



HOW ANTHROPOMORPHIC IS ODIN? THEOLOGICAL CORRECTNESS, THEORY OF MIND AND OLD NORSE RELIGION

Lunch Seminar with Declan Taggart, University Collage Cork, Thursday 6th December, 12.00-13.30, building 1451, room 515

Many elements of the Old Norse religion of Freyja, Odin and Thor have been obscured by the passage of time and cultural change or are lost to us altogether. Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR) offers a set of tools for building on the material that has survived to reconstruct those elements. Yet CSR is itself a rapidly developing discipline to which the empirical data of Old Norse religion can bring new insights and with which it can test its established theories.

In this paper, I will look at two of the theories that are most prominent in CSR today: theological correctness and theory of mind (ToM). The first proposes that humans can simultaneously hold multiple representations of deities, in particular pointing to the complex representations of deities – as omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent and so on – produced in some situations, which accord with culturally dominant models of those deities, and the simpler, more anthropomorphic representations generated and used in others. ToM describes the ability of humans to attribute mental states to oneself and other agents.

With reference to expressions of Old Norse religion and focusing on representations of omniscient-like gods, I will examine the extent to which these two theories should be integrated and in which they problematize each other. I will conclude by looking at the ways in which my theoretical framework illuminates our understanding the Old Norse religion.

No registration is needed and all are very welcome to participate.