

PROFESSOR BERND IRENBORN

Professor of History of Philosophy
Theologische Fakultät Paderborn (Germany)
Kamp 6 · 33098 Paderborn
E-Mail: b.irlenborn@thf-paderborn.de
Web: <https://www.thf-paderborn.de>

Ph.D. Theology, University of Bonn, 2002
Ph.D. Philosophy, University of Wuppertal, 1998
M.A. Philosophy, University of Bonn, 1995

Grants, Fellowships

2013/2014: Visiting Research Fellow St John's College, University of Oxford
2010: Visiting Professor, *Center for Philosophy of Religion*, University of Notre Dame/Indiana
2009: Visiting Research Scholar, Blackfriars Hall, University of Oxford
2000-2002: Research Fellowship Grant, German Research Foundation (DFG)
1996-1998: Doctoral Fellowship Grant, German National Academic Foundation
1989-1995: Study Grant, German National Academic Foundation

Functions

2017-: Chairman of the committee of the Theological Colleges and Faculties in Germany, Austria and Switzerland, which are funded by the church or run by religious congregations
2014-: Member of the board of the committee of Philosophers at Catholic Faculties and Colleges in German-speaking countries

Areas of Expertise

Philosophy of Religion (Religious Plurality); Transcendental Philosophy; Political Philosophy (Relationship between Secular and Religious Convictions), Relativism

Key Works

- Relativismus, Berlin/Boston 2016.
- Europäischer Friede, christlicher Glaube, in: *Zerfällt Europa? Die Europäische Union in ihrer größten Krise*, hg. von Berthold Kohler, F.A.Z.-eBook 2017, 123-136.
- Wahr an sich oder nur für mich? Zur Bedeutung der Philosophie für das Theologiestudium, in: *Theologie und Glaube* 106 (2016), 139-150.
- Christlicher Glaube und europäische Integration, in: Hanns-Gregor Nissing (Hg.), *Naturrecht und Kirche im säkularen Staat*, Wiesbaden 2016, 179-203.
- Religionsfreiheit und Menschenwürde. Zur Erklärung *Dignitatis humanae*, in: Berthold Wald (Hg.), *Krise und Erneuerung der Kirche. Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil*, Paderborn 2016, 218-244.
- Die Vielfalt religiöser Überzeugungen und ihr epistemologischer Status, in: Georg Gasser u. a. (Hg.), *Handbuch für Analytische Theologie*, Münster 2017, 721-747.
- Glaube und Unglaube: Facetten des heutigen Atheismus, in: Christoph Stiegemann u. a. (Hg.), *Credo. Christianisierung Europas im Mittelalter. Band III: Beiträge zur Ausstellung*, Petersberg 2017, 181-191.
- Analytische Religionsphilosophie. Eine Anthologie, Darmstadt 2013 (ed. with Andreas Koritensky)
- Gott und Vernunft. Neue Perspektiven zur Transzentalphilosophie Richard Schaefflers, Freiburg/Br. 2013 (ed. with Christian Tapp)
- Religion in the Public Sphere: Habermas on the Role of Christian Faith, in: *Heythrop Journal* 53 (2012), 432-439.

- John Hick's Pluralism: A Reconsideration of its Philosophical Framework, in: *Philosophy and Theology* 23 (2011), 265-278.
- Religious Plurality: A Philosophical Defense of Religious Inclusivism, in: *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 2 (2010), 127-140.

For more information:

<https://www.thf-paderborn.de/lehrstuehle/geschichte-der-philosophie>

Research Project: Christian Truth Claims and Philosophical Relativism

In 2016, I have published a book on relativism and its philosophical implications. It explored the term, its history, and debates about familiar propositions of relativism regarding the nature of truth. My current research project focuses on a topic which I have not considered in my book (as it was a mere philosophical enquiry): What is the impact of relativistic thinking for core Christian truth claims? In June 2019, there will be a major conference on this topic at the University of Münster (Germany) which I have organised with a colleague.

With regard to Christian thinking, there are, on the one hand, many proponents of a view which is expressed in the famous dictum of the former Pope Benedict XVI. according to whom Western societies are moving towards a "dictatorship of relativism" where Christian truth claims are not recognized as absolute any longer. On the other hand, a lot of scholars deem this diagnosis as excessive or anti-modernist (e. g. Carlo I. Accetti). In addition, some postmodern and pluralistic philosophers refer to Christian belief in defending either the idea of a 'relativistic God' (Gianni Vattimo) or the compatibility of Christian thinking and relativism (Joseph Runzo, James K. A. Smith).

Against this backdrop, several questions arise for the (mainstream) Christian worldview which I would like to address in my research project: Are core Christian truth claims in principle incompatible with or even hostile to the idea of relativism? What do Christian truth claims mean philosophically, in reference to the concepts of alethic realism and antirealism? Does every version of relativism lead to a denial of absolute truth and to moral arbitrariness? What does Christian teaching – in its main denominations – say about relativism? Are there any reasons which support the relativistic interpretation of the Christian concept of God? On the whole, I proceed on two assumptions: (1) I do not assume that something like a "dictatorship" of relativistic thinking is looming ahead. Accordingly, I assume that not every concept of relativism implies a significant problem for Christian truth claims; several distinctions have to be drawn. (2) Nevertheless, my claim is, first, that there are still two challenges for the Christian worldview arising from relativistic thinking. Some concepts of normative truth relativism pose in fact a real problem for the Christian worldview. Second, a rising popularity of pre-philosophical relativistic thinking – often in the makeup of alethic indifference or a superficial understanding of tolerance – might be in fact a serious challenge for strong truth claims as well.