

## **Charter, or founding document**

The close collaboration between Europe and the United States did not start just yesterday. Trends dating back centuries grew considerably stronger during and especially after the Second World War, and since then, the mutual enrichment of old and new worlds has only grown constantly stronger—sometimes, to be sure, by one calling attention to exaggerated differences from the other but never by ignoring or repressing the other.

What is true of economics and politics is all the more true in the cultural realm, and more specifically in philosophy. To see this confirmed, one has only to mention the names of pioneering figures such as Michel Serres, René Girard, Emmanuel Levinas, Michel Henry, Jacques Derrida, Paul Ricoeur, and more recently Jean-Luc Marion—and that is only to cite the French. Such authors now constitute a canon of sorts for philosophers on both sides of the Atlantic. More recently, this canon has been looked to by a diversity of scholars engaged in a renewal of the “philosophy of religion.” For purposes of furthering the cultural enrichments provoked by the welcome of such figures in the United States, the *International Network in Philosophy of Religion* (INPR) means to gather these scholars into a network dedicated to furthering this renewal of philosophy of religion, its definition and practice.

The reception of these authors in the United States allows for the question of religion to be treated otherwise and in a new way. Several factors contribute to this. It is obvious that the status of secularity and its institutions is different in the United States than in Europe. Also, the boundaries between academic disciplines are less fixed in the United States than in other countries. These differences likely account for the fact that the *philosophical* exchanges between Europe and the United States have, for a long time now, produced a mutual enrichment of both cultures. This presents an opportunity that awaits further development. Philosophy in general, and philosophy of religion in particular, cannot simply feed on the traditions of the past. They should also be expected to innovate. INPR intends to organize intercontinental exchanges that will seize and renew the resources of this opportunity.

Whoever says “philosophy of religion” says at once *philosophy* “and” *religion*. With regard to *philosophy*, first of all, we will be careful not to oppose ‘continental philosophy’ and ‘anglophone philosophy.’ Phenomenology, dominant within continental philosophy, and analytic philosophy, the model that typically dominates in the English speaking world, both treat religion, though in different ways: the former focusing on

“experience,” the latter by analyzing “language.” At stake, then, in the common endeavor of INPR, is working together to understand the difference between the various philosophical approaches to religion. If continental philosophy, more particularly phenomenology and hermeneutics, serve as shared basis for participants in INPR, the network will not exclude other approaches, provided they remain ever attentive to the “things themselves.”

As for *religion* – specifically here Christianity – the value of the confessional approach, Catholic, Protestant or Orthodox, remains undeniable. Intellectual ecumenism has nevertheless for long been the rule in theology, and philosophy of religion has much to gain in following that example. Studying philosophy and theology from the perspective of faith implies taking into consideration the confessional and spiritual dimension of the intellectual act. The INPR will first recognize the importance and legitimacy of such confessional research, not to impose dogma of faith, but rather to think and reflect on the basis of a Christian experience. But the confessional approach, however important, is not the only one and does not exclude other approaches, even agnostic and non-committed ones. In America, as in France, cross-disciplinary “Religious Studies” demonstrate that the question of God does not belong exclusively to departments of philosophy or theology but extends to the entire range of cultural phenomena: art, poetry, politics, scientific thought, psychiatry and psychoanalysis among many others. It is a question that engages the sense of what it is to be human, but which at the same time highlights the necessity of confronting different disciplinary approaches as well as the toleration that a plurality of religious perspectives require.

While engaged in this necessary dialogue, a dialogue as much of philosophy with itself as of philosophy and religion with each other, the INPR will make every effort to remain mindful of the importance of two things that are essential to a thriving inquiry: first, the participation of young scholars and second, transversality, indeed collaborations, among institutions. (1) Regarding scholarship, everybody knows that the first years of study, indeed of teaching, are decisive for thought and often lay the ground on which subsequent work develops. The inaugural seminar of INPR, “Décrire et réduire: en quête des phénomènes,” which took place at the Catholic University of Paris, 8-10 June 2015, clearly indicated the willingness of young scholars to work together with a single purpose. The ‘closed’ and ‘selective’ character of the seminar confirmed the necessity of having different generations of scholars meet one another. Organizing such meetings enables *creative* transmission of questions and ideas. This does not mean establishing some as master of a thought that would belong only to those who intend to appropriate it exactly and impose it on the next generation. It means rather that young scholars are initiated into a tradition and a community of thought in which innovation for the future becomes possible thanks to reception of a past. (2) As for the institutions, it is well known that people support them as much as they support people. Participation in the INPR will therefore not be independent of the institutes or universities to which each participant belongs. This issues an implicit charge to the institutions themselves to support their scholars in an internationalization that is absolutely necessary to every discipline, the teachers of it as well as the different departments housing it. Freedom of thought is not practiced independently of imposed frameworks. Quite the contrary. Out

of concern for the reality of things, and also so as to ensure as far as possible a balance among participating institutions, each program of INPR will try to secure its funding from foundations or university funds dedicated to this purpose (in Europe or the United States), with respect being paid to the possibilities available to each. The INPR should be defined above all as a space of exchange and conviviality, in confronting ideas as well as in the flexibility of proposed projects.

The “times”, “places”, and “themes” which organize the activities of INPR will be essential to the success of the project; they are the means by which it remains faithful to its founding intention. (1) Concerning “places” first of all, the inaugural seminar in Paris (June 2015) had as its principle to connect young scholars with their elders in the Parisian capital while privileging conviviality over notoriety. The difference in generations was certainly a major factor in the richness of the event, but so too was the attractiveness of the place. Recognizing this, when choosing venues, INPR will take care to consider the conviviality and nobility of the place proposed. It will take account of the necessity to vary or alternate places for the seminar in Europe and the United States. INPR is a network; it is made neither of a single person nor of a single institution. It will make every effort to find and encourage synergies among different scholars and universities, so as to cultivate a seed of thought ever up to the task of pursuing more.

(2) As for the “times” or the frequency of meetings, INPR intends to organize *a minima* a seminar every two years (preferably in the middle of June), with three days of work and three days of visiting or other extra-philosophical activity. The INPR-week will thus be an occasion to tighten the bonds of research and mutual respect that tie together scholars young and old, but also those that tie together the respective institutions and even the cultures of each continent. We will therefore take care to identify, for each event, a time and place that are sufficiently close to make possible a philosophical encounter that is both convivial and intercontinental.

(3) Finally, regarding the thematic of the seminars, these will remain as open and as broad as possible to welcome contributions from scholars young and old and thereby to make room for the conviviality we hope to foster. Selection of themes will be guided by long-term interests rather than short-term fashions. The timeliness, topicality, indeed contemporaneity, of the “discourse on God” is likely to be one of the major preoccupations of the INPR, but this will not exclude others. In INPR, all religious phenomena and themes will be approached via the “detour through thinking” that is required for the elucidation of the major questions of our times. Philosophy does not yield to immediacy or thoughtlessness, and by taking this diverted path it has a greater grasp of reality. We do not want to seek novelty at any price so as to win an undeserved notoriety. The INPR seminar will, by contrast, demand of each of its members that, on one hand, she be grounded in a philosophical tradition where she can grow and, on the other hand, that she make her own work material for common reflection and stakes of a genuine encounter. The goal is less hosting one more conference and more finding another way to philosophize together, following an “*art de la dispute*” not often practiced today but which we would be wise to recover.

Each participant will therefore find his own way into the INPR, without necessarily imposing his own agenda, nor his own mode of thinking, and still less the themes that are exclusively his. Collegiality is characteristic of reflection as well as the way it advances. It is for having forgotten this that philosophy often grows rigid and institutions, indeed traditions, oppose one another, each in defense of their own little square of turf. Just as the borders between disciplines are called on to move, so too are people, universities, countries, indeed continents. Borders are not barricades, but places of encounter and crossing toward new lands.

Among the domains still to be explored we find secularity and the secular condition to be increasingly deserving of attention. With increasing attention paid to secularity, there is surely something at issue for religion but also for philosophy, and above all for the meaning and future of humanity. The philosophy of religion in general, and the question of God in particular, have only grown more prominent to the degree that they each take seriously the secular condition. Inversely the secular understanding of secularity stands to gain from an honest and forthright confrontation with religious phenomena and the question of the definition of man that they raise, the question of God and the issue of transcendence that it raises. Philosophy, particularly in the mode of philosophy of religion, can be of service in managing this confrontation.

The rise of extremisms makes it plain that the question of the Principle has not been forgotten but insufficiently thought. Neither political action nor military invasion, be it necessary, is enough to combat the violent excesses which have so marred the course of the world. Thoughtfulness, too, is called for if we are to face up to it—toleration and the good will toward finding, at the very heart of culture itself, what there is in “common” at the heart of all humanity so as to arrive at differentiation. The question of transcendence and its trajectory, without the question being answered or the trajectory decided, is in this sense still worth asking, perhaps even necessary to ask. Transcendence: Toward who, what, and where? From who, what, and where? How and by what strength or force? The quest for an “in-common” might take place precisely in such questioning—not always or only with an aim toward believing in or adhering to the divine but also with the end of investigating “together” the status of a humanity that cannot readily extract itself from it and its possible legatees. The *International Network in Philosophy of Religion* will take note of this advance, not to suppress the question of transcendence but to submit to the asking of it otherwise. The confrontation of thoughts remains the condition for the blossoming of thinkers. Europe and the United States become teammates in this, playing a game that is better played the more engaged the players are.

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