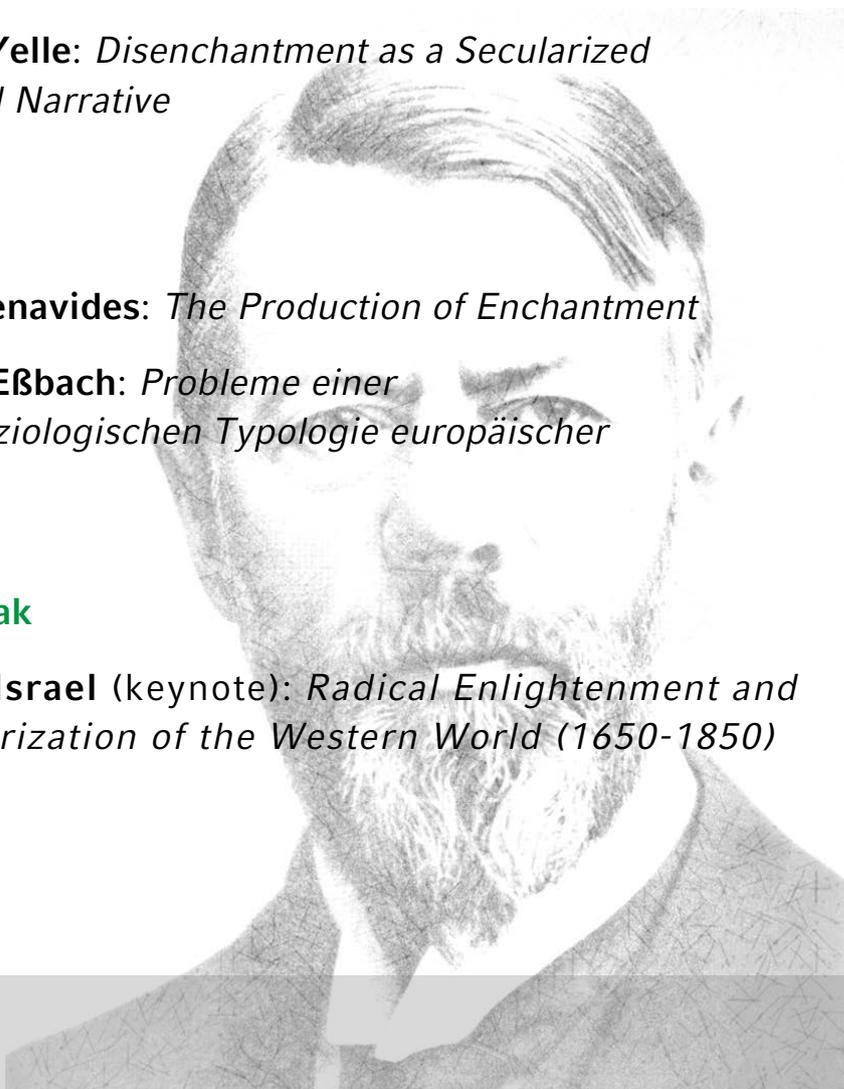
Sunday, 29 October 2017

9.30   **Lorenz Trein**: *Multiple Times of Disenchantment in the Study of Historical Thought*

10.30   **Coffee Break**

11.00   **Ernst van den Hemel**: *Postsecular Nationalism? Appeals on the Judeo-Christian Roots of Secularity in the Dutch "Turn to the Right"*

12.00   **Jason Josephson-Storm**: *The Rationalization of Magic*

13.00   **Lunch**

14.30   **Monika Wohlrab-Sahr**: *Counternarratives: Critiques of Secularism, Holistic Ideals, and Their History*

15.30   **Michael Saler**: "Fictionalism" and the Disenchanted Enchantments of Western Modernity

16.30   **Coffee Break**

17.00   **Joydeep Bagchee**: *Myth, History, Religion*

18.00   **Closing of the Conference**
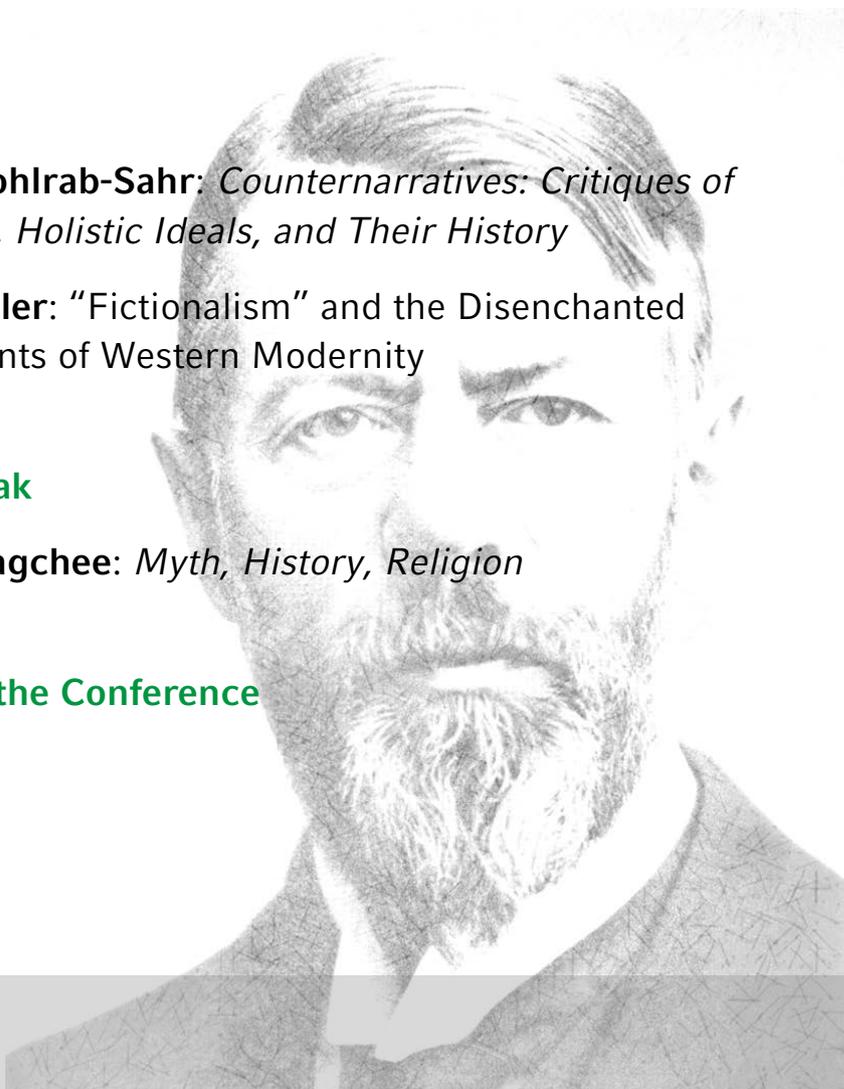
Abstracts

Egil Asprem: **Science as a Commodity: Disenchantment and Conspicuous Consumption**

Weber's most evocative pronouncement on the disenchantment of the world came in the context of spelling out the internal, vocational calling of "modern empirical science." The dissipation of irreducible mystery rapidly progresses as the scientist, dispassionately and value-neutrally, uncovers the mechanisms of nature and paves the way for rational-technological domination. But there were clouds on the horizon: the polemical aspect of Weber's lecture bears witness of the fashionably anti-intellectual *Lebensphilosophie* movement as well as the constant failure of some natural scientists to shy away from extrapolating grand theological claims from their "pure facts."

The unwillingness of certain intellectuals to play by disenchanted rules need, however, not be a problem for the thesis that disenchantment will continue; as a social process, it is driven less by the attitudes of a miniscule subculture of academics than by the material *products* of science that restructure society along utilitaristic and rational lines. If we want to know how science and technology impact on the place of religion, spirituality, and "magic" in the modern world, then, we must not only consider their professional and vocational aspects, but also the role of the *consumer* of science. In short, we must consider science as a commodity.

The first theorist to systematically look at academia from the perspective of consumerism was Weber's eccentric critic from across the Atlantic, the theorist of the "leisure class," Thorstein Veblen. This lecture will establish a dialogue between Weber and Veblen on the characteristics of "science consumption", relating it to recent debates on the "disenchantment" or "re-enchantment" of science in the modern and contemporary world. Viewing science as *conspicuous consumption* may help explain the behavior of some of the unruly intellectuals in Weber's 1917 audience.

Joydeep Bagchee: **Myth, History, Religion**

A discussion of narratives of disenchantment and secularization requires us to first thematize the relationship of narrative to history. Before we can ask whether Weber's analysis of religion either presupposes or justifies us in assuming a historical event of disenchantment, we must first clarify the relationship of religion and history. Robert Yelle pointedly asks: "To what extent is religion 'in' history, and to what extent is history 'in' religion?" If history, especially as secular, world history exists "in" religion and, moreover, a specific religion (Christianity), then the question of the historical reality of disenchantment is already prejudicial. This paper attempts to unravel the relationship of history and religion by relating them to a third term: *myth*. I will argue that the stability and autonomy we attribute to secular, world history prevents us from recognizing its mythic features, above all, that it has the common structure of a narrative recounted to organize experience, provide meaning, and orient us toward a salvific *telos*.

Gustavo Benavides: **The Production of Enchantment**

Entzauberung, *Entgötterung* and similar expressions presuppose that a world populated by gods and suffused by magic lost its gods and its magic at some point. That such processes do regularly take place is undeniable, just as it is undeniable that processes of disenchantment seem to have reached their most extreme form with the development of Western modernity. At the same time, we must consider that just as a world becomes *entzaubert*, it can become *verzaubert*, and, more generally, that there is a back and forth between discourses of disenchantment and those of enchantment that does not follow a linear development. We must also be mindful of the interplay between enchanted and disenchanted views of the world found outside the Western tradition, particularly in India, as shown by the Buddha's ridiculing of Brahmin claims and, more radically, by the Indian materialists. After a brief consideration of Indian developments, we will concentrate on the Western tradition. We will examine Lucian of Samosata's

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"On sacrifices" and "On funerals," and will compare those disenchanted second-century texts with two composed almost seventeen centuries later, namely, Joseph de Maistre's *Éclaircissement sur les sacrifices* (1810) and Franz von Baader's *Theorie des Opfers* (1836). Having examined specific instances of the interplay between enchantment and disenchantment, we will address the problem of origins and will examine whether it is possible to identify the processes whereby a world becomes suffused by magic and inhabited by gods in the first place—in other words, whether we can identify the mechanisms through which a kind of original *Verzauberung* occurs. This will be done in a speculative manner by focusing, first, on the transition from immediate to delayed consumption among hunter gatherers, and, second, by examining the process of material and symbolic accumulation by the early states.

Wolfgang Eßbach: **Probleme einer religionssoziologischen Typologie europäischer Religionen**

In meinem Beitrag setze ich mich zunächst mit zwei religionstypologischen Modellvorstellungen auseinander. Zum einen geht es um binäre Typisierungen, wie die Selbstbeschreibungen von „wahrer Religion" und anderen „falschen Religionen", die für den europäischen Religionsbegriff prägend gewesen sind. In Diskursen der Fremdbeschreibung kehrt die binäre Typisierung als Unterscheidung von Religion und „Nicht-Religion" bzw. Religion und „Pseudoreligion" nach Maßgabe der jeweiligen Definition von Religion wieder. Auch die Rede von Säkularisierung oder Entzauberung folgt einem Binarismus. Eine zweite Gruppe von Typisierungen orientiert sich an Modellen einer Evolution religiöser Vorstellungen in einer universalgeschichtlichen Perspektive z.B. von ‚primitiven' Religionen zu Erlösungsreligionen. Verflochten sind diese Modelle mit der Typisierung der hochkulturellen Lokalisierung von Weltreligionen und ihren diversen Untergliederungen. Gegenüber binären und an religiöser Evolution orientierten Modellvorstellungen plädiere ich für eine Historische Religionssoziologie, die die

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vergangenen Semantiken des Religiösen, ihre Schichtungen und Konkurrenzen, diskursanalytisch aufnimmt und erfahrungsgeschichtlich zu den epochalen Zeiterfahrungen der europäischen Moderne und ihrer Aktualisierbarkeit in Beziehung setzt.

Ernst van den Hemel: **Postsecular Nationalism? Appeals on the Judeo-Christian Roots of Secularity in the Dutch "Turn to the Right"**

During the 2017 parliamentary elections, the leader of the Christian Democrats was asked about the importance of Judeo-Christian values, a hotly debated topic during these elections. His response: "This is about who we are. Things that we've had for thousands of years like the equality between man and woman. These are the things we should protect." The claim that the Netherlands have been characterized by religiously inspired equality for thousands of years might seem a bit outlandish, but it is a telling example of an important and influential phenomenon: appeals on Judeo-Christian roots of Dutch society and claims about the origin and nature of Dutch secularity figure prominently in contemporary political debates. Roughly since the beginning of the millennium, Dutch society has experienced a "turn to the right." Exemplified by the rise of the populist PVV, which, amongst other things, has proposed to devote the first article of the Dutch constitution to the Judeo-Christian origins of Dutch society, religion and secularity have been hotly debated in this turn. The populist PVV, the liberal VVD and the Christian Democrats have all claimed the importance of highlighting and protecting the religious roots and values of Dutch society. Remarkably, all sorts of secular values are associated with this "Judeo-Christian" tradition: from the separation of church and state to gay rights and feminism, values associated with progressive secular Dutch self-image have been reframed as illustrative of the "superiority" of "Judeo-Christianity."

Whereas frequently a secular framework is used to make sense of the

turn to the right in the Netherlands, this paper argues that a postsecular reflection on history, secularity and religion is at work which is actively reframing the social imaginary of Dutch secular national identity.

By close-reading recent Dutch political discourse on "Judeo-Christianity," and by contrasting this with dominant historiographies of secularity, this paper maps the many ways in which narratives of the origins of Dutch secularity and its religious past and present are actively rewritten during the rise of Dutch nationalism. The paper concludes with a short comparison of the Dutch context with other Western European contexts, including France and Germany.

Jason Josephson-Storm**: The Rationalization of Magic**

"Magic, for example, has been just as systematically 'rationalized' as physics"

Max Weber, *Der Sinn der "Wertfreiheit*," 1917

Many nonspecialists understand disenchantment as a poetical synonym for secularization; and even most Weber scholars take the phrase "the disenchantment of the world" (*Die Entzauberung der Welt*) at face value and assume that a disenchanted world has absolutely no magic in it. It is often assumed that Weber thought that the death of magic was the natural consequence of rationalization.

But as evidenced in Weber's own writings (including the quote above), Weber not only believed that magic persisted in modernity, but that it was possible for magic itself to be rationalized. This paper will begin by recapping some of my new book *The Myth of Disenchantment* to demonstrate both the contemporary persistence of belief in spirits and magic and also to show that Weber himself was no stranger to the occult milieu. Indeed, as I interpret Weber, we live in a *disenchanting* world in which magic is embattled and intermittently contained within its own cultural sphere, but not a disenchanted one in which magic is gone. After laying out this background, I will deploy Weberian theory to

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reconstruct what it can tell us about the rationalization of magic.

Hans G. Kippenberg: **Dialectics of Disenchantment. Devaluation of the Objective World – Revaluation of Subjective Religiosity**

Max Weber was interested in the fate of religion precisely in the modern period, but he did not apply the concept of secularization for this. Richard Swedberg did not include "secularization" in the lexicon of Max Weber's key words, but he did include "disenchantment." For Weber, "secularizing" and "secularization" are concepts from the history of law that had been employed since classical antiquity to denote the transfer of land, institutions, and persons from ecclesiastical to secular law. When we inquire into Weber's understanding of religious history in the modern period, it is "disenchantment" that occupies the central position. Highly pithy remarks by Max Weber have favored this thematic concentration. For example, in his celebrated discourse about "Science As a Profession" (*Wissenschaft als Beruf*) in 1917 in Munich, he observed:

"The world is disenchanted. One need no longer have recourse to magical means in order to master or implore the spirits, as did the savage, for whom such mysterious powers existed. Technical means and calculations perform the service. That is all what intellectualization means."

The advantage of this way of looking at things is that there is a correspondence between progress in scientific knowledge and the bases of religion. Religions divesting the world of magic and denying any inner-worldly salvation change their own basis of existence. The notion of a disenchantment of the world generates a dialectics of religion different from the notion of secularization.

"In a world increasingly divested of magic ('mit zunehmender Entzauberung der Welt'), religiosity must take on increasingly (subjective) irrational meaning relationships (ethical or mystical, for instance)."

"Categories of Interpretive Sociology" - (1981 [1913]), 155.

This is the notion used by Max Weber when he turned to comparative

religious studies. Hence my paper addresses:

1. Weber's concept of the process and consequences of disenchantment in his "Religious Communities" and other contemporary texts.

2. Dialectics of disenchantment of religion in recent approaches to history, nature and society.

Michael Saler: "Fictionalism" and the Disenchanted Enchantments of Western Modernity

Max Weber's 1917 invocation of the "disenchantment of the world" expressed the ambivalent view that modern science and rationality had superseded traditional religious and supernatural outlooks, evacuating the world of divine purpose and universal meaning. Instead, different forms of reason and morality prevailed in multiple cultural domains, with rationality, efficiency and calculability as the impersonal keywords of the age. Weber's emphasis on modernity as both inherently disenchanted and secular, however, has been challenged in recent years. Scholars have shown how contemporaries addressed the problem of disenchantment by attempting to re-enchant the world in a variety of ways. They have also demonstrated that secularism did not mean the subtraction of religion from everyday life, but rather the proliferation of religious and spiritual options (including that of non-belief).

Such reconsiderations have also allowed us to revisit the dominant paradigm of Western modernity as being founded upon the Enlightenment emphasis on reason. Intellectual histories of the eighteenth century increasingly acknowledge the importance of the imagination and feelings to the philosophies and practices of the age, and from a twenty-first century perspective it is clear that the Romantic stress on the imagination has been no less constitutive of modernity than the Enlightenment faith in reason. This has resulted in a world that is simultaneously disenchanted by reason and re-enchanted by the imagination: modernity permits "disenchanted

enchantments," combining both. "Enchantment" has always had the dual meaning of "to delight" and "to delude"; an ideal, and specifically modern, form of enchantment would be one that fostered delight while forestalling delusion.

My talk will focus on one important tributary to modern disenchanted enchantment: the rise of "Fictionalism" beginning in the late nineteenth century. Fictionalism signifies the use of "story" as a master metaphor for how we understand the world and ourselves. It maintains that all domains of thought, including science and religion, are necessarily provisional and contingent constructs, narratives that differ in their types of truth claims. Fictionalism is an ironic, self-referential discourse applied to all discourses, which can be found in Nietzsche's perspectivism, American pragmatism, scientific "descriptionism" and "conventionalism," and varieties of existentialism and postmodernism. It was also found in the new mass culture of the *fin de siècle* and after. Novels, comic strips and films often commented on their status as fictions, just as new genres appeared that consciously merged fiction and non-fiction (e.g. "Autobiografiction," which was coined in 1906 to reflect the constructed, artifactual nature of life narratives).

I will focus on how Fictionalism expressed itself in modern fantasy fiction since the late nineteenth century, which tended to be "stories about stories," training its readers to see all other discourses in fictionalist terms. Christian believers, such as G.K. Chesterton, J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis, depicted God as the Supreme Artist, humanity as sub-creators, and existence as a great Story. Their religious outlook represents a form of disenchanted enchantment, in that they stressed the provisional and contingent, "human-all-too-human" understanding of transcendent and universal truths. A similar disenchanted enchantment characterized fantasy works by their secular contemporaries Oscar Wilde, Hope Mirrlees and James Branch Cabell, who found marvels and meaning in aesthetic fictions rather than religious doctrines. I will conclude that Fictionalism has become a common ground between allegedly oppositional outlooks, such as science and religion, secularism and spirituality – just as modernity unites other seeming binaries, such as reason and the imagination, enchantment and

disenchantment.

Lorenz Trein: **Multiple Times of Disenchantment in the Study of Historical Thought**

Following both historical and philosophical arguments, the rise and dissemination of modern concepts like "progress" and "history" has often been told as closely intertwined with transformations of particular religious legacies. Therefore, secularization and disenchantment are frequently depicted and conceived of as historical conditions of modernity and corresponding temporalities. Meanwhile, this interpretation was challenged only recently by an argument in the study of historical thought, according to which the emergence of distinct modern notions like "progress" and "historicity" rather appears to be a problem of synchronizing "different" or "multiple times." One implication of this approach to understanding the history of historical ideas is a historiographical displacement of secularization and disenchantment from our religious imagination of modernity. Instead of reifying such a modernist claim, my paper aims to invert this criticism of a supposedly monolithic secular time by musing on a multiple temporalities approach to disenchantment and secularization. The main focus will be on differentiating a few layers of inquiry for retelling the complex overlap of its various temporal dimensions in the study of historical discourse on religion, modernity, and a disenchanted world.

Monika Wohlrab-Sahr: **Counternarratives: Critiques of Secularism, Holistic Ideals, and Their History**

Whereas concepts of secularization and disenchantment have been central elements of modernization theories for decades, in the meantime they seem to be widely discredited, especially when they are used to make sense of non-European developments. Diagnoses of secularization have been demystified as "myths" of modernity, and concepts as well as instititions of secularism have been discredited as

– often violent – Western impositions to the non-Western world. Not only their political imposition, it is argued in these counternarratives, but also the narratives of secularization and the conceptual divide between the secular and the religious as such, are alien to the worlds to which they have been imposed.

The paper takes a closer look at central strands of this critique, especially with regard to the Islamicate world and to India. The thesis is that parts of this critique implicitly or explicitly employ concepts of wholeness and totality that are juxtaposed to the divisive nature of secularisation and secularism. This resonates with early – e.g. Romantic – critiques of secularization in the European history. It leads, it is argued, against the very intentions of the critics, to an "othering" of the non-European world. And it leaves the question for the existence of distinctions and differentiations between the religious and the non-religious in this part of the world chronically unanswered.

Robert A. Yelle: **Disenchantment as a Secularized Theological Narrative**

In the past century since Max Weber delivered his Munich lectures on "Science As a Vocation" (1917), his characterization of European modernity as the result of a process of rationalization, "disenchantment" (*Entzauberung*), and the decline of charisma has been enormously influential. In recent decades, however, this historical account has come under attack from various directions. Some scholars, including Wouter Hanegraaff, Egil Asprem, and Jason Josephson-Storm, have provided rich intellectual histories detailing the many ways in which modernity, even in some of its most scientific and critical dimensions, has been nourished by currents of esotericism and indeed remains enchanted. Others, such as Talal Asad and Michael Saler, have argued that the very idea of disenchantment represents a retrospective construction of an enchanted past, one that is possibly no older than Romanticism. Both

of these critiques pose significant challenges to still-dominant accounts of the origins of modernity through a break with a religious past, as forcefully articulated by Jonathan Israel in *Radical Enlightenment* (2001) and other works. My argument will be that, as Josephson-Storm shows in his recent book, *The Myth of Disenchantment* (2017), and as I indicated already in my earlier book, *The Language of Disenchantment* (2013), Weber's idea of disenchantment is a late iteration of one of the charter myths of modernity. Indeed, this myth is far older than has been recognized; its origins are to be located in early Christian supersessionist narratives, according to which Christ silenced the pagan oracles by driving demons from the world, and the Gospel ushered in a new dispensation, one that replaced Mosaic law and witnessed the last miracles. Each of these tropes was taken up by Protestants early in the Reformation, well before their adaptation by the radical or skeptical Enlightenment. The idea that miracles ceased was normative doctrine in English Protestantism already by 1600, long before the Deist period, and developed in ways that directly anticipated not only Weber's idea of disenchantment, but also his related idea of the routinization of charismatic authority, as further detailed in my forthcoming book, *Sovereignty and the Sacred*. Although the widespread dissemination of such narratives makes the question of Weber's specific sources somewhat beside the point, it is also clear that he was familiar with the idea of the cessation of miracles, an idea to which he refers in *Economy and Society* and which he may have taken from either Rudolph Sohm or Adolf Harnack. Much of what Weber reported as scientific history now appears deeply indebted to Protestant theological polemics. From a broader perspective, what is most important is to understand the phenomenon to which Weber directed our attention: the manner in which modernity reflects the legacy of its own, Christian past. My contribution, then, is simultaneously a critique of and an homage to this great scholar of the past century.