

Philosophers ask the big questions about religion

February 19 2019, by Jeannie Kever

Theologians focus on the content of different religious traditions, while psychologists focus on the causes of religious beliefs. Philosophers, on the other hand, focus on the evidence for these beliefs and the rationality of these traditions. The field is called the epistemology of religion.

Luis Oliveira, assistant professor of philosophy at the University of Houston, will lead a multi-continent exploration of the epistemology of religion with a \$1.3 million grant from the John Templeton Foundation.

"What arguments are there for believing in God or for following a specific [religious tradition](#)?" Oliveira asked. "What reasons and arguments are there in support of believing or not believing, in support of belonging or not belonging to a [religious community](#)?" How can individuals justify either choice?

Summer workshops planned over the next three years in Brazil, Argentina and Chile will connect Latin American philosophers with colleagues from the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom to stimulate academic interest and research in the epistemology of religion.

Fellowships will bring Latin American scholars to U.S. universities in order to further strengthen research ties between the two groups.

The project is religiously neutral. This means the work won't be limited to one religious tradition and will include study of the reasons for atheism and agnosticism, Oliveira said. Scholars of every persuasion will

be involved.

He said the timing is right. "In the last 15 years, discussions of religion in the public sphere have become very acrimonious and not very philosophical at all," he said.

"There has been too much one-sided conviction. The atheists think [religious people](#) are ignoring the scientific evidence. The religious people think atheists are ignoring obvious aspects of the human experience. Very few acknowledge the force of the points made from the other side."

Cue the community of academic philosophers who specialize in such questions. In stark contrast to popular culture, Oliveira said the philosophical discussion of religion has grown increasingly sophisticated. Yet there has been little interaction between Latin America and the English-speaking world in this regard.

That's about to change. His project will connect Latin American scholars working in the epistemology of religion with the thriving English-speaking philosophical community and will infuse the English-speaking community with new perspectives and insights from Latin America.

More information: www.uh.edu/class/philosophy/latam/

Provided by University of Houston

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