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In recent years there has been a rising interest in what is called affect theory. Donovan Schaefer's *Religious Affects: Animality, Evolution and Power* (2015) has brought this new theoretical framework to the attention of religious-studies scholars. In this provocative and insightful work, Schaefer argues against a regnant logocentric discourse that gives privileged place to reason as an epistemological foundation for the conception, construction, and theorization of "religion" and, in its place, advocates an appreciation for those affective qualities such as emotion, space, and behavior. Schaefer ties this affective theoretical approach to animality, a point that several contributors to this issue of the *Bulletin* engage and even attempt to extend.

We are pleased to offer readers of the *Bulletin* the following panel of papers on affect theory and the study of religion. Contributions by Hollis Phelps, Jay Johnson, Courtney O'Dell-Chaib, and Matthew Hotham, along with the response from Schaefer, arose from a panel at the AAR annual meeting dedicated to "Religious Affects." In addition to this panel of papers, we are also pleased to include Tyler Tully's application of affect theory to the study of trauma. Affect theory, in my opinion, has the potential to be one of the most cutting-edge developments in theorizing religious phenomena. Unabashedly self-reflexive, this theory shatters many of the epistemological and cultural assumptions that continue to dominate (Western) intellectual work, even beyond the study of religion as well as among those of us who have been calling for greater self-reflexivity in theorization. Affect theory is also provocative and raises several points for further debate, debates that will likely be sparked by the very claims being made. For myself, I wonder if affect theory risks returning us to a phenomenological approach grounded in *sui generis* religion, where the emotive, inner world of a social actor becomes the psychological foundation for the essence of "religion"—and in this sense, I am reminded of R. R. Marett's classic theory of preanimism or Rudof Otto's assumption that religion arises from an encounter with the *mysterium*

tremendum. The centrality of nature or animality in Schaefer's work also raises an important arena of debate currently being played out in our field; i.e., should religious studies scholars and our professional institutions directly engage social activism, such as we have seen with the AAR's engagement with environmental ethics and global warming? Is there a slippery slope here where we may slip into some form of secularized ecotheology? Yet there are advantages to affect theory, especially in elucidating how social actors create and maintain realities not through ideas, but by means of action, interaction, and affective reactions. Bodily religion, rather than linguistic articulations, rises to the foreground of the analysis of social actors and community dynamics. As Schaefer so wonderfully puts it, with affect theory we get to explore

a perspective that sees bodies moving through worlds under the pressure of a complex welter of affects, with language weaving between and reshaping those pressures only sometimes—and even then only haltingly and unevenly. Affect theory—examining the mobile materiality of the body—thematizes the ways that the world prompts us to move before the interventions of language. It calls attention to embodied histories that precede the advent of language. (2015, 9)

Ideally, I could see affect theory integrating various other areas of study that stress the bodily or materiality of sociability when addressing the taxon "religion"; be that ritual theories (especially Catherine Bell's seminal work), cultural geographies (notably when dealing with the geography of bodies), and recent developments in cognitive science of religion (especially in conjunction with cultural anthropology). The articles published in this issue engage, exemplify, and challenge such points. In many ways, they all offer us an opening for debating and refining affect theory for a more sophisticated and non-logocentric theoretical approach to the study of religion.

Beyond the affect theory articles, we are delighted

to include in this issue an exchange over the construction of religion within the sphere of popular culture. Specifically, Méadhbh McIvor and Richard Amesbury offer a timely discussion of a new headscarf emoji, an emoji that, for many readers, will evoke a religious signification. Joseph Laycock engages this cultural innovation, thereby opening a debate over various theoretical challenges facing those studying not just “religion” but, more specifically, the construction and utilization of “the religious” on social media. It is our hope that Laycock, McIvor, and Amesbury’s exchange will prompt further discussions and debates over the ever-changing social contexts, especially the increasingly vital online social media outlets, wherein social actors create “religion”

in various and different ways: be that in evoking or negating the taxon, the use of digital imagery as text, the dynamics of social interaction, or the competing moments of audience reception.

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References

- Schaefer, Donovan O. 2015. *Religious Affects: Animality, Evolution and Power*. Durham: Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822374909>.