

FIND'S "TRANSCULTURAL ENCOUNTERS" FORUM 2019
PHYSIS AND ANTI-PHYSIS IN RELIGIONS

Venue

India-Europe Foundation for New Dialogues (FIND)
Colle Labirinto 24, 00039, Zagarolo (Rome), Italy

Date

From 8 to 10 November

Organizers

Adrián Navigante (Director Research and Intellectual Dialogue, FIND)
Andrea Acri (Senior Lecture "Sciences Religieuses", École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris)

Conceptual Description

The fifth issue of FIND's Forum focuses on a thematic complex that deserves a transcultural approach: *physis* and *antiphysis* in religions. This terminological choice does not overlook the risk implied its very use: *physis* and *antiphysis* are terms belonging to the ancient Western tradition. *Religion*, too, is a controversial term that many scholars refuse to generalize beyond the parameters of monotheism. Posing the question as to whether a Forum can do justice to its own claim to *transculturality*, FIND's Forum 2019 adopts a specific terminology delineating a dominant discourse, only to question it by thinking and reflecting on a subject that, in this period of ecological disasters and identity crisis, imposes itself as one of the most controversial and urgent tasks for human beings (especially for those aware of their own condition and the dominating circumstances).

Physis and *antiphysis* are Greek terms denoting a world-view that existed prior to the religion now dominant in Europe: Christianity. Both terms draw a line of demarcation with regard to how human beings perceive their environment and interact with it. *Religion* can be seen, bearing in mind the scope of the terms *physis* and *antiphysis*, as a responsive attitude towards an unknown "Otherness" that is configured in different ways according to our perception of discontinuity and interaction strategies – in most cases, human attempts to homologate forces through magical identification and/or ritual dissociation. As independent but finite or imperfect beings, humans have always attempted to link themselves to a source of imperishable Life. The question is not whether such Life exists or not, but where the force attributed to it is located, and how it is handled in the context of a group seeking cohesion, stability and meaning.

FIND's 2019 Forum is inspired by Alain Daniélou's perception of the dynamics of religion, in terms of a pluralistic diversity with a graspable core. Religion for Daniélou needs to be said in the plural, even if in every social order the word *tradition* plays a unifying role in the process

of selecting, codifying and legitimating experience. The possibility of grasping the core of that plurality lies in the similarities or common patterns in the different ways that humans have chosen to relate to non-human agency. It is for this reason that Daniélou admired the unifying power of Brahmanism in India (which goes hand in hand with a metaphysical doctrine) and at the same time pointed out the problem of reductionism while observing the role of elites within the framework of a highly complex religious milieu. He also shows that the Indian subcontinent has not only developed what most Westerners believe to be “Hinduism”, but also many forms of religious attitude that move within the axis between Polytheism and Animism.

At the same time, Daniélou’s special attention to indigenous cults (and their parallels in Africa or Latin-America), as well as his emphasis on the ambivalent status of Sadhus and their mythological parallel in the god Shiva, reveals his profound interest in understanding the difference between religion as a very concrete experience based on immediate interaction with non-human agency (as in shamanic or ecstatic cults) and religion elevated to the status of a metaphysical doctrine, very often claiming soteriological power and imposing socio-cosmic norms on its behalf.

A transcultural re-consideration of Daniélou’s views in the light of the challenges of our time (the dethroning of human beings from the order of creation, increasing attention towards the *subjective* status of animals in many cultures, as well as their relationship with divine agency, and the considerable awareness of the ostensible interdependence between violence and the sacred), should place such concepts on the examination table as part of the outer layer of what is recognized as *one’s own (culture)* in order to see what the reverse side of those ideas reveals – regardless of whether such concepts should be maintained or replaced.

In this sense, FIND’s Forum proposes a discussion on the tension between immanence and transcendence in religious experience, with all the consequences that this opposition bears: *immanence* as the inherent trait of Nature (within and/or outside human beings), but also as the Life-source feeding human existence – while reclaiming something in return –, and *transcendence* as the cipher of perfect agency, its power growing with the amount subtracted from the immanent play-ground of created beings.

Not only will traditional religions and doctrines be borne in mind in the context of this discussion, but also counter-examples. From the Sub-Asian mainstream and margins (that is, metaphysics and ritual) and African tribal groups with their ecstatic orientation, to Amerindian ceremonies and shamanic articulation. In addition, transgressive groups within European modernity and post-modernity, as well as syncretic forms of religion, also play a role as impulses to recapture a form of life that is prior to the alienation of human beings in a new order, in which not only Nature, but also the power of a transcendence that sought to replace it, is emptied of its content.