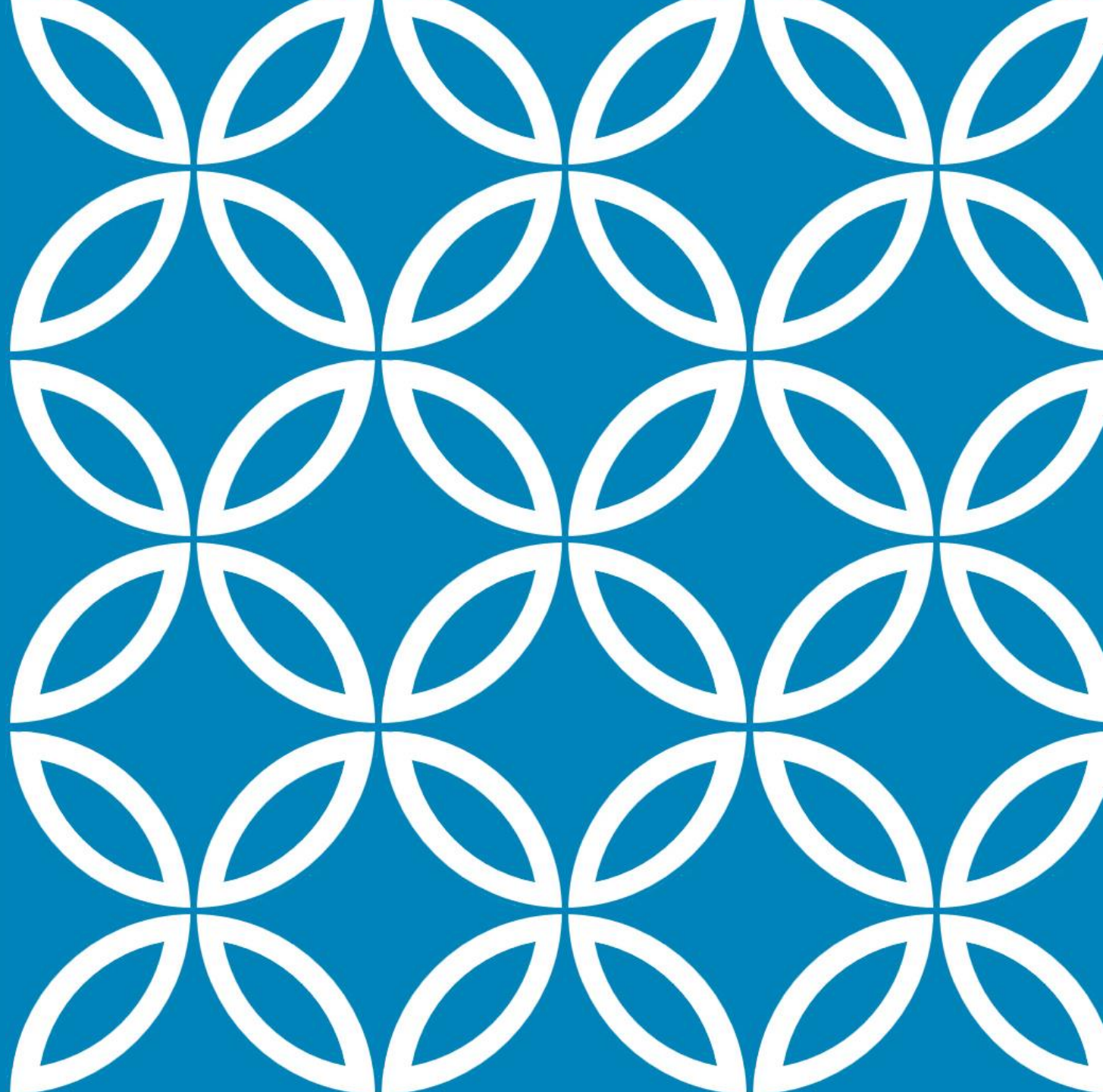
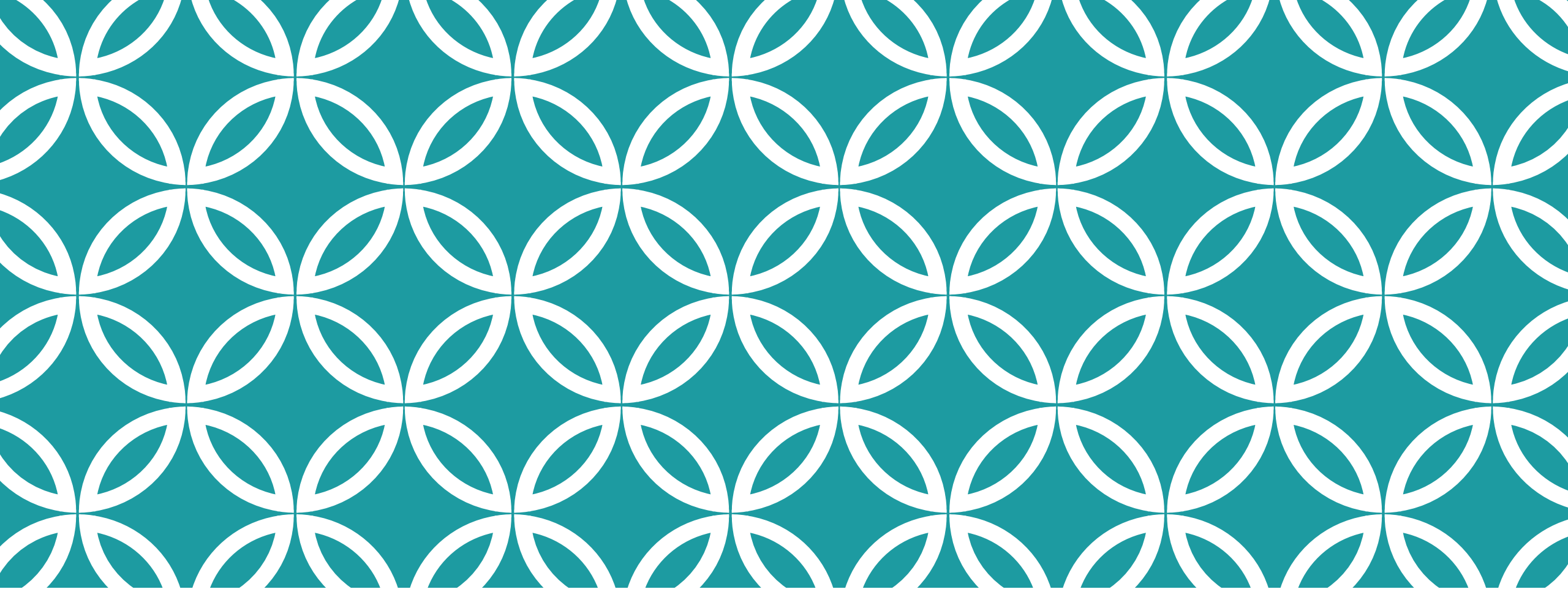


METHODS AND APPROACHES IN INTERFAITH STUDIES

Dr Angus M Slater





DEFINITIONS AND LINGUISTIC APPROACHES TO DIALOGUE



REVISION

In the last section, we examined the social characteristics and processes associated with the notion of 'post-modernity' and developed some awareness of the concept of post-modernity works to explain our current societies.

We examined differing scholarly opinion on the form of after-modernity we currently inhabit – post, late, and hyper – and teased apart the conceptual differences.

We also identified the way in which post-modernity rejects and refutes the idea of meta-narrative – arguing that meta-narratives are now impossible to convincingly uphold.



REVISION

You also had four readings to complete (Clarke & Wenzel, Ward, Smith, and Habermas) which sought to flesh out the concepts behind post-modernity and to relate this debate to the form of study you are doing in the field of religion.

Make sure that you engage with the discussion forums on Moodle and offer up a question for reflection for the group.

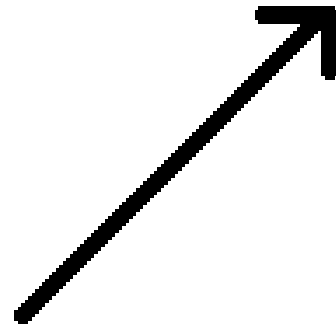


PREMODERN



"Because God put it there and that's the way it's always been."

MODERN

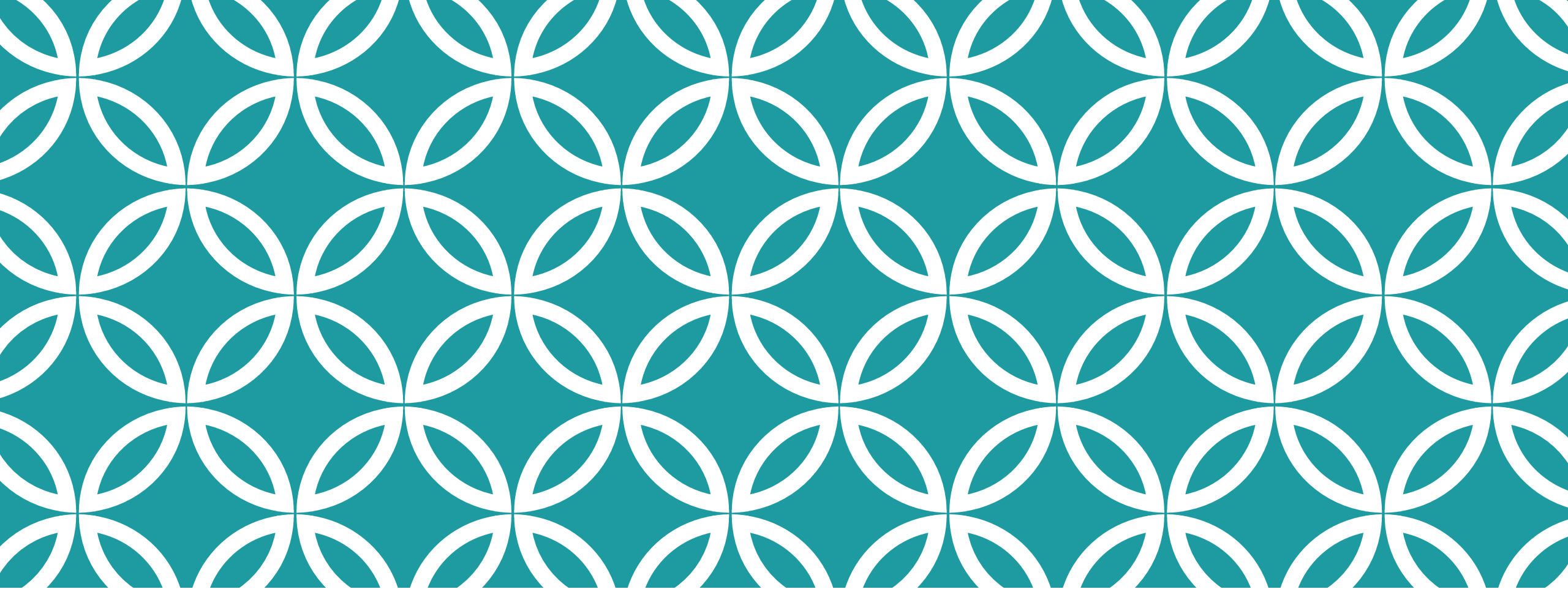


"Onwards and upwards with inevitable progress!"

POSTMODERN



"Bllpppgggghljsdlkfjowejfalsk djflksdjflksjldjl;aldfllkj;;;df"



RELIGIOUS STUDIES / THEOLOGY

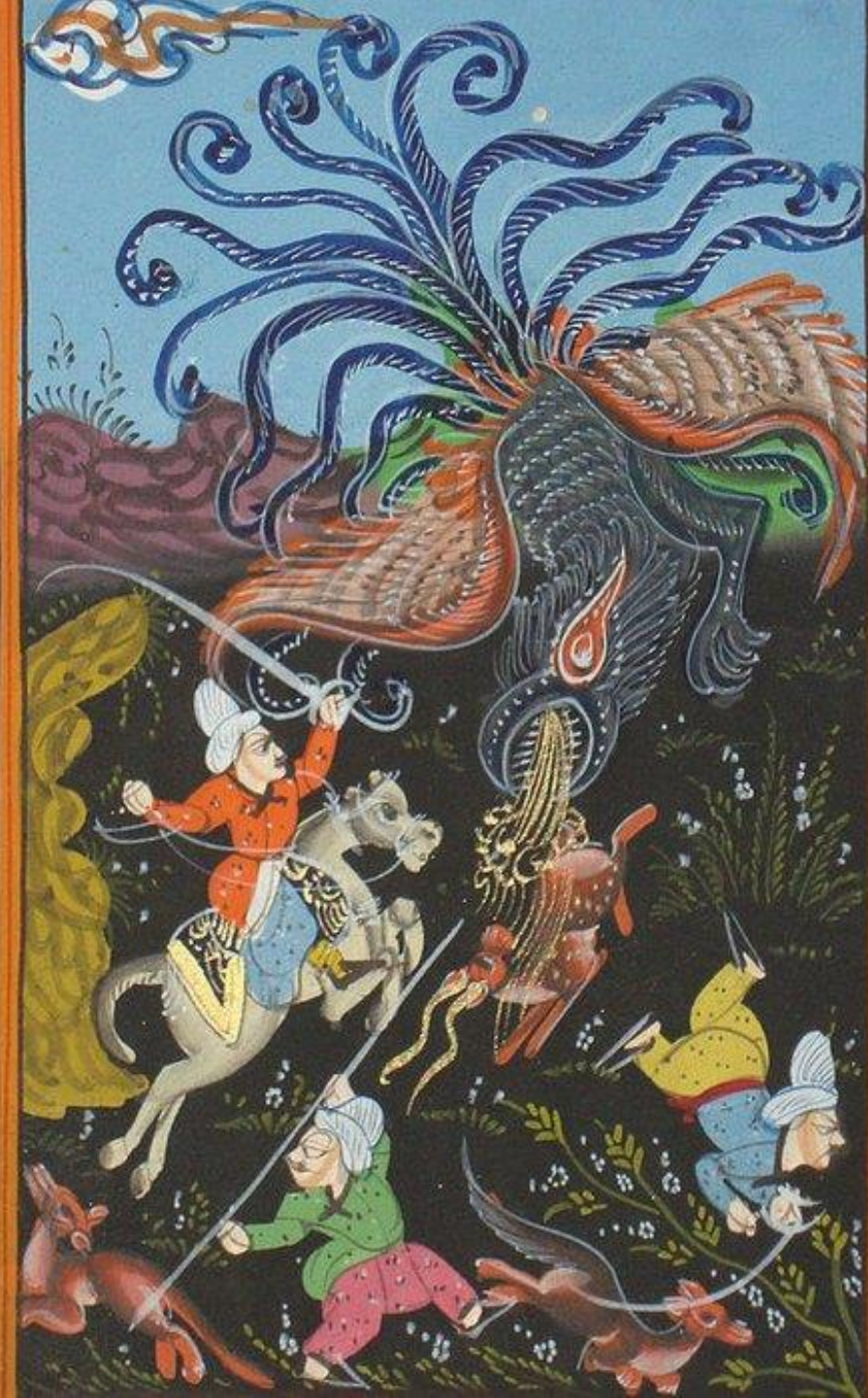


RELIGIOUS STUDIES / THEOLOGY

Having looked at some theoretical investigation of our current society, the module now turns towards looking at the various categories and definitions that we use when discussing religion and dialogue.

Some of you may be coming from established academic backgrounds, where disciplinary differences are old hat, but some (most!) students on this course will be newer to the breadth of disciplines which touch on the study of religion.

One of the first you will come across is the distinction between 'theology' and 'religious studies' – a distinction of content, aim, and method when it comes to studying religion.





RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Religious studies is generally the study of religion as a phenomenon- a thing that occurs or exists and requires rational explanation (a phenomenological approach).

It attempts to understand the broad social trends and features of that thing called “religion” through the use of social scientific methods

It adopts a position of objectivity regarding the truth claims and practices of religious faiths.



THEOLOGY

Theology is, largely, the study of the internal logic of a religious faith and its interaction with the outside world.

It generally assumes that the practitioner is a member of the faith being studied, seeking to come to a greater understanding of their own faith

It produces arguments based on history / faith / reason that attempt to persuade members of that faith, subjective in form and function.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES / THEOLOGY

Religious studies attempts to adopt something akin to a scientific ideal, adopting broadly modernistic presumptions, such as that one cannot rationally argue about faith, or offer compelling arguments where faith is involved. The project is therefore largely descriptive and explanatory.

Theological studies often assumes that this project is misconceived (that Theology/Religion is just not as *simple* a discipline as the natural sciences are), not to mention naïve. This is because Theology assumes that religious traditions have meaning, and therefore attempts to engages with questions of truth.



RELIGIOUS STUDIES / THEOLOGY

Religious studies accuses Theology of being too 'religious', because it assumes the meaningfulness and truth of the religious tradition. Theology can only ever be subjective and therefore has no place in a rational study of religion.

Theology accuses Religious studies of being too 'modernistic' and (therefore) 'secular' in its approach — it assumes just as much about the validity of knowledge as Theology does, but fails to acknowledge it. Theology sees itself as both more pre- and post- modern than religious studies.



QUESTIONS

If Religious Studies adopts an objective view of things when studying religion, what forms of knowledge are produced by it?

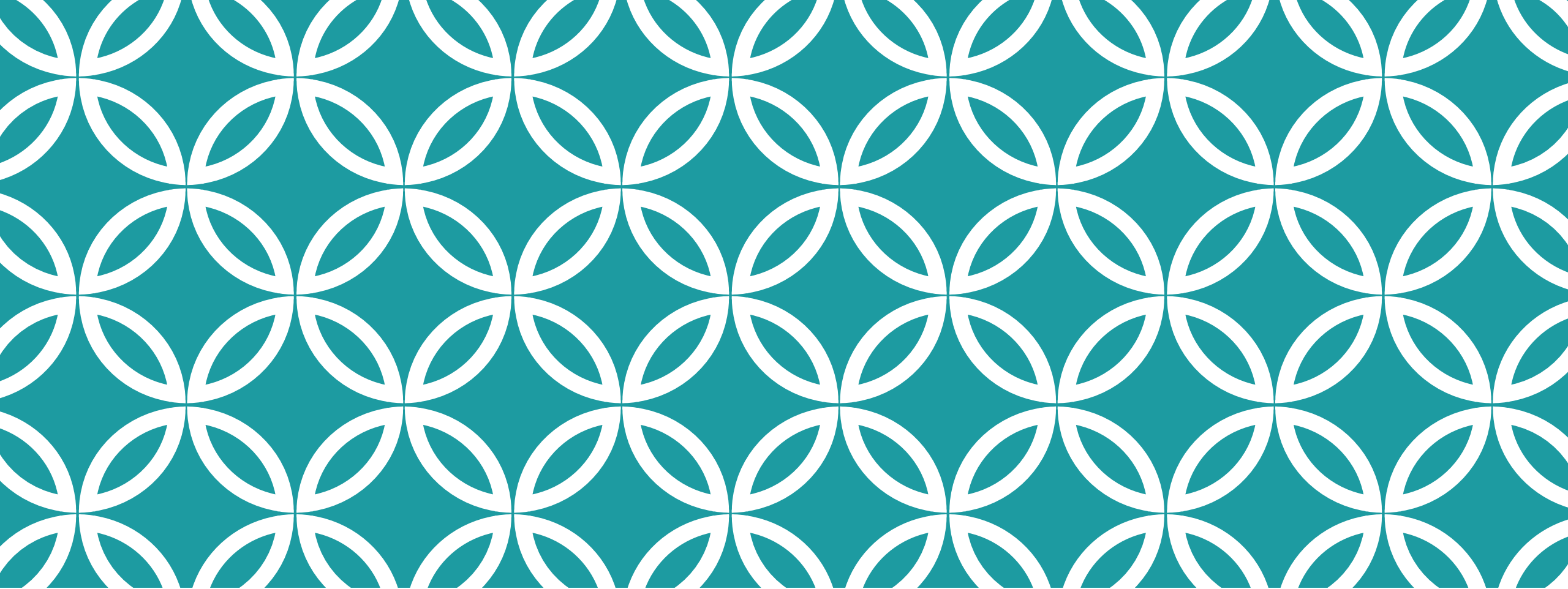
Can there be an objective view of religion – is a description of religious phenomenon enough to encapsulate the religion?

Would a religious believer recognise the form of study that Religious Studies undertakes?

Theology consciously adopts the idea of the subjective – saying that the opinions are individual opinions internal to and about a religious faith. How does this connect to the trends and processes of post-modernity?

If theology is subjective, is there a place for it within our secular academy?

If theology is an entirely internal project, seeking to explain and explore the internal coherence of a religious tradition, can it ever engage in fruitful dialogue with secular approach? With other religions?



**INTERFAITH / INTER-RELIGIOUS /
DIALOGUE**



INTERFAITH / INTER- RELIGIOUS / DIALOGUE

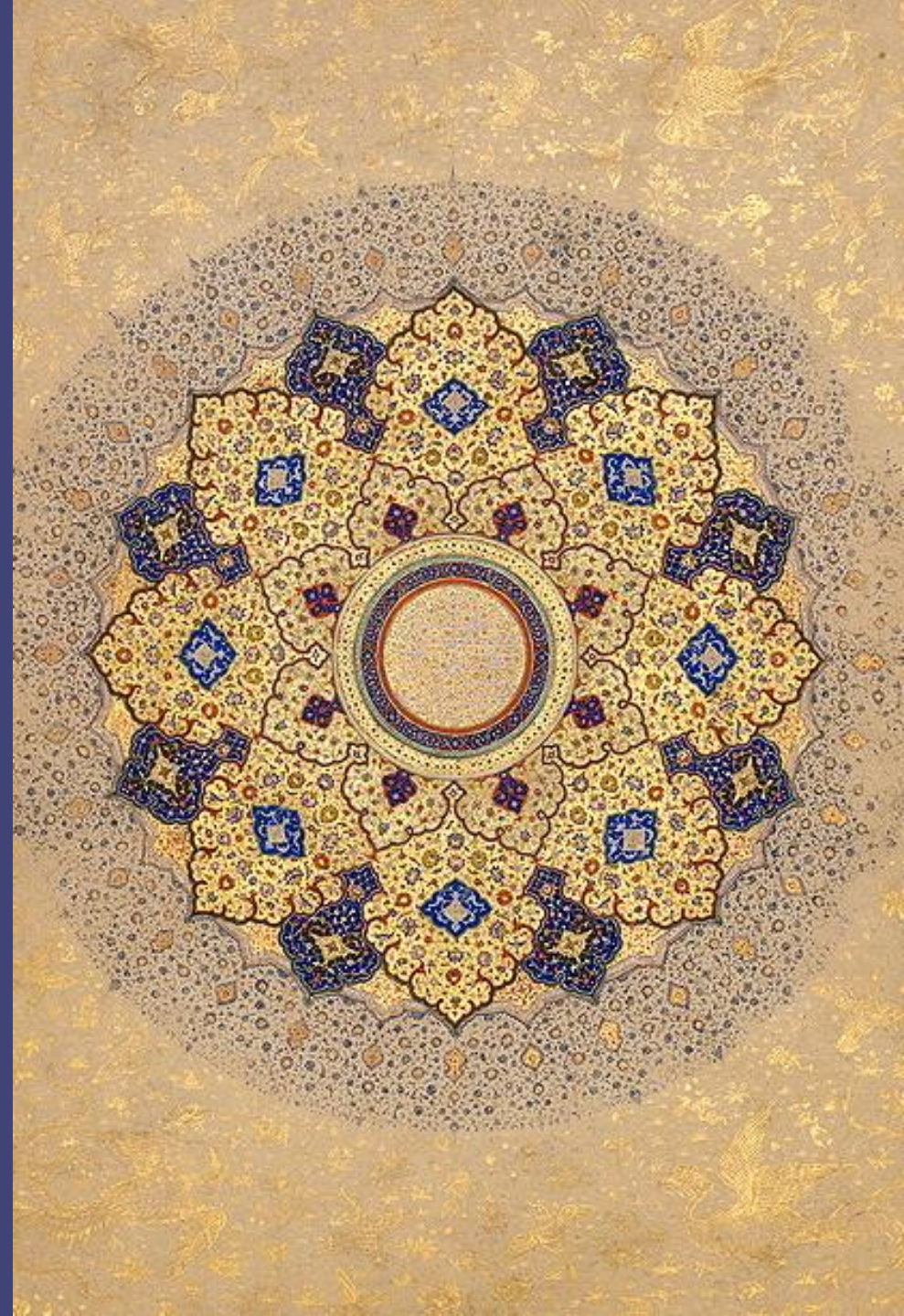
Another distinction that it is useful to be aware of now is that between inter-religious dialogue and interfaith studies.

Inter-religious dialogue is the practice of different religions talking to one another.

This can be studied either as a detached phenomenon or as a way of achieving certain ends

Interfaith studies is the practice of studying more than one faith and studying the relationship between those faiths.

Obviously, we will do a little bit of both over the course!



DIALOGUE

This distinction is important because it highlights the rise in awareness and importance of notions of dialogue and interfaith matters over recent history.

Indeed, the concept of “dialogue” as a practice or as an approach is relatively new and relies on a number of assumptions about religion as a whole and the goals and aims of our societies.

Previous discussion between religions has tended to be proselytising – aimed solely at conversion or as a tool of colonialism and conquest. Missionary work, crusading, political conversion – these were the dominant forms of religious interaction for much of our recent history.

What has caused the rise of “dialogue”?
Scholars pinpoint four trends...





MODERN CONCEPTION OF RATIONALITY

The modern concept of rationality (that things can be adequately explained without recourse to subjective or non-quantifiable knowledge) has encouraged an understanding of religious difference as arising from misunderstanding.

This assumes that religious difference, violence, or tension is able to be explained away through rational conversation and appeals to universal values.

(Myerson, G. *Rhetoric, Reason and Society: Rationality as dialogue*, 1994)



PROCESS OF GLOBALISATION / GLOCALISATION

The process of globalisation and pluralisation in our societies – where our societies have gone from largely religious homogenous to a dizzy variety of forms of belief and practices – has raised the reality of difference in our perceptions of our society.

The interconnectedness of different parts of the globe and the internal social difference of our societies has made resolving tension between differences more prominent and politically desired.

(Tehrani M & Lum B. *Globalization and Identity*, 2011)

HISTORICAL EVENTS

The course of historical events has had a huge impact on the way in which our society views itself and its relationship to others.

The end of colonialism disrupted the nature of western interaction with non-western faiths, the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions brought “dialogue” into public consciousness, and the rise of “religious” violence has driven the need for religious harmony up the political awareness scale.

(Ter Haar G, *Bridge or Barrier: Religion, Violence, and Visions for Peace*, 2005)



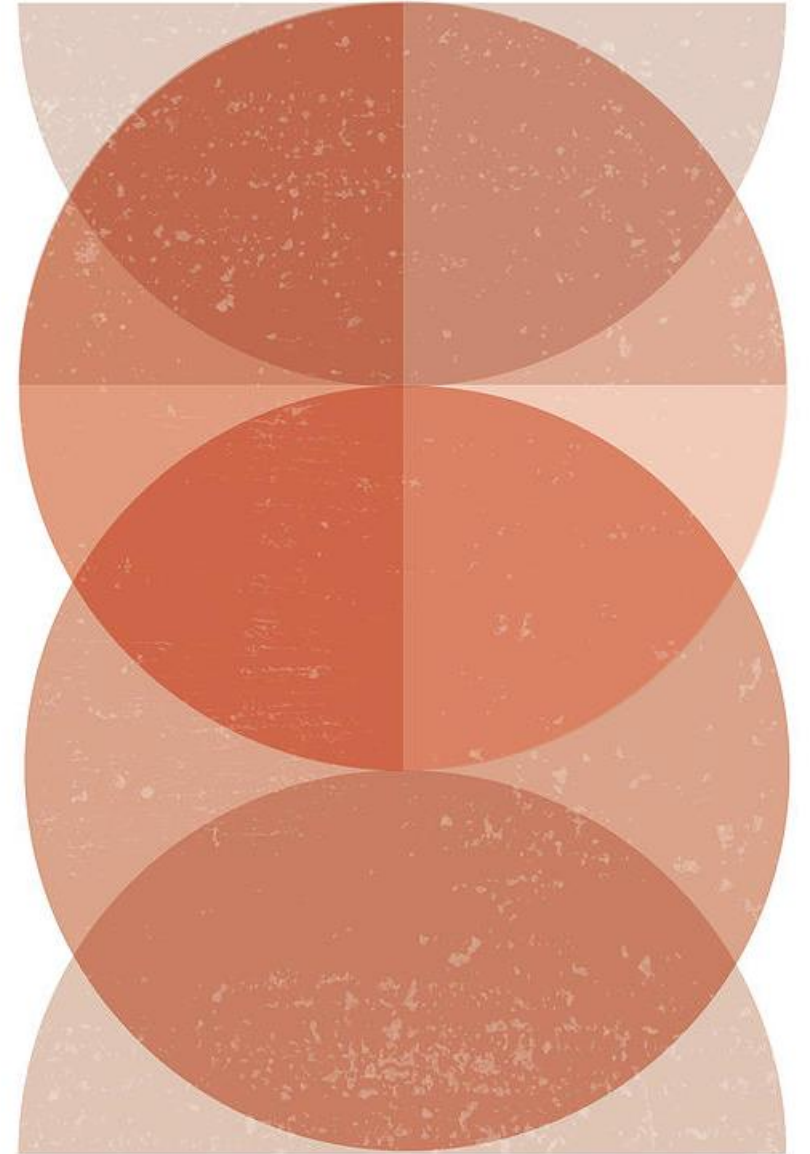
مرکز افکار و هنر اسلامی تهران - هنر و افکار اسلامی ایران - هنر و افکار اسلامی ایران - هنر و افکار اسلامی ایران
ON THE OCCASION OF
THE WEEK OF WAR
في ذكرى أسبوع الحرب

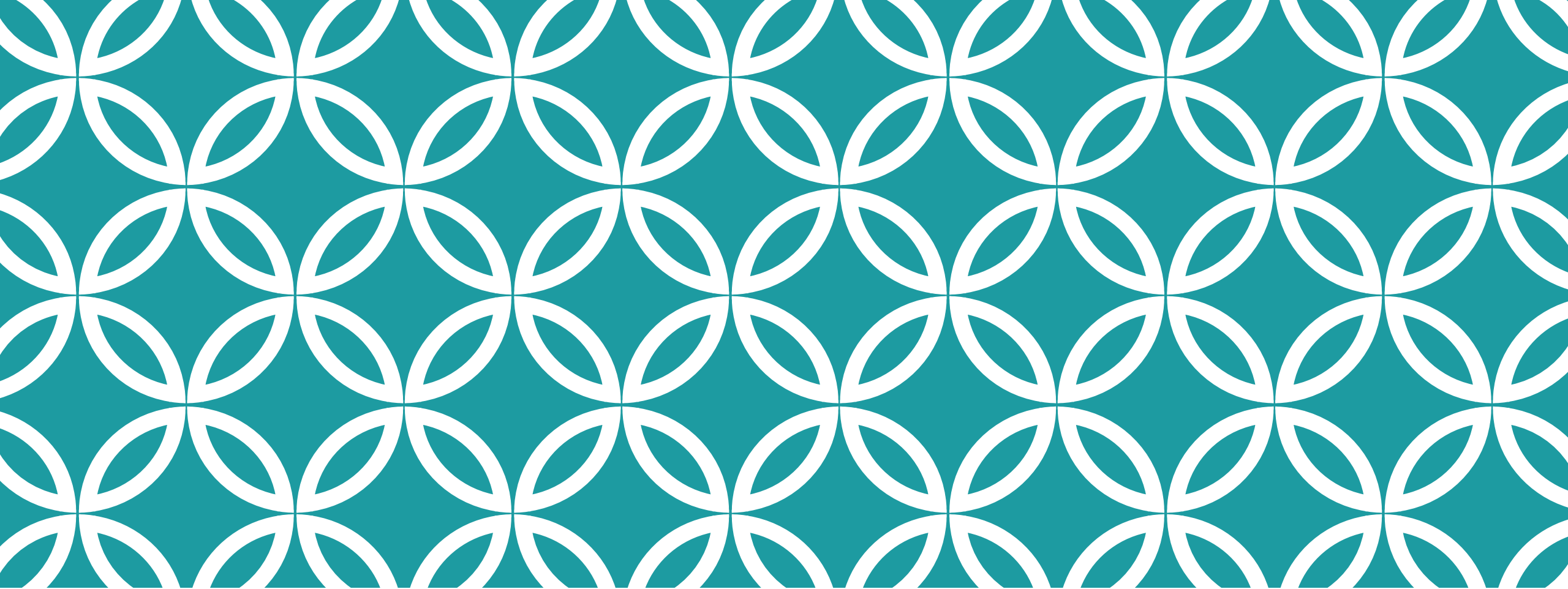
POST-MODERN TURN FROM CERTAINTY

The turn from certainty and objectivity embedded within the development of post-modernity has encouraged the exploration of forms of difference, including religious difference, and a hesitancy about the universal applicability of any one tradition.

This has meant that the more traditional form of meta-narrative about religious difference (we are right, you are wrong) has become less efficient at legitimating our perspectives on other religions.

(Pratt, D. Pluralism, Postmodernism and Interreligious Dialogue. *SOPHIA* 46, 2007)





PHILOSOPHICAL LINGUISTIC APPROACHES TO DIALOGUE

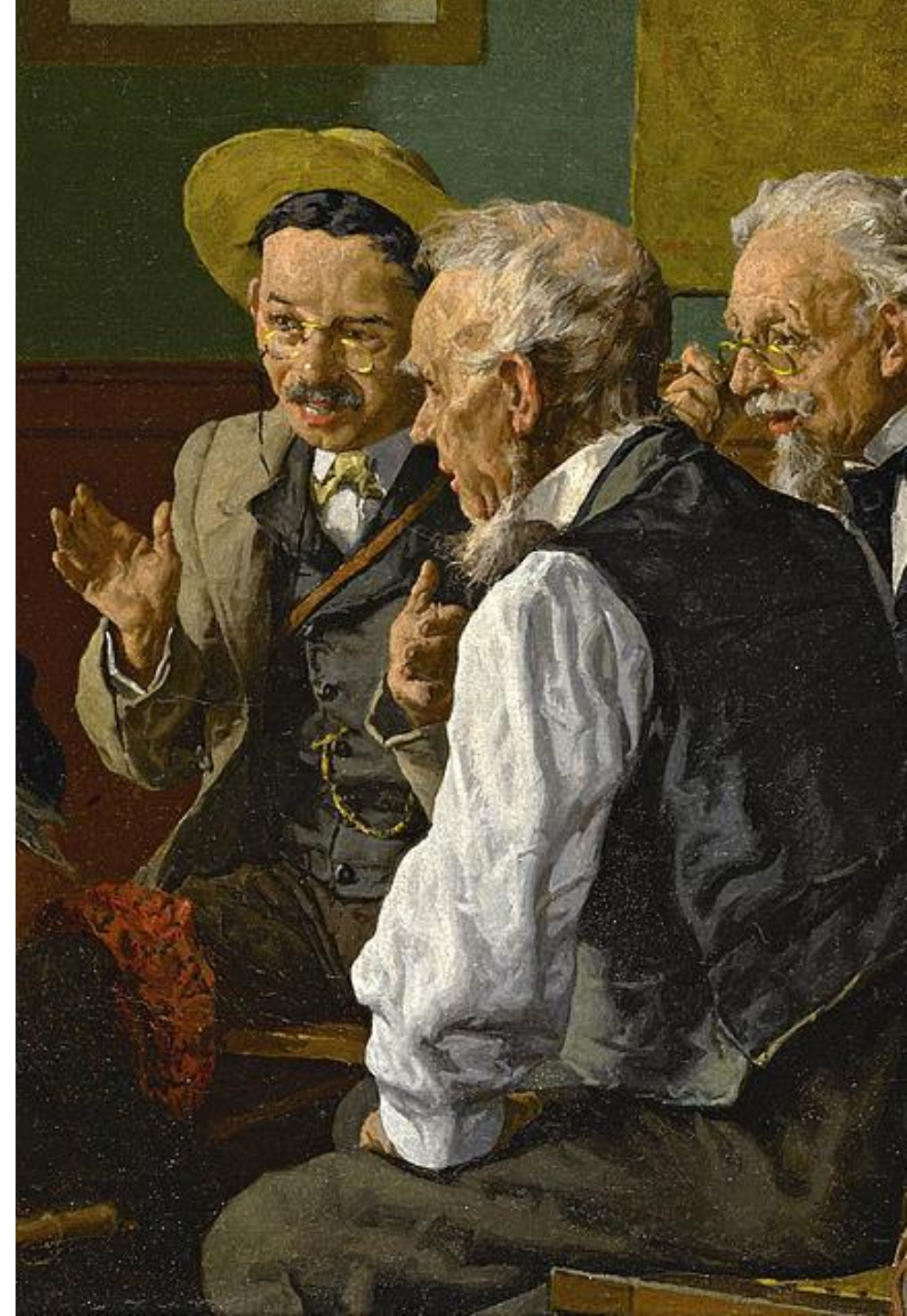


PHILOSOPHICAL LINGUISTIC APPROACHES TO DIALOGUE

This discussion somewhat presupposes we know what we mean when we talk of 'dialogue' – and I am not sure that we generally do!

A useful way of interrogating this is to try and answer the question of what you think constitutes the most minimal possible form of dialogue – what are the minimal things necessary to define an interaction as dialogical in nature?

Try it and see what you come up with.



PHILOSOPHICAL LINGUISTIC APPROACHES TO DIALOGUE

Most answers come up with various combinations of:

‘some form of **intentioned** exchange between difference that **results** in a greater awareness of the position of the other’

Each word is important for the clarity of definition there, but you may have come up with your own arrangement!

Various thinkers have attempted to tackle this problem too – we are going to have a look at some of them now.

This, of course, raises further questions like:

Can one have a dialogue with oneself?

Is agreement a necessary outcome of dialogue?

Does dialogue require intention on all sides?

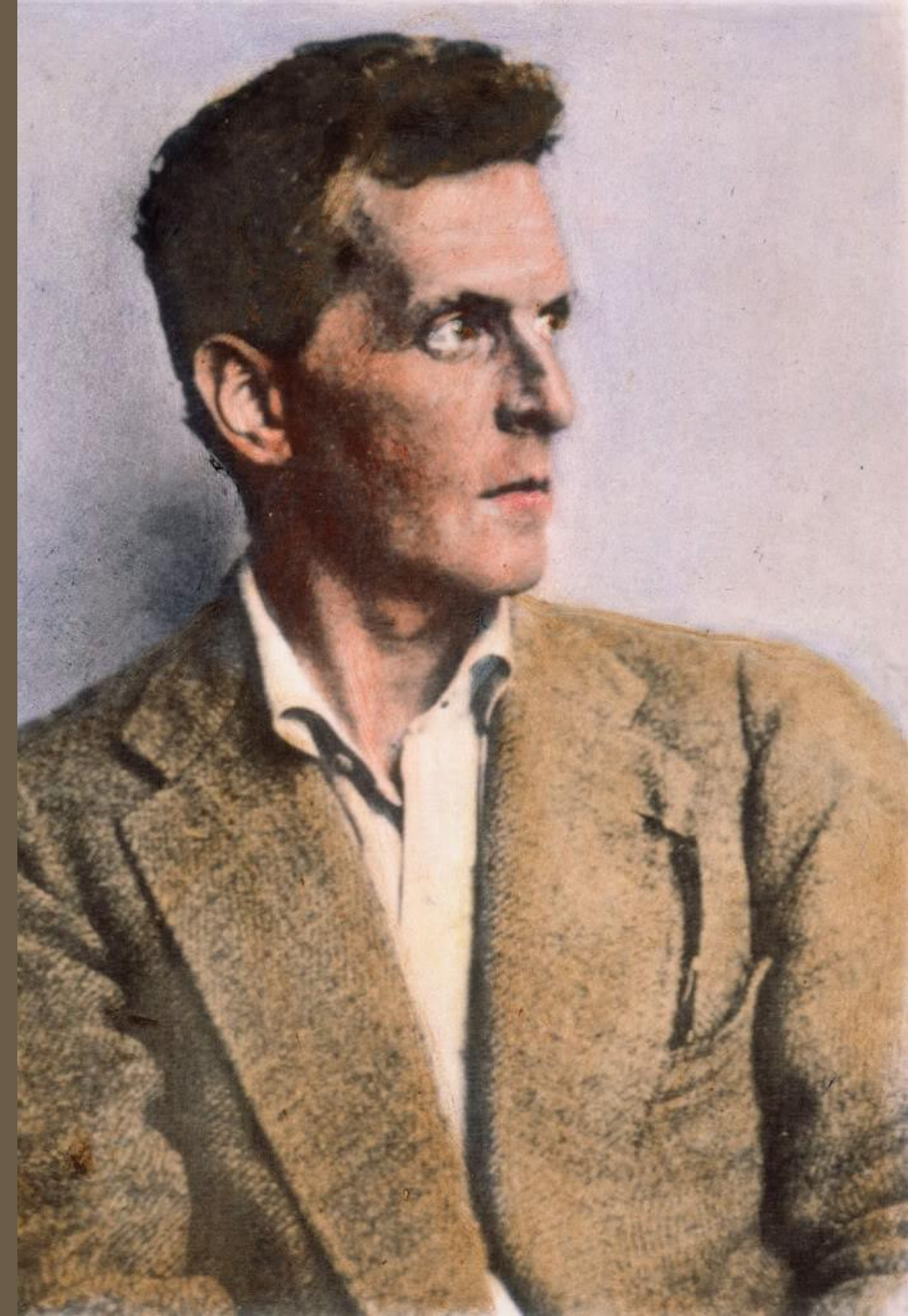
How can we be sure of the meaning of the other in this exchange?

LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN

In his work, *Philosophical Investigations*, the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein regularly referred to the concept of language-games.

The concept is based on the following analogy: The rules of language are analogous to the rules of games; thus saying something in a language is analogous to making a move in a game.

The analogy between a language and a game demonstrates that words only have meaning depending on the context of their uses — they do not exist and have meaning independently.



LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN

What does this have to do with dialogue, specifically, inter-religious dialogue?

Wittgenstein argued that one form of language games where specific regions of our language with their own grammars and relations to other language-games were religions. Religions, as we have seen, have narrative forms that create their own grammar and relations between aspects of reality.

Language and religion were, for Wittgenstein, similar in that they provide social meaning to things that are incomprehensible to outsiders – leading to the development of their own systems of meaning, a ‘grammar’

The image shows the front cover of the book 'Philosophical Investigations' by Ludwig Wittgenstein. The cover is dark, possibly black or dark brown, with a subtle texture. The author's name 'Ludwig Wittgenstein' is printed at the top in a red, serif font. Below it, the title 'Philosophical Investigations' is written in a large, white, serif font. To the right of the title, 'THIRD EDITION' is printed in a smaller, red, sans-serif font. At the bottom, the translator's name 'TRANSLATED BY G.E.M. ANSCOMBE' is printed in a red, sans-serif font.

Ludwig Wittgenstein

Philosophical
Investigations THIRD EDITION

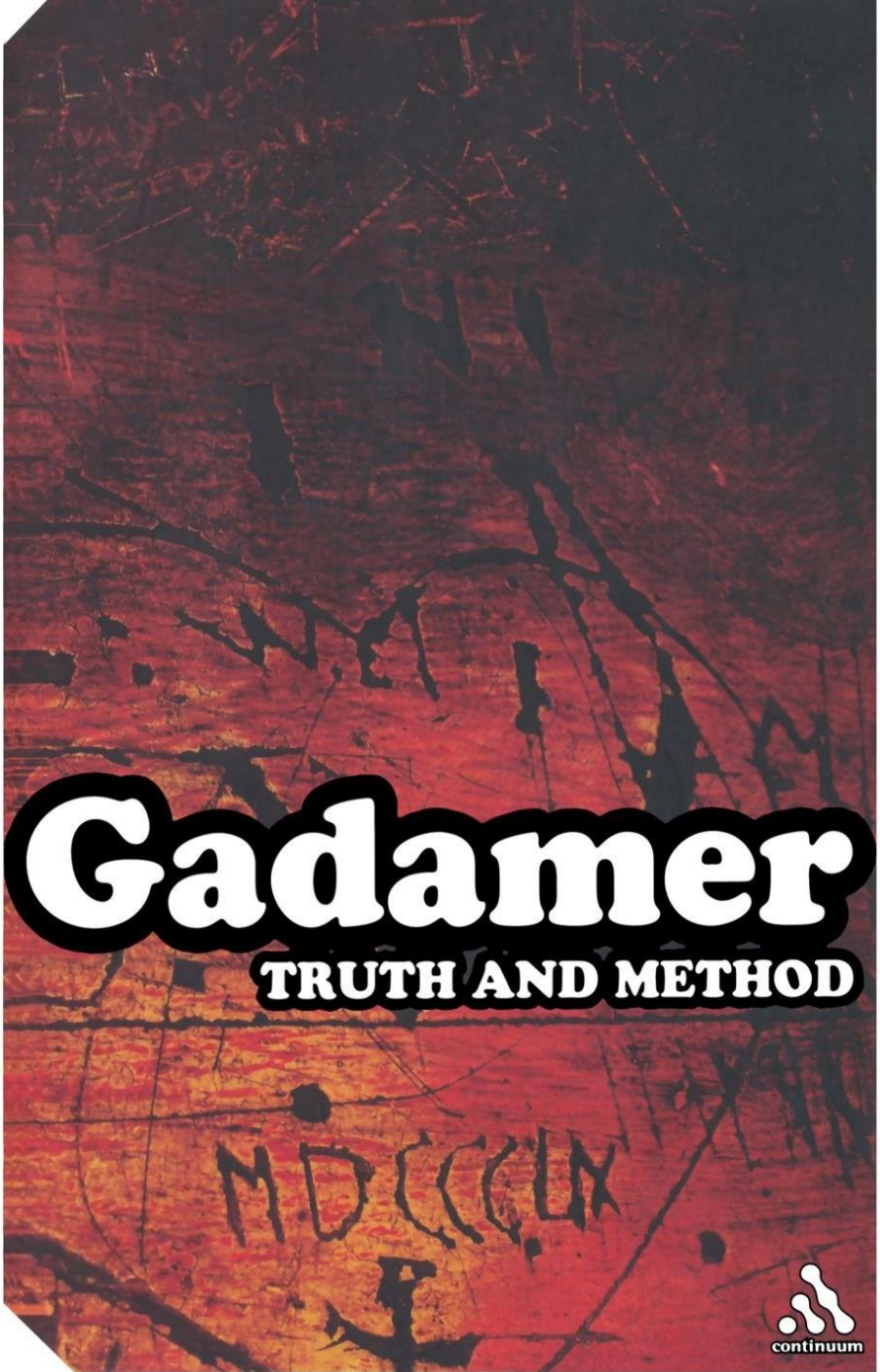
TRANSLATED BY G.E.M. ANSCOMBE

PHILOSOPHICAL LINGUISTIC APPROACHES TO DIALOGUE

This difficulty of communication between different systems of meaning means that we engage in a continual process of negotiating between our own horizon of meaning and those of others (Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 1960)

The continual process of negotiation is not necessarily a process which we actively choose to engage in, but rather an inextricable matrix within which we are caught as our systems of meaning butt up against others.

Linguistics scholars, Weigand, Vygotsky, and Rommetveit, offer some useful explanations:



Gadamer
TRUTH AND METHOD

EDDA WEIGAND

“The dialogical process can take a variety of forms, either as a specific intentioned act or as a constant mode of social interaction, an inescapable negotiation of ourselves amongst others that requires a constant flux of identity and narration to deal with the flows of definition within our complex social relationships. This social interaction takes place not only in the way we identify ourselves as a part of social groups, but also the way in which those social groups interact with one another.”

See: Weigand E, *Language as Dialogue: From Rules to Principles of Probability*, p. 160, referencing Adamzik (1995)

LEV VYGOTSKY

“The dialogical process therefore occurs not only in face-to-face encounters with a singular other, but is rather a continuous process brought about by the plurality of reality. Therefore, the occurrence of a dialogical incident is not to be seen only in a particular moment, but is rather a constant feature of our lives.”

See: Wertsch J V & Stone C A (1985) 'The concept of Internalization in Vygotsky's account of the genesis of higher mental functions' in Wertsch J V (ed) *Culture, Communication, and Cognition: Vygotskian perspectives*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p. 162-179.

RAGNAR ROMMETVIET

“Dialogue, as opposed to a dialogically formed social interaction, requires an intentional aspect – that is awareness that the social interaction being engaged in is a deliberate attempt to exchange differing viewpoints, with the aim of adequately expressing one’s own viewpoint and understanding the viewpoint of the Other. Dialogue, therefore, requires that at least two positions are represented, whether by individuals expressing their own view points or by institutions expressing the corporate viewpoint of their members and tradition”

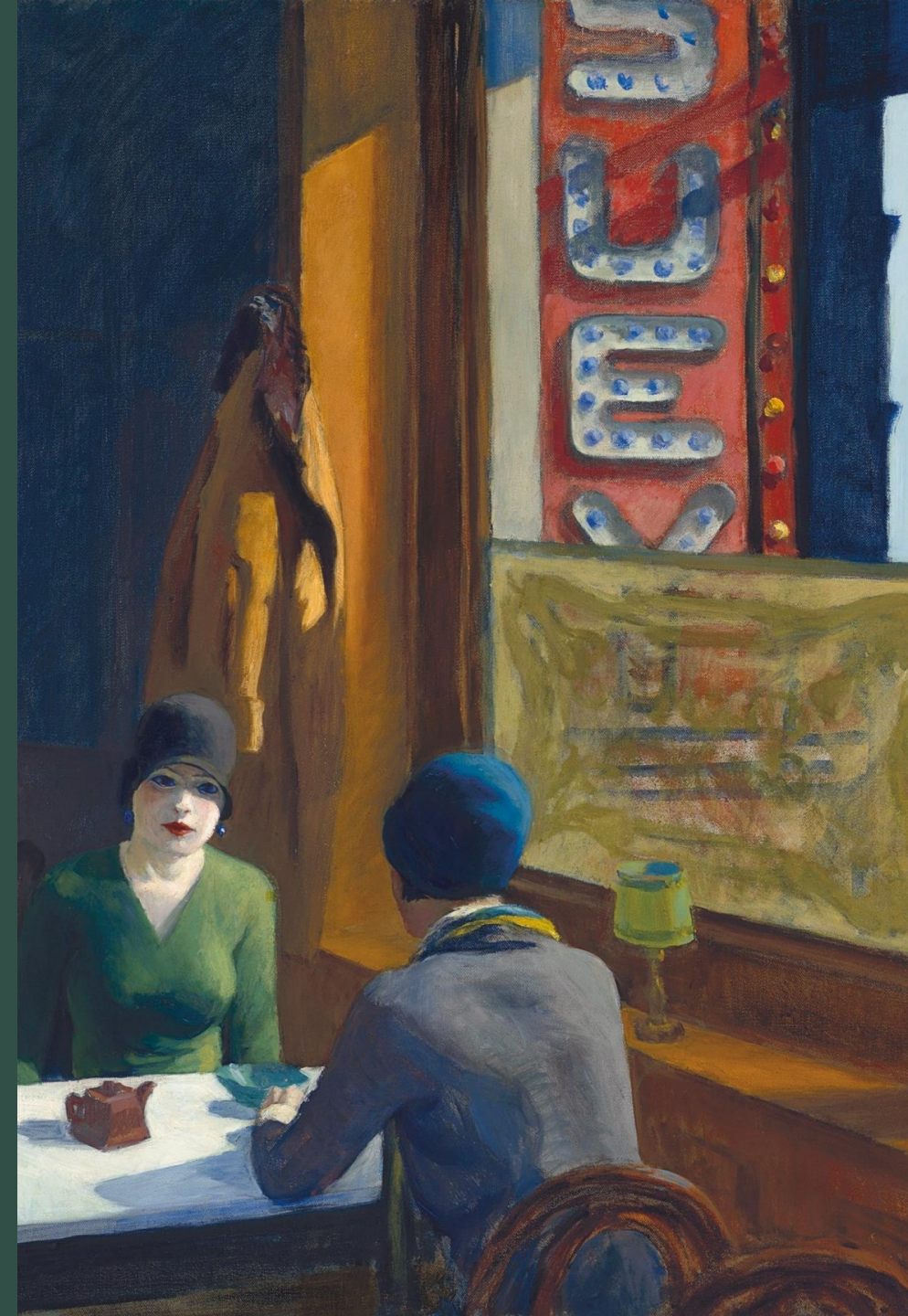
Rommetveit R (1979) 'On the Architecture of Intersubjectivity' in Rommetveit R & Blakar R M (eds) *Studies of Language, Thought, and Verbal Communication*, London, Academic Press, p. 94.

PHILOSOPHICAL LINGUISTIC APPROACHES TO DIALOGUE

Given that the boundaries between instances of identity negotiation we undertake in everyday life are hardly clear or easily identifiable as separate instances, the identification of a particular instance of dialogue is problematic.

Rather, the dialogue we undertake is a process, a continuous flow of instances that together help us form some kind of narrative continuity to our identity - within which each instance of negotiation blends into the next.

Our living is a dialogical process between ourselves and others.



READINGS

Clack, B. (1999). "Later Thoughts on Religion" In *An Introduction to Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Religion*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Cannon, D. (1998). "Religious Taxonomy, Academia, and Interreligious Dialogue", *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, Vol. 18, pp.115-122.

Ward, G. (2006). "The Future of Religion", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 74, No. 1, pp. 179-186.

Ward, G. (2012). "Theology and Postmodernism: Is it all over?", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 80, No. 2, pp. 466-484.